

Making the Stage Echo Infinitely - Analysing the Additions to the Original Work Brought by the Theatre of Fayuan Temple in Beijing Directed by Tian Qinxin

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Abstract: The adaptation of a dramatic work is both an innovative and demanding endeavor. By building upon the original text, a skillful reimagining can imbue the characters with more dynamic portrayals and distinctive linguistic styles. Meticulous management of the narrative structure and rhythm can create a story arc that is both tumultuous and captivating, ensuring that the audience's emotional engagement remains consistently heightened. And multiple use of stage art, such as wonderful sets, lighting and sound effects, etc., adds rich layers and strong artistic infectivity to the whole theatre, thus bringing significant additive effects and allowing the theatre to show a more splendid charm. Some people see the silent tablets in the temple, while others can hear the deafening echoes of history and see blood splattered in the market place. The text is adapted to the stage, so that the other world can slowly reappear. This paper will examine the original rendition of Fayuan Temple in Beijing by Mr. Li Ao alongside the theatrical adaptation directed by Tian Qinxin. The analysis will concentrate on three key aspects: the transformation of the text, the management of the plot and pacing, and the diverse stage artistry. The aim is to evaluate the cumulative impact of dramatic adaptation in relation to the source material.

Keywords: Drama adaptation process, Text transformation, Plot and rhythm control, Multiple stage art, Additive effects of adaptation.

1. Introduction

A temple serves as an excellent dojo; Fayuan Temple in Beijing emphasizes the narratives that unfold across different eras within its ancient walls. The original novel by Li Ao commences with the interment of Yuan Chonghuan at Fayuan Temple following his assassination, establishing a comprehensive framework for examining the Hundred Days' Reform through the lenses of familial ties, national identity, and the themes of existence and mortality [1]. The theatre version directed by Tian Qinxin focuses on a devastated court at the end of the Qing Dynasty, showing the changes in society and the complexity of human nature. This work is not only a depiction of the fate of individual historical figures, but also a profound reflection on a turbulent society. This essay begins by quoting the lines that recur at both the beginning and the conclusion of the play. It draws a parallel between the theatrical stage and an exemplary dojo, highlighting the intricate interplay of roles, performers, vocalization, narration, acting, auditory elements, visual aesthetics, and musical components. The

focus will be on the original rendition of "Fayuan Temple in Beijing" by Mr. Li Ao, alongside the theatrical adaptation directed by Tian Qinxin. The analysis will delve into the cumulative effects of dramatic adaptation, examining three key dimensions: the transformation of the source material, the management of narrative structure and pacing, and the diverse artistic expressions on stage.

2. The Artistic Adaptation of "Fayuan Temple in Beijing" on the Stage

When Li Ao astutely encapsulated the fundamental essence of the Fayuan Temple, the artistic expression that Tian Qinxin reinterpreted through the medium of theatre seemed to emerge as even more grandiose and intricate. [2]. However, the theatre version of *Fayuan Temple in Beijing*, directed by Tian Qinxin, is more like a debate competition in the middle of a temple or in the courtroom than a dramatic story of historical change presented in the original work. Transforming a textual story into a theatrical interpretation on stage essentially means a change of story-telling style, including the modification of lines, the embodiment of performance and the addition of plot. Initially, regarding dialogue, theatrical adaptations necessitate significant modifications to the characters' lines. Theatre is an art form that operates within the dimensions of time and space; thus, to effectively portray the progression of millennia of history on a confined stage, it requires condensation and artistic reinterpretation [3]. In terms of character dialogue, the original text is filled with a lot of talking and long speeches, which are mainly used to promote the story and set the background. This needs to be simplified in the play so that the sermons become more logical arguments. Furthermore, in the original novel presented from a divine perspective, the characters are extensively described in terms of their physical attributes, behaviors, histories, motivations, and psychological complexities. However, in the theatrical adaptation, this narrative is absent; instead, pertinent information is conveyed through the dialogue of bystanders or is transformed into the character's powerful monologues, thereby advancing the storyline. Tan Sitong's succinct term "martyrdom" consistently evokes deep emotional resonance. [4] Furthermore, the nature of a theatre actor's performance intensifies the delivery of the lines. While novels rely on the written word, plays depend on the actors, who must convey their emotional essence in a three-dimensional manner on stage. [5]. As a result, the professional actor's pauses and accents in lines are more effective in creating a heated impact. The story and the characters are also vividly presented to the audience through the meticulousness of the actors in performing the characters' movements. For example, Kang Youwei's eyes as he kneels when he first meets the Guangxu Emperor, his arms unconsciously overstepping the boundaries when he is having a good conversation, and the strict monarchical system as he is given a seat at the side of Empress Dowager Cixi exemplified the delineation of boundaries between the sovereign and the ministers, which created impediments to legal reform. Additionally, the dramatic adaptation incorporated more clever interludes to alleviate the fatigue associated with the extensive dialogue [6] and the heaviness of the history of the Hundred Days' Reform. For example, in order to continue the book's flirtation with dialects, actors were allowed to use dialect interpretations on stage in the theatre performance, including Yuan Shikai's Henan dialect, Liang Qichao's Cantonese, and Emperor Guangxu, who could not understand the dialect, making the episode funny to the audience. In addition, the young monk in the text often gives a series of commands to the traditional and stately historical figures that only appear in history, as if he were controlling a game of chess, including shouting at Kang Youwei and calling the Empress Dowager Cixi Grandma instead of her title. Such an adaptation technique allows the audience to remain in the present and on the sidelines in time with Pu Jing and the young monk to pull back from the chess game and take a more comprehensive view of the bigger picture. Overall, Director Tian Qinxin's adaptation of *Fayuan Temple in Beijing* effectively distills and artistically transforms the source material, successfully communicating the original concepts to the audience while also bringing the narrative and characters to life in a more impactful and relatable manner.

3. The Plot Transformations in the Theatre Version of "Fayuan Temple in Beijing"

On the other hand, theatre is the art of playing with the stage, and as a new form of art, subversively reproducing the text according to the creator's understanding. The theatre distills the extensive narrative from its cocoon, presenting only the essence of its core and a glimpse of the stage. This allows the audience to directly experience the most exhilarating and captivating moments, which exemplifies the distinctive allure of theatrical performance.

The theatre version of *Fayuan Temple in Beijing* has made some modifications and deletions to the plot of Mr. Li Ao's original novel to a certain extent. First of all, the theatre adaptation has made certain changes in some of the character settings and character portrayals. In the original, the central character is portrayed in chapters around the centre of the novel, which is the change of the law. The theater, conversely, presents a chaotic blend, where a spotlight illuminates the individual stepping into the limelight amidst the audience's fervor, thereby emphasizing the introduction of characters during this stage. In terms of protagonists, Li Ao's original novel is centred on Kang Youwei, who is the main character at the beginning and the end. The play, however, switches the positions of Kang Youwei and Tan Sitong, clearly making Tan Sitong serves as the primary positive figure throughout the narrative. In this context, Kang Youwei's character has been notably subdued and diminished during the process of transformation[7]. Including the image of old age and the posture of shouting, which is a big contrast with the original image of the prophet who is full of knowledge and dedicated to saving the country. In addition, one of the more controversial aspects of the play is the reversal of Cixi's image. While the original portrayed the Empress Dowager as a pedantic old woman who was thoroughly misguided and wasteful, in the play, the Empress Dowager was extremely strict, patriotic and far-thinking. Specifically, she is clear about the whole process of exchanges abroad, but also can reasonably say that the abolition of the eight-legged text of the impact of the great. Books and plays, as a form of creation, represent the thoughts of the creator to a certain extent, and the original is presented as an intertwining of fiction and historical fact [8] with the characters acting as the author's sounding boards, depicting the story for the author and reflecting the author's thoughts and ideas. Whereas history is multi-dimensional, theatre provides the audience with an alternative interpretation so that understanding is not trapped in a single accusation. In the third point, regarding the narrative weight, the drama significantly enhances the portrayal of the Six Gentlemen of the Hundred Days of the Past. This expansion allows for a more comprehensive exploration of characters beyond Tan Sitong, extending their development from specific chapters in the source material to encompass the entirety of the drama. Yuan Shikai's character is further developed, with his internal conflicts, dilemmas, and complexities becoming more pronounced through his interactions and reflections. Rather than treating the characters as mere historical figures, Tian Qinxin approaches them with nuance, providing a platform for these contentious figures to articulate their perspectives. [6].

4. The Plot Compression and Reorganization in the Theatre Adaptation of "Fayuan Temple in Beijing"

Furthermore, the theater adopted the entirety of the Hundred Days' Reform as the central narrative thread, in contrast to the original text, while positioning the struggle between reformists and conservatives as a secondary narrative arc. [9]. Compressing a book of nearly three hundred pages into less than three hours for the stage, it was necessary to make deletions to the plot as needed. The theatre disrupts and reintegrates the timeline, allowing information to be centralised, including the characters' places of origin and addresses, which are scattered in the book, to deepen the audience's memory. The original book begins with Master She, a monk in the Fayuan Temple, and ends with Pu Jing, following a chronological and methodical narrative. The performance commences in 1921, featuring Pu Jing in the role of the abbot and a young monk as his apprentice, and it vividly portrays

the upheaval within the imperial court during the Hundred Days' Reform through the lens of the master-disciple relationship. The story has changed from the present tense to the past tense, and it has a sense of interaction that recalls the past and caresses the present. In addition, compared to the additions and alterations, the drama does more deletions. The theatre deleted Guangxu's teacher, Master She and Wang Wu's brothers, and the hidden grudge between them, which was only brought up in one sentence. It also deletes the Japanese representative in the Japanese embassy who wants to help, the arrest of Tan Sitong and others, and Zhang Yinhuan's thoughts in prison. The narrative unfolds across multiple regions of China and spans various time periods, whereas the drama predominantly unfolds in two settings: the imperial court and the temple. This spatial and temporal compression heightens the discourse and the conflict of perspectives among the characters.

5. The Artistic Representation of Imagery in the Theatre Adaptation of "Fayuan Temple in Beijing"

Moreover, the allure of theatre lies in its ability to translate literary imagery into a tangible experience through the mastery of stagecraft. Theatre uses light, shadow and sound to immerse the audience in an immersive journey. Initially, regarding the arrangement of scenes and the movement of characters, the original novel traverses various locations such as the Fayuan Temple, the Imperial Palace, the Summer Palace, the Liuyang Hall, and foreign embassies, adapting the backdrop to suit the characters' journeys. In contrast, the theatrical adaptation narrows its focus to just two settings: the Fayuan Temple and the Imperial Palace in Beijing. As Director Tian Qinxin articulated, she appreciates the concept of an open stage approach [10]. The theatre is simple in terms of set design, combining the monarchy and the beauty of mediocrity, with a symmetrical centre line, an open space in the middle, and permanent rows of seats on both sides, with one side occupied by the reformists and one side occupied by the old guard, giving the impression of a debate between the two sides, both of which are pulling for the salvation of China. As a typical aesthetic work of Tian Qinxin's writing style, this play lets the audience be present at the magnificent historical scene just by the four beams and eight pillars and a few square chairs. The individual who approaches the center of the stage is grappling with a significant internal conflict. Additionally, the interplay between the lighting and set design enhances the overall presentation. The theatrical adaptation embodies a uniquely theatrical perspective [11]. The large blank space in the centre of the stage and the erection of two wheat frames are very abrupt on a theatre stage, but combined with the inner monologues of the characters, they show a sense of power of self-analysis. The wheat stands and the chasing light give the characters a pause and a listening ear as history rolls on. Moreover, the props are more intuitive to give the characters a facial image, which is easy to build up an image, deepen the impression and express the creator's concept. For example, Yuan Shikai's face is sprinkled with white powder after the opening scene, and the blood-red marks on the faces of the Six Gentlemen. Another example is the road back to the palace after the dialogue between Emperor Guangxu and Kang Youwei, where the serpentine chairs on the way are obstructed in many ways, and the obstacles are cleared again and again to return to their own positions. Moreover, the music gives a new emotional colour to the drama. Drama primarily revolves around characters engaged in intense dialogue, set against a backdrop of collective emotion. The insertion of "Qing Pingdiao" is characterized by clarity and elegance, narrating a profound sense of sorrow that encapsulates significant pathos. This reflects the sentiments of reformists within the Qing court and their emotional ties to the nation. While the song superficially addresses romantic love, it serves as a metaphor for the relationship between ruler and subject [12], reflecting the director's skilful use of it.

6. Conclusion

This paper examines the original rendition of Fayuan Temple in Beijing as presented by Li Ao, alongside the theatrical interpretation crafted by director Tian Qinxin. It analyzes the supplementary impacts introduced by the theatrical adaptation through three distinct dimensions. In terms of the transformation of textual expression, the theatre adaptation makes almost complete adjustments to the characters' lines, streamlining the large conversations and long sermons in the original into clearer logical arguments, and the contents related to the view of god in the original are uttered or transformed into the characters' recitations by the bystander Pu Jing in the theatre. The theatre actor's form of acting gives more tension to the lines, and the acting movements bring the story and characters to life. In addition, the theatre adaptation adds humorous moments to dilute the heaviness of history. In terms of narrative structure and pacing, the theatrical adaptation has altered and condensed the original narrative. There are notable modifications in character development and representation, such as the shift of the protagonist from Kang Youwei to Tan Sitong, alongside a reimagining of Cixi's portrayal. The emphasis on the roles of the Six Gentlemen of the Hundred Days' Reform and Yuan Shikai is amplified, with the trajectory of the Hundred Days' Reform serving as the primary narrative thread, while the tension between reformists and conservatives acts as a secondary subplot. The production disrupts and amalgamates the chronological timeline to enhance thematic clarity, transitioning the narrative from a progressive tense to a past tense, and omitting certain characters and scenes to intensify the discourse and ideological confrontations. In terms of the recreation of literary imagery through theatrical artistry, the play is confined to two primary settings: the Fayuan Temple and the Imperial Court in Beijing, utilizing a minimalist set design that reflects the symmetry of the central axis and the aesthetic qualities of the original literary style. Lighting and props complement each other well, with mike frames, chasing lights, and props contributing to the characterisation and portrayal of the characters. The music gives the drama a new emotional colour. However, this essay only analyses the two versions of Beijing Fayuan Temple, and only discusses the adaptation of the play based on Mr. Li Ao's original work and the version of the play directed by Tian Qinxin.

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