

**Danny Yung**

Zuni Icosahedron (Hong Kong)

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# Cultural Institution and Institutional Culture from the Transcultural Perspective

## What Is the Culture behind the Stage, and What Is the Culture inside a Cage?

### Abstract

This article presents the profile of the East Asian theatre artist Danny Yung, director of the acclaimed Zuni Icosahedron theatre in Hong Kong. In the first part, Maciej Szatkowski offers a synthesis of his artistic biography, from his early years as a theatre maker in Hong Kong in the 1980s to the creation of a transnational Chinese theatre, which provides a space for artistic encounters of established and emerging artists

from the Sinosphere and beyond. The article focuses on highlighting the main areas of Yung's work and contextualizing them in terms of the realities of Chinese cultural life. The author describes the central distinguishing features of Yung's activity and its consecutive stages over the years, as well as the impact of his work on theatres in China and Taiwan. The appendix provides a transcript of Yung's talk at the conference *Contemporary Acting Techniques in Eurasian Theatre, Performance and Audiovisual Art: Intercultural and Intermedia Perspective* (2021). The guiding idea of the lecture is the role of institutions in shaping theatre policy and connecting artists and ideas. Yung draws on examples from his own experience, describing the process of creating his most recent productions. He emphasizes the importance of collaboration and dialogue between artists, as well as the role of theatre institutions as major actors influencing the development of theatre art in contemporary Eurasia.

### Keywords

Asian theatre, Hong Kong, Danny Yung, Chinese theatre, cultural policy

### Abstrakt

**Instytucja kultury i kultura instytucjonalna z perspektywy transkulturowej: Czym jest kultura za kulisami, a czym w klatce?**

Tekst przedstawia sylwetkę Danny'ego Yunga, wschodnioazjatyckiego twórcy teatralnego, dyrektora uznanego teatru Zuni Icosachedron działającego w Hongkongu. W pierwszej części Maciej Szatkowski syntetycznie prezentuje jego biografię artystyczną, poczynając od wczesnych lat działalności teatralnej w Hongkongu w latach osiemdziesiątych XX wieku aż po stworzenie transnarodowego teatru chińskiego, który stanowi forum spotkań artystycznych dla uznanych oraz początkujących twórców, nie tylko z obszaru sinosfery. W artykule skupiono się na wyeksponowaniu głównych obszarów działalności Yunga i ich kontekstualizacji w realiach chińskiego życia kulturalnego. Tekst charakteryzuje najważniejsze wyróżniki twórczości Yunga oraz kolejne jej etapy, a także wpływ na teatry w Chinach i na Tajwanie. Aneks tekstu stanowi zapis wystąpienia Danny'ego Yunga podczas konferencji *Contemporary Acting Techniques in Eurasian Theatre, Performance and Audiovisual Art: Intercultural and Intermedia Perspective* (2021). Wykład jest refleksją nad rolą instytucji w kształtowaniu polityki teatralnej i łączeniu artystów oraz idei. Yung przywołuje przykłady z własnych doświadczeń, opisując proces powstawania swoich najnowszych spektakli. W wystąpieniu podkreśla wagę współpracy i dialogu między twórcami, a także znaczenie instytucji teatralnych jako ważnych aktorów wpływających na rozwój sztuki teatralnej we współczesnym świecie eurazjatyckim.

### Słowa kluczowe

teatr azjatycki, Hongkong, Danny Yung, teatr chiński, polityka kulturalna

The following text by Maciej Szatkowski introduces the Polish reader to the profile and work of Danny Yung. The English text of Danny Yung's lecture follows below.

Danny Yung (chiń. Rong Nianzeng) to jeden z najbardziej uznanych, wpływowych i rozpoznawalnych twórców teatralnych w obszarze kulturowym sinosfery. Jego wszechstronność artystyczna sprawia, że z powodzeniem realizuje się jako reżyser teatralny, scenarzysta, producent filmowy, projektant scenografii, kurator, twórca sztuki wideo oraz rysownik komiksów. Zamieszkały i tworzący w Hongkongu, Yung przeniósł się tam w 1948 roku w wieku pięciu lat, gdy jego rodzina uciekała przed rządami Mao Zedonga, opuszczając Szanghaj. Biografia twórcza Danny'ego Yunga jest więc historią interkulturowej asymilacji, podobnie jak w przypadku innych artystów z Hongkongu, na przykład reżyserów filmowych Wonga Kar-waia czy Ann Hui, także pozbawionych kantońskich korzeni. Po ukończeniu studiów na Uniwersytecie Kalifornijskim w Berkeley, gdzie uzyskał tytuł magistra projektowania i planowania urbanistycznego, oraz po kilkuletnim pobycie w Nowym Jorku Danny Yung powrócił do Hongkongu w 1979 roku i zaangażował się w lokalne życie artystyczne. Zajął poczesne miejsce wśród twórców swojego pokolenia, którzy w owym czasie zaznaczyli swoją obecność w sztuce awangardowej. Obecnie osiemdziesięcioletni Yung wciąż jest uznawany za lidera sztuki eksperymentalnej w Hongkongu. Jego osobowość i charyzma, a także sztuka emanują ogromną siłą kulturotwórczą i mitotwórczą.

W 1985 roku Danny Yung objął stanowisko dyrektora artystycznego kolektywu teatralnego Zuni Icosahedron, gdzie pracuje jako reżyser, scenarzysta i scenograf. Założony trzy lata wcześniej, w 1982 roku, Zuni Icosahedron w krótkim czasie stał się ważnym ośrodkiem powstającej wówczas sztuki eksperymentalnej w Hongkongu, stanowiąc jeden z kamieni milowych w jej rozwoju<sup>1</sup>. Zuni Icosahedron odegrało także znaczącą rolę w wymianie międzykulturowej między Wschodem a Zachodem, będąc pierwszym miejscem w Hongkongu, które prezentowało dzieła Piny Bausch czy Roberta Wilsona, a także mało tam wówczas znane awangardowe filmy europejskie. Lokalny ruch awangardowy, z ducha millenarystyczny, rozwijał się w czasie schyłku brytyjskiej dominacji

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<sup>1</sup> „Zuni” to koczowniczy lud z Ameryki Północnej z grupy Pueblo (jako przymiotnik oznacza również kolor niebieskoszary), zaś „icosahedron” to dwudziestościan. Por. Danny Yung, „Was macht das Theater, Danny Yung?”, interview by Lena Dorte Eilers, *Theater der Zeit*, no. 11 (2016). Termin „icosahedron” został w wywiadzie błędnie określony jako forma geograficzna, zamiast geometryczna.

i przekazania kolonii Chinom Ludowym i poruszał kwestie tożsamości, urbanizacji, globalizacji i zmieniającego się krajobrazu społeczno-politycznego. Dziś teatr Zuni Icosahedron jest centrum niezależnego, poszukującego (*tansuo*) teatru w Hongkongu. Grupa wyprodukowała ponad dwieście sztuk teatralnych, prezentowanych w ponad sześćdziesięciu miastach na całym świecie, w tym również w Polsce. Stosunkowo niedawno, we wrześniu 2022 roku w Gdańsku i Wrocławiu wystawiono *Przerwany sen* w reżyserii Danny'ego Yunga w ramach InlanDimensions International Arts Festival.

Członkowie Zuni Icosahedron w dalszym ciągu angażują się w międzynarodową wymianę kulturalną, zapraszając artystów i badaczy teatru do udziału w rezydencjach artystycznych oraz wymianie myśli na temat polityki kulturalnej. We wrześniu 2022 roku wzięli udział w sympozjum we wrocławskim Instytucie Grotowskiego poświęconym wyzwaniom wymiany kulturowej podczas pandemii oraz problemom budowania trwałych instytucji kultury, które będą w stanie sprostać wyzwaniom przyszłości. Podczas tego samego pobytu w Polsce członkowie Zuni Icosahedron poprowadzili warsztaty opery chińskiej dla uczniów szkół średnich w Gdańsku. Danny Yung i jego współpracownicy angażują się nie tylko w edukację artystyczną, ale również w promowanie dziedzictwa kulturowego, zwłaszcza azjatyckiej sztuki performatywnej. Cztery główne kierunki organizujące działania kolektywu Zuni Icosahedron to odtwarzanie klasyki, innowacje w ramach tradycji, teatr multimedialny i teatr społeczny. Dzięki wyraźnie zdefiniowanym celom oraz ich konsekwentnemu realizowaniu poprzez działania o eksperymentalnym, a nawet subwersywnym charakterze, teatr Yunga stanowi istotny wkład w rozwój innowacyjnej sztuki i estetyki scenicznej. Jego liczne współprace artystyczne oddziałują nie tylko na lokalną scenę teatralną, ale również na teatry w Chinach Ludowych i na Tajwanie.

Danny Yung od czterdziestu lat pozostaje wierny teatrowi, dla którego napisał i wyreżyserował ponad sto sztuk, w tym serię *Journey to the East*<sup>2</sup>, obejmującą znany spektakl *Journey to China*. Projekt ten był inspirowany podróżami dwóch Włochów do Chin: Marca Polo na dwór Kubilaj-chana w XIII wieku oraz Michelangela Antonioniego na początku lat siedemdziesiątych XX wieku, podczas rewolucji kulturalnej (1966–1976). W spektaklu Danny Yung pragnął spojrzeć na Chiny oczami Hongkończyków i Tajwańczyków, dzielących z mieszkańcami Chin kontynentalnych wspólną historię, kulturę i pismo, choć w odmiennych wariantach. Rossella Ferrari w książce *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* odwołuje się do kategorii kłaczka opisanej

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<sup>2</sup> Tytuł nawiązuje do *Wędrowki na Zachód* Wu Cheng'ena z XVI wieku, jednej z czterech klasycznych powieści chińskich.



Danny Yung

ZUNI ICOSAHEDRON

przez Gillesa Deleuze'a i Félixu Guattariego, by wskazać na rizomatyczny charakter twórczości Danny'ego Yunga i Teatru Zuni Icosahedron<sup>3</sup>. Ich artystyczna aktywność często opiera się na transnarodowej współpracy z wybitnymi twórcami chińskojęzycznego teatru i filmu, między innymi z tajwańskim choreografem Lin Hwai-minem i jego zespołem Cloud Gate Theater, Stanleyem Kwanem, przedstawicielem drugiej fali kina hongkońskiego, tajwańskim filmowcem Edwardem Yangiem, a także najważniejszymi reżyserami teatralnymi z Chin kontynentalnych, jak Lin Zhaohua i Meng Jinghui<sup>4</sup>. Danny Yung marzył, by Hongkong po roku 1997 stał się bezpiecznym schronieniem, w którym chińscy twórcy z różnych regionów Azji będą mogli swobodnie się spotykać i tworzyć transnarodowy teatr chiński. Chociaż Hongkong dziś boryka się z wieloma problemami politycznymi i nie stał się takim centrum, to teatr Zuni Icosahedron konsekwentnie realizuje te plany.

<sup>3</sup> Rossella Ferrari, *Transnational Chinese Theatres: Intercultural Performance Networks in East Asia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37273-6>. Recenzja książki znajduje się w tym zeszycie *Pamiętnika Teatralnego*.

<sup>4</sup> Meng wraz z Yungiem w 2000 roku zrealizowali wspólnie m. in. słynny spektakl *Experimental Shakespeare: King Lear*, ale trans-chińskich projektów teatralnych było znacznie więcej. Rossella Ferrari zauważa, że dzięki współpracy Meng Jinghuia z Dannym Yungiem, awangardowy pop zaczął korzystać z nowych mediów, do tej pory nie stosowanych w pop-awangardowym teatrze Menga. Zob. Rossella Ferrari, *Pop Goes the Avant-Garde: Experimental Theatre in Contemporary China* (London: Seagull Books, 2012), 303.

W twórczości Danny'ego Yunga wyraźnie dostrzegalne jest napięcie między zachodnią formą i techniką teatralną a wschodnią tradycją, niejednorodną i wykraczającą poza granice sinosfery, bo czerpiącą z kultury japońskiej, mongolskiej czy indonezyjskiej. Reżyser zachowuje w takich działaniach ostrożność, dbając, by silna kultura chińska (hanowska) nie kolonizowała i nie zawłaszczala elementów tradycji mniejszych narodów. Często podkreśla, że jego celem jest budowanie mostów między kulturami oraz reinterpretowanie tradycyjnych technik i klasycznych chińskich tekstów<sup>5</sup>. W swojej twórczości dość często porusza tematy związane z niełatwą chińską historią XX wieku, trudnymi latami rządów Mao Zedonga, masakrą na placu Tiananmen czy przekazaniem Hongkongu Chinom przez Wielką Brytanię. Unika jednak komentarzy politycznych i zabiegów publicystycznych, choć opowieści o współczesnych Chinach w burzliwych dla byłej brytyjskiej kolonii czasach wyraźnie rezonują na hongkońskiej scenie.

Twórczość teatralna jest fundamentem pracy Danny'ego Yunga, ale jego działalność wykracza daleko poza nią. Reżyser angażuje się także w tworzenie polityki kulturalnej poprzez prowadzenie instytucji o równoważonym wpływie na otoczenie. W tym celu regularnie organizuje sympozja i spotkania poświęcone funkcjonowaniu instytucji i jej roli. Yung zajmuje się także relacjami teatru z otoczeniem, zdaje sobie sprawę, jak istotne jest środowisko, w którym działa instytucja. Każdy zrealizowany projekt jest ewaluowany w duchu społecznej odpowiedzialności, szczegółowo analizowany, dokumentowany i raportowany.

Kładąc nacisk na dialektyczne myślenie i wykorzystując scenę jako platformę wymiany doświadczeń i myśli, Danny Yung poszerza kapitał kulturowy lokalnej publiczności. Nieustannie dąży do odkrywania sposobów łączenia współczesności z tradycją, w której ta druga często jawi się jako widmo egzorcyzmujące pierwszą (np. w *Przerwanym śnie* czy *The Spirits Play*). W jego pracy można odnaleźć wiele elementów topografii psychospołecznej wyrażanych za pomocą elementów onirycznych, osadzonych w ramach lokalnej kultury, a zarazem w rzeczywistości zawieszanej pomiędzy marzeniami, snami i szaleństwem. Cechuje ją także systematyczna archeologizacja pamięci oraz zdolność wieologłosowej prezentacji kwestii tożsamości kulturowych, trudnej historii i realiów Hongkongu czy szerzej całego regionu. Danny Yung porusza się na styku kultur, odwołując się do różnorodnych technik i tradycji teatralnych oraz idei wywiedzionych z odmiennych przestrzeni historycznych i kulturowych, co czyni jego twórczość zjawiskiem unikatowym w skali światowej.

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<sup>5</sup> Wśród klasycznych chińskich dzieł przeniesionych na scenę przez Yunga są m. in. siedemnastowieczny *Sen czerwanego pawilonu* Cao Xueqina czy *Przerwany sen* Tanga Xianzu, jedna z części *Pawilonu Peonii* z XVI wieku.

# Appendix

This is a revised version of the keynote speech that took place during the international conference *Contemporary Acting Techniques in Eurasian Theatre, Performance and Audiovisual Arts: Intercultural and Intermedia Perspective*, September 28–30, 2021, organized by the Faculty of Humanities of the Nicolaus Copernicus University (Toruń, Poland), The Grotowski Institute (Wrocław, Poland), in collaboration with the Bridges Foundation. Danny Yung's lecture was moderated, transcribed, and edited by Maciej Szatkowski, PhD (Nicolaus Copernicus University).

## Danny Yung

### **Cultural Institution and Institutional Culture from the Transcultural Perspective: What Is the Culture behind the Stage, and What Is the Culture inside a Cage?**

With a focus on cultural institutions, I will be talking about my latest interest: What is the culture behind the stage? Moreover, what if we sometimes feel that the stage is a cage? So what is the culture of a cage? I think in a cage, or on a stage, we try to figure out rules and regulations. We also try to achieve it within the framework after the stage and after the cage. Of course, metaphorically speaking, cages can be applied to many fields. I know many friends from academia. They find themselves placed in a kind of cage and on a kind of a stage as well. So how well do you/they perform? Besides, can one (individually) decide on the rules and regulations in the academic world?

It is to be admitted that I am becoming more and more interested in what is behind the stage, namely, to what extent the culture determines the making of the stage. To begin with, I was very involved in what was happening on stage. Then, I became very interested in how to curate festivals, theatre forums, and education debates, or to curate the whole issue of curatorship. I must confess that this seems an excellent opportunity to reexamine my experience on stage, off the stage, and behind the stage.

One of my first experiences of China's theatre was Kun opera,<sup>6</sup> a traditional Chinese performing art. That experience comes from many factors from various institutions, which mold the direction and the creativity. Of course, in some way, we always say that government policy is one thing; another thing is the funding agency policy. Within the art institutions, knowing how dialectic they are in what they are doing is crucial. I often talk to my friends who are in the academic area about doing research. What is behind the stage? About fifteen to twenty years ago, I met a graduate student from Pittsburgh University. She told me she was interested in traditional Chinese performing arts. I suggested that perhaps she should study Kun opera, a UNESCO expression of intangible cultural heritage, and pick one company and take a closer look at the changes and find out what causes the changes. I helped arrange for her to meet many retired Kun opera artists from Nanjing. She was focusing on the Kun Opera Company (江苏省昆剧院). Through my introduction, she did an in-depth interview, and with that, she met more people. Finally, she completed her thesis. The paper she wrote was fascinating. Her thoughts on institutions, particularly cultural institutions, and a critical review of cultural institutions were stimulating. If we want to talk about what is on stage we need an example of what is behind the stage. We need the whole context of what is behind the stage, molding what is in front of the stage. I have often worked with Kun opera performers. Most interesting was to find out that the circle of performing artists from Kun opera is very inward-oriented. There is this whole trend of intermarriage; they were frequently married to their colleagues, and very seldom were they married outside of their circle.

Some of the institutions' aspects are extremely interesting to me, in particular, how an institution can "create a spirit." This makes me think of Chinese culture and how that culture creates practitioners and molds artists. I am concerned about my work with the Chinese language, structure, and development. I am also concerned about Daoism and Dao (道), which closely relate to creativity. I have found several fascinating terms related to Daoism which I want to share:

Heterodox school: 旁門左道 (*pang men zuo dao*)

Immoral doings, underhand ways: 呀門歪道 (*ya men wai dao*)

Rebel against orthodoxy: 離經叛道 (*li jing pan dao*)

Treason and heresy: 大逆不道 (*da ni bu dao*)

Foreigners' gibberish: 胡說八道 (*hu Shuo ba dao*)

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<sup>6</sup> Kun (kunqu) is one of the oldest operas in China. Kun integrates singing, dialogue, acting, acrobatics, dancing, and material arts. It is praised as "the origin of all operas." In 2001 Kun was proclaimed a masterpiece of "the oral and intangible heritage of humanity."



These notions come from Chinese culture and can be used to comment on artistic work. For example, one can say “heterodox school” (旁門左道) when one is very creative. When one is highly creative, one will speak about “immoral doings, underhand ways” (呀門歪道). People can call one “a rebel against orthodoxy” (離經叛道) if one goes even further than they would expect one to do. If one is shaking the fundamental values of society, one can be named a traitor 大逆不道 (treason and heresy). I also found very interesting the term 胡說八道. If we carefully look at it, we can translate it as “foreigners’ gibberish.” In this example, you can see the Sino-centrism of Chinese culture, how Chinese people look at culture from the outside and how Chinese culture can see their cultural practitioners.

One of my areas of observation is creative activities in Chinese mainstream culture. We need reflective thinking about the institutes and the impact on progressive cultural exchange and creative development. Of course, we all know that censorship by the Chinese government plays a significant role. In Hong Kong, Japan, and maybe South-East Asia, foundations also play a vital role, and sometimes foundations can intervene in cultural activities. Naturally, the legal system also plays a critical role because it touches on the issue of censorship and decides what one can and cannot do.

Public media also shape how the audience reads art. Our education system molds value. In that area, I always found it crucial; there is room for academic and applied research. I wondered why there are not enough Asian scholars researching these issues. Besides, they are very reserved and very conservative. We need to know how to build trust and initiate a debate, but this process takes a while.

I have already mentioned the young scholar who did this research on Kun opera and its institution in Nanjing. It took her almost ten years to get and build trust and to understand how the cultural institution was affecting cultural development. The same with academics: some outstanding scholars are starting to compare Japanese Noh and Chinese Kun opera. We see what is on stage, but we must be aware of an institution’s impact behind the stage. The business sector can also support artists who do not want to depend on the government and foundations. If the business sector is forward-looking, then all these *cultural* activities will have more free space and finally the asset to themselves.

The art sector can sometimes be seen as a cage as it has built a cage for itself. That categorization sometimes resembles the divide-and-conquer method. An organization’s issues with categorization, labeling, and strategies makes an artist pay some costs. Discipline has become very important. To have a progressive art sector, we need to develop various strategies.

We can foment debates about the development of art and culture. As I said before, when we are involved in transcultural or cross-city activities, this is the strategy of generating new space for debates. I am going to share with you two cases. Firstly, *The Spirits*

*Play* from 2012. It is about a cemetery in Singapore and people who are dead yet still searching for their identity. I think the idea of death is very stimulating, so I composed the idea of death into the whole structure. I invited Kun opera performers, Noh opera performers, and contemporary artists to get together. The first thing I did with them was their vocal warmup exercise: they were together in the room, and they were doing the warmup exercise and learning how to listen to each other, learning to imitate and generate their voice after imitation, their own practice of warmup exercises. Kun opera and Noh share some certain commonalities regarding breathing. When I already had these two sets of artists involved in the play, something controversial was to introduce Makoto Matsushima, a contemporary dancer who has learnt Mongolian singing and vocalization. He was introducing that to Kun and then Noh. So this three-way exchange helped to break down the barrier. The exciting thing about it is that the whole experience slowly built trust among Kun, Noh, and contemporary artists.

We discussed the institutions which mold the way they perform and the way they develop. We discussed the idea of masks and the idea of costumes, and they exchanged their costumes, searching for an area or costumes and props that are common for them. I requested Noh master Kanji Shimizu not to use a facial mask until the end; when he agreed, he showed up, and I told him that his face was just like a mask. That was an example of my theatre-making from ten years ago. In that particular work, we can see the traditional performing arts institutions and how they can relate to each other, the institutions' impact on the creation of their arts, and the contemporary art institutions, which are more individual than institutional. The relationship between contemporary and traditional artists is critical, and in some way to coordinate the dialogue is fascinating. This work deals with Japanese and Chinese art and contemporary and traditional art. The whole issue of cross-cultural collaboration needs additional space for discussion and discourse, which we developed. For the artists involved, that was empowering; they become more aware, not repeating the art form, but trying to understand if they do something that lies in the origin of creativity.

A few years ago, I was greatly inspired by the Yuan dynasty author Zhong Sicheng (钟嗣成, ca. 1279–1360). This playwright was very interested in documenting Yuan dynasty performing art. He wrote this book called *The Book of Ghost*. *The Book of Ghost* is just a bibliography of art practitioners of the Yuan dynasty. There is usually a concise introduction of individual artists. What is this skill, and what is the agenda? So I decided to use some of his concepts and invited our friends from Thailand, Taiwan, China, and Japan. I tried to gather them together, and then I got a group of scholars and a group of young artists—twelve to sixteen people. They were together for four days and gave each other workshops. I felt we needed to provide an alternative kind of exchange and dialogue among these traditional and contemporary performing artists. These scholars and artists were young. So over four days, they provided different workshops. Each

of them gave workshops to the others. It was a crossover platform; I felt that after the work with artists from different cultures, I should provide a more cross-disciplinary, transcultural platform. This is also my commentary on existing art festivals because we all know that our festivals basically serve a specific class of audience.

So, the four-day conference was documented by three documentary filmmakers. Here are some of the statements of the artists:

Shim Bo-seon<sup>7</sup>: You need to be a ghost escaping from your body, look at yourself, and critique yourself. Tradition can be a meter that reflects the community and society. So I think we do need tradition and traditional art to reflect upon contemporary society.

Pawit Mahasarinand<sup>8</sup>: For you, or in your city or culture, where do you draw the line between traditional and contemporary, and what about modern? If there does exist such a line?

Tadashi Uchino<sup>9</sup>: Contemporary artists are supposed to be only concerned with the contemporary, but that is not true. The notion of the ghost tells us quite clearly: the theatre, the culture, or the performance culture is ghosted. The ghost is haunting whatever is happening on the stage.

Fu Jin<sup>10</sup>: For artists coming from different ethnicities, their every action encompasses the ideologies and cultures which set the framework, whether we will be able to understand or share the imagination. I think the premise for intercultural exchange and communication is our ability to read into every action of artists from different cultures. It is not easy, but I think it is a mission that has to be completed if we are to attempt cultural exchanges.

The most exciting part is the young artists who took classes from their masters and later developed a joint work. Furthermore, all the solo work became the highlight of the seven-day program *The Book of Ghost*. I do not know if we should call it a festival, but it is how we see the exchange platform.

I think *The Book of Ghost* is entirely about institutions because we discussed institutions from Indonesia, Thailand, China, and Taiwan. What is most interesting is that I brought scholars from Beijing (Fu Jin) and Japan (Tadashi Uchino). They were also doing much observation, and they were also participating in this transcultural exchange. I have not thought further about what to develop beyond this stage. I think this is

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<sup>10</sup> Fu Jin is a Chinese academic at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, an author, and a theatre critic.

something that always comes to my mind. Schools like drama schools should do it, and they will be better equipped to provide this kind of transcultural exchange and dialogue.

However, unfortunately, most schools teach techniques and not the culture and art institutions' structure which are behind the stage. In Asia, it is an area about which we are all very concerned about going into more deeply. It is an area in which, twenty years ago, I discussed with the late Kuo Pao Kun how we could provide a platform for exchange among such diverse cultural practitioners in Asia. Let us take a look at Indonesia. Indonesia has a few thousand islands, each with a different culture. If one looks at it from Europe, Asia looks like a lump, but if you look from Jakarta, Indonesia is thousands of pieces of culture. We must understand how we relate to minorities and the cultural customs in different parts of Asia. I think *The Book of Ghost* is just a glimpse, but in order to do that, we still had to fall back into developing productions and works. So it can be financed; I think we should go further sooner or later. The issue is how to convince existing academic institutions and existing theatre institutions that this kind of transcultural exchange platform is significant to the practitioners. After that, we discussed individuals. I think *The Book of Ghost* and *The Spirit Play* both dealt with institutions. The question I want to ask is how we can really avoid institutional pressure, both in individual practice and that hunting culture present here in Asia.

It is an area I explored in 1994 in *The Trial* based on Franz Kafka's concept. I built a stage with four mirrors, and in the four mirrors, we had artists inside performing for themselves, not the audience. It was about individual artists. When one practices, all one sees is oneself through many layers of mirrors. After 1994 I decided not to waste my time and my money anymore. Thus, after a dozen years, people tried to convince me to do it again. So in 2013, almost nineteen years later, I built the same theatre in the same space, but the technology was more advanced. In the version from 2013, I invited the artist from Japan Makoto Matsushima, and we discussed the concept in depth. We build a theatre within the theatre, a stage within the stage as a commentary on the stage. The mirror still was not perfect. Since 2013 we have experimented; the mirrors have become closer to the real mirror here. Matsushima is working on the stage as an artist, manipulating the space within the space.

I have found technology most fascinating because I think we need to have lots of exchanges in dialogue with technologists. I am very willing to carry on this dialogue, as we all know that the most advanced technology is usually used nowadays in huge rock concerts or car shows. However, the people who prepare the rock concerts or car shows are eager to join in discussion with theatre artists and share their know-how. Some time ago, I did another experiment called *One Table, Two Chairs*. As we all know, one table with two chairs is an iconic setting of Chinese traditional theatre. In some way, the table and chairs are a metaphor for a world. How do we deal with that? I invited artists from all over the world to work with just one table and two chairs.

Then, the most crucial part was the discussion after the work and debate about one table with two chairs and how we, each of us, approached this iconic setup. I used this to discuss economic and political power and how we try to balance it with the chairs. It was another experiment I was trying to do. Again, this experimentation is a commentary on curatorship and cultural exchange. In *One Table, Two Chairs*, the essential part is not to see all the plays but to listen to the post-performance discussion and debate among the artists. The basic rule was that they only had one stage with one table, two chairs, and twenty minutes to perform. Many artists broke the rules; some performed for 40 minutes, and some decided to use props instead of chairs. I just let them do it. The critical part is a post-performance discussion, more important than the fact of whether they respected the rules or not because the post-performance discussion is the part that triggers them to discuss who is curating and why they are curating in this format. This project is still ongoing, and we continue searching for a more systematic discourse of the post-performance discussion.

It is more than just looking at the picture in the flesh but more thinking of the concept of one table and two chairs as a festival, as a forum for festival art for the artists themselves. I have personally felt that the research is so important. However, when we are usually asked to produce and perform with all our energies, we are focused on what is happening on stage and less on why we have the stage, who gives us the stage, and what formulates our presentation. I think those are some of the questions.

In 2018, I was in Berlin at the Free University International Research Center Interweaving Performance Cultures. I thought the idea was fundamental, but I always wonder, what can we do if we start again? How can we make it even more progressive and productive? How can we make artists understand theoretical debates and academic understanding? The risk that artists take when they are on stage requires a step forward of getting artists and academics together and stripping their role as artists or as academics and then having a dialogue with each other. So this is the idea of one table, two chairs: a joint discussion of academics and artists.



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an experimental art pioneer and one of the most influential artists in Hong Kong and the Chinese-speaking region. In 1982, he co-founded the Zuni Icosahedron theatre and is also its artistic director. In the past forty years, Danny Yung has worked across many fields, including theater, dance, film, and video installations. He has been involved in over a hundred theater productions as a director, script-writer, producer, and stage designer. His works with Zuni Icosahedron have been performed in many cities in Asia, Europe, and North America. Danny Yung is also the creator of a series of conceptual comics, figurines, and sculptures. Besides his creative work, Danny Yung has been active in cultural and art policy education and cultural exchange between Asia and Europe, where he has served as the chairman and advisor to several institutions working in Hong Kong.

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