The Anti-Gaze in a Hybrid Shakespeare: A Discussion of Women Characters in *Prince of the Himalayas*

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Abstract Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas* reverses the characteristic gaze of Hollywood films by refusing to confine itself to the other position. The film is an example of hybrid Shakespeare, but instead of waiting passively for Shakespeare's gaze, Hu challenges Shakespeare, especially Shakespeare's characterization of the female characters in the play. Using elements of Eastern culture, Hu rewrites Gertrude and Ophelia, and creates the wolf woman. By reversing the relationship between the gazer and the gazed, Hu establishes the theme of love, forgiveness, and faith. Hu's anti-gaze marks a new trend of Asian Shakespeares.

Key words anti-gaze; hybrid Shakespeare; love; forgiveness; faith; mask

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In "Conflicting Fields of Vision: Performing Self and Other in Two Intercultural Shakespeare Productions," Joanne Tompkins argues that "[performing] Shakespeare with, among, and against other cultures (particularly non-Western cultures) directly confronts otherness and the anxiety it produces, since Shakespeare—used for centuries as a marker of 'self' in the Western world—is not the only 'self' on stage" (611). The anxiety appears in most Asian Shakespeares. Korean Director Lee Yountaek, for example, produced *Hamlet* in Seoul in 1996, but according to Yeeyon Im, the production reflected nothing but "the impasse of contemporary Korean society" (276). Japanese productions of Shakespeare face a similar challenge of erasing or compromising the local culture.[1] In 2006, Chinese director Feng Xiaogang produced *The Banquet*, a film version of *Hamlet* with martial-arts elements, that pleased neither European critics, who labeled the film to be too westernized, nor Chinese reviewers, who complained that it aims at a "completely non-Chinese audience" (Huang 234). That same year a Tibetan version of *Hamlet* was released. Directed by Sherwood Hu, this film entered the running for the Golden Globe Awards in 2007 and won awards in the 22nd Napa Sonoma Wine Country Film Festival and the Monaco Charity Film Festival in 2008. It also attracted attention in the academic field. For example, in 2009,

Wu Hui compared the theme of revenge and forgiveness in both films.[2] In China, Su Dongxiao argued that *Prince of the Himalayas* reflects a kind of Eastern anti-gaze by multiplying Western narrative structure with Eastern images and themes.[3] This paper argues that the anti-gaze Su has identified is possible because Hu does not confine himself to the other position in a hybrid Shakespeare. Instead of waiting passively to be gazed at, Hu challenges Shakespeare, especially Shakespeare's characterization of the female characters in the play. Using elements of Eastern culture, Hu rewrites Gertrude and Ophelia, and creates the wolf woman. This combination of female re-characterization and setting marks a new trend in Asian Shakespeares.

In filming a Tibetan version of *Hamlet*, Hu knew that if he rigidly followed the original text without considering the local conditions and customs, his production would turn into a show of puppets wearing Asian masks. His solution was to deny Shakespeare's authority and synchronize the original text with the local culture. From the beginning Hu sought to create a hybrid film:

> Having lived in the US for almost twenty years, I have experienced a lot. As a Chinese poem goes, "Night comes and where is my home?" I keep asking myself, "Where am I from? Where am I going to?" Four years ago, I went to a coffee shop in New York with a friend. In our chat, I suddenly had an idea. If I move Hamlet to a place which is the closest to the sky, and ask him to ponder over the questions about life and death there, what effects would I have? At that moment, the mysterious Tibet gave birth to *Prince of the Himalayas*. (http://www.spph.com.cn/books/bkview.asp? bkid = 118040&cid = 352845)

As a Chinese American film director, Hu sought to establish a coexistence between Western and non-Western cultures not only by moving Hamlet to Tibet but also by standing back from his own position as a Chinese director thinking about Hamlet in a New York coffee shop. Hu was born and raised in Shanghai but relocated to the US to receive his Masters of Arts degree from New York State University and earned a Ph. D. in directing from the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His educational background in a sense predetermined the hybridization of his cinematic production. Yet, unlike many other Asian film makers, Hu welcomes such hybridization. He named his film *Prince of the Himalayas* to indicate its multiple origins. Posters for the movie illustrate the beautiful and mysterious Tibetan landscape while at the same time proclaiming that the film is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[4] Hu's version of Shakespeare denies the Western text as the only authority. Tibet itself is a competing authority. Yet Hu goes a step further. Westerners have generally viewed Tibet as a mysterious place. It has the world's highest mountains. Some of its mountain peaks are holy places that only religious disciples could get close to. The Tibetan Buddhism and the indigenous religion, Bon, are unique in world religions. Even its medicine seems inexplicable by science. In many of the Western films, Westerners appear as explorers or expeditioners hoping to unveil the mysteries of Tibet. In adapting *Hamlet* to Tibetan culture, Hu refused to adopt such a Western gaze. He makes Hamlet a native Tibetan and dates his story back to a time when no Western explorers have found the

place. By authorizing the Tibetan culture, Hu changes the original power relationship between Western and non-Western cultures and develops a way for his film to gaze back on the Western culture.

The same hybridization that characterizes the dominant culture of the film also characterizes the way Hu protrays the main female characters. In typical Hollywood films, the camera gazes at women. Hu tries instead to make them people, not objects. For example, Hu completely reworked the character of Gertrude. He has said that he was always troubled by the idea of Gertrude's wedding Claudius only two months after her husband's death: "The portrayal of Claudius and Gertrude seems rather unreasonable in the original text. As the queen, how come Gertrude hastily marries the murderer of her husband?" (Zhou 174) Hu's question is not new. Due to insufficient clues in the play, audience and critics find it hard to explain Gertrude's immediate marriage with Claudius or to determine if she is involved in the murder. Most film productions reflect such a difficulty. In Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948), there is only a vague hint that Gertrude might have been an accomplice when Hamlet in Act III, Scene II watches the angry Gertrude leave the room in surprise. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990), Gertrude appears innocent, and her sensuality seems the only reason the director can give for her marriage. In the modern version of *Hamlet* (2000), Michael Almereyda shows once again an ambiguous Gertrude, leaving the doubts on her open for discussion. If Hu accepted Shakespeare as the only authority, he would follow those directors in shooting an ambiguous Gertrude, or at least a woman who is controlled by her passion. While it may work for those Anglophone directors, such a cloned image in Tibetan culture would not be convincing. Hu therefore orientalizes Gertrude, making her a pious, faithful, and self-sacrificing mother. Hu's interpretation goes like this. Seventeen years ago, the young Nanm (Gertrude) is forced to leave her lover, Kulo-ngam, who is Claudius in *Hamlet*, and to marry Kulo-ngam's brother, King Tsanpo. Being faithful to love, Nanm gives her virginity to Kulo-ngam before her marriage and as a result bears a son, Lhamoklodan, the prince of Himalayas. In Hu's rewrite, Nanm's marriage with Kulo-ngam is not a betrayal but a reunion with her lover and son. That's why she appears to be so happy at the beginning of the film.

It is not a rare phenomenon to rewrite Gertrude in Asian Shakespeares. In Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, for example, Gertrude is an ambitious woman who wants to have power and love at the same time. Yet her sensuality and adultery strike Chinese audiences as Western, if not Shakespearean. By contrast, Hu uses Chinese culture to challenge both Shakespeare and Western culture. Between Gertrude and Nanm, there are three essential differences. First, Nanm does not love King Tsanpo. She loves from the beginning Kulo-ngam but is forced to marry the king who is simply attracted by her beauty. Hence, when Lhamoklodan asks "have you eyes" in the closet scene, Nanm gives a totally different answer from that of Gertrude in Shakespeare's play. Nanm does not say "Oh, Hamlet, speak no more! / Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct" (3.4.90 – 93). Instead, she smacks her son out of anger and explains: "You don't know the truth. You don't know how powerful or desperate love could be."

Because Lhamoklodan speaks for the most part the same words Hamlet does, while Nanm does not follow Gertrude, we find ourselves listening to her instead of only watching her. This shift is part of what I mean by the anti-gaze that characterizes Hu's film. Moreover, by repeating Hamlet's words, Lhamoklodan represents a Western perspective. By giving different answers, Nanm stands for an Asian voice. The key word in Nanm's answer is love, which Lhamoklodan misunderstands as Nanm's confession of loving both King Tsanpo and Kulo-ngam. He therefore says to Nanm, "Throw away the worse part of your heart! Keep the other half!" In contrast to Gertrude, who gives an evasive answer—"What shall I do" (3.4.187), Nanm does not hesitate to choose. "You are wrong! You are absolutely wrong! The part you ask me to throw away is exactly my true love." By emphasizing how Nam corrects Lhamoklodan's mistake, Hu defies the Western perspective.

Going further, Hu turns Gertrude into a popular image in Chinese folklore and literature—a woman who suffers from her unhappy marriage and endures hardship for those she loves. "I love your uncle. My love began long before your birth. It is your father who deprived me of my love... Seventeen years! Ah, seventeen years! Life without love is death!" Hu has Nanm emphasize the precedence of her love. It precedes her marriage, and her marriage brings her nothing but misery. It should be noted that feminist readings of *Hamlet* began half a century ago in the West. In 1957, Carolyn Heilbrun published "The Character Hamlet' Mother" to defend Gertrude. The essay was warmly welcomed by feminist critics. In 1994, Margaret Atwood wrote the story "Gertrude Talks Back." In that story, Gertrude admits that she commits the murder because of long-term sufferings from her unhappy marriage. "It wasn't Claudius, darling, it was me!" (Atwood 19) In 2000, John Updike published *Gertrude and Claudius*, in which Gertrude's unhappy marriage is once again emphasized. Unfortunately, all these voices are muted in Anglophone cinematic productions. The original text becomes the main hindrance for those directors' free adaptations. Hu is different. He gets inspiration from his Asian background, and creates a woman who trusts, values, and sticks to her love. When Nanm says "You are wrong" and reveals gradually the truth of love, she becomes the one who holds and controls the voice. The audience, especially the Western audience, loses the privilege of relying on the Western text. They have to listen to what Nanm says to understand the whole story.

In addition to her hidden love and unhappy marriage, Nanm is different from Gertrude in the way she relates to her son. The Oedipus complex seems to be a popular reading of *Hamlet* in the West. In Zeffirelli's version, for example, Hamlet seems intent on raping Gertrude in the closet scene, which makes the Hamelt-Gertrude relationship "the most graphic of the Oedipus-inspired interpretations on film" (Bevington 630). Yet such a reading is in conflict with Chinese culture. In Hu's adaptation, there is no indication of the Oedipus complex at all. Just like a traditional Chinese mother, Nanm cares about her son and does not hesitate to save him when Lhamoklodan tries to commit suicide after killing Odsaluyang's father. Hu films an emphatic close up to show how Nanm uses her hands to grab Lhamoklodan's knife, an important plot to show her as a good mother. Moreover, Hu changes the identity of Lhamoklodan to make Nanm's remarriage more understandable. While Hamlet is the

son of Gertrude and old Hamlet, Lhamoklodan is not the son of King Tsanpo. His real father is Kulo-ngam, who is forced to call his son nephew for seventeen years. When Nanm marries Kulo-ngam, she is hoping to make the wedding a family reunion, an important concept in Chinese culture. That's why when Lhamoklodan comes back to attend King Tsanpo's funeral, Nanm seems eager to tell Lhamoklodan his true identity. The revelation of Lhamoklodan's true identity replaces the story of revenge for the father's death. The search for a hidden identity and the need to learn concepts of love, forgiveness, and faith fit an Eastern paradigm rather than a Western perspective, at least as *Hamlet* defines that perspective.

Nanm therefore differs from Gertrude in the way she embodies Eastern conceptions of love and forgiveness. In Tibet, life is to a large degree influenced by a person's religious faith. People believe that one should not lie, steal, or be greedy, let alone harm or kill others. While Shakespeare's play allows the possibility Gertrude is involved in her first husband's murder, Hu's movie makes clear that Nanm has nothing to do with the death of King Tsanpo. She gets excited when she realizes that Kulo-ngam may be the murderer of King Tsanpo. Her religious faith tells her that the only way for redemption is to ask for heaven's mercy. In the film, there is a full length shot of how Nanm runs to a lake and prays sadly in tears. It is one of the most striking scenes when Nanm and Kulo-ngam hug each other beside the lake, begging sincerely for heaven's mercy. The lake here is supposed to be Lake Manasarovar, which the theme song of this film focuses on. [5]

A sea of faces
Om mani padme hum
But I cannot find my lover
He is gone
Om mani padme hum
Lake Manasarovar is glistening
Om mani padme hum
Is it the holy lamp
my lost lover lights for me. . . .
(my translation, He)

While the loss of the lover foreshadows the impending death, Lake Manasarovar embodies the religious faith with which one is able to light the holy lamp. [6] In *The Tune of Brahma*, Shakyamuni Buddha mentioned the 10 benefits of lighting the holy lamp:

One becomes like the light of the world
One achieves clairvoyance of the pure eye as a human
One achieves the Deva's eye
One receives the wisdom to discriminate virtue from non-virtue
One is able to eliminate the concept of inherent existence
One receives the illumination of wisdom

> One is reborn as a human or deva
> One receives great enjoyment wealth
> One quickly becomes liberated
> One quickly attains enlightenment
> (http://www.khandro.net/ritual_offering_light.htm)

Hu uses such religious ideas to convey the theme of the whole film. He hopes that his audience could be enlightened to the concepts of eternal love and forgiveness that his rewrite stresses. As Hu once mentioned in an interview,

> "I'm going to make a totally different *Hamlet*. It is different not only in form but in connotation. It is about love, not revenge. It subverts the story of usurpation and revenge. It is a story in search of love and forgiveness. Mysterious births and blood relationships make all characters suffer. It is about love's helplessness, dangers, and devotions. *Prince of the Himalayas* expresses the transmigration and eternity of love. (http://www.spph.com.cn/books/bkview.asp?bkid=118040&cid=352845)

Because he focused on love, Hu naturally needed to think hard about how to portray Ophelia. Odsaluyang resembles Ophelia in the basic plot. She loves Lhamoklodan, the prince of Jiabo Kingdom, who accidentally kills Po-lha-nyisse, Odsaluyang's father, and is forced to leave the country.[7] Odsaluyang then goes mad and dies in water. It is easy to recognize this Tibetan version of Ophelia. Yet, there are fatal problems in this image. In *Shakespeare, Madness, and Music* (2009), Kendra Preston Leonard devotes a whole chapter to filmic Ophelias, arguing that directors like Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, and Michael Almereyda "treat Ophelia in similar fashion by infantilizing her, limiting her intelligence, and eradicating, both her spoken and sung vocality" (65). Those directors unanimously choose to show a sexually immature Ophelia, who is incapable of understanding her life and people around her. The hidden logic goes like this: Ophelia is not mature enough. She is too naïve to understand what is going on around her, which leads to her madness. Such an image can never go along with a story of love and forgiveness. By contrast, Hu creates an Ophelia who differs from traditional Ophelias in three ways, which can be analyzed in terms of love, faith, and forgiveness.

First, Odsaluyang is more active and outspoken in love than Ophelia. She does not hide her feelings but rather embraces Lhamoklodan when he returns from Persia. Having received a precious gift from Lhamoklodan, she announces her love by saying "just like your love, I'll keep it forever." In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia is submissive and obedient. She obeys Laertes when he compares love to "a fashion and a toy in blood" (1.3.6) and asks her to "think it no more" (1.3.10). She has the same words when Polonius forbids her to "give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet" (1.3.135). Odsaluyang is different. She is more confident and firm in her love. When her brother, Lessar, expresses his concern by saying "if he gets your love but cannot be with you, your sorrow will be endless," Odsaluyang assures him, "I'll let

love keep my heart." She trusts her love and shows no regret in sleeping with Lhamoklodan. If Ophelia is but "a body to be watched" (Rutter 302) in other filmic versions, Odsaluyang is obviously more vocal and brave. Her words are in most cases expressions of love, the theme Hu wants to convey in his rewrite.

The second way Hu tries to de-center Western values is by giving Odsaluyang a strong religious faith. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia has little mind for herself. She is more like a puppet, easily controlled and manipulated by others. She makes no protest when her father uses her as a piece of bait to test Hamlet's state of mind. When Hamlet kills her father, she does not express any anger but becomes mad instead. Her grief and insanity seem proof of women's frailty. Odsaluyang, by contrast, is more dominant than Ophelia. Knowing that Lhamoklodan is mournful about his father's death and mother's remarriage, she urges him to be tough and strong. She can even sense Lhamoklodan's plan and warns him against doing anything hasty and rash. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia returns the love letters out of her father's wish. In *Prince of the Himalayas*, Odsaluyang returns their token only after Lhamoklodan kills her father. The different timings reveal different personalities. Ophelia is devoid of independent mind. She seems too young and innocent to understand the surrounding complications. She does not even make her own decisions. In contrast, Odsaluyang judges for herself. She returns Lhamoklodan's love token not because she is obedient but because she can no longer accept his love. When Lhamoklodan exclaims, "You are my love. Only you can save my soul!" Odsaluyang retorts, "Don't talk about love. You are unworthy of it!" To fit the plot, of course, she cannot be the perfect woman, even though she is strong. Lhamoklodan's revenge and killing violate her religious faith, and become the main reason for her madness. In the departure scene between Odsaluyang and Lhamoklodan, Hu switches his camera back and forth to show Odsaluyang's inner turmoil, and then focuses on Odsaluyang's hand, showing how the love token drops from her hand onto the ground. When other directors insist on Ophelia's failure to comprehend the world, Hu highlights a moral and ethical choice that no one feels easy to make.

Hu makes the third change of Ophelia—her active willingness to forgive—the most subtle. It takes two steps to realize. First, Hu romanticizes Odsaluyang in her madness. He shows her not much like a lunatic but an angel or fairy. Odsaluyang never curses or complains. She does not scream uncontrollably as Ophelia does in Olivier's *Hamlet*. Nor does she behave lewdly to her guardians, which Zeffirelli takes more than two minutes to demonstrate. She does not have wild and terrified eyes. She looks instead gentle, amiable, and happy. She often dances or sings beside Lake Manasarovar. She asks for heaven's mercy, hoping to have a reunion with her lover and her father in the afterlife. By romanticizing Odsaluyang, Hu diminishes the idea of hate and revenge.

The second step is to make Odsaluyang pregnant. But where many students like to believe, based on very little textual evidence, that one of the causes of Ophelia's madness is that she finds herself pregnant, Hu focuses not on the horror of her unwed situation but the religiousness of the event. Odsaluyang gives birth to a baby as she dies, and such an event has religious connotations, epitomizing the concepts of love,

forgiveness, and faith. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia's death is not put onto stage. It is told by Gertrude and serves more like a fuse for the later duel between Hamlet and Laertes. In Zeffirelli's film, Ophelia's death is shown, and yet the camera stays far. Audience could only see her from a distance, indicating a cold and reserved response. In contrast with Ophelia's death, which is sad, helpless and desperate, Odsaluyang's death does not mean the end. It is followed by the birth of a baby. Hu is careful not to picture too realistically the process of childbirth. For him, it is more like a legend that people hear, tell, and respect. Hence, Odsaluyang walks into the camera, looking not particularly like a woman in labor. She faces the lake (Lake Manasarovar), which is static and still. It externalizes Odsaluyang's mentality: although she is in physical agony (she is going to give birth), she is not possessed by any hatred or repentance. She is going to give birth to a baby. Hu emphasizes the religious connotation by having a bird's eye view of Odsaluyang. It seems that someone is looking down from heaven and witnessing the birth of Odsaluyang's baby. Considered by both Hindus and Buddhists to be a place of pilgrimage, Lake Manasarovar is associated with several religious legends. "Hindus regard it as mental creation of God Brahma specially made so that pilgrims to Kailash would have a place to perform their ablutions. Buddhists believe that Queen Maya, the Buddha's mother, was carried here by the gods and washed prior to giving birth to Buddha" (Chamaria 66). Hu's intention here is pretty clear. Although Odsaluyang dies, she forgives Lhamoklodan, and the new-born baby, who is supposed to the leader of their later generations, embodies mercy and forgiveness from heaven. The scene after her death proves such a message. Hu uses a wide-angle lens to show the beautiful Tibetan landscape. There are interconnected mountains, green trees, and a bright sun reflected in the river, an indication of spring. When the wolf woman, a created character in *Prince of the Himalayas*, follows the baby's cries and finds Odsaluyang's child near the lake, she picks him up and exclaims, "Prince! Prince of the Himalayas!" The audience suddenly realizes the power of forgiveness Hu tries to convey. People may die. Hatred and revenge bring nothing but disasters. Only forgiveness can bring hope back to the world. It comes in the form of new life and forms an endless cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Lhamoklodan is not inspired by this moving scene because he does not see it. Instead, he drops into a state of despair, and he is in this low condition when he has to make his final decision between revenge and forgiveness. Hu realized that Lhamoklodan's relationship to the two main women, Nanm and Odsaluyang, is insufficient to fully establish the themes of love, forgiveness and faith. He therefore introduced the character of the wolf woman to lead Lhamoklodan to enlightenment. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the ghost of old Hamlet refers to religious conceptions like purgatory and asks for his justice. He wants Hamlet to kill Claudius, leaving Hamlet on his own to ponder whether he should take revenge or not. In *Prince of the Himalayas* the ghost is an evil force, not wrapped in religiosity. He forces Nanm to marry him, makes no hesitation to kill her and Kulo-ngam after realizing the betrayal, and urges Lhamoklodan to kill his real father. The only counter-force is the wolf woman, who knows all the truths. If the ghost represents the force to revenge, the wolf woman

epitomizes the wish to forgive. She is different from Nanm and Odsaluyang. Her message is more direct and explicit.

In order to avoid the difficulties the audience may have in accepting this created character, Hu disguises her as a prophet figure that is commonly seen in Shakespearean plays. Hu makes her first appearance mysterious and foreshadowing, perhaps imitating the way Akira Kurosawa introduces the forest spirit in *Throne of Blood*. She comes out of nowhere and seems to know what has happened and will happen. She interrupts Kulo-ngam, who tries to wash his hands in Lake Manasarovar, and says, "The old king died. The new king ascends the throne. There will be blood everywhere." Her words, like those of the forest spirit in *Throne of Blood*, foreshadow impending deaths and disasters that no one can escape. But here the wolf woman plays a greater role than in *Throne of Blood*. She does not disappear after foretelling the future disasters. She remains in the camera, standing either behind the characters or in distant corners. Her role manifests in two aspects.

First, she is the narrator for what happens in the past. Knowing not much more than Lhamoklodan, the audience may frequently feel puzzled by the hidden secrets in the film. The wolf woman shoulders the responsibility of solving the mystery. When Kulo-ngam admits his sin to Nanm and says that it will be his fate if Lhamoklodan kills him in the end, the audience may not understand their sadness. The wolf woman appears here to give the explanation. "The older brother is a powerful king. The younger brother is forced to give up the girl he loves. They see each other before marriage, and the girl gives herself to the younger brother. For seventeen years, the loved ones are torn apart. The king discovers their love. Unable to accept the shame, the king decides to kill his younger brother and punish his wife in the cruelest way." In giving the wolf woman the power to explain, Hu draws the audience's attention once again to the Asian voice. One needs to listen to and respect such a voice to understand the whole truth. The truth goes like this: almost everyone in the film needs to choose between love and hate, between revenge and forgiveness. Their decision determines the destiny of not only themselves but those around them. As the central figure, Lhamoklodan has to make his decision, which to a large degree determines the end of the film.

Where Kirosawa's forest spirit represents destiny, Hu's wolf woman represents active agency. Her role goes beyond that of narrator. She is a participant, and she helps Lhamoklodan choose his course of action, talking with him after he has set his mind on revenge. She not only warns him that "Slaughter is coming to family members" but also helps him to think: "I'm going to tell you a story between two brothers in a royal family." By revealing the hidden story, the wolf woman seeks to prevent an impending disaster. Unfortunately, the ghost appears and interrupts her story. The wolf woman tries again in the mousetrap scene. Being invited by Lhamoklodan, the wolf woman puts the murder scene onto stage. While the mousetrap serves mainly as a proof of Claudius's sin in *Hamlet*, it is for the wolf woman to tell the truth in *Prince of the Himalayas*. Hu borrows the mask dance that is popular in Tibetan festivals to tell the story. Through the mask dance, the wolf woman hopes to remind Lhamoklodan not to be cheated by the masks. He needs to discover the truth hidden

behind. Hu has similar hopes. *Prince of the Himalayas* wears the mask of a Shakespearean play. It helps to attract attention from both audience and critics. What the film is truly about, however, is a Tibetan story of love, forgiveness, and faith. What's more, the masked dancer obtains a new power. While the audience watches the dancer on stage, the dancer can gaze back on the audience behind the mask. The reversed relationship between the gazer and the gazed becomes one of the most important features of this film. Although the mask dance is interrupted by a flock of crows coming into the court and putting out the light, Hu's mask dance continues. It rises to the climax when Lhamoklodan knows his true identity. To prevent him from making mistakes, the wolf woman gives explicit advice: "Do not let the miseries of your last generation become the reason for your hatred!" Hearing this, the ghost gets furious. "You've said too much! What are you teaching him?" The wolf woman answers directly, "Love! Real love!" Her answer helps Hu to lift the mask and reveal his true purpose—to tell a Tibetan story of love. Before he dies, Lhamoklodan says to the ghost, "I hope my death can remind people of the choice between love and hate. I have no regrets. Hope your evil spirit stay away from our pure heaven in Jiabo. Go!" And the ghost disappears.

In addition to the concepts of love, forgiveness, and faith, there are two more messages hidden behind the mask. One is the concept of reunion, which is highly valued in Chinese culture. Nanm hopes to have a reunion with Kulo-ngam and Lhamoklodan in her remarriage. Odsaluyang hopes to have a reunion between her lover and her father with the help of heaven. Death is what ultimately brings Nanm, Kulo-ngam, and Lhamoklodan together. The picture of their bodies in blood on the white snow is impressive and startling. The second message is the eternal cycle of life and death. In the last shot of the film, Hu focuses on Lhamoklodan's baby son and the fire burial behind. Death and birth are here connected. In Buddhist religion, death is not the end. It is just one part of samsara—the eternal cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Although Lhamoklodan, Kulo-ngam, Nanm, Odsaluyang, and Lessar are all dead, they have brought hope to their land. The hope is Lhamoklodan's son, the future leader of Jiabo. When he grows up, he may lead his people to stay away from hatred and revenge and to live in a purified world. This hope marks as the ending note of Hu's mask dance.

Prince of the Himalayas is a daring challenge to Shakespeare. Although there are similar characters and plots, Hu gives totally different interpretations. His Gertrude is not characterized by "a mother's guilt upon her son" (Eliot 91). She is instead a victim of forced marriage and a pious, self-sacrificing mother. Odsaluyang is localized, as well. She is not "a decorative object" (Mulvey 63) that is often seen in Western cinematic productions. She is brave, outspoken and kind. She gives birth to a baby, a symbol of hope in the film. The wolf woman is Hu's most daring creation. She exists to challenge the Western interpretation. She is the only one who knows all the truths. She is also an important force to stand against revenge. Through these female characters, Hu presents the theme of his film—not revenge, but love, forgiveness, and faith. Hu's rewrite challenges the Western perspective. It requires efforts for Western audience to understand his film, which is based on Asian culture. By au-

thorizing the local elements, Hu realizes the anti-gaze that more and more Asian films are heading for.

It should be admitted at the same time that there are still many problems with this film. Its editing is rather choppy, and there are too many close up shots in the film. The actors and actresses, being all Tibetan natives and speaking the Tibetan language, seem awkward and affected in reciting the Shakespearean lines. Moreover, Sherwood Hu adopts computer animations, which give a poor presentation of how a baby comes out of water. Hu has good hopes to integrate religious connotations into the childbirth scene. Yet, it remains a question how to harmonize Shakespearean plots with mysterious legends. Despite its weaknesses, *Prince of the Himalayas* tries hard to develop a hybrid approach to Shakespeare that balances cultures and attracts audiences.

【Notes】

1. See Yasunari Takahashi, "*Hamlet* and the Anxiety of Modern Japan," *Shakespeare Survey* 48 (1995): 99 – 111.
2. Wu Hui, "To Seek Revenge or to Forgive: Two Chinese Films about *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare et l'Orient*. Edité par Pierre Kapitaniak et Jean-Michel Déprats (2009): 189 – 197. Wu gives a detailed analysis of the two films but does not explain why *The Banquet* is necessarily better.
3. Su Dongxiao, "Crossing Borders through Hybridization: An Examination of Postcolonial Narrative Strategy in *Prince of the Himalayas*," *Dianying Wenxue* 6 (2009): 39 – 41.
4. Interestingly, one cannot find any indication that *Throne of Blood* is a Japanese version of *Macbeth* in Akira Kurosawa's posters. Nor can one find any indication that *Chicken Rice War* is a Singaporean version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Chee Kong Cheah's posters. It seems not a common practice in previous Asian Shakespeares.
5. The song's name is "Holy Incense" sung by Sa Dingding and composed by He Xuntian.
6. In Tibet, Lake Manasarovar is a place of pilgrimage. It is believed that people can cleanse all sins by bathing in it or drinking its water. In Hu's film, the lake is one of the most frequently-appeared backgrounds. It indicates how important religion plays in the film.
7. In Tibetan language, Jiabo means exactly the king.

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