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**THEATRE INTERNATIONALISATION:
A VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVE**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

DINH THI NGUYEN, Master of Creative Arts

FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS

2005

CERTIFICATION

I, Dinh Thi Nguyen, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Dinh Thi Nguyen

10 November 2005.

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Dinh Thi Nguyen

November 2005

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ABSTRACT

During the last century, there have been many international theatrical exchanges which provided theatre practitioners with a wide range of opportunities to adapt and borrow elements or techniques from one theatre culture to apply to another. However, the question remains, whether this process is a collaboration in which “foreign” elements equally exist with the original tradition, creating a new form or are they assimilated into the tradition and absorbed by it? Do “foreign” elements remain foreign, used within familiar structures?

In this thesis I map out a conceptual framework for analysing a number of related practices in adapting and borrowing techniques from various theatre forms to integrate into one’s own form. I define this process as a concept of theatre internationalisation.

This study of theatre internationalisation explores the experiences and practices of theatricals from Vietnam, together with a wide variety of other theatre cultures, in order to develop my own approach to practising the concept of internationalisation in theatre. Through analysing theatre works of international and Vietnamese directors and theoreticians I search for my own creative practice as a Vietnamese theatre director.

It is hoped that this study will not only provide Vietnamese theatre practitioners, particularly the younger generation, with a key to finding the potential to strengthen their own theatre culture, but will also serve to foreground the diversity of theatrical practice in contemporary cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the 20th century, the growing number of international performance festivals and cultural exchange projects have been breaking down barriers between the world's theatre cultures. An international community is emerging where both those who make and consume theatre have become increasingly familiar with a diversity of forms and issues presented on stages of all nations. However, there have evolved a series of new theoretical “isms” in the theatre today that need to be strongly questioned. This phenomenon is opening up new relationships between theatre cultures that are eroding the specificities of their own traditions.

A prominent area for international exchange, theatre culture will be susceptible to cross-cultural influences. Recent theatre practices reveal that theatre practitioners adapt, assimilate, borrow or innovate in response to a wide range of contacts and encounters, forced or voluntary. Old forms are constantly being remoulded to the requirements of today. New practices are being created and, if accepted and practised for a time, become absorbed into traditional practice.

In this thesis I map out a conceptual framework for analysing a number of related practices in adapting and borrowing elements or techniques from one theatre culture to apply to another. For the purpose of my discussion, I perceive this process of internationalisation like a quarry used to create one's own works from raw materials gathered from a vast treasure house of cultural tradition. Those works should be considered as experimentation to achieve a true integration of the "Other" and your "Own". In a metaphoric way they may be seen as the myriad colours of rainbow within which the primary colours are still recognisable.

The question is whether this process, as complex as the many variants of cross cultural exchange in the theatre, can be encapsulated by the term "internationalisation". Is it a collaborative process in which foreign elements equally exist with the original tradition and then create a new form which becomes familiar? Or are they assimilated into the tradition and absorbed by it? Do "foreign" elements remain foreign, used within familiar structures - thus demonstrating their Otherness? (to be analysed in chapter 2)

Those questions have compelled my practice and the search

for answers to such questions is a core of this thesis. Like other theatre cultures - particularly Asian ones - Vietnamese theatre practitioners face an issue of how to preserve our cultural identity while engaging fully with the international community.

The impacts of colonialism in Vietnam are both conceptual – the introduction of foreign models – and practical – the introduction of invasive political and economic structures. The imposition of foreign theatrical models makes cultural identity problematic both in thought and in action. A difficult question, for Vietnamese scholars and theatre practitioners, is the extent to which this objectification of traditional cultural practices adjusts changes in theatre culture. Has it resulted in the adoption of foreign modes of self-perception? There has been a public debate in Vietnam about Vietnamese traditional theatre, its value as well as whether traditional practices can be used in response to situational contingencies in contemporary practice as a new presentation of tradition.

My assertion that tradition is the contemporary interpretation of the past, rather than something passively received, is a crucial element in a theory of preserving tradition. My point is that in theatre cultural identity must be understood as creative

and dynamic, and such an understanding is only possible with a symbolic concept of culture.

In utilising the concept of “internationalisation” of theatre, I am less interested in creating a new genre than, through analysing and comparing different models, in searching for a stimulus to strengthen my own theatre culture. This is essential not only for my own works but also for the young Vietnamese generation who are struggling for a new theatrical identity in which they can demonstrate their creativity. After many years working with young directors and actors, I have seen their hunger for changes to old fashioned theatre forms which no longer attract contemporary audiences. Recently, in an effort to stimulate and develop Vietnamese theatre culture, many seminars and national theatre festivals were held, focussed on strategies for improving the quality of theatre works. The results were not as optimistic as the aims of the strategies. In the National Theatre Festival - 2004¹ the quality of productions disappointed spectators because *“they are mostly not professional and presented in an old style.”*² The reviewer reasoned that *“the writing style remains much behind the times; the directors’*

¹ Held in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Quang Ninh and Ho Chi Minh Cities.

² Tien Phong Newspaper’s review, No. 212, Friday - 22/10/2004.

*creativity is underdeveloped.”*³ It was suggested that “*in the coming years, theatre young people, who will be responsible for the development of our theatre culture must be given opportunities for their creativity.*”⁴

Like many other Vietnamese theatre practitioners I strongly agree with the above suggestion. After returning from Australia in 1997, where I received a Master of Creative Arts degree, I started a similar journey searching for a solution. I wanted to look for the context in which interpenetration and/or exchange of techniques, theories and principles between theatre forms takes place. The argument and controversy surrounding this subject is imperative if we are to understand exchanges and avoid the increasing threat of elimination of all cultural borderlines.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*

A POINT OF DEPARTURE

When I first came to Australia in 1995 to study at Wollongong University, I had a big question in my mind: How do Australian mainstream audiences receive theatre productions created by people from different cultures? Was it similar to when people attended various restaurants to partake of different cuisine without questioning whether there was such a thing as an Australian restaurant? The exploration of food's multiculturalism inspired me to reach towards the idea of theatre internationalisation.

Before defining "internationalisation" in theatre I determined to examine how different theatre genres, especially Asian theatre, had been made in Australia - my theatrical, rather than gastronomic, point of departure.

Geographically Australia is in Asia but culturally it is hard to call it an Asian country. Recently, organisations such as Asialink and Export Oz and artistic events such as:

- The Brisbane Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art;
- The 1994 Asia-focused Adelaide Festival;
- The annual Asia-Pacific Film Festival in Sydney and;
- Asian theatre festivals organised by Playbox in Melbourne and Belvoir Street in Sydney

have proven of growing interest not only in cross-cultural exchanges between Australia and Asian countries but also in intercultural exchanges between communities described as multicultural inside Australia.

One of the most significant aspects of multiculturalism is that it allows people from different cultures to identify themselves by showing their cultural differences. Cross-influences between various ethnic or linguistic groups in multicultural societies like Australia have been the source of cultural exchanges in which the existence of cultural or national communities remains recognisable. This has been achieved through mutual influences and without hiding behind their national identities.

However, this type of exchange⁵ is only possible when it is officially accepted by the political system in place. I have

⁵ Will be discussed further in chapter 2.

chosen to search for a context in which I could explore how a nation's theatre culture is involved in the process of exchange with another nation. By seeking the underlying process for cultural exchange between nations, I expected to differentiate international exchange, rather than the processes of multicultural exchange within one national set of theatre practices.

Within the concept of theatrical internationalisation I hope to provoke new thinking about theatrical practices of using elements from other theatre cultures, rather than the influences between ethnic groups or communities inside one nation.

CHAPTER 1

A DEFINITION: INTERNATIONALISATION OF THEATRE - AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN HOME AND FOREIGN THEATRE CULTURES

In the Introduction I raised the issue of how foreign theatrical elements can be amalgamated with traditional performance forms. In this Chapter 1, I examine briefly three possible models of integration of cross cultural theatrical elements into Vietnamese theatre forms. The setting of my thesis is in Vietnam and my understandings arise through my own theatrical practices. I stated three questions in the introduction which I now return to:

1. Can internationalisation be the inclusion of foreign elements existing equally with traditional elements to make a new form that becomes familiar?

2. Through contact with international theatrical influences, do foreign elements introduced to traditional theatrical forms become absorbed?

3. Do foreign elements introduced into Vietnamese traditional forms remain foreign and demonstrate "Otherness"?

The issue of cultural identity is particularly acute for Vietnamese people who are very respectful of their own tradition. There are conflicting definitions of what Vietnamese cultural identity is, because of a long history of being influenced by foreigners. It is important, I think for theatre practitioners to understand that culture is not a fixed but a discursive space that enables interaction to take place. "*Culture engenders a sense of belonging, of identity and inclusion.*"⁶ However this also "implies exclusion, denial of membership, and borders. Borders, the lines that demarcate one culture from another, may not be as clear-cut as national borders but they are at the centre of cultural relations."⁷

Recently, in Vietnam, theatre practitioners have been expected to develop international cultural exchange programs in which they can take opportunities to learn from other theatre cultures

⁶Waston, Ian. *Negotiating Cultures: Eugenio Barba and The Intercultural Debate*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002, p.3.

⁷ ibid.

to strengthen Vietnamese theatre. In this Vietnamese traditional theatre's renaissance, the effort has been to apply international theatrical techniques to our own theatre works. But this tendency has been accompanied by increasing concern that Vietnamese traditional theatrical principles are being lost to a tourist entertainment. This is why the identification of common cultural themes and the maintenance of Vietnamese traditional theatre practices and processes are important issues in integrating foreign elements with traditional theatre forms.

Cultural identity in Vietnam may be viewed as deriving from Vietnamese traditions which in turn have been closely linked to Vietnamese models of spirituality. In contemporary society the concept of cultural identity is constantly adapting and is creatively fashioned by the current generation. In making contemporary theatre, new processes deviating from the traditional may be introduced in response to situational contingencies to create new theatre forms. For example, one of Vietnamese traditional theatrical forms, Cai Luong⁸ was established by the combination of Western realistic drama and

⁸ Will be detailed in Chapter 2.

Tuong in the early twentieth century when French colonisers came to Vietnam.

The establishment of Cai Luong is an evidence of the inclusion of foreign elements existing equally with traditional elements to make a new form that now has become a traditional theatrical form. In this creation we can see the influence of a realistic style of acting, which is drawn from Western drama integrated with Vietnamese traditional dance and movements.

In my own development as a theatre practitioner I have learned from contact with Australian and British cultures. These cultural exchanges have been helpful to me as a Vietnamese theatre director. However there are also Vietnamese cultural values, which I would not compromise. For example, in recent years, through increasing cultural exchanges between Vietnam and Western countries, we have seen a lot of Western films, performances and art products in which there is much sexuality. The facts of life are not a problematic issue for Vietnamese; however in Vietnam both creators and consumers choose discretion in showing sexual scenes in our own artistic works.

In my 2000 production of “Romeo and Juliet”⁹, in Ho Chi Minh City, for instance, on which I worked with a British director, Roger Chamberlain, a Western concept of physical theatre was used to express Romeo and Juliet’s feelings when they first meet and kiss. The dancers at the carnival slowly turned to melting bodies representing sexuality and Roger said to me: “it is very sexy”. But the sexuality was shown using a Vietnamese aesthetic, rather than the predominantly American way used in imported materials.

By directing this play, my desire was to bring Shakespeare's plays closer to Vietnamese audiences, and to enable them to comprehend cultural values of other countries, while being aware of their own tradition. Simultaneously I hoped to show international audiences a different version of *Romeo and Juliet* with a Vietnamese interpretation, by using one of the most important principles of Vietnamese traditional theatre: to materialise invisible elements of characters. From my point of view, this is a matter of integrating the ‘Otherness’ of the

⁹ Redirected in Hanoi in 2003 for my Doctor of Creative Arts, which will be detailed in 4.4

Vietnamese cultural traditions whilst still maintaining the integrity of a Shakespeare production. Consideration was taken of the cultural identity of both western and Vietnamese traditions.

The exploration of theatre internationalisation has given me an appreciation of the great advantages of cross-cultural exchange through which each theatre culture can enrich itself by absorbing or adapting techniques from other models. In addition, I am aware of the vitality of understanding cultural identity, how and where theatre is created and what it can tell us about notions of geography, boundaries and nations.

Within the scope of this discussion, then, I define theatre “internationalisation” as an encounter between home and foreign theatre cultures in which cultural borderlines are respected by all participants. In such an encounter practitioners from one theatre culture - the Own - can adapt or absorb techniques from various cultures - the Other, whilst the meaning and context of the absorbed ‘foreign’ elements retain

their cultural significance and do not disturb the cultural identity of the theatre piece. Both retain and unite their independent cultural values to create a new heterogeneous theatrical identity. By “the Own” I mean the native theatre forms which can be traditional or a form created by absorbing elements from “the Other” which then become accepted as part of native culture. “The Other” should be seen as theatre forms which do not belong to the same culture; they can also become, through time, a type of “Own”, developed from the former.

Richard Schechner, an American director and theoretician, used the term “internationalism” to describe exchanges among cultures. However he felt that the important exchange for artists was not that between nations suggestive of official exchanges and artificial boundaries.

Rather he advanced the discussions of “interculturalism” by pointing out: *“in the postcolonial world, national boundaries and*

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cultural boundaries differ.”

¹⁰ Schechner, Richard, “Interculturalism and The Culture of Choice: Richard Schechner Interviewed by Patrice Pavis.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, edited by Patrice Pavis

Schechner's statement seems to me based on a Westerner's perception in which cultural identities of nations are ignored. In Asian countries in general and in Vietnam in particular, cultural identity is considered as a spiritual boundary. Rather than referring to cultural boundaries as “*artificial kinds of boundaries*”¹¹ I prefer the notion of respecting these boundaries and identifying them, since culture is both material and spiritual.

The importance of spiritual culture to the development of human knowledge cannot be underestimated. Culturally, the simple question: “where are you from?” may not simply be answered with : “from where I live”. To answer this question fully you need to include the cultural context in which you are rooted. For example, it is unlikely that any one who has not grown up with Vietnam’s civilisation of water rice, can be sufficiently aware of the numerous metaphors of fish sauce or shrimp sauce that hint at spiritual concepts and values. The flavour of

(41 - 50), London: Routledge, p. 42

¹¹ *ibid.*

them represents a torrent of emotions, thoughts, taboos and fantasies which are transformed into a deeply spiritual experience. In making theatre, there will be an incomplete interpretation of a text if we do not fully understand what is flowing under the text - the cultural subtext. We cannot neglect spiritual concepts from which a theatre language frequently is developed.

Schechner has drawn the attention of theatre scholars to the interdisciplinary advantages between theatre and anthropology, but he does not suggest that one discipline interprets society for the other. A theatre practitioner cannot fully comprehend a play from another culture if he/she ignores the cultural context. This cultural context, used in the process of bringing theatre into being or evaluating its finished products, ranges freely, but purposefully, in an effort to emphasise cultural values. In many societies, theatre and religious ritual, seen as a cultural value, have come to share common characteristics. These characteristics make it difficult to draw any clear line between ritual and theatre.

Schechner explains that the meaning of a particular ritual is altered when that ritual is transformed from its own culture into another: "*it [ritual] means something different to us*", he states, "*You go to another country to see your own more clearly.*"¹² His statement is highly questionable: what about the 'Other' culture? Can rituals, which are a part of one's cultural heritage, simply be used in personal ways without understanding their original meaning? Schechner's view that "*[a]ny ritual can be lifted from its original setting and performed as theatre - just as any everyday event can be.*"¹³ is also questionable: how can he lift rituals of a non-Western culture to an everyday event in the service of American standards without a distortion of the original rituals?

As Rustom Bharucha, an Indian theatrical scholar, pointed out:

¹² Schechner, Richard, "Fragments of Dialog(s)", *The Bennington Review*, December 1978. p. 97.

¹³ Schechner, Richard. *Performative Circumstances from the Avant-garde to Ramlila*. Calcutta: Seagull Books. 1983. p. 150.

*“Schechner presumes to represent ‘other’ cultures by placing them in his own ‘map’ of post-modern performance.”*¹⁴

Schechner’s writings conspicuously reveal his state of preoccupation with the ‘himself’ overpowering the representations of ‘Other’ cultures. Instead of considering the validity of cultural/spiritual boundaries, he upholds the individual contexts of other cultures through a simple mixture of physical and ritual actions, in order *“to reveal himself as a set of disconnected thoughts,”*¹⁵ and to celebrate his own fragmentation.

By analysing Schechner’s point of view on international theatrical exchanges I wanted to begin my task by confronting my own cultural identity in relation to the prodigiously diverse cultures in Vietnam. I am aware that preserving cultural identity does not stop cultures from changing. It is true that “culture” functions as a process of ongoing actions in which exchange is encouraged and the past can be told as it truly is, not was. But it is not justified for traditional cultures to assimilate foreign

¹⁴ Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre and The World: Performance and The Politics of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993, p. 28.

¹⁵ Schechner 1978, p. 92.

values simply because this has become an international trend.

To develop further my idea of theatre internationalisation, I have undertaken numerous studies on theatrical experiences in relation to my intention. One of them was Ong Keng Sen's¹⁶ practice in Singapore where selected foreign elements were introduced to become absorbed into their own theatre works. In 1996, I was invited to attend a workshop called SEALAB¹⁷ in Singapore, where artists from Southeast Asian countries were gathered to work together. They were encouraged to use their own national backgrounds to create a work in which we would see both a harmony of various art forms and the uniqueness of each country. The final presentation was improvised by actors, dancers and performers. They had taken part in a series of workshops on movement, traditional and folk dance, and music led by representatives of countries, each with a unique musical harmony. In this presentation, I saw something very new, yet still heard sounds of Thailand's xylophone, Vietnamese musical

¹⁶ An artistic director of Singapore's TheatreWork Company.

¹⁷ South-East Asian Laboratory organised by Singapore's TheatreWorks Company; funded by the Japan Foundation Asia Center.

instruments such as the *Dan bau* and *Tam thap luc*, together with other countries' musical instruments. At the same time, I saw unique movement styles developed from what participants had learned during the workshop.

This workshop was part of a project funded by the Japan Foundation Asia Center in which an adaptation of Shakespeare's play *King Lear* was directed by Ong Keng Sen; performed by an multinational cast, with text written in Japanese by Rio Kishida and then translated into Mandarin, Bahasa Indonesian and English. In this production¹⁸ actors spoke only in languages corresponding to their performance traditions and locale (Mandarin, Japanese Noh, Bahasa Indonesia, Thai). All characters were turned to abstractions: for example Lear became the Old Man, Goneril and Regan were collapsed into the malevolent figure of the Older Daughter, Cordelia was the Younger Daughter, Gloucester and Kent were reduced to the Loyal Attendant, and Edmund became a lascivious Retainer. One of the production's most remarkable

¹⁸ The premiere was in January 1999 at Kallang Theatre, Singapore.

points was that all actors could identify themselves with specific forms and traditions of acting, yet performances still corresponded to the abstracted qualities of each character. However, I wanted to know why Ong chose a Japanese actor to play the King using Japanese Noh theatre techniques while the Older Daughter was played using Chinese opera techniques? Was it because China and Japan, the Northern Asians, were becoming dominant politically and economically? Did he see theatre casting as representative of national status, a political statement?

Beyond those questions I saw, in Ong's way of melding different techniques from different theatre forms, potential to help me explore more deeply my embryonic ideas of theatre internationalisation. I saw there an integration of indigenous theatrical elements within a consciousness of each's identity. Was this closer to internationalisation? As discussed above, my aim has always been to find a way of strengthening my own theatre culture by applying techniques and models from other

theatre forms to create new theatrical presentations. And I strongly believed that Ong's concept of theatre internationalisation could help to fulfil this intention.

My concept of theatre internationalisation is a type of **theatrical exchange between nations in which techniques or elements from foreign theatre forms are assimilated and their cultural context respected, and in which, in return, a similar offer is made from my own tradition.** More particularly, the idea of theatre internationalisation is closely connected with aesthetics of identity. Of course this is a matter of choice and there is no way such a choice can escape from being viewed in a larger hierarchy of forms, but the consideration of the concept of theatre internationalisation can, I think, provide a powerful testing ground to deal with controversial issues such as the debate on cultural identity in contemporary societies.

Actually in Vietnam, there had been a number of prior

experiments using foreign theatre styles¹⁹, though these were an unintentional impact of colonisation. However, many problems prevented development of a more mature theatre: a lack of understanding regarding the structure of theatrical genres, confusion about theatre forms, and an insufficient knowledge of how to preserve cultural identity led to a superficial imitation or, at best, a reluctant mixture.

It is helpful, I think, to recognise previous generations' achievements, as well as their failures. I therefore began searching Vietnam's theatrical history to discover whether there were earlier examples of internationalisation. This is the subject of the following chapter.

¹⁹ Will be discussed in 2.1

CHRONOLOGY OF THEATRICAL INFLUENCES ON VIETNAMESE THEATRE

Particularly Western-educated readers, unfamiliar with theatre's history in Vietnam, may find some dates in this document at odds with a more generally recognised chronology of theatrical development.

I therefore provide below a readily referenced summary that details when Vietnam experienced world-wide influences of international importance.

Influences	Dates Source Material	Vietnam Dates
Religious rituals	25000 BC at least in South America Caral	? > 13th century
Chinese Opera	740 AD > 12th century	13th century > early 19th century
French classical drama (Moliere, Racine, Corneille, etc.)	17th century	Late 19th century > 1920s
Konstantin Stanislavsky	1863 - 1938	1950s > present
Bertolt Brecht	1898 - 1956	1980s > present

CHAPTER 2

VIETNAMESE THEATRE CULTURE AND AN APPROACH TO THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONALISATION

Vietnamese theatre was established and developed in conjunction with religion, just as European theatre practices were through early Christianity and classical Greek theatre through religious ceremonies. However in Vietnamese theatre, theatrical elements could not be separated or recognised independently. While in Europe, five centuries before Christ, Greek theatre could offer humankind works by great authors like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes and a theatrical theory by Aristotle, Vietnamese theatre's birth was based on religious rituals and folklore elements which cannot be distinguished as theatre performances. Moreover, though established in the 13th century²⁰ it was influenced by foreign colonisers for many centuries.

In the development of Vietnamese theatre, the enrichment of the theatrical form through the absorption of foreign elements

²⁰ Dinh Quang. "Asian Theatre: Tradition and Modernity." In *Vietnamese Studies: Vietnamese Theatre and Other Theatres of Asia* (7 - 18). Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1998, p. 8.

was not always in accordance with the notion of internationalisation set out in Chapter 1. Often the introduced foreign elements swamped or disturbed the original Vietnamese traditions. It is useful in the context of this thesis to analyse the reasons for these unequal exchanges and this is the content of the following discussion.

2.1 Historical background

Vietnamese theatre history could be read as a narrative of learning and adapting while, at the same time, trying to resist domination by foreign cultures. From its birth, there were influences from foreign theatre cultures, particularly the Chinese²¹ and the French²². Though in the struggle for national independence Vietnamese artists were trying to preserve their own cultural identity, it is impossible to deny that the development of theatre culture parallels the growth of cultural exchange between nations. Were those exchanges a passive reception of an invading colonial culture or were they a conscious choice?

²¹From the 13th -18th centuries.

²² From the late 19th century - 1954.

2.1.1 The establishment of *Cheo* and *Tuong*: borrowing and adapting Chinese Opera/Sung Drama

Under the Ly - Tran dynasties (12th - 13th centuries), the arts of singing, dancing and performance had become very popular in Vietnamese society. However a theatre art form, in a general context, had yet to be established. Performances of dance and song were merely an imitation of life's everyday activities reflecting Vietnamese people's aspiration for a better life. But they formed the foundation for creating a rapidly expanding theatre culture. During this period, a Mongolian war prisoner, Ly Nguyen Cat , was teaching dance and singing for people of the Royal Art group²³ which became a driving force in the foundation of Vietnamese traditional theatre.

Under the Le dynasty (15th century), Vietnamese theatre was invigorated through a combination of the following elements:

- The art of singing, dancing, music, and verbal spectacle expanded in a wide range of forms.
- The creation of written literature and Vietnamese

²³ According to *Dai Viet su ky toan thu*, an ancient book of Vietnamese History.

language.²⁴

- The influences of Chinese theatre, especially Chinese opera.

However, in terms of genre, there was no discernible form which can be identified by historians. In the late 15th century two tendencies evolved in the presentation of performances. One used folk tales, dance and music; this developed to become Cheo. The other was focussed upon stories related to the Royal government which became Tuong. Both Cheo and Tuong represent a still flourishing classical Vietnamese performance tradition.

Cheo is a theatrical form of story-telling, in which actors present themselves at the beginning of the performance indicating the story that they are to tell and how they will use dance and singing to indicate the narrative. The audiences are not only spectators but also commentators, who enjoy performances and, at the same time, give their feedback on the quality of acting. Cheo actors are not expected to completely live within characters' lives and the audiences always play an objective

²⁴ Before the 15th century, the official language in Vietnam was Chinese.

role in analysing what is happening on stage. Occasionally they support actors and create a rhythm to the play by adding dialogues or drumming.

It can be said that in Cheo, actors and spectators are co-creators, analysing, commenting on the story and reminding each other how to create the performance. Cheo actors are more interested in improvising, building the spectacle of the performance by applying exaggerated movements and verbal actions in order to highlight what they want to tell than in undertaking logically dramatic action. For this reason, a Cheo play can be easily divided into different pieces to be performed.

Unlike Cheo, Tuong reflects the reality of life by creating a model of performance in which elements such as dance, movements and singing, even set and decoration are shaped in symmetry. For instance, left – right, up – down, inside – outside, in Tuong are elements of the performance that follow the principle of Ying and Yang. In Tuong, actors use stylised movements to express characters' action rather than imitating realistic actions. For example, the audiences can see a man

jumping up on a horse created through a series of movements without a real horse.

Moreover, in Tuong, actors sculpture characteristics of their roles by showing their characters' ways of walking, ways of moving their eyes and their hands, making up their faces and costuming at the beginning of the play. Basically, Tuong artists depict life in their own aspiration. The Tuong actors often place their characters in typical, sometimes illogical situations in order to highlight their message to the audience. Again, Tuong is different from psychological realistic drama, where spectators explore characters through understanding logical dramatic actions.

The period from the 16th - 18th centuries has been described “*as an artistic mutation*”²⁵ in which performing art improved to a higher level by expanding short spectacles to become full-scale performances. With the creation of their own language, performers could use Vietnamese scripts to produce theatre performances instead of using Chinese stories. This brought great opportunities for performers to add more and more

²⁵ Tran Viet Ngu. *About Cheo*. Hanoi: Music Institute, 1996, p.277.

elements of Vietnamese folklore to their performances of dance, song and music, thus identifying a Vietnamese culture. Moreover, the exchange between indigenous religious ritual and other religions²⁶ enhanced Vietnamese traditional theatre's ability to reflect its society.²⁷

²⁶ Such as Buddhism and Confucianism.

²⁷ Refer to Illustrations 1 and 2.

Illustration 1. An old Cheo performance. Vietnam National Cheo Theatre Company.

Illustration 2. An old Cheo performance. Vietnam National Cheo Theatre Company.

The increasing development of Vietnamese literature and poetry²⁸ had a strong impact on performing arts. As a result, “in the 18th and early 19th centuries Cheo [and Tuong] became an epic theatre”²⁹ with the creation of a number of Vietnamese plays³⁰ in these genres, indicating characteristics of a burgeoning and unique theatrical form.

Of course, the growth of traditional theatre with a strong Vietnamese identity offended Chinese feudalistic dominators who had always³¹ been ambitious to assimilate Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, through theatre performances Vietnamese intellectuals criticised their Royal government authorities who had become corrupt and heavily controlled by Chinese feudalism.³² It can be said that Vietnamese theatre culture had historically been eager to learn and absorb from other theatre cultures, but continuously resisted cultural assimilation.

²⁸ A well-known “Story of Kieu” was written by Nguyen Du in the 18th century.

²⁹ Tran Bang. *An Overview on Cheo*. Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 1999, p. 47.

³⁰ For example “Quan Am Thi Kinh”, “Truong Vien”, and “Kim Nham”.

³¹ Vietnam had been colonised by China for thousands years.

³² For example, a Cheo play “Kim Van Kieu” adapted from “A Story of Kieu” by Nguyen Du.

2.1.2 The establishment of Spoken Drama within the influence of French theatre

Before discussing the influence of colonial French theatre on traditional Vietnamese theatre it is necessary to understand that Cheo and Tuong traditions were primarily movement and musically based theatrical forms. French theatre in Vietnam became known as Spoken Drama. Any Vietnamese theatre using primarily spoken dialogue became known as Spoken Drama.

There are two opinions regarding the establishment of Vietnamese Spoken Drama:

- The first point of view holds that Spoken Drama's birth was inherent in Vietnamese traditional theatre, such as Tuong and Cheo, since in those theatre forms there are elements of “speaking”³³.

- The second point of view states that Vietnamese Spoken Drama was imported from the West, particularly from France.

³³ Such as verbal farce and verbal imitation.

The establishment of Vietnamese Spoken Drama met the aesthetic demands of urban intellectuals and audiences for a theatre form that was closer to their lives in the 1920s. At the time, existing traditional theatre forms no longer attracted this audience; *Tuong* was performed with stories about Royal government, and *Cheo* reflected moral issues relating to country people. In step with day-to-day changes within society, Vietnamese theatre practitioners had been trying to renovate their performances, but they perceived they could not save themselves from gradually falling into oblivion. “ *During the 1920s, under the French colonisation, rural areas were pauperised and Tuong and Cheo had lost their audiences. Performers had to move to big cities where the Europeanisation was rapidly expanded.*”³⁴ They sought a more suitable theatre form that facilitated a direct approach to social issues; they found Western drama - particularly French classical drama - more flexible in reflecting the human condition, since performers did not have to include song and dance.

To assess which opinion regarding the establishment of

³⁴ Tran Bang. “French Theatre and Vietnamese Traditional Theatre.” In *The Influences of French Theatre on Vietnamese Theatre Culture* (209 - 13). Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 1998, p.209.

Vietnamese Spoken Drama is more convincing, we need to analyse the relation between theatre art and the reality of life, and the methodology of representing reality in Cheo, Tuong and Spoken Drama. If there is no similarity between these forms, then it is difficult to say that one was developed or rooted from the other.

Tuong and Cheo depict human life in a convention-bound and stylised form whereas Spoken Drama represents reality through naturalism and realism, similar to the spectator's everyday lives. While the structure of plays for Spoken Drama requires logical dramatic actions which are developed within a certain timeframe and location, plays for Cheo and Tuong are created in an open structure in which there is no limitation of time and place. This leads to different artistic languages: in Tuong and Cheo, performers use singing, choreographed movements and speaking in conventional rhythms to create their characters. Performances are elevated beyond naturalism and realism: *"Cheo belongs to the epic and conventional theatre of the Orient. In the past, it relied heavily on impromptu performance (ung dien). Leaning upon the main body of the plot and the available traditional models (types) of scene, song and dance,*

*the performer might improvise to create characters.*³⁵

In Spoken Drama, actors mostly use physical and verbal actions, movements close to everyday life - although those elements are consciously selected, a refinement of naturalism.

It can therefore be said that the evidence points toward Vietnamese Spoken Drama being established within the influence of French classicism in the 1920s. In his book *“An Application of Stanislavsky’s Method to Actor Training”*,³⁶ Hoang Su agreed that *“it is hard to share with theatricals who have the opinion which states: Vietnamese spoken drama was rooted from traditional theatre because the strongest foundation of drama is literature from which a written script is created and dramatic actions are developed whereas speech in traditional theatre has to respect its conventional melodies.”*³⁷ It is a tenuous observation to consider Vietnamese traditional theatre resulting in Spoken Drama because these two forms use very different techniques.

In summary, the influx and the influence of French theatre that

³⁵ Tran Bang. “Modern Cheo in Vietnam.” In *Vietnamese Studies: Vietnamese Theatre and Other Theatres of Asia* (19 - 24). Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers. 1998. p.20.

³⁶ Hoang Su. *An Application of Stanislavsky’s Method to Actor Training*. Hanoi: Theatre Institute. 2005.

³⁷ Hoang Su. “An Application”, 2005, p. 15

travelled all over Vietnam during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, eventually induced a big change in Vietnamese theatre culture. I have no doubt that the establishment of Vietnamese spoken drama can be credited to the French influence as a positive impact on Vietnamese theatre culture. However, the way that Vietnamese dramatists applied the French model to their own theatre needs to be analysed for its impact upon theatre internationalisation. The following section will detail this analysis.

2.2 An expression of internationalisation in Vietnamese theatre culture

Following the introduction of Spoken Drama into Vietnam in late 19th century there have been many theatrical experiments in cultural exchange, some of them before terms such as “interculturalism” or “transculturalism” were fashionable. At the same time, Vietnamese theatre practitioners were attempting to modernise traditional theatre. By combining Western techniques with Cheo and Tuong, they wanted to give Spoken Drama a national character. In other words, they wanted to enrich their own theatre culture in parallel with protecting their cultural identity when making theatre. Certainly, this process

was not smooth.

The impetus to discover what value Spoken Drama had in Vietnamese society has been a matter of heated debate since the 1930s. What elements from French theatre we could apply to traditional theatre without distorting traditional characteristics? Whether theatrical practices adapting French techniques could be used in the struggle for independence against French colonial domination have long been questioned.

2.2.1 Late 19th century - early 20th century: absorbing French theatre

In the early 20th century, after the French had established their colonisation of Vietnam, there were a large number of Vietnamese intellectuals trained by a French-focused education system. In many French-Vietnamese schools, plays written by Corneille, Racine and Moliere were introduced to Vietnamese students who were required not only to study them but also to create performances based on those texts. In high schools, Vietnamese students learned French theatre by analysing its structural aspects together with the creation of character, style and genre in plays written by not only classical but also

contemporary French playwrights. It can be said that French theatre arrived in Vietnam through written scripts, rather than performances. Consequently, during the 1930s, there were a number of new Vietnamese playwrights such as Vi Huyen Dac, Doan Phu Tu, Vu Trong Can, Vu Trong Phung, Khai Hung and Nguyen Huy Tuong, whose dramatic methodology was influenced by writers such as Beaumarchais, V.Hugo, Musset and J.J Bernard.

The development of a national play writing style required an official and professional system of performances which had not yet formed by the 1930's. A viable performing arts culture is not simply the capacity to transform a written script into a production on stage. Its ability to stimulate scripts and, more importantly, to create a cultural identity through its production styles and characteristics is paramount. So, the development of a theatre culture demands a parallel growth of performance and play writing styles. Unfortunately, at that time Vietnamese theatre practitioners had no opportunities to learn acting and directing for Spoken Drama, apart from watching a few French performances undertaken by visiting French theatre companies.

Some theatre practitioners appropriated Cheo and Tuong

masters to create what are described as Cheo van minh (“civilised” Cheo) and Kich Cheo (a mixture of Cheo and Drama). In these forms, scenery and the decorated stage used the conventions of Western realistic theatre to specify the action’s location. They removed all characteristics of traditional Cheo such as conventionalised scenes, stylised movements, and songs. As a result, they generated a discernible form. It is difficult to define such performances: are they Cheo or Spoken Drama?

This experimentation does not fit the definition of internationalisation as set out in Chapter 1 as techniques were borrowed without any appreciation of cultural meaning. A Cheo production can no longer be called Cheo if its traditional structure, cultural significance and typical characteristics that identify it as a theatrical form are removed. I am not saying that it is impossible to apply elements or techniques from other forms to traditional Cheo. Preserving tradition does not demand a stop to learning and exchanging, but theatre practitioners engaged in these cases need to define which genre they are working in so that they can make choices that ensure the homogeneity/validity of the work. Nguyen Dinh Nghi, a famous theatre director makes his comment on the

phenomena: *“this is not because theatre practitioners did not want to use strong elements of traditional theatre, but that they were curiously confused about the difference between genres.”*³⁸

In Hanoi and Saigon, French opera houses, very different from Cheo and Tuong performance spaces, were built in 1911 for French theatre companies performing for French audiences - including authorities, soldiers, business men and women. Later a number of Vietnamese involved in relationships with these French had opportunities to watch performances. The change of performance spaces generated a new way of receiving theatre works: the audiences came to theatres for watching performances only, not for talking about their everyday lives. It is important to note that in Vietnam until eighteenth century performances had been presented at pagodas, temples or markets³⁹ where ordinary people came for social meetings rather than for enjoying performances. The introduction proscenium theatre of Western style was carried out in 1911 when the French performed their theatre works in Hanoi and then in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City). These events resulted in the

³⁸ Nguyen Dinh Nghi. “Issues of Drama Acting in The Period: 1921 -1945.” In *The Influence of French Theatre on Vietnamese Theatre* (214 -30). Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 1998, p. 218

³⁹ See illustration 3

foundation of a number of drama groups.

Illustration 3. A performance of Tuong in the South of Vietnam in 18th century,
Theatre Museum in Danang.

The first Spoken Drama performed by Vietnamese actors in Vietnamese occurred on the 25th April 1920; it was Moliere's play "*Malade Imaginaire*"⁴⁰ since there had not yet been a written play in Vietnamese. This script may also had been chosen because Moliere's comedies are close to Vietnamese Cheo in the way they reflect society satirically. The performance of "*Malade Imaginaire*" encouraged Vietnamese writers to create their own stories reflecting Vietnamese society. Following this event, many original Vietnamese plays⁴¹ were shown at several small performance spaces.⁴² However those performances were considered as preparatory for the official establishment of Vietnamese Spoken Drama.

On the 22nd October 1921 the premiere of the play "*Chen thuoc doc*" (A Cup of Poison), written by a Vietnamese playwright Vu Dinh Long, was performed by Vietnamese artists at the Hanoi Opera House. It is seen as the foundation of Vietnamese Spoken Drama.⁴³

The introduction of French theatre was not only a step toward

⁴⁰ It was written in 1672.

⁴¹ For example "*Manh guong doi*" (A Mirror of Life) by Tran Tuan Khai, "*Co giao Phuong*" (The Teacher Phuong) by Nguyen Ngoc Son.

⁴² For example Hang Bac Street Theatre, near Hoan Kiem Lake in the centre of Hanoi.

⁴³ Xuan Yen, Hoang Su and Tran Viet Ngu. *The History of Vietnamese Theatre*. Vol.3. Hanoi: Academy of Theatre and Film, 2000, p. 55.

the creation of Spoken Drama but also a strong influence on Vietnamese traditional theatre particularly Cheo and Tuong. Professor Tran Bang contends this *“is a complicated confrontation which causes both negative and positive results.”*⁴⁴

A substantial negative result of French colonisation was that it brought great economic poverty to Vietnamese people living in the countryside; traditional theatre, very popular in rural communities, could no longer find its audiences. Cheo performers had to bring their performances to the big cities and, in order to attract urban spectators, Cheo masters had to make their performance relevant to audiences who had seen French theatre.

Unlike the three unities rule⁴⁵ of French classical drama, a Cheo play is a sequence of actions and events which sometimes tell the whole life of a character and within which all actions take place in unlimited spaces. Originally Cheo was performed in the entrance square of Buddhist temples and pagodas or in markets where there was no distance between performers and

⁴⁴ Tran Bang. “The Influences of French Theatre”, 1998, p. 209.

⁴⁵ The unities of place, time and action (Aristotle’s poetics)

spectators. These open spaces enabled performers to gain better communication with their audience. People came to performances not only to see the show but also to talk and meet friends and relatives, a social communication. Once moved to cities, performers had to modify their Cheo productions so that they could perform in an opera house/proscenium theatre,⁴⁶ known as ‘theatre of boxes’ (*san khau hop*) in Vietnam. This type of performance space not only greatly modified the performance but also enforced a new kind of audience response. Traditional scripts were rewritten in a realistic style to better encompass contemporary stories.

In summary, Cheo theatre had to break its traditional principles to survive. Viewed sympathetically, it is understandable that traditional artists of the time had no choice but to abandon peasant farmers - their traditional mainstream audience - in order to engage with the ‘petty bourgeoisie’.

The primary positive theatrical result of colonisation was that the absorption of French literature and classical drama brought traditional theatre practitioners closer to a means of expressing contemporary stories. Depicting contemporary society became

⁴⁶ For instance, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City Opera Houses.

a new concern in Cheo plays. Traditional performers were encouraged to meet an aesthetic demand from their contemporary audience who wanted to see characters like themselves living an everyday life - rather than kings, princes and princesses.

2.2.2 The establishment of Cai luong

Meanwhile in the South of Vietnam in the early 20th century, under the influence of the French drama and Tuong, a new form of popular theatre arose. Cai luong was created by combining folk music with realistic-style acting.

Like Cheo in the North and Tuong in central Vietnam, Cai luong had a strong foundation in Southern folk songs and music. During the late 19th century Southern folk songs and music had been rapidly developed throughout Southern provinces. “*Many families formed their own amateurish groups to perform for their communities.*”⁴⁷ Through absorbing French drama, some Cai luong masters⁴⁸ created performances using Vietnamese

⁴⁷Xuan Yen, Hoang Su, and Tran Viet Ngu. *The History of Vietnamese Theatre*. Vol.2. Hanoi: Academy of Theatre and Film, 2000, p. 65.

⁴⁸ For example, Truong Duy Toan, Vuong Hong Sen.

poetic stories.⁴⁹ These Cai luong masters' groups were financially supported by a French educated intellectual, André Than. One of the most famous groups was SaDecamis and "*its first performance of 'Luc Van Tien' in 1917 in Vinh Long town was a foundation of Cai luong.*"⁵⁰ It can therefore be said that from its birth, Cai luong was influenced decisively by two theatrical currents: Tuong and French drama.

Moreover, through contact and exchange with Chinese sung drama from *Guang dong* province in China⁵¹ as well as with Western music, Cai luong selectively absorbed new elements by adding new musical instruments into its original orchestra, such as guitar, mandolin and violin.

By absorbing Tuong's stylisation and French realistic acting style, "*Cai luong managed to create an 'intersection' of these contradictory structures.[...] This blend enabled Cai luong theatre to cope with the inevitable modernisation generated by the time, while preserving its national essence and its dramatic*

⁴⁹ For example, "Luc Van Tien" by Nguyen Dinh Chieu.

⁵⁰ Xuan Yen, "The History of Vietnamese Theatre" Vol.2, p. 68.

⁵¹ During the 1920s - 30s a number of visiting Chinese Sung drama groups from Guang Dong toured their productions to South Vietnam where many Chinese emigrated.

*peculiarities.*⁵²

Clearly the presence of French theatre in the early 20th century generated a vast change to Vietnamese theatre, the evident impact of one theatre culture on another and further evidence of Vietnamese theatre's development through imposed international "exchange".

However it is necessary to point out that the genre which Vietnamese theatre adapted most over this period of time was primarily classical theatre. Not all variations or trends in French theatre had equal influence; Vietnamese society at this time was only introduced to French classical drama. More contemporary forms of French theatre were not shown in Vietnam. At the time when Vietnamese theatricals started their drama, French theatre had departed from classicism by raiding other cultures for inspiration; witness the "Turkish" scenes in Moliere, Voltaire's use of Chinese elements, and more recently, the continuing interest in Oriental theatre by major French theatrical innovators, from Antoine to Artaud, J.L. Barrault and Ariane Mnouchkine.

⁵² Le Duy Hanh. "Cai Luong: Its National Identity and Modernisation." In *Vietnamese Studies* No.4 (32 - 5). Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1998, p. 32

Simultaneously the influence of Western theatrical techniques, especially modern realism⁵³ has been enormous even in those Oriental countries with rich theatrical traditions of their own such as India, Japan and China. While Vietnamese practitioners saw Western drama as a flexible means of representing human life, easily absorbing techniques like realism, Western theatre practitioners like J.L. Barrault and M.Marceau, who visited Vietnam in 1960 and were inspired by Vietnamese classical forms of Cheo and Tuong, called them models of “*total theatre*”⁵⁴. Still earlier Artaud had a similar response to Indonesian Balinese theatre and called it a model of “*pure theatre*”.

It is apparent from the Vietnamese experience that increasing international connections have intensified interest in international theatre exchanges. Among the most important exchanges for Vietnamese theatricals was Stanislavsky’s psychological realism.

⁵³ Like Ibsen, Meyerhold, and Vakhtangov.

⁵⁴ Mich Quang. *The characteristics of Tuong*. Hanoi: San khau [Theatre]. 1995. p.272.

2.2.3 From 1954 - 1975: The influence of Stanislavsky's method.

Stanislavsky's working method of analysing characters' life by creating and developing a "spine" of psychological/inner and physical/outer dramatic actions was not familiar to traditional performers. However it helped them to explore their characters in a creative way, rather than passively emulating previous generations.

During the anti-French war (1946 - 1954) selected Vietnamese young people were nominated to join workshops on Spoken Drama⁵⁵ where they studied Stanislavsky's method through translations from Chinese. After the victory, theatre and film schools were opened in North Vietnam to train professional directors and actors for Spoken Drama and film, while a large number of Vietnamese dramatists were sent to study in the former Soviet Union. Returning home, those Soviet-Russian trained people became a new generation of directors and theatrical scholars whose exploration and studies of Stanislavsky's method became broadly transformed throughout

⁵⁵ In the speech given by a well-known scholar, Nguyen Tuan when he visited Moscow in 1988; mentioned in "An Application of Stanislavsky's Method to Actor Training" by Hoang Su. Hanoi: Theatre Institute. 2005, p.16.

Vietnamese theatre culture. *“A study of Stanislavsky’s methodology to apply it to our spoken drama and film was undertaken in various ways.”*⁵⁶

It is again implied⁵⁷ that, under the influence of a “foreign” theatre form, Vietnamese theatre changed rapidly after applying Stanislavsky’s acting method to both Spoken Drama and traditional theatre: Tuong and Cheo.

During the 1960s and 70s a large number of realistic style drama productions were warmly received, particularly since they well served the government in reflecting reality within Vietnam: Stanislavsky’s method was seen as an officially sanctioned guide for making theatre. There were two primary reasons. Firstly, during the war, Vietnamese dramatists had few opportunities to share experiences with artists apart from Soviet-Russians, who were dominant in Vietnam both economically and politically. Secondly, Vietnamese practitioners realised that through making theatre they could serve the government’s cultural policy of reflecting Vietnamese society

⁵⁶Hoang Su. *An Application of Stanislavsky’s Method to Actor Training*. Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 2005, p. 17.

⁵⁷ And confirmed by my association and discussions with Hoang Su at the Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

through realism as well as generating propaganda for the anti-American war.

However it would be improper to deny that many good quality theatre productions⁵⁸ using Stanislavsky's acting and directing style were effective, not only in Spoken Drama but also in Cheo and Tuong. By using Stanislavsky's method, Soviet-Russian trained directors⁵⁹ *"created an artistic and creative environment where Tuong performers better built up their traditional characters."*⁶⁰

In parallel, many written works were published by theatrical scholars who explored theoretically Stanislavsky's method.⁶¹ These works not only provided Vietnamese theatre practitioners with a useful background, but also were used as text books for training directors and actors in theatre and film schools.

However, through an incomplete understanding of the difference between theatrical forms, in some Tuong and Cheo

⁵⁸ For examples, "Dai Doi Truong Cua Toi" written by Dao Hong Cam, directed by Dinh Quang (1975); "Doi Mat" written by Vu Dung Minh, directed by Dinh Quang (1976).

⁵⁹ For example, Ngoc Phuong, Vu Minh, Doan Anh Thang, and Ngo Xuan Huyen.

⁶⁰ Xuan Yen. *Tuong in a New Age*. Hanoi: Theatre Publishing House. 1998, p. 116.

⁶¹ For example, *"The Issues of Acting"*; and *"The Art of Psychology - Realistic Acting"* by Dinh Quang.

productions⁶² Stanislavsky's method was applied inappropriately. It can be said of them that they were "*edging their foot to fit wrong size shoes*."⁶³ Ironically the idea of modernising traditional theatre through a realistic performance style was inverted by turning Cheo and Tuong characters into contemporary ones; for example, they reduced princes and historic personalities to stereotypical figures enthusiastic to fulfil political duties during the 1960s -70s. By rewriting Cheo and Tuong plays using a realistic style without questioning whether realism suits a Cheo play's structure, the notion of "internationalisation" was used to poor effect. Similarly, musicians in Vietnam attempted to reform music by using motifs from Western opera.⁶⁴

These hybrid forms without appropriate cultural understanding demanded a solution which was called a "movement of renewing Vietnamese theatre culture", particularly prevalent at the end of the anti-American war in 1975.

⁶² Cheo plays: "Tam Cam", and "Luu Binh Duong Le"

⁶³ A Vietnamese metaphor about matching objects in a wrong way.

⁶⁴ Plays such as '*Mau chung ta da chay*' (1962) written and directed by Tran Bang, National Cheo Theatre Company; and "*Co Giai phong*" (1964) written and directed by Tran Bang, Tao Mat and Ha Van Cau, National Cheo Theatre Company.

2.2.4 From 1975 - 1990: the renewal of Vietnamese theatre.

After unification of the North and the South following the anti-American war, recognising the importance of strengthening their own theatre, dramatists undertook many activities to renew Vietnamese theatre culture in a “new age”. One strategy was to apply techniques taken from other theatre forms whilst preserving a national identity.⁶⁵

As detailed earlier in this chapter, at this point in time Vietnamese theatre consisted of two categories - traditional theatre and Western-style Spoken Drama. While the former inherited the highly stylised traditions of centuries, the later was largely modelled after Stanislavsky’s method.

Although Stanislavsky’s method had been widely accepted during the 1980s, many Vietnamese dramatists⁶⁶ turned to non-realistic Western theatre, while persisting with Vietnamese traditional theatre. There were two reasons.

⁶⁵ Inspired from the slogan: “To build a modern culture within strong national identity” decided by Vietnam’s government at the 6th Communist Party’s Congress in 1976.

⁶⁶Such as Nguyen Dinh Nghi, Nguyen Dinh Quang, and Ngo Xuan Huyen.

Firstly, during the war, both traditional theatre and Spoken Drama had been used for propaganda in which Vietnamese artists were expected to write and produce realistic plays about the political reality of Vietnam. However, after the war Vietnamese artists realised that it was a mistake to apply principles of realism to non-realistic traditional theatre; it resulted in a mono-toned nuance in both theatre styles. Therefore Spoken Drama artists began looking for forms that could express their feelings more vigorously. Similarly traditional theatre practitioners were very interested in modernising Cheo and Tuong before they became antiques being shown in museums.

Secondly, in the wake of the government's open-door policy,⁶⁷ works of non-realistic Western theatre artists, such as Brecht, Peter Brook and Grotowski, were introduced into Vietnam. In addition, through international cultural exchange programmes numerous Vietnamese theatricals had opportunities to study and perform in Western countries. In return, Western theatre artists were welcome to collaborate with Vietnamese artists.

⁶⁷ Decided by the government at the 8th Communist Party's Congress in 1986.

It was largely Western theatre artists' interest in Vietnamese and Asian theatre that inspired many Spoken Drama directors like Nguyen Dinh Quang and Nguyen Dinh Nghi⁶⁸ to look back at their own theatrical legacies and explore the possibilities of integrating the expressive styles of Cheo and Tuong into Spoken Drama. They found that Cheo and Tuong's fluidity in scenic structure, unlimited stage presentation of time and space, and various stylised staging conventions not only enabled playwrights and directors to realise their broader vision on stage, but offered ample opportunity for actors to move more expressively beyond daily life representation. Those directors also found that one of the best ways to characterise Vietnamese spoken drama in its national identity was to apply Cheo and Tuong principles to it.

Nguyen Dinh Nghi believed that *"it [traditional theatre] is the best way leading me to a modern theatre. I am greatly in debt of it"*⁶⁹ His production of *"Hon Truong Ba Da Hang Thit"*⁷⁰ (Truong Ba's Spirit in the Butcher's Skin), a symbolic play about the

⁶⁸They are both People's artists.

⁶⁹ Nguyen Dinh Nghi. *An Interview With Nguyen Dinh Nghi About Directing* by Nguyen Thi Minh Thai. Theatre Magazine No.4, 1978.

⁷⁰ Written by a famous contemporary playwright, Luu Quang Vu; performed by Vietnam National Theatre Company in Hanoi 1989, toured to the United States in 1998.

struggle between good and evil, was an example. The story is about a good man whose spirit,⁷¹ after his death, is transformed to a dead Butcher's body, who becomes alive again with his own body but the good man's spirit. Symbolically, the play's message is that a good man's spirit should be retained to create a better society. In this production, Nguyen Dinh Nghi successfully applied traditional theatre principles by using stylised representations of time and space. He achieved a true integration of traditional techniques and Western style drama.⁷² *"The production [Truong Ba's Spirit in Butcher's Skin] was a suggestion of how to make our [Vietnamese] spoken drama become more Vietnamese."*⁷³

⁷¹ In Vietnamese traditional belief, dead people's spirit remain alive.

⁷² Refer to Illustrations 4 and 5.

⁷³ Nguyen Thi Minh Thai. *A Memory of Nguyen Dinh Nghi*. Hanoi: Theatre Magazine, No. 2, 2002.

Illustration 4. *Truong Ba's Spirit in the Butcher's Skin*. Vietnam National Theatre Company, 1989.

Illustration 5. *Truong Ba's Spirit in the Butcher's Skin*. Vietnam National Theatre Company, 1989.

Meanwhile some directors⁷⁴ were breaking away from the conventions of traditional theatre to produce plays in a more realistic style.⁷⁵ They blended contemporary subjects and realistic elements⁷⁶ with old conventions designed to represent ancient themes and peoples. Together with the above mentioned directors, a number of Russian trained ones⁷⁷ continued to experiment with applying Stanislavsky's method to traditional theatre productions. Some of them were successful in using Stanislavsky's "actor preparation" to improve traditional acting skills while maintaining traditional fundamental principles.⁷⁸

Unfortunately apart from the above successes, a number of experiments misconceived the use of "psychology-realistic" acting style for Cheo and Tuong performance. Directors⁷⁹ following this tendency produced performances which were a

⁷⁴ For example, Doan Hoang Giang and Le Hung.

⁷⁵ For example, "*Nang Sita*", directed by Doan Hoang Giang, performed by Hanoi Cheo Company in 1989.

⁷⁶ Such as modern music and set decorations.

⁷⁷ For example, Pham Thi Thanh, Le Chuc and Le Hung.

⁷⁸ For example, Doan Anh Thang and his Tuong production "*Nguoi con gai Kinh Bac*" (A Northern Girl" which was granted a Gold Medal at the National Theatre Festival in 1985.

⁷⁹ For example, Doan Hoang Giang and his Cheo production "*Nang Sita*" performed by Hanoi Cheo Theatre Company in the 1980s.

confused mixture of Spoken and Sung Drama, neither drama nor Tuong/Cheo. Those directors did not sufficiently question whether they could generate an integration by employing two different styles in one production. They lacked an awareness of the suitability of a technique applied to a different theatre form. For example, representations of the character in Stanislavsky's acting style cannot be applied to Cheo and Tuong acting where actors are not expected to become completely transformed into the character on stage; they can also comment on the character they play. However Stanislavsky's techniques of physical action and external observation remain helpful to Cheo and Tuong actors in creating their characters.

During the 1980s some Vietnamese theatre scholars found Brecht's dramaturgy to have parallels with Oriental theatre,⁸⁰ particularly Vietnamese traditional theatre. In comparison with Brecht's techniques, Vietnamese Cheo and Tuong make a similar use of alienation to distance their audiences from the living part of characters. Ancient Cheo and Tuong also placed audiences in an objective role by using a directorial ideology which fostered dismissal of critical thinking, whereas Brecht's techniques enhance the spectator's ability to critically

⁸⁰ Refer to section 3.1

comprehend a story's content. It suggests that Brecht's techniques help to enlarge the role of audiences by giving them more opportunities to develop their imagination and critical faculties. Also it has been recognised that Brecht's epic theatre⁸¹ has direct application to the question of how contemporary Cheo and Tuong stories might better be represented.

Consequently some theatre directors consciously applied Brechtian alienation to both Cheo, Tuong and Spoken Drama: Dinh Quang suggests: *"Actually, being rooted from an Eastern epic theatre form, we should explore Western experiments of epic theatre, particularly Bertolt Brecht's theory which is closer to our traditional method of play writing and acting rather than being influenced by Aristotle's theory which is very different from ours."*⁸²

Following that trend, there have been a number of successful experiments applying Brechtian techniques to traditional Vietnamese theatre.

⁸¹Described as a "dialectical epic" to differentiate with Elizabethan Epic.

⁸² Dinh Quang. *The Characteristics of Tuong, Cheo and their Prospects*. Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 2004, p.111.

The National Cheo Theatre Company's production of *Caucasian Chalk Circle*⁸³ productively combined Brecht with Cheo; utilising Cheo's traditional stylised movements, gestures and chorus, the director achieved a homogeneity without breaking Cheo principles.

Two wooden rostrum were the primary elements of the stage setting.⁸⁴ Brecht's river and the bridge by which Grusha crosses it were indicated exclusively through actor's movements. Grusha's journey from one rostra to the other using Cheo's movements, singing and music demonstrated the dramatic tension of the situation. Her adventures, told in a series of short scenes rather than in continuous time, were depicted by various motifs of Cheo dances and music. For example, the singers in Cheo are separated physically from the physical performers who act and dance on stage.

⁸³ Directed by a German director, Alexander Stillmark; performed by Vietnamese Cheo actors in Hanoi, 1983.

⁸⁴ Refer to Illustrations 6 and 7.

Illustration 6. *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Vietnam National Cheo Theatre Company, 1983.

Illustration 7. *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Vietnam National Cheo Theatre Company, 1983.

In this production a set of singers, placed at the side of the stage (as in Cheo), sang about how Grusha saves the child and persists in her moral decision despite hunger, cruelty and danger; simultaneously the actor playing Grusha dances with a series of “*buoc xien*”⁸⁵ (a turn by moving feet together) to represent her strength of will. These actions were harmonised with quick rhythm drum.

By quickly shifting positions of the rostra, the play’s scenes ran without black-outs. In this production of *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, all dramatic action was conducted in an open structure which consisted of 32 pieces narrated by the chorus. The prologue set up an unique tone for the whole play: farmers told the invited audience that they have arranged this performance to showcase their conflict over property ownership, hoping the audience’s comments would help them overcome the problem. Frequent subsequent appearances of the chorus reminded the audience of watching the farmer’s presence during the telling of the story.

⁸⁵ Refer to Illustration 8.

Illustration 8. *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Vietnam National Cheo Theatre Company, 1983.

With the participation of singers and musicians, Stillmark obtained a further alienation effect using traditional Vietnamese theatre forms - a combination of the hyper-realistic acknowledgement of theatricality and ethereal stylisation.

This production demonstrated how a contemporary story could be told using a traditional theatrical form. It suggested a practical answer to the question of how to modernise our traditional theatre, a long standing major concern of Vietnamese theatre practitioners. The latest report from Vietnam News on the Cheo Festival⁸⁶ stated: *“This year’s competition will discuss if Cheo has to be maintained in the traditional way or has to be made modern.”*⁸⁷ My answer is that it need to be modernised; more importantly my generation is obligated to find a strategy to make it fruitful.

2.2.5 Seeking a strategy

Vietnamese theatre⁸⁸ has recently confronted reduced audiences. Particularly young audiences are now more

⁸⁶ Held annually in Ha Long City from 7th to 17th September 2005.

⁸⁷ In Vietnam News’ review, a daily newspaper in English language, 07/09/2005.

⁸⁸ Including Spoken Drama and traditional theatre.

engaged with movies and exotic live music shows. We seek a strategy to attract the audience's attention to theatre, but it is a complicated issue with connections to areas such as economy, culture and education.

Professionals remain aware of the central role of our audience in theatre. Together with developing performance theory and practice, we should give emphasis to a more developed understanding of audiences. If we look to theories of Brecht, Grotowski and to the practices of Barba, and Augusto Boal, (analysed in chapter 3), we can see that all their experiments focused on repositioning the audience's role in theatre. Brecht created a play structure for "*Verfremdung*" (for shock value) to give his audiences a new role as critics while viewing theatre productions. Grotowski's technique of "textual montage" promotes in his audiences more imagination; he undertook an experimentation which "*exploits precisely that flexibility of theatre to test an audience's balancing of stage and other worlds.*"⁸⁹ Augusto Boal saw his audiences as participants in a theatrical process rather than viewers in a performance.

⁸⁹ Bennett, Susan. *Theatre Audiences*, second edition. London: Routledge, 1998, p.15.

Those experiments illustrate the need for a more and more developed performance theory and practice in an attempt to retain and attract theatre audiences. My study of theatre 'internationalisation', I believe, becomes particularly important in terms of challenging paradigms for theatre practices that are seen as outmoded in Vietnam. I also believe that my ideas should be introduced to my students who are responsible for modernising Vietnamese theatre.

One of my directing students, Lan Huong⁹⁰ has been eager to find a new way of presenting her theatre works. In her graduation production⁹¹ of "Solar and Lunar Eclipse"⁹² she was encouraged to create a theatrical form by combining physical theatre techniques and pantomime.

The play was adapted from three multicultural stories: "The Rickshaw Driver"⁹³, "The Female Fox"⁹⁴ and "Motherhood."⁹⁵ It

⁹⁰ She is a leading actress at Youth Theatre.

⁹¹ I was a supervisor for Lan Huong.

⁹² It was performed at Youth Theatre in April 2005.

⁹³ A Vietnamese contemporary story by Nguyen Cong Hoan.

⁹⁴ An ancient Chinese story which was adapted to become a famous Tuong play "Ho Nguyet Co turning into a Fox."

⁹⁵ A story by Hans Christian Andersen.

was difficult for her to find underlying commonalities to integrate three different stories from different cultures and periods of time into a single message about human life and death. Her success was to utilise a body language to express characters instead of verbal dialogue. Most of the characters' conversations were transformed into physical movements - non-verbal actions.⁹⁶ In discussion with me, she indicated that she strongly believed in a powerful ability of actors' movements to inform audiences without speaking. I would paraphrase her by saying she wanted to use a theatrical sign language to communicate with spectator by signals.

I strongly supported her creating a theatrical form that enabled her audiences to develop their imagination, rather than passively sitting in an auditorium and listening to long dialogues. Moreover I saw, in her production, a promising future in fulfilling my idea of theatre internationalisation.

⁹⁶ Refer to Illustrations 9 and 10.

Illustration 9. *Solar and Lunar Eclipse*. Youth Theatre, Vietnam, 2004.

Illustration 10. *Solar and Lunar Eclipse*. Youth Theatre, Vietnam, 2004.

Seeking a strategy - my role.

As a permanent lecturer at the Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, I have been teaching directing, acting and voice for many years.⁹⁷ The idea of internationalisation has helped me in teaching students to apply techniques I have learned through this research, observing and also working with colleagues from different theatre cultures.

In the Department of Drama at the Hanoi Academy, Stanislavsky's method has been the major methodology for training actors. Students are encouraged to create characters through firstly detailing their internal life and then expressing those internal elements through physical actions and intentions. This process is known as the "psychology - realistic" technique in Vietnam. However, in rehearsals with students I find that actors have problems transforming their feeling and emotion into physical expression. They are aware of the character's motivation and can feel the internal emotion, but do not know how to express them in physical actions. In other words, their difficulties in determining external actions create a gap between psychological and physical expression which stops actors

⁹⁷ I have been teaching since I graduated from Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film in 1986.

showing what they feel.

I have increasingly been interested in creating opportunities for students to work with theatricals from other theatre cultures⁹⁸ and investigating methods of actor training used by directors like Barba and Grotowski through which we could learn and absorb techniques to improve our teaching method.

Recognising that students had problems constructing a shape for expression, as Grotowski described: “*the composition of role*”⁹⁹ through externalised signs, I gave them exercises in using their bodies to demonstrate through a system of selected signs what they imagine. For example, at a moment of psychic shock, a moment of terror, of mortal danger or tremendous joy; a man can use his body to express psychological content. This exercise gives students freedom to connect their inner impulse (invisible) with the outer reaction (visible). The result is that the audience see visible impulse.

This research commenced in 1998 when I organised a

⁹⁸ From Australia, Britain, Singapore, and France.

⁹⁹ Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards A Poor Theatre*. London: Methuen. 1969, p. 17.

workshop¹⁰⁰ on acting in which my students worked with Geoff Gillham, a British theatre director¹⁰¹ on a series of exercises 'creating images of their thought'. During the workshop, students were asked to explore how they shaped their bodies in given circumstances, for instance when they were hurt physically or emotionally by someone else or left alone in an empty locked house. Students, at first, were encouraged to determine what kind of thoughts they had, then select as many physical positions for their bodies as possible to demonstrate those thoughts in a series of "still pictures". By doing so, students developed their ability to transform invisible elements into visible.

I strongly believe that with an understanding of the advantages of 'internationalised theatre, my students confidently take responsibilities for strengthening our theatre culture. Certainly it is not an easy process. The facts reveal that many great directors have endeavoured to seek a strategy for strengthening their own theatre works by adapting and borrowing techniques from other forms, but they were not always fruitful - at least within the parameters of my view of

¹⁰⁰ Supported by the British Council in Hanoi.

¹⁰¹ From Big-Brum Theatre Company in Britain.

internationalisation as set out in Chapter 1.

It is therefore essential to examine how international directors have undertaken reform of their theatre theories and practices through adopting techniques from other theatre forms. This is a core of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMPLES OF EXPERIMENTS IN INTERNATIONALISATION.

There have been many experiments which can be considered as examples of 'internationalisation' if by that we imply integrating elements, techniques, principles from various theatre traditions to create new forms or new presentations.

Contact among theatre practitioners around the world has encouraged influences between practitioners even before modern travel made this convenient. Nearly all great innovative theatre directors of the twentieth century have, each in their own way, found Oriental theatre to be a source of inspiration. The works of Peter Brook, Grotowski, Barba or, to go even further back, of Bertolt Brecht, are the first fully conscious attempts in theatre to establish, analyse, and promote exchanges. It is too early to say what kind of theatre will eventuate but those exchanges are already entrenched in theatre and are growing as international exchange continues to evolve into a pervasive environment.

3.1 Bertolt Brecht

One theatrical theorist who supports my idea of theatre internationalisation is Bertolt Brecht. He was so impressed by the skills of Peking Opera acting that his idiosyncratic interpretation of Chinese techniques became a basis for his theory of Epic theatre. His representation of “Epic” is a concept which *“sometimes moves a story beyond the logical or expected unities of time and place, and which regularly imbued it with larger human and political meaning. His “alienation” technique was utilised to get his audience to think, as opposed to conventional theatre technique which invited them to become totally emotionally involved.”*¹⁰² Brecht often pieced his theoretical works together from various sources and thought of his theatre as a workshop where plays and concepts were always in progress, always growing and changing. His Epic theatre sought to change conventional modes of production and reception which he had found constricting.

One of the essential factors in Brecht's ‘alienation’ technique is the role of spectators, who are discouraged from submitting to

¹⁰² Bordman, Gerald. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.101.

their experience uncritically, or engaging through conventional empathy with the characters in a play. All the technical developments Brecht promoted¹⁰³ were devised to provoke a critical audience and, using them, he compared differing ways an audience might perceive dramatic theatre versus epic theatre:

“The dramatic theatre’s spectator say: Yes, I have felt like that too - Just like me - It’s only natural - It’ll never change - The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are inescapable - That’s great art; it all seems the most obvious thing in the world - I weep when they weep, I laugh when they laugh.

*The epic theatre’s spectator says: I’d never have thought it - That’s not the way - That’s extraordinary, hardly believable - It’s got to stop - The sufferings of this man appal me, because they are unnecessary - That’s great art: nothing obvious in it - I laugh when they weep, I weep when they laugh...”*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Brecht’s term ‘a theatre for the scientific age’ in *The Messingkauf Dialogues* by Bertolt Brecht, trans. John Willett, London: Methuen, 1977.

¹⁰⁴ Brecht, Bertolt. “The Epic Theatre”, trans. John Willett in *Twentieth Century Theatre - A Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Drain. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 113.

Brecht stated that *“The A-effect [Alienation effect] was achieved in the German epic theatre not only by the actor, but also by the music (choruses, songs) and the setting (placards, film etc.)”*¹⁰⁵

The aim of this technique is to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident. Brecht liberated the theatre spectator from the restrictions of Aristotelian practice. He argued that to apply this technique to a production, stage and auditorium must be purged of everything “magical” or of any suggestion which developed spectators' imaginations. The actor should not allow himself to become completely transformed on stage into the character he is portraying. Rather he reproduces characters' remarks and presents their behaviour to the best of his abilities and knowledge of men; but he never tries to convince himself that this amounts to a complete transformation.

Unlike conventional actors who devote their efforts to a psychological interpretation that they see as the principle aim of their art, the actor creating a Brechtian A-Effect tries not to evoke empathy: *“He underlines the technical aspect and retains the attitude of someone just making suggestions.”*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Brecht, Bertolt. “From Alienation Effects in Chinese” in *Twentieth-Century Theatre: A Source book*, ed. Richard Drain, trans. John Willett. London; Routledge. 1995, p. 114.

¹⁰⁶ Willett, John. *Brecht on Theatre*. London: Methuen, 1964. p. 138.

For this reason, an audience can explore relationships between their life and their own society.

To generate the full A-effect the actor should begin rehearsing by paraphrasing the content in vulgar prose and by the gestures designed for the verse. Gesture will become a representation of the characters' life. All of these technical elements Brecht developed from observing Chinese opera actors: *"A masterly use of gesture can be seen in Chinese acting. The Chinese actor achieves the A-effect by being seen to observe his own movements."*¹⁰⁷

Brecht's aim of reactivating stage-audience relationships was a development of what he adopted from Oriental theatre, but it was based on his own aesthetic, philosophical and political objectives. Can we blame him for copying or simply imitating other theatre forms? Brecht himself stated that his theatre is *"dialectical epic."*¹⁰⁸ His theory met the aesthetic demand of modern societies and therefore it was more and more acceptable and has been picked over in various theatre cultures during the second half of twentieth century.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p. 139.

¹⁰⁸ Dinh Quang, *The Characteristics of Cheo, Tuong and their Prospects*. Hanoi: Theatre Institute, 2003, p.90.

3.2 Augusto Boal

In Brazil during the 1960s and 70s, the director/author Augusto Boal used Brecht's theory and practice as the basis of his concept of a "Theatre of The Oppressed" which developed later to become the "Forum Theatre". The form has since been popularised in Europe through his establishment of a Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in Paris.¹⁰⁹ His arsenal of techniques have become increasingly familiar to theatre practitioners throughout the world. According to Boal: "*Forum Theatre is one strategy, albeit perhaps the most influential, within the Theatre of the Oppressed system.*"¹¹⁰

A key aspect of Forum Theatre is the repositioning of the actor-audience relationship. The typically Boalian concept of "spectators" summarises the proactive role Boal has in mind for those who watch. They may be sitting in a seat watching, but they can and should be mobilised to cross into the light. This creates opportunities for the audience to join in rehearsing strategies for life, seemingly a rather joyless and academic exercise, but those who have experienced the process will

¹⁰⁹ Set up in 1978.

¹¹⁰ Johnston, Chris. *House of Games*. London: Routledge. 1998, p.234.

know that Forum Theatre is most effective when it's playful.

Boal argues that in Brechtian theatre the audience is brought to consciousness, but the power to act remains with the characters. He concludes: "*The poetics of the oppressed is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action!*"¹¹¹

In light of the discussion of internationalisation it is of particular interest to trace a theatrical journey departing from the East to Bertolt Brecht through the West, then via Augusto Boal to Latin America and back to Vietnamese theatre. Surely this is a tribute to the power of great ideas which remain powerful today. Brecht picked over techniques from Eastern theatre then expanded it to form his own theatrical formula; Augusto Boal invigorated Brecht's theory to create his own theatre form; and Vietnamese theatre practitioners used Brecht's techniques to strengthen their own traditional theatre,¹¹² a part of Eastern theatre. This spiral process reveals that the World's theatre

¹¹¹ Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. New York: Urizen Books. 1979, p. 155.

¹¹² Refer back to 2.2.3

culture could not gain the diversity it has today without such international exchanges. I strongly believe that indigenous theatre cultures must be involved in a process of internationalisation to enrich themselves.

3.3 Peter Brook

One of the most controversial theatre practitioners in the twentieth century is Peter Brook who has increasingly been interested in the idea of a “*culture of links*.”¹¹³ Brook has been eager to create his own idiom of theatre and acting technique through an exchange between theatre cultures.

However, his approach to adapting theatre forms from other cultures, particularly his interpretation of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, is questionable when my definition of “internationalisation” is applied to it.

For this production, Brook stated: “*We are not presuming to present the symbolism of Hindu philosophy.*”¹¹⁴ This statement encapsulates the questionability. “*What is the Mahabrahata*

¹¹³ Brook, Peter. “The Culture of Links.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, ed. Patrice Pavis. London: Routledge. 1996. p. 63.

¹¹⁴ Quoted by Bharucha in “Theatre and the World”, p.71.

without Hindu philosophy?"¹¹⁵, Rustom Bharucha questioned. And I would add: How can a Western audience appreciate the *Mahabrahata* without Indian cultural values? It is true that the epic is universal. But, the *Mahabrahata* is Indian before being universal. It is, I think, the responsibility of all theatricals to see both the universal and the particular in a work of such scope.

Like Richard Schechner,¹¹⁶ who believed all national and cultural boundaries can be mixed, Brook chose to ignore the cultural values of the text on which he worked. The *Mahabrahata*'s universal beauty has been fostered by its own spiritual experiences and cultural significance..

However, Brook did not merely borrow or adopt elements from Indian classical theatre. Through exemplifying a Western representation of non-Western context without concern for its philosophy, "*he has taken one of [Indian's] most significant texts and decontextualized it from its history in order to 'sell' it to audiences in the West.*"¹¹⁷

From my view of internationalisation, I see Brook's way of

¹¹⁵ Bharucha, "Theatre and the World", p.71.

¹¹⁶ Refer back to section 1.2

¹¹⁷ Bharucha, "Theatre and the World", p.68.

appropriating another culture as a paradigm for occupying¹¹⁸ culture rather than promoting a “*shared space*”¹¹⁹ or “*shared experience*”¹²⁰ as he promised. Through explaining the structural principles of the original epic, Bharucha pointed out that Brook was telling the story of the *Mahabharata* to Western audiences and that “*one cannot expect any ‘shared experience’ to unite the actors and spectators within the world of the story.*”¹²¹

A substantial number of theatre critics complained that Brook’s *Mahabharata* “*continued the traditional Western appropriation of Oriental material for purposes of exoticism, spectacle or making indirect political reference, without any attempt to discover the voice of that material itself.*”¹²²

Rustom Bharucha argues that “*the [Sanskrit] Mahabharata must be seen on as many levels as possible within the Indian*

¹¹⁸ In the military sense.

¹¹⁹ Brook, Peter. “Lettre a une etudiante anglaise.” In *Timon d’ Athennes* , translated and adapted from Shakespeare by Jean-Claude Carriere. Paris: CICT. 1978, p.7.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ Bharucha, “Theatre and the World”, 1993, p.76.

¹²² Carlson, Marvin. “Brook and Mnouchkine: Passages To India?” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.88.

context.”¹²³ Bharucha is correct to say that the *Mahabharata* is an epic which cannot be separated from Indian culture. It is suggested that any director working on this epic needs to create an interpretation that is based within the text’s own cultural context. One may say that “*The difficulty is not so much to understand the foreign as to take into consideration both the familiar and the foreign, to measure the distance from [yourself] to the other in the dialectic of the universal and the particular, of transcendental philosophy and of country-to-country ethnology.*”¹²⁴

My argument is that a theatre director is responsible for interpreting all meanings of the text including spiritual, historical, cultural concepts and values which lie underneath the written words. I remain convinced that theatre practitioners must understand both the cultural specificities of their performance and also their expectation of what they want the audience to perceive. In the specific situation of the *Mahabharata*, there was a lack of awareness of the epic’s religious belief which was likely to reduce the audience’s recognition and understanding

¹²³ Bharucha, “Theatre and the World”, 1993, p.70.

¹²⁴ Pavis, Patrice. “Introduction: Towards a Theory of Interculturalism in Theatre.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, edited by Patrice Pavis, (1-19). London: Routledge. 1996. p.12.

of the innate context of the traditional epic. This implication points to the importance of respecting spiritual values of the text of which Eugenio Barba was carefully aware.¹²⁵

Simplifying the epic characters and reducing them to the level of cartoons cannot justify Brook's structural principle of discontinuity in which the actor-as-storyteller is free to step out of his or her role at critical moments.¹²⁶ The problem was "*how can we begin to understand a major character like Kunti if we don't know anything of her past oppression...*"¹²⁷

I wonder whether Brook can achieve an encompassing context of this epic without concerning himself with the Hindu perspective of action which indicates the characters' evolution through different stages in life. A Westerner cannot have a sense of the characters' lives without reference to their history. From the perspective of my vision of theatre internationalisation I do not infer Brook or any Western director should imitate Indian or Eastern traditional performances. Directors are able

¹²⁵ Eugenio Barba's more successful practice of utilising Kathakali techniques will be discussed in section 3.5

¹²⁶ For example, Maurice Benichou/ Bruce Myer as Krishna during the Bhagavad-Gita (see William, David, "Peter Brook and The Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives", London: Routledge, 1992.)

¹²⁷ Bharucha, "Theatre and the World", 1993, p.77.

to create their own idiom of theatre, but they are expected to absorb fundamental principles of original traditional performances. Without an understanding of these principles, their interpretation of the epic becomes a “fuzziness”. Significantly, in Brook’s production *“the story being told was something mythical and remote, from another culture, nothing to do with my life.”*¹²⁸

As discussed in the chapter 1, internationalisation of theatre is a theatrical collaboration which demands a respect for different cultures. It is important for theatricals to understand more carefully the operations and relations of self and Other, West and East. At one level, one may argue that Brook has the right to produce a performance with relevance to his theatre works through a transformation of indigenous materials. But what does collaboration mean? What about “shared space” and “shared experience”? *“He [Brook] locates ‘culture’ as an artificial delimitation, an impoverishing shell of naturalised givens, constructed from ossified stereotypes of superficial difference: [...] the conventions of tourist culture, a corollary of nationalism.”*¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 75.

¹²⁹ Williams, David. “Remembering the Others That Are Us: Transculturalism and Myth in Peter Brook’s Theatre.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (67 - 75), p. 72.

In the context of theatre internationalisation, I would agree with David Williams in his critical response to Brook's theatre that *"Superficially, Brook's theatre is postmodernist, in its multi- and intertextuality, its deferral of closed 'meanings', its auto-citation and relativization of totalizing scenic discourse."*¹³⁰ In summing up, Peter Brook's practice did not bring me closer to the understanding of international theatre.

3.4 Jerzy Grotowski

Jerzy Grotowski (1933 - 1999), who became fascinated by oriental theatre, started as a director in a small experimental theatre company in Poland. His technique of textual montage and method of physical actions were constructed by combining what he learned from Stanislavsky with his experiences of Oriental theatre. Unfortunately too many people have participated in workshops on his 'method' conducted by people who studied with Grotowski for a short time and have, through mistaken interpretations, passed on grave errors and misunderstandings: *"He rejected Stanislavsky's system in favour of discovering a means of eliminating from the actor's*

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.76.

psyche all that blocked the path towards the transgression of self."¹³¹ This comment implies that Grotowski's connection to Stanislavsky was forgotten or not taken into account. In fact Grotowski did not forget those who came before him but rather searched for useful tools that could help him in creating his own work. Truly he did what Stanislavsky said: *"Create your own method. Do not depend slavishly on mine. Make up something that will work for you."*¹³² Grotowski considers that Stanislavsky's most useful discovery was his final period of work, where the method of "physical actions" appeared.

On the other hand, Grotowski found additional sources in his journeys to Asia and using them added to materials he took from Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and other theatre directors. *"I have studied all the major actor-training methods of Europe and beyond. Most important for my purposes are Dullin's rhythm exercises, Delsarte's investigations of extroversive and introversive reactions, Stanislavsky's work on "physical actions," Meyerhold's bio-mechanical training, Vakhtangov's synthesis. Also particularly stimulating to me are the training techniques of Asian theatre - specifically the Peking Opera,*

¹³¹ Eyre, Richard and Nicholas Wright. *Changing Stages*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000, p. 361.

¹³² Quoted by Thomas Richards in *At Work with Grotowski On Physical Actions*. London: Routledge, 1995, p.4.

*Indian Kathakali, and Japanese Noh theatre.*¹³³ With this synthesis, Grotowski and his actors evoked a process in which the decisive factor is the actor's technique of "psychic penetration". This is not a technique of portraying a character under certain given circumstances, or of "living" a part. The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask in order to sacrifice it, expose it. By approaching a type of acting which is closer to sculpture he attempted to abolish the distance between actor and audience so that the spectator can comprehend his own petty, geometrical, spiritual instability, knowing eventually what is good and what is evil. Spectators are led to a creative process of self-research and self-development. These essential factors have brought Grotowski's theatre closer to Eastern theatre forms where acting, through a combination of singing and dancing, is seen as exposing the anatomy of a soul, presenting a being through those elements which are invisible.

However, Grotowski was aware that all the movement exercises had a different function. Thus, it was important to

¹³³ Grotowski, Jerzy. "Toward a Poor Theatre." In *The Grotowski Source book*, edited by Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner. London: Routledge. 1997, p.26.

recognise which technique can help to develop actor's works. For example, he realised that yoga could not give his actors a real concentration "*because the goal of yoga is to stop three processes: thought, breathing, and ejaculation.*"¹³⁴ But he also discovered that certain yoga positions can improve a human body's adaptation to space. Clearly, his intention was to search for a way to transform the physical elements into elements of human contacts.

In his "*Towards a Poor Theatre*", Grotowski details the actor training methods which he utilised during the early to mid sixties: "*Many of these methods - head rolls, body rolls, eye and face exercises - seem influenced by Kathakali training.*"¹³⁵

In his "Theatre laboratory", masters who came from various nationalities transformed their own performance techniques and modes into a common language of expression. This process consisted of a rigorous investigation of various liturgical and ritual genres to identify performative modes. "*Step-by-step these sequences will be built by Grotowski into "fragments" or*

¹³⁴ Grotowski, Jerzy. "American Encounter: Grotowski interviewed by Richard Schechner on December 1, 1967." In *Towards A Poor Theatre*, edited by Eugenio Barba. London: Methuen. 1968, p. 208.

¹³⁵ Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1985, p.227.

models of a total, intercultural work.... Grotowski's work is intercultural, drawing on techniques whose performative/psycho-physiological basis is shared among many, if not all, cultures."¹³⁶ The remarkable point is that in this process the participants, who at the same time show their own performance modes and absorb from others, still have opportunities to identify themselves in terms of culture.

After his visit to China in 1962, Grotowski turned to the training processes of classical Chinese theatre and the traditional dance-drama of India, using eye movements and breathing exercises for his own psycho-physical exercises. However, the problem was that the more his actors learned about those techniques, the more Grotowski became sceptical about adopting performative conventions from Oriental theatre: *"I do not think that we can adopt from them any techniques or that they could inspire us directly."*¹³⁷ He realised that *"the inflexible nature of the hieroglyphic signs in Indian theatre prevented Western actors from understanding them."*¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Quoted by Richard Schechner in *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 1985, p.256.

¹³⁷ Kumiega, Jennifer. *The Theatre of Grotowski*. London: Methuen. 1985, p.116.

¹³⁸ Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre and The World: Performance and The Politics of Culture*. London: Routledge. 1993, p. 25.

This problem in Grotowski's process of integrating Indian techniques with his psycho-physical mode of acting is reflected in Vietnam where we have had a similar problem integrating Stanislavsky's system of psycho-physical acting with Cheo and Tuong's performative conventions.¹³⁹

It is essential, I think, to be aware of the functions of borrowing techniques when applying them. Techniques we borrow from other theatre forms, in my viewpoint of internationalisation, should be used as a stimulus rather than as a source of imitation. A Western actor would have difficulty codifying elements of Oriental theatre particularly Cheo or Tuong if he or she does not comprehend their fundamental meanings. Similarly a Cheo or Tuong actor can not perform in the psycho-physical mode of acting, but he or she can use psycho-physical principles for actor's preparation. Grotowski's actors became trapped by the hieroglyphic signs in Indian theatre because they merely imitated Indian techniques and used them as materials, rather than as a stimulus.

Surely, this is a matter of carefully analysing theatrical

¹³⁹ Refer back to 2.2.3: The influence of Stanislavsky's method on Vietnamese theatre.

techniques, elements and principles prior using them. One director who successfully applied techniques from “Other” to his “Own” is Eugenio Barba. His way of using the other’s theatre techniques as a stimulus is the subject of the following section.

3.5 Eugenio Barba

Eugenio Barba left home at the age of 17. From the village of Gallipoli in South Italy where he grew up, he emigrated to Norway after studying for three years at the Naples Military College. In his new country, he worked as a welder, then as a sailor on tankers travelling to the Orient. Today, as one of the foremost explorers of “theatre anthropology”, he continues to travel to Japan, India, Indonesia and other countries.

In his International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) actors are encouraged to imagine Indian Kathakali colours and exoticism, acrobatics and religiosity allowing them to appeal to their subjectivity and imagination. Through analysing the process of training Kathakali actors, Barba recognised that the expressiveness of the eyes is essential and the control of their musculature demands many hours of hard training daily for years. Each different nuance has a specific meaning; the way of

moving your body, the direction of a glance, the degree of opening or closing eyelids are determined by tradition. In a comparison with European theatre, Barba said: “*Such control in a European actor would only restrain the organic reactions of the face and transform it into a lifeless mask.*”¹⁴⁰ Although having experience in Oriental theatre, Barba realised that “*Kathakali, like all Oriental theatre, cannot be copied or transplanted. It can only serve as a stimulus, a point of departure.*”¹⁴¹ What he took from India were exercises to develop actors' expressiveness. He adapted Kathakali technique to his artistic works which he called “composition”. This is seen as a *stimulus* for the actor to create signs, to consciously mould his own body into a formation which is rich in suggestiveness and power of association: the body of the actor blends with a spectator's imagination.

In observing the exercises, songs, prayers and offerings of the young students at the Kalamandalam, Barba realised how they “*crystallised their ethos through artistic behaviour and ethical attitude.*”¹⁴² Perhaps Barba's study of the history of religions

¹⁴⁰ Barba, Eugenio. *Beyond the Floating Island*. New York: PAJ Publications. 1985, p. 58.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁴² Barba, Eugenio. “Eurasian Theatre.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (217 - 22), edited by Ptrice Pavis. London: Routledge. 1996, p. 217.

enabled him to respect the innate context of traditional performances like Kathakali. Unlike Peter Brook, Barba was aware that its performance was permeated with a “religious belief” that compelled the actor to commit his work and his performance with their ethos.

Also Barba developed techniques for vocal production. His actors practise voice in the same way Oriental theatre actors do: straightforward imitations of certain timbres of voice which are described by Grotowski as the different tones of voice ‘resonators’. After practising the work of those techniques, “*the effect was interesting*”¹⁴³ - Barba said. Students discovered the value of personal images for engaging the voice, in order to attain one's individual sound-universe. The process generated a tangible reality which engaged the whole organism and projected it in space. “*The voice was a prolongation of the body which, through space, hit, touched, caressed, encircled, pushed, searched far away or close by; an invisible hand which stretched out from the body to act in space or to renounce action.*”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Barba, “*Beyond the Floating Islands*”, p. 58.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

In this case, Barba's intention was not to take the whole theatre form, nor its principles, to create a new one. His aim was to understand the principles by which a performer constructs a scenic presence, not in order to produce a homogenised theatrical form but to find analogies that enable communication between people from different cultures. What he did is to apply techniques to strengthen his actors' preparation in a way that simulates their expressiveness - a significant factor in the art of acting. Barba himself saw this as only a matter of *"not being afraid of one another. Having the courage to approach one another until one becomes transparent and allowing glimpses of the well of one's own experience."*¹⁴⁵

In Oriental theatre the actor is immersed in a convention that he must completely respect. The actor in Western theatre, however, is a creator. By researching the text, using his own sensibility and historical experience, he brings a personal universe to his audience. This essential difference shows that each theatrical practitioner has his/her own approach to the profession, the preparation of acting.

Some may question whether Western audiences can see and

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.58.

feel physical laws which evoke particular emotions in a specific performative context. The movement of the actor does not have a meaning until it is contextualized within an expressive situation. The expressive language of Oriental actors becomes significant only in relation to their ethos. It cannot be separated from culture, history and style. Others may claim that Barba is trying to reduce cultural difference to construct a “universal theatre.” For example, a greater part of Bharucha’s book¹⁴⁶, in which he uses Indian culture and theatre as a reference from which to criticise exploitation of it by the Euro-American cultures, is related to this accusation.

The reality however is more complex. Ortiz¹⁴⁷ argues that cultural interaction is a dialectic of sorts in which the original culture (Own) subsumes, adapts, and/or incorporates cultural fragments from the other (Other) with a potential for becoming creolised versions of their original selves. In his context of “Theatre Anthropology”¹⁴⁸ Barba pointed out: “*[his theatre] does not seek principles which are universally true, but rather*

¹⁴⁶ Bharucha, Rustom. “Theatre and the World”, London: Routledge, 1993.

¹⁴⁷ Fernando Ortiz’s concept of the neocultural, discussed in “Contexting Barba” in *Negotiating Cultures* by Ian Watson. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Eugenio Barba’s article summing up the experience of his ISTA was first published in *De’gre’s*, *Revue de Synthe’s Se’miologique*, No.29, Brussels, 1982.

directions which are useful."¹⁴⁹

In my perception of theatre internationalisation, Barba's study of the principles of scenic presence does not reduce the diversity of artistic languages to a universal tongue. More importantly it has a potential to create a strong link between different cultures in which history and cultural difference are not erased, even if that might be desirable. Cultural interaction is the relationship between the Own and the Other in which each culture can absorb elements of other. A theatre can open itself to the experiences of other theatres not in order to mix together different ways of making performance, but in order to seek basic principles which it has in common with them and to transmit these principles through own experiences.

Thus Barba's intention was to study how to use different techniques through understanding their principles. This behaviour, I think, becomes more acceptable in the conception of theatre internationalisation that requires an equal relationship between cultures. Even if a minority culture is not an equal partner in a cultural relationship, it is as capable of adopting elements from the dominant culture as the latter is of exploiting

¹⁴⁹ Barba, Eugenio. "*Beyond the Floating Islands*", p. 135.

the former. For instance, Vietnamese traditional performers credit their experiences with applying Brechtian alienation technique in the production of Brecht's "*Caucasian Chalk Circle*" which was inspired by Eastern theatres. If we find an appropriate way of absorbing or adopting elements from other theatre cultures without distorting their historical and cultural values as Brecht, Boal, Grotowski and Barba did, then we can not be blamed for eroding cultural identities.

3.6 Others

Another example of a practice in which other types of cultural exchange took place through studying and learning theatrical techniques is that of Robert Wilson. An American director, he discovered similarities between Noh theatre and his own artistic intentions concerning audiences. He admired how Classical Noh theatre respects the spectator and gives the spectator a freedom: "*...I found a form of theatre which satisfied my aesthetic sense, the classical Noh theatre of Japan. It earns respect from the audience, it doesn't harass or attack them, it just gives them space.*"¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Wilson, Robert "Hear, See, Act: Robert Wilson interviewed by Der Spiege." In *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (100 - 3), edited by Patrice Pavis. London: Routledge. 1996, p.100.

Unlike Brecht, who formulated his theory of alienation more clearly after researching Chinese theatre, Wilson doesn't formulate a theory but confirms that Japanese theatre corresponds to his aesthetic perception. He also finds a model in Noh for what the actor's work should be. In his production of *Knee Plays* (1984) performed by a varied group¹⁵¹ of actors, Wilson took inspiration from a large number of Noh movements together with its traditional placement of musicians during the production.¹⁵² Furthermore, Wilson utilised structural aspects from Kabuki; he discovered a kind of narration in that form which balances the importance of single images and the progression of the story simultaneously.

In *Knee Plays*, *"actors were walking across the stage in a typical Noh posture: with knees slightly bent, centred in the pelvis, arms held slightly apart from the body, the elbows turned outwards so that there is space between the trunk and the arms."*¹⁵³ These movements are the visible borrowings from

¹⁵¹ Consisted of Americans, three of whom were Asian origin: a Chinese woman, a Korean man, and a Japanese woman.

¹⁵² Musicians sat stage right in full view of the audience.

¹⁵³ Weiler, Christel. "Japanese Traces in Robert Wilson's Productions." In *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (105 - 113), p. 111.

Japanese theatre. However, Wilson's intention is not to reproduce Oriental expressions but to "quote" them from their source. His use of elements from other theatre cultures can be seen as merely random, marginal, interchangeable; however this process also admits the possibility of formal integration, which suggests a common denominator for even diverse cultural manifestations. Obviously, *"it evokes a spirit of collaboration between artists [...] of diverse cultures, and provokes a collaborative effort between theatrical styles which understand themselves as exclusive [...]."*¹⁵⁴

Wilson's strategy of inventing and developing an international collaboration is a process which interests me because it allows both audience and artist to appreciate aesthetically sounds, pictures, and movements as independent entities in a perceptually optimal display.

Ariane Mnouchkine's experiment of presenting Shakespeare plays to French audiences in a Kabuki-derived performance

¹⁵⁴ Wirth, Andrzej. "Interculturalism and Iconophilia in the New Theatre." In *Interculturalism and Performance*, edited by Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (281-89). New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications. 1991, p. 285.

style could be regarded as another type of adoption from one [Other] theatre form to create a new presentation. Mnouchkine's use of Asian theatre influences is a technical means of encouraging actors steeped in naturalism to break out of this constriction and to perform in a more explicitly theatrical way; she found: *"The Asian theatre has always been our [Westerners'] source. The Japanese theatres, Noh and Kabuki, have been very enriching. They allowed actors to fashion a performance tool with great discipline"* and *"...in Asia such beauty in things, in gestures, a simple ceremonial quality which seems to me indispensable."*¹⁵⁵ In response to criticisms that her style is a kind of exoticism inappropriate for the Western scripts, or a simple gimmick, she said: *"There is nothing Japanese in Richard II: the references to Kabuki, to Noh, to bunraku, are to do with the ritual aspects, like traces rather than a mould."*¹⁵⁶

Unlike Peter Brook, Mnouchkine's work does not involve any simplistic imitation of real Asian forms. The Asian influence is useful as a tool, but there is almost nothing authentically Asian in her productions. With the use of Asian theatre influence as a

¹⁵⁵ Mnouchkine, Ariane. "Theatre is Oriental." In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, (93 - 7). 1996, p.96.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

technical device her intention was to escape from naturalism with the objective of renewing Western theatre because she found no living Western theatre capable of showing the desired combination of theatricality, spectacle and metaphor. This is despite the fact that she has been very successful with Western traditions.¹⁵⁷

Most importantly, again in Mnouchkine's works I have found the idea of utilising foreign elements as a technical approach to renew one's own practices constructive "internationalisation". What makes the above examples remarkable is that they did not merely flesh out structure lifted from a foreign culture with indigenous subject matter, but they truly transformed their model. Although initially their attempt was a copy, when the models became deconstructed and associated with native performance traditions then a new form, a new technique was generated. Eventually, the model "disappears" in a new technique, which gains its own identity of form and of content. Such "disappearance" or absorption of an adopted model in the new form of performance or technique is the mark of internationalisation as I am attempting to define and encapsulate it. It is not merely superficial adjustments nor an

¹⁵⁷ Her "Western" style successes.

idea for a costume change, but is more accurately signified by adopting and integrating a technique, principles and/or elements from foreign theatre cultures to native theatre performance. The following chapter will discuss how I practised these ideas in my theatre works.

CHAPTER 4

MY PRACTICE OF INTERNATIONALISATION OF THEATRE

With a growing but already strong belief in the potential for theatre internationalisation, I started utilising and adapting principles and elements from other theatre forms in my works over eight years ago. My graduation production of *Market of Lives*¹⁵⁸ for my Master of Creative Arts in 1997 was the first attempt to insert some Vietnamese traditional theatre elements into a production performed by Australian actors for Australian audiences.

The play *Market of Lives* is about the battle between honesty and deceit; justice and hypocrisy; good and evil. Tran Cong, a man who betrayed his friend, Trung, by taking Trung's credit as a hero in the American war, becomes a high ranking officer after the war. One day they meet again in a market where

¹⁵⁸Written by a Vietnamese playwright, Le Quy Duong, who has become a Australian citizen since 1999; performed by Australian third year acting students at the Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, Australia.

Trung, now blind due to a war injury, lives in very poor conditions. The dramatic tension begins from this point: should the truth be brought to light or not?

In our production, there were three major locations: the market and also Tran Cong's house in present time, plus a battle field in past times. We realised that it was better to represent these locations in such a way that dramatic action ran without stop for scene changes. Therefore we arrived at the idea of using Vietnamese traditional theatre's stylisation of time and space. This allowed us to depict simultaneously both the past and the present in the same space. For example, in the market Trung and Tran Cong met again and they recalled when Trung had shot an American plane down and his eyes were seriously injured; Tran Cong left him for dead and later took credit. Two actors playing Trung and Tran Cong were standing on left and right stage foreground while another two actors playing Trung and his girl friend (in the past) were celebrating their happiness at victory at centre stage.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Refer to Illustration 11.

Illustration 11. *Market of Lives*. Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, 1997.

This device was also used in the scene when Tran Cong's wife goes to the market at night to discover the truth about her husband. Knowing her husband's betrayal, she expressed her disappointment by rolling her body on the ground.¹⁶⁰ By having four black umbrellas around her, which in Vietnam represent a bureaucratic system¹⁶¹, we attempted to hint at a criticism of the current governmental system. However I realise that we were at error in not sufficiently questioning whether Australian audiences could recognise those signals. Our metaphor could be understood only by Vietnamese who live within that system.

In addition, *Cheo*'s stylised movements were used for the last scene when Tran Cong goes to Trung's funeral at the market. Dancers with plastic fans¹⁶² formed a line between Tran Cong and the ghost of Trung.¹⁶³ The conversation between Tran Cong and the ghost was effectively presented by the involvement of dancers who symbolised the gap between two different worlds: Trung's honesty and Tran Cong's deceit.

¹⁶⁰ Refer to Illustration 12.

¹⁶¹“umbrella” is a metaphor for Vietnamese bureaucratic authorities.

¹⁶² Made of plastic records to suit the symbolic style.

¹⁶³ Refer to Illustration 13.

Illustration 12. *Market of Lives*. Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, 1997.

Illustration 13. *Market of Lives*. Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, 1997.

It was my intention to extend the dramatic conflict until the very end of our production. By having a gap between Trung and Tran Cong at the end of play, I hoped the audience could realise my message: the battle between honesty and deceit never ends.

Market of Lives was the first time I had experienced technical aspects such as lighting and sound effects as an important part of the process of producing a theatre work. During the 1990s in Vietnam lighting and sound effects had been used for theatre but “*they were seen as a minor support to acting and directing.*”¹⁶⁴ In this production lighting and sound effects not only represented dramatic atmosphere, but also supported actors creating their characters and actively engaged in the interpretation of the play. For example, two different spaces, the market and the battle field, were represented by isolation to two different tones of light: cool (blue) light was used to focus on Trung and Tran Cong in the market at night; warm light (amber) concentrated on the battle field where Trung (in the past) met his girlfriend.

¹⁶⁴ Hoang Su. “An Introduction to the book ‘*Ngươi Bao Quạt Tam Nhìn*’ ” (Care Taker of A Vision) by Ian McGrath, trans. Nguyen Dinh Thi. Hanoi: Academy of Theatre and Film. 2000, p.2.

This shift in attitude towards theatrical technical elements has been an invaluable experience that I have achieved through international exchanges and they have become a strong foundation to mobilise the development of theatre technology in Vietnam (this issue will be discussed further in section 4.5: The Centre for Theatre Technology).

Despite the success of the “*Market of Lives*” production¹⁶⁵, there were some aspects that did not satisfy my then current perception of internationalisation in theatre. Structurally the play is symbolic of an “ideological fight” between good and evil, rather than a physical fight. The fighting scene between Trung and Tran Cong would therefore have been better represented in non-realistic style. It was inconsistent to depict this physical fight in naturalistic style.

The costuming was also not effective when main characters wore dresses derived from daily life. It was simply an imitation of Vietnamese dress which was contrary to my concept of internationalisation. The costume design would have been more correct had it been more symbolic in style, more consistent with a costume design in which our Australian

¹⁶⁵ It was sent to Sydney season for International week in 1998 in Sydney.

audiences could recognise Vietnamese characteristics and, at the same time, see it as not so different to themselves.

Moreover the use of Vietnamese folk music to underline the characters' emotion was questionable. Can an Australian audience deeply feel or "touch" meanings of a music rooted from a different culture? They may enjoy its strangeness rather than comprehend what it means in the play. Original Vietnamese folk music, did not bring either actors or spectators to a better understanding of Vietnamese culture since they could not perceive the detailed cultural context of unfamiliar music. It would have been more accurate to compose music developed or inspired from Vietnamese music that suit an Australian musical aesthetic in a way similar to Puccini's adaptation of Japanese motifs characterising *Madame Butterfly*.

The above self-criticism brought me to a further and deeper exploration of how to effectively integrate theatre elements from different theatre forms in order to create homogeneity within a theatrical production. The production of *Market of Lives* should be seen as a beginning in the process of fulfilling my creative idea of theatre internationalisation which increasingly has had influence on all my subsequent theatre works.

4.1 Travelling North

Upon my return from Australia, I was compelled to undertake practical works through which I could explore more deeply the concept of internationalisation. The lessons from “*Market of Lives*” generated a question: how might I present an Australian play to Vietnamese audiences?

In 1998, Dr Ian McGrath, a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, Australia was invited to conduct a lighting and sound design course at my school, Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film in Vietnam. During the course¹⁶⁶ I directed the play *Travelling North* by Australian playwright David Williamson upon which Ian’s Vietnamese technical students could practise lighting and sound. Initially it was only a workshop production, but the project was so successful that the Australian Embassy in Hanoi provided funds for a full scale production¹⁶⁷, performed in Vietnamese by Hanoi Theatre Company’s actors and acting students from Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

¹⁶⁶ Which will be discussed further in 4.5: The Centre for Theatre Technology.

¹⁶⁷ The production was presented in December 1998 at Cong Nhan Theatre in Hanoi.

The reason I chose to direct this play was that its subject is relevant to contemporary Vietnamese audiences' concerns in particular Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam. It was about an old couple, Frank and Francis, who maintain a sense of responsibility for their families while searching for their own happiness. By presenting the play, I was interested in introducing an Australian way of life to Vietnamese people whose culture is so different.

Experimenting with the essence of internationalisation, I interpreted the play within my understanding of Australian people and their society, while at the same time finding the best way for Vietnamese spectators to comprehend the play's message. It was important for an audience not only to see the play as "foreign" but also to learn experiences in relation to their own life. After long discussions with Michael Pearce¹⁶⁸ we arrived at the idea of creating a set that could represent something Australian but which was connected to Vietnamese culture; for example, it could be a representative of love and happiness or a typical feeling about landscape and its people's

¹⁶⁸ An Australian theatre designer who worked as a supervisor for Vietnamese design students at the time.

characteristics. The main point was to generate theatrical images evoking both Australian and Vietnamese sensitivities. The aim was for audiences to realise that this was an Australian story, that they could be in the same situation in their life, rather than saying: “this was someone else’s problem, I do not care.” Therefore, the primary set included two components: a back cloth¹⁶⁹ representing an Australian atmosphere and a wooden element shaped as a “heart”¹⁷⁰ representing Frank and Francis’s love.

However we preferred a not-too-obvious depiction which might reduce audiences’ imaginative engagement. We believed that a modern audience expects to see on stage something that could enrich their creativity rather than watching what they see everyday. Thus the back cloth was painted in a not too detailed abstraction using a mixture of colours characterising Australian climates such as amber and lush tropical greens. In order to create an unity of style, the “heart” was built in an abstract shape using similar colour tone to the back cloth, but we added a suggestion of soil colour at the bottom of it and made some cracks to suggest interior space. More importantly we

¹⁶⁹ The use of colours was based on my impression of Australian landscape.

¹⁷⁰ The shape hints at a popular real stone called “Hon Trong - Mai” (Male and Female) in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam.

attempted to meld both components: the back cloth and the “heart” harmoniously by using similar colour tones and texture.

We also realised that this “heart” had to be quickly and flexibly operated to suit the play’s fluid structure. Unlike contemporary Vietnamese plays, *Travelling North* consists of numerous short scenes that require flowing and quick scene changes to avoid disturbing the audience’s concentration. For me it was an opportunity to point out that the old style of closing the Front of house curtain or long black-outs for scene changes, which were still often used in Vietnamese theatre, could not be applied to plays such as *Travelling North*.

By introducing this play to Vietnamese audiences I hoped to promote a new trend, shifting styles of play writing.¹⁷¹ I found in this play a more powerful structure that included the capacity for many associations with our society. The play’s fluidity enabled us to depict a large number of dramatic events in a continuous yet rapid *mise-en-scene*. In a modern society, where time is valuable, waiting in the dark during a scene change or black out no longer interests audiences after working hard all day. This innovation was an important benefit from “internationalised”

¹⁷¹ Refer back to the introduction and chapter 2

theatre, I believed.

The production's fluidity was achieved by moving two separate parts of "the heart" within a changing light ambience. By placing these two parts in different positions we created a differentiation between locations; for example, these two parts were separated to generate an open space in the North where Frank and Francis lived together and enjoyed their freedom while a stuffy room in Melbourne, where Frank felt uncomfortable, was represented by putting two parts of the "heart" together.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Refer to Illustrations 14 and 15.

Illustration 14. *Travelling North*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 1998.

Illustration 15. *Travelling North*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 1998.

An important experience I have gained through working in an environment of “internationalisation” is the power of shared knowledge and skills. The continuity of *Travelling North* would not have been possible without an effective involvement from lighting designers and operators. Under the tuition of Ian McGrath and supervision of Michael Pearce my lighting, sound and set designers created an appropriate ambience for the whole play. Through selecting typical colours¹⁷³ for the set and lighting, the designers represented not only the typical climate of differing locations, but also the mood¹⁷⁴ of each scene. In order to achieve those effects they were asked to become aware of Australian customs and way of life through researching Australian culture, for example Australian death rituals.

In the last scene, the moment of Frank’s death happened in a warm ambience using red colour to suggest that Frank was not alone. Through researching materials and discussing with Australian colleagues we discovered that red in Australia implies passion while in Vietnam it suggests a death.¹⁷⁵ But by

¹⁷³ For example, amber for locations in the North Australia and blue for Melbourne.

¹⁷⁴ For example, dark blue for Fank’s illness and orange for Frank and Francis’s happiness.

¹⁷⁵ This concept was used in production “Macbeth” which will be analysed in the next section.

using this colour we wanted to present his happiness at being with his lover rather than his death. After this Francis and Frank's friends drink champagne while talking about his life. This custom is quite different to Vietnamese people who normally cry and prepare the mourning ceremony without drinking. Theatrically the question was how we presented this scene: make it relevant to Vietnamese culture or keep it original? After a long discussion we agreed that this scene must represent Australian customs. To change this important "after death" scene would be a cultural imposition and contrary to my concept of "theatre internationalisation".

Regarding the interpretation of relationships between characters we concentrated on two factors: on one hand we explored characters' actions that present the Australian way of life. For example, Francis's daughters disagreed with their mother's decision to travel north to live with an old man (Frank). Their criticism of Francis and Frank living together "in sin" was depicted as strong arguments rather than a violent fight, as can happen within Vietnamese customs. However, on the other hand we highlighted the relevance of the play's subject to Vietnamese people through enhancement of the conflict between the old couple and their children.

After its performances in Hanoi the production was seen as a theatrical experiment “*telling a Western*¹⁷⁶ *story in Vietnamese ‘taste’*.”¹⁷⁷ However, as the director, I realised that it was very difficult to urge a Vietnamese actor to become completely a real Australian on stage; it was not merely a matter of making up the actor’s face or dying their hair. I became sceptical about directing a foreign play using a naturalistic acting style. It was impossible for Vietnamese actors to play foreigners whilst maintaining a characters’ original life style and, at the same time, making them relevant to an audience belonging to a different culture. The above was evidenced by, for example, the actors playing Francis’s daughters: if they tried to emulate Vietnamese people’s violence, for greater relevance to the audience, their characters became more Vietnamese, whereas if they tried to become real Australian characters, then they lost that relevance of passionate inter-generational argument. Likewise when we respected Australian death rituals, we created a representation different to Vietnamese life; if we made it relevant to the Vietnamese audience then we risked becoming disrespectful to Australian culture. This difficulty

¹⁷⁶ In Vietnam we see Australia as Western country culturally.

¹⁷⁷ Minh Thuy. *A review on ‘Travelling North’*. Hanoi: Theatre Magazine, No.11, 1998.

brought me to the idea of directing a “foreign” play with an interpretation based on Vietnamese perceptions. It was Shakespeare’s play “*Macbeth*.”

4. 2 *Macbeth*

The production of *Macbeth*¹⁷⁸ was a cross - cultural exchange project between Vietnam and Australia in which I and Barry Breen¹⁷⁹, an Australian theatre director, worked as co-directors with staff and acting students at the College of Theatre and Film in Ho Chi Minh City. It was the first time *Cai luong* elements were used in a Shakespearian play which was promoted as a drama, not a *Cai luong* production. There had been a number of adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays performed in Vietnamese traditional theatre forms¹⁸⁰ but these productions were seen as ‘traditional’ theatre productions rather than drama. “*This is the first time that Shakespeare has been presented with such strong elements of Vietnamese tradition,*”¹⁸¹ commented Ha Quang Van, the deputy director of

¹⁷⁸The opening performance was on the 10th November 1999 at Ben Thanh Theatre, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

¹⁷⁹ An Australian theatre director from Ballarat Community Development Centre.

¹⁸⁰ For example, National Tuong Theatre Company’s “Othello”, performed during the 1980s-90s.

¹⁸¹ in Vietnam News - Wednesday October 20, 1999.

the College of Theatre and Film.

The initial impetus was to create a new theatrical form for telling Shakespeare's wonderful story, but in the Vietnamese language. I also saw this as an opportunity to further explore internationalisation by melding Vietnamese traditional theatre principles with Western classic drama. For two reasons we chose *Macbeth*. Firstly, the play's penetrating and harrowing study of ambition was and will be meaningful to our contemporary society. Secondly, the play's genre and style enabled us, as directors, to apply *Cai luong* techniques such as movements and music. Moreover, *Cai luong* is characterised as a 'reformed' theatre¹⁸², which includes both *Tuong* and *Cheo* principles and a naturalistic acting style, and its flexibility allows free use of both classical and contemporary stories. This flexibility also enabled us to freely re-orchestrate musical tunes by adding Western musical instruments such as electronic organ and guitar. More importantly, as discussed in the previous section, we wanted to interpret a Western play within a Vietnamese perspective.

Our use of *Cai luong* techniques aimed not only to create a new

¹⁸² Refer back to 2.2.2

theatrical presentation, but also to enhance the expression of mythical elements, such as the Witches' appearance, that are so important in *Macbeth*. From a Vietnamese point of view, we discovered that the Witches were a "second person" inside Macbeth, a mysterious part buried within the figure of brave Macbeth. The representation of Witches is a Shakespearian device at the core of the play for unmasking Macbeth and his wife's ambition. However, in Eastern cultural ideology Macbeth and his wife may be viewed as two sides of one ambition which could be described as Yin and Yang. After exploring further we realised that Macbeth, his wife's murderous conspiracy and their panic after killing Duncan were spoken out in their monologues; this was certainly not realistic. In real life people do not speak openly of such issues; thus a stylisation of expression in *Cai luong* form could provide a broader vision for this play.

In the production actors played all characters using dramatic physical actions which differentiate *Cai luong*'s acting from the Stanislavskian method. However, Macbeth and his wife's monologues were presented by two extra *Cai luong* singers with *Cai luong* music in the foreground.¹⁸³ These two additional

¹⁸³ Refer to Track 1, appendix 1.

singers represented both Macbeth and his wife's "second person", a further commentary, while these characters were still acting upstage. It is important to note that one of the fundamental principles of *Cai luong*'s singing is to express a character's inner feelings and thought; at the same time singers and musicians in *Cai luong* often function as narrators who comment on characters to the audience.

We realised we could apply this principle to strengthen an actor's expression and to focus our audiences' concentration, rather than simply making the production look intriguing. We believed that the audience could pay more attention to sung monologues¹⁸⁴ than characters' speeches. Furthermore these two singers wore *Cai luong* traditional costume similar to our musicians; by doing so we wanted to tell the audience that we, Vietnamese, are exploring a Western story.

As discussed above the Witches in our interpretation were a representation of Macbeth's hidden face - the Evil. Thus we used *Cai luong* movements and dances for the Witches' scenes to differentiate both alternative sides of Macbeth.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Added suspension of disbelief provided by music accompaniment.

¹⁸⁵ Refer to Illustration 16.

Illustration 16. *Macbeth*. Ho Chi Minh City College of Theatre and Film, 1999.

Combining these elements, “a very *European dramatic atmosphere was created by a Cai luong musical orchestra.*”¹⁸⁶

In this production we used both *Cai luong* instruments such as Dan nhi (two strings), drum and wooden bell as well as electronic organ and guitar. However electronic instruments were mostly used to create sound effects such as wind and ambience while *Cai luong* instruments accompanying singers, combining with electronic instruments only occasionally.

In order to create a homogenous style for the production, we initially decided on an abstract decoration for the set which was designed to represent both a dramatic atmosphere and the play’s message, rather than illustrating the story. This idea was inspired from the Eastern philosophy of balancing human life: Hot - Cold; Good - Evil; Yin - Yang. For example in the opening scene’s sketch a gold sun with red bow-and-arrows¹⁸⁷, which are a symbol of the King’s power in Vietnamese culture, are “Hot” whereas sky and clouds are “Cold”. Similarly, in the last scene’s sketch, the contrast between “a white moon” and black font symbolised “Good and Evil.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Hoang Kim. *An Amazing Marriage between Macbeth and Cai luong*. Thanh Nien daily Newspaper’s review, 15 November 1999.

¹⁸⁷ Refer to Illustration 17.

¹⁸⁸ Refer to Illustration 18.

Illustration 17. *Macbeth*. Ho Chi Minh City College of Theatre and Film, 1999.

Illustration 18. *Macbeth*. Ho Chi Minh City College of Theatre and Film, 1999.

Within the play, the characters' ambitions lie between good and evil; they become good or evil, depending on how the character balances him/herself.

Unfortunately because of the lack of budget we were not able to manufacture this set design. Alternatively a simpler set was manufactured which maintained the same ideas shown in the the production.¹⁸⁹ This substitutional set consisted of a black back cloth with a red circle symbolising a sun¹⁹⁰ representing both an ambition for power and its cost paid by a death (red colour). This context was closely connected with Vietnamese contemporary social issues concerning governmental authority.

Following development of this abstract set design, we decided that costumes should also be in a non-realistic style. A neutral design was chosen using two colours: black and white¹⁹¹ - again symbols of good and evil easily recognised by Vietnamese audiences. Lady Macbeth's costume, however, was a red cloak representing her murderous conspiracy.

¹⁸⁹ Refer to appendix 2 for full production.

¹⁹⁰ In ancient time, sun was a symbol of Vietnamese Kings.

¹⁹¹ Refer to Illustration 19.

Illustration 19. *Macbeth*. Ho Chi Minh City College of Theatre and Film, 1999.

Actors did not make-up as their “Scottish” characters. Our intention was to underline the production’s form in which Vietnamese young people were telling a story of Macbeth, rather than turning themselves into Western characters. This technique aligned itself with Brecht’s “alienation effect”. By applying this technique we hoped our audience would perceive the story of “*Macbeth*” as a practical experience from which they could enhance their political and social understanding.

Likewise, all props such as swords, paper fan and shields were designed in *Cai luong* style¹⁹², allowing our audiences to obtain a further realisation of our non-realistic form. Moreover in order to avoid disillusioning our audiences, other props such as chairs and tables for the banquet scene or Macbeth’s head after being killed were also made in the non-realistic style.

¹⁹² Refer to Illustration 20.

Illustration 20. *Macbeth*. Ho Chi Minh City College of Theatre and Film, 1999.

In technical support non-naturalistic lighting emphasised dramatic atmosphere, rather than clarifying the plot which was clearly depicted by actors' expressions. For example, it was not necessary to focus light on the ghost of Duncan as it appeared in the banquet because in this scene Macbeth's panic was much more important. By using a "hot" colour we aimed to represent Macbeth's feelings instead of Duncan's presence.¹⁹³

All sound effects were generated by musicians using both *Cai luong* and electronic musical instruments. The idea of using live music was beneficial not only to actors, but also to our audiences. In traditional theatre, particularly in *Cai luong*, musicians not only act as a support to actors but they also shape spectator's feelings. Therefore they can occasionally improvise their music; for example, they can increase the drum's beat when the drama needs more tension; or they can mellow the mood by reducing tempo or music pitch.

In general this production was closer to my conception of "internationalisation" in making theatre. In particular we consciously applied techniques from one theatre form to a text coming from a very different culture. In so doing we carefully

¹⁹³ Refer to Track 2, appendix 1.

interpreted Shakespeare's story for Vietnamese contemporary audiences without destroying the play's structure and style. By using *Cai luong* elements we brought the story within the grasp of Vietnamese audiences, while at the same time creating a new voice for Shakespeare's play. Furthermore through working with an Australian director, we had an opportunity to share ideas and experiences in finding effective ways to present the play to not only Vietnamese but also audiences with perceptions governed by international standards.

However, the use of *Cai luong* singing and music seemingly generated a confusion when defining a theatrical genre for this production: "*It was difficult to describe exactly the play's genre.*"¹⁹⁴ It was suggested that our audiences might see this production as *Cai luong* because they obviously heard *Cai luong* melodies and saw *Cai luong* movements. This reaction brought me to a further exploration of how to use techniques from other theatre forms without using any original elements.

¹⁹⁴Nhat Lam. *From Rehearsal Space to Stage*. A review on "Macbeth", Thanh Nien Newspaper, 17th November 1999.

4.3 *The Land of Bliss*

In the first year of my Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) course in 2003, I had an opportunity to work with ten Australian acting students at the Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University on a production of *The Land of Bliss*.¹⁹⁵ We chose this story for two major reasons. First, by working on this project I could apply my concept of theatre internationalisation, using a Vietnamese story and Vietnamese theatre techniques for Australian actors to perform in Australia. Second, this project provided those acting students with an opportunity to explore a different culture, thus meeting the Faculty's policy; as the Dean stated: "*We work hard to ensure that our environment is intellectually stimulating, culturally diverse and academically rigorous.*"¹⁹⁶

In discussions with the co-director, Lotte Latukefu,¹⁹⁷ as well as actors, composers and production crew, we decided that the production¹⁹⁸ should not be presented in a Vietnamese

¹⁹⁵ Based on a Vietnamese fairy tale, performed at the Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University, Australia in June 2003.

¹⁹⁶ A letter from Professor Andrew Shultz, the Dean of Faculty of Creative Arts in the Faculty's brochure, 2003.

¹⁹⁷ A lecturer in singing, School of Music and Drama, Faculty of Creative Art, Wollongong University, Australia.

¹⁹⁸ Refer to appendix 3 for full production.

traditional style, though it derived from a Vietnamese folk story. We were aware that we were to perform for a contemporary audience in Australia and a purely Vietnamese traditional form may have led, through an insufficient understanding, to confusion regarding the production's context. I am not saying that Australian audiences are not perceptive enough to understand Vietnamese traditional theatre, but rather that it would be difficult for them to comprehend fully the meaning of each theatrical signal whose origins lie within a historical and cultural context of a foreign hundred year tradition. This would be contrary to my concept of internationalisation which requires the adaptation of techniques and principles from one theatre form to others, rather than merely copying or imitating them. Further my intention was to state that we could approach the content of internationalised theatre through blending Eastern with Western theatre techniques. In addition the story itself conveyed a rich meaning relevant to Western contemporary society: the need to strive for a higher quality of life. It was therefore desirable to create a theatrical form closer to this contemporary audiences' perception so that they might relate it to their own concerns.

Consequently we selected dramatic techniques from *Cheo* traditions; in particular we used stylised movements to

represent space and time and explored the relationship between music and performance in Vietnamese traditional theatre to engage our audiences. Basically, however, we wanted to present the story within a broader perspective to explore how Australians/Westerners see Vietnamese/Eastern culture and how some Vietnamese see the West. These ideas were intended to test further the concept of theatre internationalisation.

Before work commenced on the production itself, we conducted workshops to investigate ways of thoroughly and cohesively integrating vital elements of Vietnamese traditional theatre with Western drama styles. Our intention was to maximise the potential of traditional Vietnamese techniques to accentuate the poignancy of contemporary thoughts contained in the text. Theatrically the story was located in many different places and in different times. It would have been very difficult to represent the main character, Tu Thuc's long journey to Fairyland realistically since dramatic events and locations were continuously changing. For example, he goes to an old pagoda to meet a young maiden then, years later, he visits the blue mountains seeking fairies; over a long period he visits a Pink Mountain, a Cave in the Green Clouds, a magic mountain

floating on the sea, etc. It was impossible to represent such a journey in realistic detail.

The question was how to depict all these events without exhausting the audience's suspension of disbelief. We decided to use Vietnamese *Cheo* stylised movements to stimulate our audience's imagination to follow Tu Thuc's saga. For example, the boat journey on the river was represented by a series of boating dances¹⁹⁹; by turning his body and taking a jump, he left the boat to arrive at a mountain meeting with three fairies; then, by walking around stage, Tu Thuc and the fairies arrived in Fairyland.²⁰⁰

Our intention was not to demonstrate real fights on stage. As discussed above, our purpose was to utilise Vietnamese traditional theatre's advantage to create an enhancement of our audiences' perception. Therefore by using *Tuong* fighting dances, which energise actors bodies through strong and exaggerated movements, we created stylised combat. By so doing we hoped our audiences would perceive a characters' strength, rather than experiencing real violence.

¹⁹⁹ "Mua cheo thuyen" in Cheo.

²⁰⁰ Refer to Track 3, appendix 1.

Alongside these expressive elements, certain structural and environmental aspects were adapted from Vietnamese traditional theatre. In the boat scene a wave-cloth²⁰¹, which indicates “water” was used to emphasise Tu Thuc’s arrival in the next scene. A metal peacock with a spiralled heart, a long and coiling dragon and trees with enchanted flowers implied characteristics of locations; at the same time those elements, we hoped, could stimulate an audience’s perception of Vietnam.

Music played an important role in this production. One essential principle of Vietnamese traditional music is that it not only supports actors but also contributes to the performance as a story teller. At the beginning of our production a story teller set a locale by telling audiences of something which had happened in Vietnam, not Australia. She invited audiences to enjoy the story with singing, dancing and music. We did not hide our musicians but they, in modern dress, were a component of the broader ambience. All these exotic elements on stage prepared our audiences to watch something unfamiliar to them. The story then evolved through actors and musicians acting as a conduit between characters and spectators. These

²⁰¹ Refer to Track 4, appendix 1.

musicians provided the audience with signals preparing them for what would happen. In such a performance this motif of suspension of disbelief could attract an audience to explore an unfamiliar story, and make it easier for them to accept. Another advantage of live music was that it enabled musicians to match actors' rhythms. For this purpose, live music was preferable since a fully recorded sound track would be unable to adjust to actors' tempos differing nightly.

However a recorded sound track was more suited to creating ambience for the production. We decided, therefore, to use both live music and recorded sounds. Throughout the performance electronic sounds and pre-recorded tracks melded with live percussion and violin. While the electronic sound tracks created a dramatic atmosphere, live music in co-operation with the performers communicated the narrative.

In order to not simply imitate 'traditional' movements but to interpret their characteristics to create relevant dramatic actions, our actors did not copy all details of *Cheo* "*Mua cheo thuyen*" or *Tuong* fighting movements: techniques such as rolling fingers, walking on knees and dancing with weapons

demand years of training. We chose rather to analyse the functions of those movements and use them as tools to present characters' actions: in other words we consciously applied fundamental principles, rather than picked over original elements. Those stylised movements were used for enhancing the actors expressions, rather than decorating or making our production more exotic.

Likewise composers and musicians during rehearsals were encouraged to listen to Vietnamese traditional music - not to repeat it, but to obtain a sense of rhythm and mood from which they could compose their own music. They were not expected to use Vietnamese musical instruments such as rhythm drum, Dan bau (one string) bamboo flute, etc.; they substituted with violin, Western flute and drum.

However an exception was made for the wedding scene where we used an original Cheo tune "*Luu thuy kim tien*" and a Vietnamese folk song²⁰² sung in Vietnamese by an Australian actor. At the time we began working on the production, our intention was to ensure audiences knew the story was located in Vietnam in a form which allowed us to provide them with an

²⁰² "Cay truc xinh" (A Beautiful Ivory Bamboo) . This song is about a beautiful girl who hopes to have a great love.

exciting evening in which they could explore unfamiliar elements. But how could an Australian audience understand the content of that song and music? Was this choice a loss of integrity in the production?

Although the content of the song was explained by the physicalisation of the scene, the use of original dance and song was in opposition to my purpose: creating a homogenous integration of different techniques.

This weakness resulted from an insufficient consideration of the number of elements that can be effectively applied while avoiding a sense of random mixture. By mixing Cheo and Tuong movements, a Vietnamese story, contemporary music and costume plus Vietnamese and Turkish songs and a contemporary set design the audience received a blurred mix of cultural elements, rather than understanding the meaning of any one element. If 'internationalised' theatre demands true integration in which different adapted techniques may be freely accepted by the audience, then this production compelled me to explore and practise further. I asked myself whether I could apply Vietnamese traditional theatre techniques, creating a true integration, without using any original traditional elements? I

found an answer in my production of “*Romeo and Juliet*”.

4.4 *Romeo and Juliet*

In my production of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare,²⁰³ I looked for a theatrical form capable of showing the spiritual aspects paramount to this play. I found that Shakespeare’s writing is not in a realistic style and “... *[his] text is itself masked in any case: it is not a conversation in a sitting room or a cafe. It is not realism but poetry.*”²⁰⁴ Through redirecting²⁰⁵ this play I intended to explore further the development of my concept of internationalisation.

In this production I wanted to escape from the realism which has so frequently appeared on Vietnamese Spoken Drama stages until today²⁰⁶ and which is perceived as outmoded by audiences; young spectators in particular prefer to watch

²⁰³First performed by actors from Theatre No.7 in Ho Chi Minh City in 2000, redirected in 2003 with using actors from Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

²⁰⁴ Mnouchkine, Ariane. “The Theatre Is Oriental.” In *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, edited by Patrice Pavis, 1996, p.97.

²⁰⁵ This play was co-directed by myself and Roger Chamberlain, a British director in Ho Chi Minh City in 2000. I redirected this play but in different version for Vietnamese technicians, who attended the Lighting and Sound Design Course held by Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film in association with Glen Street Theatre, Australia. We were intending to produce the whole play, but because of the limitation of time and budget, only one scene was staged.

²⁰⁶ The play of *Romeo and Juliet* was produced in realistic style by Youth Theatre (1982), directed by a Soviet-Russian trained director Pham Thi Thanh.

realistic performances in movies. My aim was to represent the story of “Romeo and Juliet”, enhancing my audiences’ imagination by creating visible images, rather than forcing a contemporary audience to “live” in the same situation as “Romeo and Juliet”. In this case, an expressive characteristic of *Cheo*’s performance was useful as a means of making invisible elements visible. However, to avoid a confusion with genre, I decided not to use any original *Cheo* elements. Instead I carefully analysed *Cheo*’s aesthetic principles to define its advantages for my production. Moreover, Grotowski’s idea of textual montage, which can be likened to a sculptor’s work,²⁰⁷ was an inspiration for me to develop my vision.

However in this production, both *Cheo*’s principles and Grotowski’s study only served as points of departure. In particular I did not copy all the conventions and stylised movements of *Cheo*, nor use any original elements such as music. But since this was a drama and not a *Cheo* production I applied only its fundamental principle: that is, as a means to materialise a character’s spiritual life. Similarly, by following Grotowski’s suggestion regarding actors’ gestures and physical actions, I urged actors to create through movement meaningful

²⁰⁷ Refer back to 3.4

images from which the audience could evolve their perception of the performance's messages.

In Scene 2, Act 2 (often called the 'balcony' scene²⁰⁸), my vision was to create an image of two different worlds - one physical and the other spiritual, with both being visible to the audience. The form of the scene was structured through a combination of dancers' movements and, simultaneously, characters' action within the naturalistic location. For example, at the moment when Romeo gives her a kiss, their emotion is materialised by dancers' physical movements. My intention was to enable the audience to see how both characters feel rather than concentrating on their kiss. In other words, the characters' "internalisation" was emphasised and shown through dancers' movements.

In terms of setting, in discussions with the set designer²⁰⁹, we decided that there was no reason to have a wooden balcony or garden as, again following the production style, the set was to be depicted by actors' movements. Like Grotowski, I strongly believe in the potential of an actor's gesture to evoke an

²⁰⁸ Refer to appendix 4 for the whole scene.

²⁰⁹Hoang Song Hao, a Vietnamese designer, lecturer in theatre design at Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

expression of place and space. *“By his controlled use of gesture the actor transforms the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into animate partner, etc.”*²¹⁰ I also believe in the capacity to create a more attractive theatrical image by utilising actors’ bodies and their acting; theatre becomes unique if we find a depiction that is not available in other art forms. I was therefore attempting to create a form using as much actor’s movement as possible and, by so doing I hoped to attract contemporary audiences back to theatre in Vietnam.

However, learning from my previous experiments, I consciously considered which technique could be effectively used for each component of the production. The acting was based on a development of dramatic actions using Stanislavsky methodology. Dancers’ movements were choreographed²¹¹ using contemporary dance style, rather than traditional dance.

Costume was designed to evoke images of Romeo and Juliet not too unfamiliar with Vietnamese audiences. Hence their costume was closer to contemporary Vietnamese fashion,

²¹⁰ Jerzy, Grotowski, “Towards a Poor Theatre.” In *The Grotowski Sourcebook*, edited by Lisa Wolford and Richard Schechner. London: Routledge. 1997, p.32.

²¹¹ By Nguyen Minh Thong, a choreographer from Vietnam Opera and Ballet Theatre.

rather than following an Elizabethan style. For example, a long white skirt for Juliet and a white shirt for Romeo were similar to young Vietnamese men and women's clothes. By using white we represented a purity which is known as "faithful love" in Vietnamese culture.²¹²

In order to differentiate two worlds - physical and spiritual - we created an abstract motif for dancer's costumes, but without using any particular texture or detail of traditional costume. The green dress was made of soft materials to create flowing, graceful movements representing the soulful beauty of the young couple.²¹³

²¹² Refer to Illustration 21.

²¹³ Refer to Illustration 22.

Illustration 21. *Romeo and Juliet*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2003.

Illustration 22. *Romeo and Juliet*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2003.

The images described above were enhanced by lighting effects intended to isolate our differing worlds by using contrasting colours. At the beginning of the scene, blue flood light represented a peaceful and romantic ambience. When Juliet entered on “the balcony”,²¹⁴ the light became warm by adding amber, reflecting her desires. At this moment Romeo and Juliet had not yet united; thus they were in separate lighting areas. When they met, the light shifted focus to them using a mixture of blue, amber and pink to represent their happiness; however the dancers - the couple’s spiritual life - remained in a beautiful blue to which was added a small amount of amber sidelight to emphasise the dancers’ musculature. However we preferred a subtle separation between two worlds to ensure an unity of the scene. Since both worlds exist in close spiritual proximity, then the light on one area had to smoothly shift to the other.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ She was carried by 4 people wearing black costume.

²¹⁵ Refer to Illustrations 23 and 24.

Illustration 23. *Romeo and Juliet*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2003.

Illustration 24. *Romeo and Juliet*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2003.

We intended using music in this scene to support each character's mood, rather than creating a naturalistic ambience. For the dancers we choreographed movements following Romeo and Juliet's rhythm in which the characters' spoken dialogue became a score for dancers and choreographer. This representation itself was musical, thus an addition of any kind of music would have been unnecessary. Our actors, dancers and choreographer worked closely together during rehearsals in order to comprehend both the content of the text and the meaning of the movements. Moreover, any extra music could distract audiences' concentration on visual images which were an essential point in our objective. Hence we decided to use minimal recorded contemporary music to enhance certain points; for example, at the beginning to set up an overall mood, or at the moment Romeo kissed Juliet to highlight the climax of the scene.²¹⁶

This partial production of Romeo and Juliet was considered an experimental work in which "*there was a very nice integration of Vietnamese traditional theatre style and Western elements.*"²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Refer to Track 5, appendix 1.

²¹⁷ Hoang Su. In the speech addressed at the closing ceremony of the Lighting and Sound Design Course held by Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film in association with Glen Street Theatre (Australia) in October 2003.

In the light of my study of internationalisation I considered this production as a true integration of different techniques to achieve homogeneity. The most important experience was that we selected which technique or principle could advantage our theatrical expression, and enhance our audiences' reception. It can be said that through practising and learning I finally found a way to successfully integrate different techniques in a homogenous form.

4.5 The Centre for Theatre Technology

The idea of 'internationalisation' has been a means to improve technical elements such as lighting and sound for theatre, which had been a weakness in Vietnamese theatre in past years.

I am very proud to say that The Centre for Theatre Technology (CTT) is a culmination of my endeavours over nearly ten years of calling attention to improvement of the quality of theatre technology. CTT's establishment²¹⁸ provides a significant contribution to excellence in theatre technology which had been

²¹⁸ It was established on the 1st November 2004 under the decision made by Vietnam's Ministry of Culture and Information and I have been appointed as an acting director.

missed in Vietnam for several decades.

In earlier times technical elements were utilised in Vietnamese theatre but they were seen as a minor part of any theatrical production. In particular there were no professional lighting and sound designers in either centralised or local theatre companies throughout Vietnam. Lighting and sound operators were available but they worked on productions “*simply as an electrician who was in charge of turning light and sound equipment on and off.*”²¹⁹ They had no appreciation of lighting and sound synopses, cue types and interpretative concepts that a theatre technical professional needs to know. More importantly they lacked a basic background for working within a collaborative process. Consequently they were considered as a “lower class” in a production team and were required to passively follow directors’ “orders”.

This situation could not result in a professional theatre culture in a contemporary society where audiences have seen a rapid development of technology and where, to achieve this, theatrical practitioners are expected to work on their production

²¹⁹ Hoang Su. “Introduction to the text book ‘Care Taker of A Vision’” by Ian McGrath, trans. Nguyen Dinh Thi. Hanoi: Academy of Theatre and Film. 2000, p.3.

as collaborators. Throughout the world the internationalisation of economy and culture provides audiences with great opportunities to consume achievements of modern technologies: they have enjoyed digital and surround sound effects; they are no longer unfamiliar with grand and spectacular lighting effects generated by modern equipment.

The lack demanded an education system for training professional theatre technicians. However Vietnam did not have qualified lecturers, since we had avoided this issue for so long. During and after the war, Vietnamese theatre practitioners did not have opportunities to study this subject and practise with modern equipment.

Being aware of advantages from “internationalisation”, I have instigated as many training courses in theatre technology for Vietnamese technicians as possible. In association with various theatre institutions and companies²²⁰ the Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film conducted a series of training courses²²¹ on theatre technology, from which graduates will be

²²⁰Such as Faculty of Creative Arts, Wollongong University; National Institute of Dramatic Arts; Glen Street Theatre (Australia); and Des Techniciens Du Spectacle (France).

²²¹ Supervised by Dr Ian McGrath in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh Cities in 1998 and 2000; Tony Yolden in Hanoi in 1999; Tristan Taylor in Hanoi in 2003; and recently the French lecturers in Hanoi.

selected to become lecturers at the CTT. These international exchange projects have been highly appreciated by both Vietnamese cultural authorities and theatre practitioners since “*they set up beginning steps towards long term training courses in the future.*”²²² More importantly these projects generated new insights, suggesting changes to old attitudes in this field.

CTT’s activities highlight the importance of theatre internationalisation and provide further evidence confirming that Vietnamese theatre practitioners can find strategies to modernise their theatre culture.

For my own theatre works, the knowledge of theatre technology I have gained from Western, particularly Australian experiences, has brought much confidence to me in the role of technical director, an unfamiliar position for Vietnamese theatre practitioners. In the production *The Storm*²²³ I worked as a lighting designer and technical director, and effectively utilised knowledge learned from Western theatre.

²²² In the speech given by Mr Tran Thanh Hiep, director of Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film at the opening ceremony of the Centre for Theatre Technology, November 2004.

²²³ Written by Vu Minh, directed by Le Manh Hung, performed by Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film’s fourth year acting students in March 2005.

*The Storm*²²⁴ is a play about Vietnamese young people striving for a better life. Unlike their forefather's generation who sacrificed their life to the country in order to preserve traditional values, a young man naming himself "Storm"²²⁵ took an alternate path. This fine arts student together with his girlfriend, a medical student, easily break free of these traditional moral obligations to create a better new life through accumulation of money; they no longer believe in an ideology that does not give them luxury. Consequently the young man gets married with a much older, rich woman while his girlfriend marries a rich foreigner. Their actions are seen as a sin in Vietnamese heritage, upsetting to their parents who always expected their children to respect tradition. The conflict between the parents and their children is the play's theme.

As lighting designer and technical director I started analysing the play and commenced discussions with the director²²⁶ and the set designer²²⁷ to determine a style for our production. We decided to present *The Storm* in a non-realistic form, since the play's structure was not realistic. Although some scenes

²²⁴ Refer to appendix 5 for full production.

²²⁵ Symbolised as young people's struggle for their future.

²²⁶ Le Manh Hung, a lecturer at the Department of Drama, Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

²²⁷ Hoang Song Hao, a lecturer at the Department of Design, Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film.

depicted the young people's daily life, the dramatic conflict between young and old was presented through the young man and his girlfriend's conversations with their dead parents. Furthermore the major dramatic action was symbolised as the young peoples' search for a better quality of life. Thus the story could be told in a symbolic form.

The primary set (centre of stage)²²⁸ represented the road along which young people were trying to reach their future, was symbolised by a red sun. This set was used for all scenes of the play. In discussion with the director and set designer we agreed that lighting effects were very important not only to create dramatic atmosphere and interpret characters, but also to contribute to a continuity of running scenes together.

²²⁸ Refer to Illustration 25.

Illustration 25. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

Through carefully selecting colours and plotting lights for the whole play, I concentrated on how to realise the director's idea of differentiating between the two generations, rather than depicting a natural environment. Of course physical aspects such as time and space were important to create a suitable mood for each scene. For example, in Scene 1 located at a railway station where passengers mingled, I focussed on representing the chaos rather than lighting the station. By mixing blue, amber and white at very low level, I created different tones on passengers while, at the same time, representing night time.²²⁹ When the young man met a girl in the rain,²³⁰ I did not represent rain; instead a beautiful violet colour was created by mixing dark blue and pink²³¹ to represent their youth and aspiration for a better future.

²²⁹ Refer to Illustration 26.

²³⁰ Refer to Illustration 27.

²³¹ Blue and pink in Vietnam represent youth and aspiration.

Illustration 26. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

Illustration 27. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

The most dramatic moment was where the young man and girl talk with their dead parents. This scene demanded differentiation between two worlds: young and old; present and past; alive and dead. Our expectation was however, that differentiation should not be too obvious in terms of theatrical lighting, otherwise it might disrupt our intention to suggest people talking as if they were both alive. In order to achieved that I used two lighting sources: one with mixed blue and orange chasing the young man and girl; the other with green following the dead parents, but at very low levels since they were supported by hand-held candle light²³².

Similarly in the scene when the young man was drawing a picture of his girlfriend before they go their separate ways (the girl to marry a foreigner, the young man to marry an older woman), the girl was lit as though she is in a portrait painting while the young man is isolated in a lonely and cool area²³³.

²³² Refer to Illustrations 28 and 29.

²³³ Refer to Illustration 30.

Illustration 28. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

Illustration 29. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

Illustration 30. *The Storm*. Hanoi Academy of Theatre and Film, 2004.

More importantly, through working together with the director and production team we created a collaborative working environment that had not been achieved before. For many years, Vietnamese theatre technicians had no opportunity to enter discussion with directors, through which they could demonstrate their creativity. This process resulted in a lack of technical ideas that could improve the quality of theatre works. Through discussing and negotiating we approached a complex idea to clearly communicate with our audiences. For example the wooden “road” was initially painted in a bright yellow colour which became much brighter when lit; thus distracting from the characters. Through negotiation, the set designer added some dark brown colour to it and the problem was solved. Such seemingly simple interaction had been rare in Vietnam in the past.

In summing up, I saw the Centre of Theatre Technology’s establishment and my own practices of theatre technology as a meaningful fulfilment of my growing understanding of the importance of internationalisation in theatre. But it is only the beginning of success. I strongly believe that within the context of theatre internationalisation it is possible to develop

Vietnamese theatre technology to support a more robust contemporary theatre culture.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

My study of theatre internationalisation has been a complex analysis and exploration of a wide range of concepts supported by practice and experience in theatre works, searching for a deeper understanding of the context and application of internationalisation of theatre. My aim throughout this thesis has been to define a theatrical process in which practitioners from one theatre culture can adapt and utilise techniques from other forms to create a true integration for their own works. In the chapters relating to content, I have sought to explore the experiences and practices of theatricals from Vietnam and a wide variety of theatre cultures, in order to develop my own approach to practising the concept of internationalisation in theatre.

From a point-of-departure inspired by exploring internationalised “food” in Australia, I have attempted to contextualise various models of international theatre exchanges, such as multicultural and intercultural theatre and

through this comparative analysis I have arrived at my own definition of internationalised theatre in Chapter 1.

By including a second chapter on experiments by Vietnamese theatre practitioners, who over many years searched for strategies to strengthen our theatre culture through international exchange, I have examined their successes and failures which further provoked my ideas of theatre internationalisation. On my way towards the core of this concept I have developed a burgeoning understanding of fundamental principles from various theatrical heritage and applied them to my own culture without breaking tradition values.

A further analysis of theatrical experiments undertaken by directors and theoreticians such as Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal, Peter Brook, Grotowski and Eugenio Barba added a global perspective to my investigations. This was the content for Chapter 3 which refined a model that brought me closer to a better understanding of my concept.

Throughout Chapter 4 I have analysed my subsequent theatre works in which I have attempted to refine my practice of theatre internationalisation by adapting different techniques to create

homogeneity in theatre productions. By examining my productions in relation to directing and theatre technology, I indicate how I have advanced my contribution to the evolution of Vietnamese theatre.

In the context of theatre internationalisation, I also realise that the process of integrating elements and techniques from various theatre traditions to create new presentations depends very much upon a director's objective. The application of techniques derived from other forms can be seen as a technical approach for a director developing his/her interpretation. This strategy should be considered as a series of choices designed to achieve uniqueness in a directors' theatre works. When analysing my theatrical practices I also indicate various options in which directors may make decisions of how to adapt and borrow theatrical elements from international cultures to shape their own productions.

However, it would contradict my concept of internationalisation if the theatrical 'borrower' ignores cultural values in which those elements are rooted. Such a theatre work does not serve diversity among the world's cultures, but betrays human principles based on a mutual respect. Thus, in this thesis I

recognise the moral choice expected of theatre practitioners when determining their utilisation from other theatre cultures. It would be professionally and intellectually dangerous if choices promoted cultural domination which too frequently menaces contemporary societies, leading to cultural conflicts and worse.

Throughout Chapter 4 I detailed a specific context of internationalisation of theatre in which I utilise techniques from both Western and Vietnamese traditional theatrical models while avoiding distortion of these fundamental principles. Of course, I realise it is a complicated process that requires complete understanding of not only those principles, but also aspects of historical, moral and cultural values. To summarise, internationalisation must be tempered by humane principles if it is to become a constructive force in theatre.

In addition my ultimate objective has been to provide Vietnamese theatre practitioners, particularly our younger generation, with a key to finding the potential of internationalised theatre from which they can, I hope, fulfil their responsibilities in strengthening their own theatre culture. It is hoped that this study serves to foreground the diversity of theatrical practice in contemporary cultures. Certainly theatre -

as culture - is an ongoing revolution in which there can be no standing still and I strongly believe that the study of theatre internationalisation is one of the most effective ways to reach a higher evolution in theatre cultures.

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²³⁴ The English titles in square brackets are translated by myself.

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