สรุป

การถ่ายทอดความคิดของผู้เขียนลงในผลงานจิตรกรรมนั้น ปรารถนาให้ผลงานเป็นเสมือนสื่อสะท้อนภาพของความจริงภายในของมนุษย์ยุคปัจจุบันในลักษณะการสะท้อนออกมาอย่างอ้อม มากกว่าการสะท้อนออกอย่างตรงไปตรงมา ทั้งนี้ก็เพื่อความอิสระทางความคิด เพื่อต่อยอดการสร้างสรรค์อย่างไร้ขอบเขต รวมถึงการได้มีอิสระในการตีค่าหาความหมายตามแต่ช่วงเวลาประสบการณ์หรือความรู้ใหม่ๆ ที่ผู้ชมได้รับสัมผัสมาก่อนชมผลงาน การถ่ายทอดผลงานอยู่ในลักษณะที่ไม่ซับซ้อนมีรูปทรงปรากฏน้อยและมีมิติแบนๆ เพื่อเจตนาแสดงสาระของรูปทรงที่ต้องการแสดงออกอย่างชัดเจน และเรียบง่าย โดยปรากฏอยู่ในบรรยากาศที่คลุมเครือแฝงเร้น ไม่บอกช่วงเวลาแม้จะปรากฏมิติของแสงและเงาในผลงานบางชิ้น โดยผู้เขียนหวังว่าบทความนี้จะเป็นประโยชน์แก่ผู้ที่สนใจในงานศิลปะอันจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการนำไปพัฒนาสืบต่อไป

Behind Brecht's Great Wall: Chinese Subjects in Bertolt Brecht's Works

By Pattara Danutra *

Recently, one movie (Forever Enthralled) and one documentary released in Thailand cover the topic of Mei Lanfang. This legendary Chinese opera master has become internationally recognized, partly due to the fact that he was raised by Bertolt Brecht, a highly influential German dramatist, as a model of the 'alienation acting' style which Brecht theorized and preferred. This interpretation of Brecht toward Lanfang's acting style, of which he saw only once, brought about controversies, especially on whether Brecht correctly comprehend the essence of Chinese acting. This issue also exists in other facets of Brecht's theories and practices.

Bertolt Brecht's personal library, now a part of the Brecht Archive in Berlin, contains numerous books on China (Berg-Pan 215). In his Berlin flat, few displayed objects were not originated in East Asia (Tatlow, The Mask of Evil 3). The bathroom walls of his garden house in Los Angeles were papered with Chinese newspaper (Bentley 36). In the postcard, dated November 27, 1934, written to his son Stephen, Brecht briefly penned: "Here's a pretty card with an old Chinese picture, children playing theatre. Look closely at the play they're doing. I think it will strike you are as very modern [...]" (Letters 188). These personal items reflect the issue of how meaningful China and Chinese objects were to this great German dramatist. This fact also applies to the aspect of his intellectual and artistic works. Brecht's set of Chinesiche Gedicine (Chinese poem) is well known for its achieving the spirit of Chinese culture. Many of his plays involve Chinese elements. China and Chinese culture, for Brecht, are not simply objects, but the subjects that considerably intrigue and motivate his artistic creativity and intellectuality.

However, a remarkable point of this issue is that Chinese elements in his works are far from authentic. Brecht, whose 'alienation effect' theory is prominent, specified that all adult characters in his Life of Confucius must be performed by children. The urban China setting in The Good Woman of Setzuan is only an imaginary land. Similarly, Brecht's version of Turandot features China as mythical and exotic. Based on an old Chinese play, The Caucasian Chalk Circle has Georgia, not China, as its setting.

Brecht many times mentions his wish to visit China, but he never did or even put a real effort into doing so in spite of having the chance. Although his reading and collections of books on China and Chinese culture were voluminous, he did not desire to learn the Chinese language. In all probability, his interest in China and Chinese culture was limited to his own purposes.

It is interesting to examine how China and Chinese literature and philosophy had affected Brecht. The connection between him and Chinese subjects is arguable and popular issue among Brechtian scholars. If the Chinese motifs in his plays and poems are not identical to the real quality of being 'Chinese', what do

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they represent? Brecht always acknowledged that his knowledge of Chinese art was limited (Tatlow, The Mask of Evil 3). I would like to posit that Brecht exploits Chinese subject matter as instrument to achieve his aesthetic ideology, rather than as a collective documentation of Chinese culture. Although Brecht treated his Chinese motifs with respect, he allows them only to inspire him, not to dominate his paradigm of aesthetics.

To prove my thesis, the paper is divided into three parts: first, Brecht's input of Chinese literature and philosophy; second, his works having or relating to Chinese elements; and third, some remarks on his concept of Chinese motifs.

Brecht's Input of Chinese Literature and Philosophy

This exploration on the background of Brecht's source of Chinese literature and philosophy covers only literary and performing art sources. The other source of visual art, albeit significant, is not included in this paper. The historical survey is divided into two periods: Brecht's formative years and his mature years in exile. This part illustrates the preliminary contributions of these sources to Brecht's following creativity and thinking. The end of this survey will preliminarily discuss the issue of how these sources shadow his art works and thoughts.

Formative years

Brecht's infatuation with Chinese literature had started in his late teenage years, while living in his native Augsburg. He read a lot of inexpensive translated books in the series of world literature titled Aus Fremden Gaerten, published by the Hauser Verlag publishing house. Among them are titles poorly translated from Chinese masterpieces. He enjoyed reading these German versions without caring much about the translators' Chinese language deficiencies. They became his gateway to the Chinese literary world (Berg-Pan 205).

Later, during his twenties, Brecht turned to English versions of many Chinese philosophical poems, of which most were from Arthur Waley's translations (Berg-Pan 205). In the period of his late twenties and early thirties, after having moved to Berlin, he seriously studied works of some famous Chinese poets /thinkers, including Laotse, Confucius, Chuang-tse and Mo-tze. Two influential books were Alfred Forke's book on Mo-tze and Wilhelm's translations of Loatse's Tao Te-Ching. Interestingly, during this period, when Brecht focused on Chinese philosophical poetry, he started his interest in Marxism.

Brecht's windows to the realm of Chinese aesthetics and philosophy were not limited to only translated works. They included the fictions originally written by German writers. Among them are Hans Bethge's Chinesiche Floete (Chinese Flute) and Alfred Doeblin's Die Drei Springe des Wang Lun (Wang Lun's Three Wells). Brecht later followed the footstep of these novels through exploring China and Chinese elements as the subjects of artistic presentation (Hayman 75).

The next stage of Brecht's exposure to using China and Chinese elements as artistic motifs and given circumstances was through dramatic works, of which all were politically oriented. Similar to a large number of German artists of his youth, Brecht appreciated Communist ideology and was interested in China, which had the strong clash between dictator government and pro-Communist peasants during Brecht's youth. In 1927, Earnst Thaelmann, the leader of the German Communist Party, asked his young members to support the Chinese people who were fighting against the pro-military Chiang Kai-shek's government. To follow Thaelmann's request, the Communist Youth of Germany published a play titled Haende weg von China. Although Brecht was not its playwright, it is known that the young Brecht was a part of this movement.

The other major inspiring input was from Sergei Tretiakov's Roar China (1924). It featured the outrageous behaviors of European businessmen and militaries in China (Tatlow, The Mask of Evil 262). Its Meyerhold-directed production came to Berlin in 1930. The performance had deep impact on many German dramatists of that period, including Brecht (Berg-Pan 208). He afterward regarded Tretiakov as his master, and borrowed the 'alienation' term of this Russian playwright to be developed to his own famous 'Epic Theatre' theory. Undoubtedly, the Chinese setting and the political theme of Roar China considerably impressed Brecht.

Anthony Tatlow, a scholar expert on the area of Brecht and Chinese subjects, has a remark for this early period. He observed that the young Brecht, like other young German artists during the 1920s, was intrigued by the exoticness of Chinese culture (The Mask of Evil 6). Under the stream of Communist movement during his youth, Brecht admired China in this period as an ideological model country due to the fact that the Communist political philosophy was gradually put into practices there.

Mature and exile years

Brecht's interest in studying Chinese literature and philosophy did not terminate at his formative years. It continued to his adulthood period when Brecht was in exile in many countries from the age of 35 to 50 years old. It was the time when Brecht seriously read Mao Tse-Tung's poems and ideological books. To the question which book he read in 1954 had made the strongest impression on him, Brecht replied, "Mao Tse-Tung's 'On Contradiction'. [...] My reliance on a renaissance of the arts triggered by the rise of the Far East, serves to bear fruit more quickly than I would have thought" (Voelker)

From traveling to many countries, the exile Brecht gained increased artistic experiences. Meanwhile, he became more exposed to the realm of actual Chinese performances. In his Moscow trip to participate an international director forum, in March 1935, he met Mei Lan-fang, a famous Chinese opera performer. Lan-fang's solo performance in a female role from the classical Dayu shajia (The Fisherman's Revenge) immensely captivated him (Martin 78). This first time experience of a real performance from the Far East urged him to write the well-known essay titled 'Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting'. It features the official debut of his applying the signature term 'verfremdung' (alienation) (Willett, Brect on Theatre 91). Not only in this essay, but also in other writings did Brecht refer to this Lan-fang's presentation as a distinguished example of good acting according to his 'alienation' concept (Willett, Brecht on Theatre 139). Moreover, during his living in exile in the US, Brecht saw full-scaled Chinese opera performances in New York's Chinatown (Berg-Pan 205).

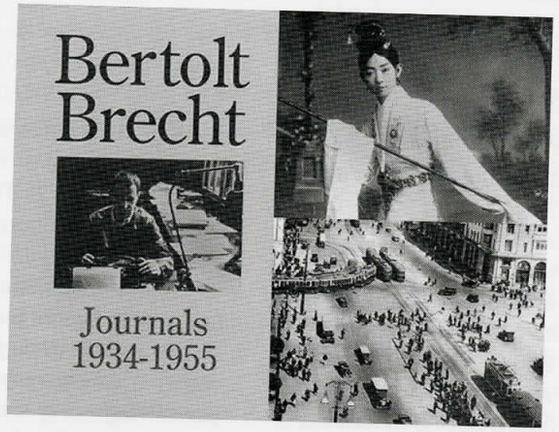
It is noticeable that, during the formative period, Brecht was intrigued by Chinese culture mainly through reading materials, of which most were translated or adapted versions. Regarding the ground of translated sources, their translation quality is questionable. The doubtful quality of literalness and authenticity of these works later foreshadowed Brecht's ensuing practices on dealing with Chinese subjects. Concerning the mature and exile years, there is a similarity among the reading materials originally in German and by German writers Brecht read, and among the theatre productions he saw. Many of them were politically oriented, and only used Chinese elements as their milieu to indirectly criticize German or Western society.

Moreover, the actual Chinese performances Brecht viewed were not completely original or authentic. Mei Lan-fang, though from mainland China, was a Chinese artist who was in cross-cultural collaboration and artistic modernization. His performance in Moscow was only a demonstration and solo piece, not featuring the full form of Chinese opera. The full-scale Chinese opera troupe Brecht saw in New York was US-based. It did not directly come from mainland China.

These doubtful qualities of accuracy and authenticity of Brecht's sources on the knowledge of China and Chinese subjects are projected in Brecht's following 'Chinese'-relating works.

Brecht's 'Chinese' Works

The outputs of Brecht's involvement with Chiense motifs are various. They include not only dramatic works, but also poetry translations, prose and theoretical writings. Distinctively, these works similarly carry Brecht's objective of using Chinese elements as his artistics motifs, as well as the instruments to articulate his social messages. This issue will be further discussed after the survey on Brecht's 'Chinese' works in this part. The works belonging to dramatic category is discussed first, followed by those of non-dramatic category.



Dramatic works

Brecht's Chinese elements had appeared since the period of his early plays. The protagonist or Baal (1918), his first play written at the age of 20, shares many features with Li Po, a Chinese poet, whose works Brecht read in German version from the Aus Fremden Gaerten series (Berg-Pan 205). Moreover, his first oriental character, Shlink, in In the Jungle of the Cities (1923), his third play, is a Chinese-Malaysian timber merchant (Hayman 75).

The focus goes to Brecht's two masterpieces known for their Chinese components: The Good Woman of Setzuan (1938-40) and The Caucasian Chalk Circle (1944-5). The former play has its names of characters and places in Chinese and uses an urban Chinese community as its setting. However, apart from the names, none of the other elements relate to Chinese identity. Chinese components in this play are only fictional. This masterpieces of world dramatic literature is regarded as a distinguished example of Brecht's apllicaiton of his 'alientaion effects' theory into playwriting practices. He intentionally exploited these Chinese names and settings only to create the sense of exoticness and estrangement to his audience (Tatlow, The Mask of Evil 256).

Ironically, in spite of its Georgia circumstances and Russian names of characters, The Caucasian Chalk Circle has the authentic Chinese spirit. This is because this play is based on a Chinese play titled The Circle of Chalk. Brecht saw its adapted production translated into German by Klabund during the 1920s. Brecht freely adapted its story to be his Russian-setting version.

The other six plays having Chinese motifs are less recognized, but they are not less interesting in terms of illustrating Brecht's concept of Chinese subjects. They belong to the

categories of early Brecht-labeled 'didactic', short, unfinished and/or not-staged plays.

During his productive 1930 year, Brecht penned four short didactic plays: He Who Says Yes, He Who Says No, The Measures Taken and The Exception and the Rule (Esslin 92). They were equipped with Oriental elements, especially the last two titles, The Measures Taken, a musical drama, is about four characters who are members of the German Communist Party and have just came back from conducting an illegal mission in China. The Exeption and the Rule is about a dispute among a group of travelers caused by a water draught, taking place in a Chinese desert. The Chinese setting in both plays are mere backdrops of the plays, which involve nothing about geographic, historical, ethnic or cultural identities of China. Renata Berg-Pan speculates that, "They (these four plays) have little to do with revolutionary China, but disguise Brechtian concerns under a rather transparent Oriental guise" (209).

Inspired by his impression of many Chinese philosophers, Brecht wrote Life of Confucius before 1944. This unfinished play is known for its ironic portrayal of the famous Chinese philosopher, having several inaccurate and non-realistic components. Apart from assigning children to portray all adult characters in this play, Brecht's portrayal of Confucius is not accurate. The image of the young Conficius in this play is rather parodying; however, Brecht wanted to explore the philosophical essences of the oriental thinker whom he respected, not the biographical dimension (Berg-Pan 214)

Not long before his death in 1956, Brecht planned to stage Turandot or The Congress of Whitewashers. It was written during his late years, while living in Berlin, This incomplete and unpublished play is similar to The Good Woman of Setzuan in the fact that China in this play is mythical and not genuine. Brecht again borrowed China to attack Western intellectuals and the Weimar Republic (Berg-Pan 215; Esslin 314). This unfinished play shows his persistent notion on presenting Chinese subjects in his works regardless of their authenticity. This quality also appears in Brecht's poems, fiction and theoretical writings.

Non-dramatic works

Brecht has been acclaimed as a great German Poet, novelist and drama theorist of the 20th century. Similar to dramatic works, many of his non-dramatic works deal with the Chinese issues. During his exile and mature years, he translated twelve Chinese poems into German under the same title Chenesiche Gedichte (Chinese poem, 1939). Seven of them are from the translated English versions of Arthur Waley. They are philosophical poems from the pen of Po Chue-yi. Although he did not know Chinese, Brecht seems to have caught fairly well the intentions of the original poems. According to Tatlow's analysis, "Better, more precise visualization is one of the features that distinguished Brecht's poems from Waley's translations of the original (Stalking the Dragon 207)."

Two of his unfinished prose works are famous for infusing Marxist with Chinese philosophy: Me-ti oder das Buch der Wendungen and Tui-Roman (Berg-Pan 210). Written as little booklets of behavioral codes, both works are inspired by Forke's book on Mo-tzu and Wilhelm's translated book on I-ching (Book of Changes), but have nothing exactly alike with Chinese philosophy and system of thought. The Chinese-like names of the characters sound very similar to many Western political figures. For example, To-tsi stands for Trotsky, and Ka-me for Karl Marx. According to Berg-Pan, "Brecht merely used the form of Chinese wisdom literature as a kind of 'alienation' for the better and more effective expression of his own idea" (211). In other words, Brecht borrowed Chinese components to indirectly articulate his social messages in a Western context. This practice is similar to what Brecht did in The Good Woman of Setzuan.

Apart from the case of exploiting Chinese settings and names, there is also the issue about Brecht's disregard in discussing the

aesthetics of Chinese theatre correctly. Among his theoretical writings, 'Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting' is dominant. In this essay, as mentioned above, inspired by Mei Lan-fang's solo, Brecht appreciated Chinese opera acting for its non-realistic and presentational quality.

One of the remarkable lines in this essay Brecht wrote is that, "Above all, the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusion," (Willtee, Brecht on Theatre 91).

However, some Brechtian experts argue that Brecht's comprehension toward the unrealistic aspect of Chinese opera acting was wrong. For instance, Stark Young, a leading American critic of the New Republic experiencing Lan-fang's performance, wrote that, "The Chinese theatre is spoken of as completely unrealistic art, entirely ideal in character [...] The theatre of Mei Lan-fang is not completely without realism" (Martin 81). Having different viewpoint from Brecht's on the same subject matter, Carol Martin emphasized that, "While Brecht was seeing 'alienation,' Mei was concerned with essence. [...] Mei, in the words of his contemporaries, was concerned with the 'essence' rather than the appearance of things" (78). Nonetheless, in my opinion, if we read this essay carefully, we can grasp the sense that Brecht only brought Chinese acting and theatre to his own concepts. Actually, Lan-fang's acting is only a mock-up of Brecht-favored acting style that he used to exemplify his a priori theatre aesthetics. The content of "Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting" essay implies Brecht's sense of admiration as well critical observation. Similar to the issue of Chinese settings in his plays and prose, the objective of this essay is not to correctly elaborate or educate the characteristics of Chinese acting to the readers. Brecht only wanted to use the Chinese acting presentation he saw to illustrate his concept of the acting style he favored.

This brief survey on Brecht's dramatic and non-dramatic works set up an argument about why many of Brecht's works lack the concern to explore Chinese motifs and issues with the qualities of authenticity and accuracy. And, as an artist, are these practices and notions of Brecht legitimate?

Remarks on the Brecht's Chinese Subjects

From the historical surveys of the Chinese-relating sources Brecht consumed and the Chinese-relating products he produced, I can draw some analytical points. Some are from my own perspective, and the others are cited from other Brechtian experts.

Above all, since his early years, Brecht read books on Chinese literature and philosophy through the glass of non-Chinese language: German in the beginning and later in English (Berg-Pan 205). Next, he never encountered any real and authentic Chinese performance. However, we cannot assume that because of these non-genuine sources, Brecht's works are unauthentic. During the same 1920s period, there were artists who had the same



background as Brecht, and explored Chinese subjects authentically. Friedrich Wolf, one of Brecht's contemporaries, is a good example. His Tai Yang erwacht play was also inspired by Klabund's The Circle of Chalk, the same inspiration of Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuan and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. The Chinese components in Wolf's play are real and factual, based on documents compiled from newspaper and magazines; in comparison, Brecht chose to do the opposite in this plays. Thus, it was Brecht's intention to present his works on Chinese subjects inauthentically (Berg-Pan 209).

Ironically, some works show that Brecht had a masterful level of comprehension and genuine sense of aesthetics about Chinese subjects. His translations of Chinese poems and The Caucasian Chalk Circle support this point. In spite of being translated from the secondary source of English versions, his poems contain more Chinese spirit than his sources. Moreover, even though it is adapted into Russian circumstances, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, based on a Chinese play, is a very Chinese for its thematic content. So, the Chinese aspects of Brecht's works appear to be his intuitive quality. In other words, Brecht's innate aesthetics are rather close to the Chinese ones.

It is wrong to assume that Brecht's ignorance caused the misrepresentation of Chinese qualities in his works. The misleading characteristics of Chinese components in The Good Woman of Setzuan are purposeful. Brecht did not want his audience to identify the Chinese-like setting in the real China. With these unauthentic Chinese elements, he expected us to feel distance from the story in order not to be involved with the narratives and not to be sympathetic with the characters. As a result, we will use our thinking, not our emotion, to view his plays. Life of Confucius is quite the same. He wanted us to focus on the essence of Confucius' philosophy, not his biography. So, the correct biographical element is not essential.

Berg-Pan remarks that many motifs of Brecht's works are close to Brecht's personal qualities. In the case of Chinese historical figures, Confucius and Po Chue-yi are the figures with whom Brecht liked to identify himself. Both were artists having difficulties in their life and living in exile, similar to Brecht (Berg-Pan 213). As a result, Confucius became a subject of his play, while Po Chue-yi's poems became Brecht's favorite subjects of translation.

Regarding the issue of borrowing Chinese settings to criticize German society, not only did Brecht practice as such, but so did many of his contemporaries, especially the ones from the pro-Communist movement. Surrounded by the rising Nazi movement, after World War I and before World War II, many German dramatists employed Chinese backdrops to indirectly comment on their society, in order to be accused of explicitly attacking the Facist government they hated (Berg-Pan 209).

In terms of artistic evolution, Tatlow observed that Brecht had aesthetic development of his Chinese motifs. In the beginning, during his youth, he approached Chinese subjects simply as exotic and exciting things. Later, during his exile years, he dealt with them more maturely, artistically and innovatively (The Mask of Evil 6). It is remarkable that the Chinese motifs in his early plays are straightforward, but the ones in his later plays during exile years are more theatrical and gimmicky. A major evidence of Brecht's aesthetics on Chinese subjects is his successful translation of Po Chue-Yi's poems.

Conclusively, the issue of whether Brecht's works abuse Chinese qualities, to some extent is debatable. This survey tells us that the Chinese subjects in Brecht's works deviate from their authenticity. As Brecht's theatrical gimmicks, they serve his personal aesthetics, and are used as instruments to discursively criticize his Right-wing society. Nonetheless, should we overlook their significance?

I believe that it would be very boring if Brecht's works were full of authentic Chinese components. It is Brecht's legitimate right, as an artist, to interpret other cultures. What he did to his Chinese subjects is not exploitative, but innovative. As a matter of fact, Brecht not only employed Chinese subjects, but other in

subjects from various cultures as well: Bavarian folk theatre, Shakespeare, farce, musical theatre, other Oriental theatres (India and Japanese), and so on. The group of Chinese subjects, however, is the most persistent and recurring.

During his peripatetic years, among various offices, Brecht would start working only when the décor of his room was finished. The obligatory items were those from the Far East: a Japanese mask, a Chinese calligraphic scroll and several Chinese items (Tatlow, The Mask of Evil 7). Although the Chinese subjects in Brecht's works are not identical with their real cultural counterparts, they are authentic in the personal territory and in the artistic realm of Bertolt Brecht.

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