

# “Inner Peace”, “Reversal”, and “Indeterminable Tao”: Lin Zhaohua’s Assimilation of Taoism

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**Abstract:** This essay interprets how Taoism influences Lin Zhaohua’s attitude towards political and cultural hegemony, *xiqu*’s aesthetics, and directing aesthetics with regard to his allusions to the specific texts of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Through analyses, I uncover how Lin holds the Taoist “inner peace” to prevent the disruptions of political and academic authorities, how the Taoist tenet, “Reversal is the action of Tao”, helps Lin theorize his methods of Sinicizing *huaju* with *xiqu*’s aesthetics, and how the indeterminable Tao frees Lin from the restraints of fixed theatrical school. The essay thus argues that Lin’s application of Taoist tenets in his directing life parallels the way of pursuing Taoist freedom and enables him to stand at the forefront of the field of Chinese theatre. The Taoism-based theory of intercultural performance has the potential to resist hegemonic “Western” theories and the equality emphasised in Taoism could contribute to the establishment of heterogeneous communications among different theatrical cultures.

*Keywords:* Lin Zhaohua, Taoism, theatre, *xiqu*, *huaju*

Considered one of the most significant Chinese theatre directors since the 1980s, Lin Zhaohua and his productions have been analyzed from numerous perspectives such as avant-garde features, the aesthetics of *xiqu* (Chinese Opera 戏曲), historical significance, etc. For example, Li Ruru interprets the historical and cultural impacts on Lin’s adapted production of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (premiered in 1990; Li 1999: 355–367). Bettina S. Entell and Alexa Alice Joubin associate Lin’s *Hamlet* with June-Fourth Movement (1989) inside China (Entell 2002: 126; Joubin 2021: 3). Lin Weiyu discusses Lin amalgamation of *xiqu*’s narrative techniques and “stream of consciousness” in his adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* (premiered in 2006, Lin 2016: 37–52). However, the philosophical foundations that influenced Lin’s directing experiences have rarely been discussed. Lin is influenced by traditional Chinese philosophies and has often mentioned the influences of *Chan* (禪 a philosophical and religious school of Chinese Buddhism) and Taoism. According to the words of Lin Weiyu, a scholar who owns a long-term friendship with Lin Zhaohua and constantly interviewed Lin Zhaohua from 2002 to 2004 in Beijing, Lin Zhaohua is retired and indulges himself every day in books about *Chan* rather than any other theories.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding this, combing through Lin Zhaohua’s own texts embodied in his essays as well as interviews published in the last forty-odd years, he rarely talks about how the tenets of *Chan* affect any specific methods adopted in his productions. On a few occasions when he mentions *Chan*, he only uses “epiphany” to express that artistic creating should not repeat or be classified into any existing theatrical schools, and “epiphany” leads him to numerous brilliant designs in his acclaimed productions (Lin 1992: 292). Meanwhile, “Laozi and Zhuangzi, [the initiators and representative philosophers of Taoism]” are also considered by

Lin to help him approach the psychological state of the so-called “epiphany” as well as “a new world of theatre” (Lin 2014a: 62). Lin, on countless occasions, traces the concepts or phrases of Taoism in order to elaborate on his behaviours or directing aesthetics. Hence, I argue it is impractical to study Lin’s directing life from *Chan*. Taoism could provide a new perspective to interpret Lin’s attitudes toward the external world, *xiqu*’s aesthetics, and directing aesthetics.

Taoism is one of the oldest indigenous Chinese philosophies initiated by Laozi and Zhuangzi during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period (770BC – 221BC). As a philosophy focusing on individuals instead of collective groups, Taoism encourages human beings to pursue a free life by detaching themselves psychologically from the external society. Taoist philosophers praise nonexistence as they believe the existent world comes from nonexistence, thus, nonexistence embodies infinite possibilities to develop. Since things keep developing from nonexistence to existence, and further, from existence to nonexistence, Taoist philosophers take reversal as a tenet to describe the action of the world. These tenets will be further utilized to discuss Lin’s directing experiences. Chen Rongjie argues that the Taoist concepts such as “abstract” and “void” were borrowed by the subsequent followers of Chinese Buddhism, and Zhuangzi’s texts greatly influenced Chinese Buddhism, particularly *Chan* Buddhism (Chen 2006: 143, 167). That is to say, in China, Taoism is more primordial than *Chan* Buddhism.

In this essay, I do not claim that Taoism is the most significant cause that guides Lin’s choices and behaviours during his directing life which should be fostered by various elements; yet, his utilization of Taoist arguments to illustrate his understanding of theatre or the field of theatre could prove a change of his comprehension of theatre from a naïve realist perspective to a meta-physical or theoretical one. Most of Lin’s personal texts are recorded in his biographical book, *Comic Book of Lin Zhaohua* (2014), co-edited by Lin Weiyu and Xu Xin. I will take this book as a main academic source, accompanied by some of his essays as well as his interviews published online, to study the Taoist influences on him in a topical instead of chronological way. All the Chinese texts cited in this essay are my translations.

### “Inner Peace”: Challenging Political and Cultural Hegemony

I first come to interrogate the Taoist influences on Lin by putting them into the socio-political context where Lin lives. Born in 1936, Lin Zhaohua witnessed and experienced the hegemonic propaganda during his most energetic ages—the years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Lin always expresses his dissatisfaction with the political propaganda of communism (Lin 2014a: 20–24). During the 1950s when the Chinese teenagers were educated to establish the same pursuit of contributing to communism and sacrifice their lives for communism, Lin kept interrogating the value of these pursuits. He suffered from the hierarchical political system as his application for participating in the acceptance examination of The Central Academy of China was once rejected by his manager of a military-owned Film Studio in 1957. His anti-hegemonic thoughts first revealed themselves during his undergraduate program when he was asked to work on farms in the countryside: “I come to the theatre academy to study. Why would I come to the university to stay in the countryside without payment for a long time? Why don’t you just transfer me to the School of Agriculture” (Wu 2011)? Lin’s negative attitude towards hegemonic politics was intensified during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when he and his wife were forced by the political requisites to publicly excoriate his father-in-law who was defined as a capitalist betraying communism. Some of Lin’s most respectable predecessors such as Zhao Qiyang, Jiao Juyin, Diao Guangtan, Yu Shizhi, Lan Tianye, Ying Ruocheng, etc., at the same time, were sent to the countryside or industries to receive communist education. Even though, he did not berate the hegemonic politics publicly, which might be attributed to his living context when most people were cautious about expressing their real political arguments in mainland China.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, all these experiences

only revealed themselves as a weak complaint even in the New Age after the proclamation of the Reform and Opening-Up policy (1978-): “There are too many conferences held by the Communist Party of China. I hate attending conferences! The others compete to express their loyalty to communism... All that they say is hypocritical...” (Lin 2014b: 40). His dissatisfactions and complaints about the hypocritical performances of the meetings hegemonically required by the Chinese authorities are, to some extent, solved by Taoism. Although his first encounter with the texts of Taoism was in the mid-late 1980s (Lin 2014b: 129), Lin’s knowledge of Taoism as a concept could be traced back to 1976. He recollects:

Every morning [in 1976], I went to Tongzi River (*Tongzi he* 筒子河) to practice acting and voice. A teenager practised kung fu there these days. He was fit and strong. One day, I could not help but ask him, “What kind of kung fu are you practising?” The teenager answered while practising, “Nine Dragons with Eighteen Skills (*Jiulong shibashu* 九龙十八术)...” When we became familiar with each other, he told me he was a *qigong* massager at China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences.<sup>3</sup> Massage and *qigong* are worth learning. This young man taught me Taoist Meridian kung fu (*Daojia ziwugong* 到家子午功). [The only gesture of this kung fu is] making fists with both hands. There were a lot of meetings held in [Beijing People’s Art Theatre]. I practised [Taoist Meridian kung fu] and did not pay much attention to the content of every meeting so that the meeting which often lasted hours felt like a very short period for me. At the end of the meetings, I concluded with several sentences, “This problem is significant and needs more discussions...” This means I at least used my mind during the meetings. At every meeting, we rarely sat in sofas but cross-legged on the ground. Yu Shizhi found this phenomenon in days and asked me after a meeting, “What were you doing there, Zhaohua?” I confessed to him, “Practicing Taoist kung fu...” I told him, “You can also practice this [Taoist kung fu] if you don’t want to listen to the meetings held by the municipal Party committees. Nobody else will discover that...” (Lin 2014b: 81).

The overarching target of practising *qigong* is maintaining the “inner peace” of one’s psychological state; yet, this text shows that Lin’s deployment of the “inner peace” of Taoist kung fu not only helps him psychologically escape from the political meetings but also enables him to implicitly protest against the hegemonic political requisites of the Communist Party of China.

Confronting the corruptive society two thousand-odd years ago, Zhuangzi maintained an “inner peace” and negatively reacted to the external world. Yan Shian investigates Zhuangzi’s “inner peace” by arguing that Zhuangzi’s negative responses to the darkness manifest themselves as carelessness, which could be considered an implicit and mockery resistance (Yan 2011: 95). As a director of a State-owned theatre whose family members are all working for the Chinese authorities, it might be impossible for Lin to explicitly say “No” to the activities of hegemonic political propaganda, particularly endless political meetings. Thus, the Taoist Meridian kung fu endows him with an “inner peace” and enables him to psychologically escape from the hypocritical political propaganda, which can be read as a silent resistance.

Further, the ideologies in China are also affected by the hegemonic authorities. Lin angrily says, “Artistic creation should be individual” (Lin, Peng, and Meng 2018). Guo Shixing, Lin’s close collaborator, explains this sentence to the interviewers: “The problem he faced at that time was that government did not allow artists to express themselves freely; it wanted to turn artists into a mouthpiece of official politics” (Lin, Peng, and Meng 2018). The hegemonic politics always restrict the development of arts and cultures, and does not let the Chinese artists create freely. The political restrictions on artistic creations, particularly Lin’s creations, are usually carried out through pro-socialist scholars and State-owned theatres. When asked about his attitude towards the negative reflections from the external society, Lin conveys, “I definitely accept the insightful comments but care not a little bit of those who humiliate me... The Taoist philosophers accentuate the importance of ‘inner peace’. I don’t think I can create any great productions if I am worried about what achievements or prizes they can get” (Baobaodu 2011).<sup>4</sup> This is not a whim idea but should be attributed to Lin’s own experiences in the field of

Chinese *huaju* (spoken drama) which is imbued with academic hegemony. Considered one of the forefront figures of Chinese “explorative theatre” (Tansuo xiju 探索戏剧) in the 1980s, Lin keeps exploring the alternative aesthetics of the (socialist) realist tradition of Chinese *huaju*. Yet, his experimental productions, not like the others that mainly receive applause around mainland China, are usually excoriated by audiences, especially some academic scholars, for betraying the realist tradition, because BPAT, the leading theatre around China where he works, is constructed modelling after Stanislavki’s Moscow Art Theatre and deploying realist performance as its tradition. The experimental or avant-garde features embodied in his productions are usually criticized as too formalistic and lacking content (Ma 2007). What is noteworthy is the “failure” of his *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* (premiered in 1998), a collage of Anton Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, which premiered in 1998. *Three Sisters* is one of Chekhov’s most outstanding dramas. It was written in 1900 and had its debut in 1901 at the Moscow Art Theatre. The play tells the story of the boring life of the three sisters of the Prozorov family. Such a life is disturbed by the soldiers led by the gallant Vershinin. The sisters’ desire to go to Moscow, where they grew up but had not been again for many years, grows stronger while witnessing their little brother, Andrey, losing his dream of being a violinist. They discuss with the soldiers about the outside world and the future world, which gives them more expectations of going outside this small town. After a large fire in this small town, the soldiers are about to leave. The three sisters are left to continue their life of boredom. As for the play *Waiting for Godot*, the most distinguished play by Irish playwright Samuel Beckett, two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, are set to wait for somebody called Godot on an anonymous road with a tree nearby. They do not know who Godot is and why they are waiting for him/her. The whole play is filled with their conversations about themselves, the surroundings, Lucky and Pozzo, and Godot, which sound paradoxical. In this production, Lin finds a similarity between these two plays—“Waiting”. The three sisters are waiting for someone who can take them to Moscow while Vladimir and Estragon are waiting for Godot. In order to highlight the waiting conditions of these two groups of characters, Lin deletes most other characters such as Andrey, Natalia, Fyodor, and some soldiers of *Three Sisters*, and Lucky and Pozzo of *Waiting for Godot*. Because this production is concerned with two different plays and does not conform to some principles of realism, a unified story and realistic scenography for example, this experimental production was lambasted by countless veteran scholars in BPAT and the field of Chinese theatre who were “loyal disciples” of socialist realism and harshly refused to take a collage of these two canonical plays into one production at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, the three sisters on Lin’s stage are nearly static and the texts are woven with each other without any explicit boundaries, which confused the ordinary Chinese audiences in 1998 who got used to socialist realist performances for decades. Thus, the audiences also showed their distaste for this work as around half of the audiences left the auditorium during the performance and Lin and Yi Liming, the stage designer of the praxis, lost around 370,000 CNY in creating it (Lin 2014a: 303).<sup>5</sup> Lin was upset about the failure of the box office and was annoyed by those conservative scholars who were dominant in power discourse.

According to Guo Xiaonan, the publicly published comments in China usually represent the attitude of the Chinese authorities. The writers of these comments neither analyze nor know new theatrical aesthetics, thus, they sometimes hurt the development of theatrical troupes (Guo 2019: 104). Lin has only been awarded two prizes—The Theatre Academy Award (Directing Award) of The Central Academy of Drama and The Best Director Award of The Denny Award in Beijing for International Excellence in Theatrical Arts (2015)—in mainland China even though he is the initiator of the Chinese little theatre movement and encourages numerous Chinese directors of the younger generations to explore theatrical aesthetics.<sup>6</sup> The managers of BPAT do not want to admit that Lin has worked as the deputy chair of this theatre. When

BPAT celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of establishment in 2002, the official report listed every director who had worked for this theatre except Lin Zhaohua and his friend Li Liuyi; Lin cut out this report from the newspaper and hung it in his home, implicitly protesting against the managers.<sup>7</sup> Lin's friend, Hu Weimin, also mentions, "[Lin] once said sadly with a frown and head slightly raised: 'I acknowledge that I am the son of Beijing People's Art theatre, but Beijing People's Art theatre does admit that I am its son'" (Hu 1992: 158). In 2006, Lin adapted Henrik Ibsen's *The Master Builder* (premiered in 2006) to criticize those dominant intellectuals of the field who stick to their so-called traditions and block the younger generations' ways of exploring new methods in Chinese theatre (Lin 2014b: 287). Li Zehou's analyses of Zhuangzi's writings could help to understand Lin's attitudes towards external comments: "An individual gets rid of the restrictions brought by external issues, thus, he achieves absolute freedom... This is Zhuangzi's ideal personality" (Li 1985 78-9). Lin also achieves his artistic pursuits by detaching himself from external comments. According to the texts mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, Lin's concern about the achievements of his productions awarded by the hegemonic scholars of the field of Chinese theatre was converted to carelessness after he read the texts of Taoism. Such carelessness, brought by the Taoist "inner peace", does not insinuate that Lin gives up challenging realist tradition. On the contrary, Lin only closes his ears to prevent himself from the negative comments—maintains a psychological state of "inner peace" while facing the excoriations—and, as a one-way output, challenges continuously the dominant realist tradition of Chinese *huaju* in his productions as well as interviews.

How does Taoism influence Lin to challenge hegemonic (socialist) realism? After 1949, (socialist) realism became the orthodox mode of representing the socialist reality in mainland China. According to Yang Lan, the main political targets of socialist realism are "to idealise realistic life according to communist ideological standards" and "to educate people in socialist ideology and spirit" (Yang 1996: 94-5). Therefore, the dominant (socialist) realism in the field of Chinese *huaju* could be considered an artistic manifestation of political hegemony. While creating their third little theatre production, *Wild Man* (premiered in 1985), Lin and Gao both expressed their distaste towards socialist realism and the Confucian literati tradition. From late 1983 to early 1984, Gao encountered numerous Chinese folk arts, coupled with the ideas of Taoism and *Chan*, and decided to challenge the dominant socialist realism and Confucianism with these primitive cultures of ethnic minorities or marginalized Chinese philosophies. Lin's interest in adopting folk arts to replace socialist realism in *huaju* is inspired by his reading of Tao Yuanming's essay, *The Peach Colony* (Taohuayuan ji 桃花源记). Tao, one of the most prominent writers in ancient China, is usually considered a sage-like man who lives according to the Taoist tenets. Tao was invited by the current authorities many times to be an official but always resigned dozens of days after due to his disgust at the Confucian political culture as well as his love for a peaceful life in nature. Interestingly, Zhuangzi was also suggested to be the prime minister of his country but rejected due to his love for a free and natural life (Wang 2021: 221-2). *The Peach Colony* is one of Tao's most well-known essays which expresses his love for nature and his eagerness to leave society. Lin writes, "I love nature. Nature brings infinite enjoyable feelings of beauty to human beings. That's why Tao Yuanming wrote *The Peach Colony*" (Lin 2014b: 131). This idea encourages Lin to discover what could represent nature. He states in subsequent, "Folklores and witchcraft rituals can also contribute, to a large extent, [to the creation of theatre]. No Confucian elements" (Lin 2014b: 131). This argument constructs a dialogue with Laozi and Zhuangzi's socio-cultural pursuits: Laozi and Zhuangzi were willing to take advantage of ahistorical and asocial human nature to criticize the socio-cultural requirements of the last dynasty advocated by Confucius (Zheng 2019: 17-8). Lin also wants to take folk arts that feature nature to deconstruct the Chinese theatrical traditions coloured by Confucianism.

In *Wild Man*, a singer who represents nature wears a cloth that is designed to be black and

white to refer to the Taoist *yin* (阴), *yang* (阳), and Eight Trigrams (*bagua* 八卦). He is also called by the protagonist, an ecologist, as a man who believes in Taoism. It seems that the indigenous Chinese folk arts are considered by Lin to represent nature, which are altogether symbolized by Taoism. Under the guidance of Taoism, Lin and Gao in *Wild Man* deploy the dances of the traditional Shamanic ritual *Nuo* (傩), the performances of indigenous Chinese legends such as “God *Pan Gu* (盘古) using an axe to chop and create the universe” and “God *Kua Fu* (夸父) chasing the sun”, and the wild men living before civilization. The entire stage is designed as a chaotic space which refers to Laozi and Zhuangzi’s imagination of the birth of the universe (Zhang 1995: 44). The stage of *Wild Man* is no longer a well-organized realist performance but a chaotic carnival of nature-fostered entertainment. More Chinese folk arts are utilized by Lin afterwards. To list a few, he stages *yangko* dance, a popular rural folk dance in Liaoning province, in *Birdmen* (Niaoren 鸟人, premiered in 1993), to deconstruct the solemn of realist performance; adopts the Beijing rhythmic hawking arts in *Teahouse* (Chaguan 茶馆, premiered in 1999) to depict the life of grassroots in Beijing; and recruits the professional performers from Shaanxi province to sing the local operas *Lao Qiang* (老腔) and *Qin Qiang* (秦腔) in *White Deer Plain* (Bailu Yuan 白鹿原, premiered in 2006) so as to reveal a vulgar singing that is almost opposite to the so-called civilized realist acting<sup>8</sup>, etc.

As Terry Eagleton conveys for the modern era of late capitalism: “aesthetic becomes the guerrilla tactics of secret subversion, of silent resistance, of stubborn refusal.” For him, aesthetic form becomes its content: “a form which repulses all social semantics and might just allow us a glimpse of what it might conceivably be life to be free” (Eagleton 1990: 369). It is arguably that Taoism inspires Lin to use the indigenous Chinese folklores, which are closer to nature and rooted in lower-class Chinese people’s life and free from any restrictions of forms, in order to find an alternative aesthetics of dominant socialist realism and implicitly challenge the hegemonic political ideologies. The Taoist “inner peace” enables Lin to avoid political accusations, but does not forbid Lin from expressing his complaints about the hegemonic Chinese politics implicitly through the lens of challenging dominant socialist realism implicitly.

### “Reversal is the Action of Tao”: Sinicizing *Huaju* with Reformed *Xiqu*’s Aesthetics

Due to his inability to read English texts, Lin did not have a deep understanding of the modernist theatrical theories such as “The Theatre of Absurd”, “Theatre of the Cruelty”, stream of consciousness, and among others, that were introduced into China in the 1980s regardless of their dates of creation. Lin’s own directing aesthetics is mainly influenced by his own experiences. Lin was born in a big family where most of his relatives were theatre-goers of Chinese *xiqu* and in 1936 when traditional Chinese arts were still relatively influential around mainland China. During his study at The Central Academy of Drama (*Zhongyang xiju xueyuan* 中央戏剧学院), the current president of the university, Ouyang Yuqian, asked the staff of the Department of Acting to teach their students traditional Chinese *xiqu* and *quyi* (rhythmic storytelling). He subsequently worked at Beijing People’s Art Theatre, one of the most authentic State-owned theatres in China. During Lin’s early career, Jiao Juyin, one of Lin’s most respectful predecessors, put forward the “Chinese School of Theatre” (*Zhongguo xuepai* 中国学派) by arguing Sinicizing *huaju* with traditional Chinese arts: “We have to own Chinese School of Directing, Chinese School of Performing, enabling *huaju* to demonstrate perfectly the emotions and states of our nation” (Jiao 1988: 13). Often considered a disciple of Jiao’s “Chinese School of Theatre”, Lin has a strong background in indigenous arts and always insisted on assimilating traditional Chinese culture, particularly *xiqu*, to develop *huaju*. While pursuing this target, how does Taoism influence his methods of using *xiqu*’s aesthetics? The essay does not argue that Lin’s assimilations of *xiqu*’s aesthetics are solely influenced by Taoism, yet, Taoism could be used as one of various ideas that contribute to these assimilations.

Lin concludes the Taoist influence to his deployment of *xiqu's* aesthetics in the subsequent text:

I abide by Stanislavski's [acting system] for years, and then I find the concepts of "jumping in and out of characters" and *Verfremdungseffekt* of Bertolt Brecht. These [theories] are incompatible with *xiqu's* aesthetics. *Xiqu's* actors do not care about "jumping in and out of characters". They perform very freely. From a perspective of Taoism, nonexistence fosters existence; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe. From the perspective of space, the stage of *xiqu* is empty. Emptiness can express everything (Lin 2014a: 71).

This text proves that the Taoist nonexistence or void influences Lin's methods of Sinicizing *huaju* with *xiqu's* aesthetics in two ways: The freedom of actors' performance and the empty stage. Stanislavski's system requires its actors' performances to be monolayered or "I am". Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* develops the performing arts to be double-layered—a character and the objective narratives "jumping" out of the character.<sup>9</sup> Both theories limit their actors to one or two specific identities during the performance. Taoist nonexistence takes Lin to realize that *xiqu's* actors do not care about what identities they are performing so that they cannot be classified into specific identities but perform freely. What should be highlighted here is that Lin does not mean to make identities non-existent, but rather wants to make the boundaries among different identities non-existent, thus, all identities could be performed by the same character at the same time. This understanding of *xiqu's* acting is extracted from a Taoist tenet, "reversal is the action of Tao". In Chapter Forty of *Laozi*, Laozi writes, "Reversal is the action of Tao. Weakness is the function of Tao. The things of the world come out of existence, and existence comes out of non-existence" (Chen 2020: 217). Lin specifies this argument by alluding to another sentence of Laozi and compares it with dialectics in order to make it more comprehensible: "Chapter Twenty-Two of *Laozi* writes, 'The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight... He whose (desires) are few gets them; he whose (desires) are many goes astray'. These are all about dialectics" (Lin 2017: 33)! Applying this tenet to Lin's arguments of *xiqu's* acting aesthetics, the performance of *xiqu's* actors that need not be or cannot be classified into fixed identities gives rise to infinite layers of the actors as well as their performances. Simply put, the cancellation of the classification of different identities, on the contrary, enriches the identities. A *xiqu's* performer can perform with various methods through different times, spaces, and identities. Lin argues, "What [*xiqu's* artists] explore is the multilayers of performance" (Lin 1985: n.p.). He extracts "dual structure acting" (*Biaoyan de shuangchong jiegou* 表演的双重结构) from *xiqu's* acting aesthetics and dismantles the boundary between actor and character to be void. Practically to say, Lin's de-classification of his actors' identities is manifested as "performing simultaneously an actor and a character" (Gu 2018a: 21). Lin Zhaohua lists three ways to achieve his "dual-structure acting": *zhui-yilistic* narrative, audience-facing narrative, and storyteller's narrative (Lin 2010a: 280).<sup>10</sup> Due to the limited word count, I will briefly introduce three main methods by which he achieves the multilayers of identities out of the nonexistence of classified ones.

*Zhui-yilistic* narrative (the narrative of recollection) asks actors to change the dialogues that are currently happening to a narrative story that happened in the past. Differing from those who perform or "dive into" their recollections, Lin's actors, while performing *zhui-yilistic* narratives, should hold the state in present to narrate the past. The actors use a tone similar to a third-person perspective and past tense to speak their texts; yet, the third-person perspective here does not refer to anyone else but their characters in the present. These actors, while performing their characters in the present, narrate the stories of their characters in the past. By doing so, Lin's actors perform simultaneously the actors in the present, the characters in the present, and the characters in the past. The entire story is transformed into a recollection of the characters in the present. This *xiqu's* aesthetics could be interpreted from the Taoist arguments on time. Zhuangzi writes, "There was a beginning. There was a beginning before that

beginning. There was a beginning previous to that beginning before there was the beginning” (Chen 2019: 80). What Zhuangzi wants to express here is that people should not treat time as a sequential concept, because, as a part of Tao, time should be indivisible. The concepts such as “past”, “present”, and “future” are coined by human beings, which hurts the completeness of time. Ye Weilian compares this Taoist argument with the Chinese language – particularly the ancient Chinese which does not have tense – which enables traditional Chinese literature to challenge the limitations of time periods (Ye 2002: 12). Under such a view of time, different periods in traditional Chinese literature could be juxtaposed or disordered as they are originally the same thing. There is no evidence to prove the direct influence of the Taoist arguments on time to the traditional Chinese literature, *xiqu* included, but Lin’s assimilation of *xiqu*’s recollection resonates with Ye’s illustrations of such an aesthetic connection. The view of time in the *zhui-yilistic* narrative of Lin’s actors is synonymous with Zhuangzi’s understanding of time in which the “past”, “present”, and “future” cannot be segregated but is a unity. The borders between different periods are treated as nonexistent, thus, multiple periods or the feelings of the periods could be staged simultaneously.

Moreover, audience-facing narrative lets actors change inter-character dialogues to be the communications between characters and audiences. This is a technique frequently used in *xiqu* in which *xiqu*’s characters usually speak or sing out their inner thoughts directly to audiences. Lin asks his actors to directly speak the characters’ texts, even the texts as a part of dialogues, to audiences and deliver the characters’ emotions to audiences; he thus wants the fictional emotion to transcend the “fourth wall” and affect the real world of the audiences. This aesthetics reverberates with Taoism in the field of artistic space dimension. I need to trace to a Taoist argument, “revering the real” (*shang zhen* 尚真), that influences one “essence” of *xiqu*’s acting aesthetics. The word, “real” (*zhen* 真), is utilised sixty-six times in *Zhuangzi* to illustrate Zhuangzi’s praise of “real”. Talking about the real as a virtue, he writes, “Real is a man’s pure sincerity in its highest degree. Without this pure sincerity, one cannot move others” (Chen 2019: 874). In other words, Zhuangzi believes that one can move others with the real that is rooted in his heart, which unveils a unity between the psychological world and the physical world. Laozi states, “The great governance [of Tao] does not have distinguishment” (Chen 2020: 173), which uses political philosophy to indicate his ontology that everything – no matter psychological, physical, or conceptual – is connected with each other and cannot be differentiated. All boundaries in between are not created by the world itself but defined by human beings. Zhuangzi’s argument of “revering the real” extends Laozi’s argument and aims to dismantle the boundaries by deploying the external, physical, and formal features to understand and reflect the internal and psychological real. He puts forward not only “There are no boundaries between things and those who use things (human beings)”, but also “Tao is the one connecting all” (Chen 2019: 614, 69). As a result, everything transcends the boundaries and becomes a unity. When Lin’s actor speaks out the character’s psychological movements, he transcends the border between the character’s psychological real and the fictional world. When he further speaks this to the audiences, the borders between the fictional world and the auditorium collapse as well. Thereafter, the borders between the characters’ psychological world and *xiqu*’s fictional world, and between the fictional world onstage and the real world of the auditorium are discarded in Lin’s audience-facing narrative to be non-existence and different spaces could be united into One.

Lastly, storyteller’s narrative requires actors to maintain both the identities of narrators and characters. The actors, during the performance, on the one hand, speak texts with an observational attitude, and on the other hand, perform or experience characters. Sometimes, they cross-perform different identities; other times, they play the roles of characters while narrating. This method keeps signalling to audiences that the actors are playing the roles of characters rather than are characters themselves.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these three main methods, more methods

such as “actors watch performances with audiences” and “actors perform with scripts in their hands” are deployed by Lin according to *xiqu*’s aesthetics. Thus, Lin’s actors can “jump into characters”, “jump out of characters”, narrate, perform, observe themselves from a third perspective, or experience the life of characters regardless of time and space (Lin 2001: 78). This technique potentially reflects the Taoist views of the relationships between “Self” and “Other”. Liu Shaojin interprets Zhuangzi’s texts by writing that Zhuangzi’s understanding of the universe can be classified into several levels. The highest level could be defined as “holding a view before the existence of objects” (Liu 2007: 68). Because the concept, “object”, embodies the meaning of the differences among different things, thus, this worldview leads to a unified understanding of the world. The second level features “believing in the existence of objects as well as the same origin of these objects”. Objects, in this level, are still connected (Liu 2007: 68). However, when people focus on the differences among objects, the perfection of Tao or the world will collapse, which is discouraged by Zhuangzi (Liu 2007: 69). In Lin’s storyteller’s narrative, an actor should get rid of his views of the differences among identities in order to perform more identities such as those of the actor himself, difference characters, and even a narrator of the story, at the same time. Arguably, Lin’s assimilation of the Taoist tenet, “nonexistence fosters existence”, releases his actors from the classification of specific fixed identities and enriches the techniques of performing.

Lin’s conclusive text on his understanding of *xiqu* from the Taoist perspective cited in the last paragraph also reflects his comprehension of theatre space. Despite his allusion to Laozi’s well-known sentence, “Out of Tao, One; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe”, he also argues a similar sentence elsewhere: “I like Taoism. At the very beginning [of my career], I search for inspiration from Taoism. [Taoism accentuates] that nonexistence is existence; existence is nonexistence. An empty stage can express anything” (Chen 2020: 225; Lin 2010b). He further associates this Taoist tenet with the empty stage of *xiqu*: “Empty stage. I like emptiness. This is related to the Chinese Taoism and *Chan*. From a Taoist perspective, emptiness is infinity. An empty stage can express infinite things. The aesthetics of the traditional Chinese *xiqu* bears resemblance [to emptiness]: everything is empty while everything can be expressed. From psychological space to physical space, everything can be expressed” (Xu and Lin 2010). Empty space is deployed in almost every production directed by Lin to break through the limits of the onstage space. In his *The Master Builder*, Lin makes the stage empty with only a red sofa located at the centre of the stage. Although the space of the play keeps changing as it should be “a plainly furnished workroom in Solness’s house” in Act One, “an attractively furnished small living room in Solness’s house” in Act Two, and “a large, broad veranda, part of Solness’s house” in Act Three (Ibsen 1978: 785, 834, 840), Lin’s stage is a completely bare one painted and lit in black, grey, and white, and very few colourful props are featured. Talking about this design, Lin argues, “I like the emptiness of stage. I wish the stage could flow. It is also an influence brought by *xiqu*” (Lin 2014a: 68). What flows on this empty stage is not only physical time and space that audiences are able to recognize such a flow with regard to the performance of the actors, but also the psychological space of the protagonist, Solness. The entire performance is designed by Lin as a very short period before Solness climbs a ladder when Solness recollects his past life (Lin 2016: 37–52). In other words, all the characters, except Solness, only exist in Solness’s recollection and the whole stage can be seen as Solness’s psychological space. The empty stage of this production extends the space onstage physically and psychologically. At various points, Lin in his *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* deploys an empty space to transcend the borders between texts. In this production, Lin Zhaoxia puts the three sisters on an isolated “island” at the centre of the stage while Estragon and Vladimir at a triangular “sand beach” at the front stage. The stage cannot be considered a completely empty stage but not many specific props depicted in the scripts can be seen. Talking

about the performance of this production, Lin puts forward again the empty stage of *xiqu* and confesses that an “empty stage is not easy but very difficult to handle... everything is revealed by actors’ performances. The actors are starkly exposed on the stage” (Lin 2014b: 299). Thus, the changes between the two plays and inter-textual communications of this production are carried out by the actions of running across the river located around the isolated “island” and between two stages taken by the dual-roles of Pu Cunxin, the actor of Vershinin and Vladimir, and Chen Jianbin, the actor of Estragon and Tuzenbach. A *xiqu*’s bare stage adds more freedom to the performances of Lin’s productions. Further, not all the stages of Lin’s productions are designed as empty ones; some of the others are abstract rather than nearly empty, which might also be partially impacted by Taoism. Lin argues:

Perhaps after the mid-1990s, it occurred to me unclearly that my general artistic pursuits and my understanding of creation and theatre might have gone into a phase of “mountains are once again mountains”. Laozi and Zhuangzi helped me reach the state of “epiphany” and enter a new world of theatre. Before that, I might still take beautiful scenery as the overarching target and pursue beautiful and fancy forms. After that, I realized such a superficial pursuit of the forms of stage does not solve the essential problems of theatre. I will not be a master if audiences can clearly see my designs onstage. A minimalist and abstract stage will deliver a stronger impact to audiences.<sup>12</sup>

Lin’s adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* (Premiered in 2004) could be taken as an example to elaborate briefly on his deployment of an abstract stage space. This production has a 2-meter-tall stage on which the branches of several cherry trees are thrust into the yellow-burlap-made “sky”. What is staged in front of the spectators is a quite narrow interlayer that seems to be blocked by two thick layers of the soil and some relatively taller actors/actresses have to duck their heads while walking. A feeling of oppression is unveiled through this stage design as an anonymous spectator even repeats “oppressed” four times to describe this stage in his/her review article (Liu 2014). Meanwhile, on the soil-like stage grow not only eight bare cherry trees which indicate the space of the orchard but also a dust-covered piano, an exquisite desk clock, a cabinet, some pillows, and several chairs. These pieces of furniture which mark the space of houses are interspersed in the soil-like stage and even some of their bottoms are embedded in the “soil” like floor. The dismantled hierarchical boundary between the serfs and nobles during the transition from a feudal serf society to a new one is visualized on the stage. The legs of little girls stretching out from the left and right sides and the ghost-like women wandering upstage altogether demonstrate the psychological eagerness of Lyubov, the protagonist, to go back to her childhood when she could dance with her friends and see her mom. What Lin’s stage explores in this production is not the real world where the play takes place, but instead the suppressing atmosphere of the story, the equalized identities during a turning point in Russia, and the psychological status of the protagonist.<sup>13</sup> According to Tao Dongfeng, “From the perspective of aesthetic experience,” Zhuangzi’s approach to “the existence out of nonexistence” in the field of artistic creation lies in “minimalism” (Tao 1995: 173–4). Once the most powerful and meaningful features are captured in an artwork, the missing information or messages could be born in the surrounding emptiness. Lin, in these productions, focuses on depicting actor’s representative actions or abstract features of sceneries with an extremely minimalist method. Consequently, more complicated things such as Solness’s physical experience and psychological condition, the interactions between *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*, and Lin’s criticism on narrow-minded people have the potential to leave the empty space to his audiences to fill and imagine according to their own experiences.

Accordingly, the Taoist “reversal” helps Lin assimilate *xiqu*’s aesthetics in two different methods. As for *xiqu*’s acting aesthetics, Lin treats the boundaries in the acting time, space, and identity, as nonexistent so as to achieve a freer acting system – in contrast to Stanislavski’s theory which requires actors to perform strictly according to the superficial reality. As for *xiqu*’s stage

designs, Lin keeps only the representative features of the performance and abandons most of the concrete decorations in order to ask his audiences to fulfill the surrounding emptiness with their own experiences and understanding.

### “Fleeting and Indeterminable Tao”: Breaking through the Restraints of Specific Directing Methods

The dialectics Lin learns from the Taoist “reversal” also contribute to his pursuit of breaking through the restraints of any concrete theatrical schools. Lin alludes to one sentence of Chapter Twenty-Two of *Laozi* to demonstrate his thoughts about directing: “[The Taoist sage] is free from self-assertion, and therefore he is distinguished; from self-boasting, and therefore his merit is acknowledged’... This is also beneficial to my self-cultivation” (Lin 2017: 33). This sentence teaches Lin that he should not be satisfied with what he has achieved but needs to keep being modest so as to acquire the possibilities to promote his directing aesthetics. He, in *The Master Builder*, concentrates on expressing a similar argument. In this production, Lin asks Pu Cunxin, the actor of the protagonist Solness, to climb up a high ladder the top of which is designed to be higher than the ceiling and cannot be seen by the audiences, so Pu is considered always in an action of climbing rather than that of reaching the top. Pu’s symbolically continuous climbing action is illustrated by Lin as his own attitude towards his job: “I don’t want to be a master. Master means that he is already at the top of the mountain while I still want to climb higher” (Tian 2018a). Lin’s directing experiences parallel this pursuit well, which is usually praised by some Chinese journalists and scholars as “each production has its own unique features” (Gu 2018b: III). This notion should be traced back to one of his most respectable predecessors, Jiao Juyin. Considered the initiator of “The School of Chinese Theatre”, Jiao’s directing aesthetics greatly influenced Lin’s attitude towards theatre. In 1985, Su Min and some other distinguished Chinese scholars published a book to study the directing aesthetics of Jiao systematically. They argue:

Jiao Juyin always shows an innovative attitude towards his artistic practices. He “gets rid of the old-fashioned elements of the last production and innovates the valuable ones in the subsequent praxis”, “takes the uniqueness of a theatrical genre as the foundation”, and “assimilates various features from outside”, thus, he frames a uniquely artistic way that “each production has its own unique features”. Suppose we agree that artists are respected for their uniqueness and the pursuits of “being different from others”, Jiao’s productions are even different from the previous ones of his own. He is an artist who always holds a passion and wishes to pursue something new (Su et al. 1985: 190).

Considered one of the most loyal disciples of Jiao’s directing aesthetics, Lin always endows each of his productions with unique features as well. Talking about the idea that “each production has its own unique features”, Lin confesses he “does not repeat the productions of other directors or that of his own” (Zhu and Wang 2013). To list a few, Lin started to explore “dual structure acting” in his *Absolute Signal* (Juedui xinhao 绝对信号, premiered in 1982), ask each of his actors to prepare a fifteen-minute long improvisational performance in *Bus Stop* (Chezhan 车站, premiered in 1983), deploy Chinese folk arts and stream of consciousness in *Wild Man*, create the theatre-fete-cum-fairground *93 Nights of Theatrical Karaoke* (93 xiju kala OK zhiye 93戏剧卡拉OK之夜, 1993) by putting short performances with food carts in the same space, apply pop cultures and films to *Faust* (Fushide 浮士德, premiered in 1994), create *Old Tales Retold* (Gushi xinbian 故事新编, premiered in 2000) and *Richard III* (Licha sanshi 理查三世, premiered in 2001) by means of devised theatre, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Pu Cunxin comments on Lin, “Lin Zhaohua keeps pushing himself, experimenting, and exploring [news ways of creating productions]” (Sina 2014). Shang Zhenshui conveys, “Lin Zhaohua challenges innumerable restrictions while adapting [Maeterlinck’s *The Blind*]” (Lin 2014b, 384). Wu Zuguang states that Lin “holds an ambition to challenge and reform the realism that has dominated Chinese theatre

for decades... In creating *Bus Stop* and *Wild Man*, collaborating with Gao Xingjian, Lin started exploring multivocality and epic theatre” (Lin 2014a, 169-170). The continuous innovations in Lin's productions make him always energetic and an “evergreen tree” of the field of Chinese *huaju*. The continuous innovations in Lin's productions make him always energetic and an “evergreen tree” of the field of Chinese *huaju*.

Apart from the influence of the Taoist “reversal” on Lin's modest attitude to the general aesthetics of his productions, Laozi's descriptions of the form of Tao, the origin of the world, are cited by Lin to theorize his opinions about theatrical schools or theories. Lin conveys:

What is Tao? [Tao] can only be felt rather than delivered by speeches. Laozi says Tao is the Fleeting and indeterminable. I reinterpret this ancient argument from a contemporary perspective: Tao can also be seen as a kind of telepathy. When people can naturally find the harmony between their own psychological states and the rhythm of the cosmos, they achieve a balance (Lin 2017: 33-4).

“Tao is the Fleeting and indeterminable” is extracted from Chapter Fourteen of *Laozi* in which Laozi describes the features of Tao (Chen 2020: 113). Synonymous with Lin's allusion to the concept, “epiphany”, of *Chan* Buddhism, his utilization of the indeterminable Tao cannot be simply interpreted as his comprehension of life but should be put into the realm of directing aesthetics. In 1986, a video recording of Lin's adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Schweyk in the Second World War* (Erci dazhan zhong de shuaike 二次大战中的帅克, premiered in 1986), played at the Hong Kong International Brecht Seminar, attracted the attention of Jurgen Flimm, the chair of Thalia Theatre in Hamburg, who subsequently invited Lin to his theatre to direct *Wild Man* in 1988. Lin firstly teaches German actors to practice the Taoist *qigong* as he writes on his directing notes: “The secret of the Taoist kung fu is ‘inner peace’... ‘Silence’ enables an individual to replace complicated thoughts with only one idea. One thinks about one issue, focuses on one target, one sound, one picture, one character, or one beautiful thing, then he succeeds in getting rid of anything else... Finally, one reaches the state of being a part of the universe [that no boundaries exist between him and the external world]”.<sup>15</sup> Such a kind of practice, according to Lin, aims to help the actors enter a psychological state of unconsciousness. The actors relaxedly move their bodies along with the music. Lin points out the target of asking these German actors to practice *qigong*: “I do not want them to perform with standardized actions” (Lin 2014b: 149). We do not know what “standardized actions” were performed by those German actors, but we know Lin equally disliked every stylistic “hat” put on his head (Ferrari 2012: 27). Although he received the most orthodox training in Stanislavski's acting system, Lin spent all his directing life challenging this theatrical school. He also refuses to be classified as a member of the avant-garde contingent even though he is considered one of the most experimental directors in China (Ferrari 2012: 27). Facing a question about the classifications of his directing aesthetics, Lin says that it pertains to “free theatrical aesthetics” (Lin 2001: 82). This argument means that Lin is not restricted by any specific theatrical schools, but directs dramas according to his own feelings about the relationships between the performances and the world. Countless times, when asked about his deployment of a specific technique in his praxes, he does not know how to answer, because these techniques cannot be traced to any theories but Lin's own devising practices.

Similar to Lin's contemporary understanding of the Taoist connections between human beings and the universe, Lin's devising techniques are initiated from the perspective of human beings themselves instead of any theories. Early in 1980 while he was directing *Toast for Happiness* (Weile xingfu ganbei 为了幸福干杯, premiered in 1980), Lin replaced the realistic scenery with an abstract one only for interest. The pursuits of interest also push Lin to use a little girl to play the role of Hitler in *Schweyk in the Second World War* and deploy a real tree on the stage of *Bird-men*; he even wants to put *Richard III* in a playground and every murder or deception depicted in the play is performed as playing a game. Lin Jianming, the consultant of Lin's adaptation of

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, conveys on Lin's directing aesthetics, "Actually, the children's game is a natural and pure theatre game" (Li 1992: 243). During an interview with Li Ruru, Lin puts forward, "Theatre is actually a game" (CAHSS Webteam 2015). Taking *Richard III* as an example, Lin first asks his actors to play various Chinese children's games during the rehearsal and selects some of the games that would be applicable to present the plots. There are at least fifteen games such as "Hawk and Chicks", "One, Two, Three, Wooden Man", "Pets Play Ball", "Rock, Paper, Scissors", and among others, adopted in the performance. For example, when Richard III talks about his aspiration of killing those who could hinder his way toward the throne, he is playing a game, called "Hawk and Chicks", as he is a hawk, catching and "eating" those pitiful chick-like aristocrats. Another game, entitled "One, Two, Three, Wooden Man", is deployed in the scene when two murderers are assigned by Richard III to kill his brother, Clarence. "One, Two, Three, Wooden Man" needs a man facing a wall to speak aloud "One, Two, Three, Wooden Man" according to his/her own speed and several men approaching him/her from behind silently. When the first man finishes speaking the sentence, he can turn his head around to look at the others. Meanwhile, the others should freeze themselves as wooden men. If someone moves while being starred by the first man, he/she loses. If the first man is touched by any one of the others, he/she loses. In Lin's modified game, Clarence acted as the first man with his eyes covered by his own hands in the middle of a transparent tent, a prop indicating the tower where he was jailed. He had to keep talking with 2 murderers approaching him respectively from right and left and to turn his head to look at them so that those who were stared at should go back outside the tent. Once he was distracted by the words of the first murderer and was begging for life, the second murderer stabbed him from the other side and uttered the text similar to the original text, "Look behind you, my lord" (Shakespeare 2008: 59). The cruel murders are treated as games by Lin's actors. These games deployed by Lin not only add a sense of amusement to this production, but also add a new theme to it: "Conspiracies are not dreadful. Being insensitive to conspiracies is dreadful, because [it means] that you are enclosed by conspirators" (Zhang and Lin 2003: 8). The game is a fountainhead of Lin's directing aesthetics.

According to Johan Huizinga, "Play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing" (Huizinga 1980: 1). Thus, the game is a preliminary activity deeply rooted in the nature of human beings or even all animals, which marks the natural connections between human beings and the world accentuated by Taoism. Zhong Tai argues that "being detached from human beings' bias and communicating directly to the world" (*yi ming* 以明) is one of the overarching ways to approach Tao (Zhong 2022: 24). Therefore, Lin takes his interest and psychological state of playing games as the motivations for directing dramas, bridging his productions with nature or the universe seamlessly and resonating with his understanding of the Taoist arguments on human-world relationships. However, this "epiphanic" or "telepathic" directing aesthetics does not mean Lin despises theatrical theories. On the contrary, he reads academic books widely, such as those about Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Martin Esslin, Antonin Artaud, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, Vsevolod Meyerhold, etc (Zhang and Lin 2003: 5).<sup>16</sup> In his essay, "A Soliloquy Written at My 'Kennel'", Lin writes down one of his most famous arguments: "'Expressing the reality', 'expressing the essence', idealism, materialism, symbolism, absurdism, modernism, post-modernism, and even post-post-modernism, etc. [I] ask all of them to stand around me, waiting for the birth of babies—I create my theatre aesthetics" (Lin 1998: 10-1). This text, accompanied by Lin's utilization of the Taoist *qigong* to release his actors from specific acting systems, could be interpreted as another way of pursuing Tao—"understanding the nature of every object while preventing subjectivity" (*yuwuhuazhe, yibuhuaye* 与物化者, 一不化也) (Wang 2021: 268). Xu Fuguan interprets the title of the first chapter, "Wandering Where You Will" (*Xiaoyao you* 逍遥游), by saying, "Zhuangzi's 'you' embodies the meaning of

'gaming'. The "gaming" here does not denote any specific games but reflects the free activity or the free spirit exposed within 'gaming'" (Xu 2010: 69-70). "Gaming" denotes Lin's free will in treating different theatrical conditions. He does not directly use the forms of theatrical theories but absorbs and "digests" them to create a new one for a specific production based on his own comprehension of performance. Hence, the Taoist philosophy, to some extent, inspires Lin to dismantle the boundaries among different theatrical schools, concepts, and personal thoughts in order to contribute to the continuous innovations of his directing aesthetics and praxes.

### Conclusion

Bertrand Russell comments on Taoism, "Lao-Tze's [or Laozi's] book, or rather the book attributed to him is very short, but his ideas were developed by his disciple Chuang-Tze [or Zhuangzi], who is more interesting than his master. The philosophy which both advocated was one of freedom" (Russell 1922: 188). Lin's various utilizations of the Taoist tenets can be altogether considered as his pursuit of Taoist freedom. He keeps breaking through the fixed things and ideas such as the political and cultural hegemonies in China, the old forms of *xiqu*, dominant realist tradition of *huaju*, and even the productions that were just created by him. For Lin, once one production is created or one argument is put forward, it is already old-fashioned and starts to limit his creative mind. By continuously looking into the non-existence, Lin succeeds in deconstructing the boundaries between the past and the present, different cultures inside China, and even the Chinese cultures and others'.

From a perspective of new-intercultural performance, theatre in the "East" has been suffering from the hegemonic cultures of the "West" for centuries. Penny Farfan and Ric Knowles in 2011 proposed, "...there is room for more globally syncretic and historically grounded understandings of intercultural performance as something that did not begin or end with Western modernism, and that does not simply involve Western appropriations of the Other" (Farfan and Knowles n.p.). Subsequently, the theatre artists from the "East" were encouraged to "weave" different traditions in their praxes based on their own identities and fight against the "Western" dominance in the field of intercultural performance. However, in 2018, Tian Min still pointed out that the movements of (new)intercultural performance "remain[ed] theoretically Eurocentric and geopolitically Western-centred" (Tian 2018b: 1). Although some distinguished "Eastern" scholars such as Rustom Bharucha (India) put forward some theories that were internationally influential, the number of them is still far smaller than that of the "Western" theories. Hence, accentuating the Taoist influence on Lin's directing experiences and directing aesthetics can contribute to the establishment of a Chinese-centred theory of intercultural performance. An intercultural theory initiated based on traditional Chinese philosophy could be considered one of the voices to balance the overwhelmingly dominant "Western" intercultural theories. Further, highlighting the significance of transcending the classifications of different concepts as well as objects, the arguments of intercultural performance based on Taoism could provide a united and equal view towards different cultures.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> My interview with Lin Weiyu through the online call of WeChat on 17 June 2022.
- <sup>2</sup> My interview with Lin Weiyu through the online call of WeChat on 17 June 2022.
- <sup>3</sup> *Qigong* is a sub-genre of Taoist *kung fu*. Practicing *qigong* does not require the practitioners to move their bodies fast but maintain a static gesture to clear their minds, which reverberates with Indian yoga or Buddhist meditation.
- <sup>4</sup> Lin also alludes a Taoist tenet, “achieving by doing nothing”, to express the same opinion. See Lin, Zhaohua. 2001. “*Xiju de shengmingli* [The Vitality of Theatre].” *Literature & Art Studies* (3):76–84.
- <sup>5</sup> 370,000 CNY was almost equal to 44,700 USD in 1998. The average annual salary of a Beijing citizen was around 12,285 CNY in 1998.
- <sup>6</sup> Lin’s winning of The Theatre Academy Awards (Directing Award) is mentioned by himself in one of his own essays. See Lin also alludes a Taoist tenet, “achieving by doing nothing”, to express the same opinion. See Lin, Zhaohua. 2001. “*Xiju de shengmingli* [The Vitality of Theatre].” *Literature & Art Studies* (3):76–84.
- <sup>7</sup> My interview with Lin Weiyu through the online call of WeChat on 7 February 2024.
- <sup>8</sup> The spoken drama was considered a civilized art in contrast to indigenous Chinese theatre which was “obscene” during the early twentieth century. See Fu, Jin. 2021. *A History of Chinese Theatre in the 20th Century III*. London and New York: Routledge.
- <sup>9</sup> *Verfremdungseffekt* (or Alienation Effect) is a theatrical concept incepted by Bertolt Brecht. This concept denotes a situation where actors do not pretend that they are the characters, thus, their audiences are not completely moved by the performances onstage but are able to think about the performances reasonably. A distance is created between the performance and audiences.
- <sup>10</sup> These are three main ways put forward by Lin to achieve “dual-structure acting”. There are also some other ways, such as performing ancient or imaginary stories with contemporary gestures, sitting on the sides of stage to witness other characters’ performances, performing as rehearsing with texts in hands, and performing as script reading, experimented by Lin to achieve the same effect.
- <sup>11</sup> More illustrations about three ways to achieve Lin’s “dual-structure acting” can be seen in Lin Weiyu’s essay. See Lin, Weiyu. 2010a. “‘*zenme shuo*’ ‘*shuo shenme*’ ‘*shuo shi shenme*’: *zhongguo dangdai juchang daoyan lin zhaohua de daobiaoyan meixue* [How to Perform What to Perform What is Performance Itself: Directing-Acting Aesthetics of Chinese Contemporary Theatre Director – Lin Zhaohua].” *Taipei Theatre Journal* (11): 269–327.
- <sup>12</sup> “Mountains are again mountains” is a part of a *Chan* Buddhist argument put forward by a Chinese monk, Qingyuan Xingsi (671–740). He says three states of studying *Chan*: At the beginning one studies *Chan*, he sees mountains are mountains and waters are waters; after one gains insight through the teachings of a master, he sees mountains are no longer mountains and waters are no longer waters; after epiphany, he sees mountains are once again mountains and waters are once again waters. Lin uses this text here to illustrate that he gets rid of the superficial forms of stage and pursues the essential meanings of it. See Lin, Zhaohua. 2014a. *Daoyan xiaorenshu: kanxi* [Comic Book of Lin Zhaohua: Watching Dramas]. Beijing: The Writers Publishing House, 62.
- <sup>13</sup> More illustrations about the stage design of Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* can be seen in Chengyun Zhao’s essay. See Zhao, Chengyun. 2024. “Directing Dramas is Returning Hometown: Reading Lin Zhaohua’s *The Cherry Orchard* from the Perspective of the Taoist Freedom, *Xiaoyao*.” *Theatre Academy* 2 (1):73–95. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10829736>.
- <sup>14</sup> “Improvisational performance” is an experimental performing technique which asks actors to perform without scripts, thus, these actors can perform according to their momentary feelings or their audiences’ responses. Their speeches and actions vary in different performances. “Stream of consciousness” was first a narrative mode used in novel writing which explores a narrator’s multitudinous thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind. In theatre making, stream of consciousness is deployed to describe the praxes that perform psychological movements rather than physical actions. “Devised theatre” references a collective creation of theatre in which every member equally contribute to the creation of a production. No director or playwright is highlighted in devised theatre.
- <sup>15</sup> The directing notes of Lin Zhaohua. Accessed on 28 February 28, 2024.
- <sup>16</sup> These theorists are not listed chronologically in that they were introduced into China almost at the same time after the proclamation of the Reform and Opening-Up policy.

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