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# Outside interference or Hong Kong embracing its unique identity? The Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival

Sarah Olive<sup>1\*</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Ongoing clashes between Hong Kong citizens and its government have foregrounded questions about outside interference in Hong Kong's politics (largely from the government and media of the People's Public of China), as well as debate about what institutions in Hong Kong are neo-colonial, heavily inflected with nostalgia for British colonialism, or in the process of being 'colonised' by the People's Republic of China. This article looks at Shakespeare in Hong Kong (and, to some extent, greater Chinese) theatre and education as one of those contested institutions, using the particular case of the now-defunct Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival. The author probes their initial, surface impression of the festival as a simple outpouring of colonial sentiment and impulse, using its sizeable archives to realise a reading of the institution that highlights the complexities of international and intra-regional politics, culture and identity in Hong Kong and greater China. It builds on the Hong Kong literary critic Michael Ingham's call for attention to Hong Kong's quest—sometimes overt (as in the demonstrations of 2019), sometimes implicit (in the body of literature Ingham explores in his cultural and literary history)—for a unique, post-colonial identity that is inspired—but, critically, not confined—by its Chinese and British histories. The article briefly outlines the origins and set-up of the festival before juxtaposing the dominance of English language and culture in it with the opportunities it presents (seized by several teams) for intra-regional cooperation, competition and sharing diverse, greater Chinese cultures. The article offers a model for critically appraising other institutions and cultural products in Hong Kong in ways that resist easy (but false) binaries of British or Chinese, colonial or indigenous.

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## Introduction

An undergraduate festival of Shakespeare performed in Hong Kong, founded and run in large part by expat Australians, Britons and Americans, with English as the exclusive language, designed to ‘promot[e] Shakespeare in the Chinese world’ (Professor Simon Haines, Chairman of CUHK English department, video of the eighth festival)?<sup>1</sup> That sounded like a neo-colonial educational project to me. Accusations of neo-colonialism in Hong Kong are extremely topical and controversial, with the Chinese government recently alleging that outside, specifically British, interference is behind protests in Hong Kong against its Legislative Council’s consideration of an extradition plan that would allow Hong Kongers suspected of criminal wrongdoings to be taken into mainland China (Blanchard and Smout, 2019). Similar allegations were levelled at the time of the ‘Umbrella protests’, concerning what the protestors perceived as the government in Beijing’s failure to implement open elections and universal suffrage in Hong Kong (Kaiman, 2019). As an English major, I studied postcolonial literature and theory at undergraduate level and my teaching (and some of my research) is regularly informed by it<sup>2</sup>. It is thus perhaps not surprising that I was wary of colonial legacies when I first discovered the festival. However, I am going to share here the three-year journey that led me to challenge my initial impression; to cast a critical eye, not a criticising one, over the festival. I argue that, although it is possible to read the post-handover festival as colonial nostalgia (at least) or an intentionally anglicising project (at worst), such readings offer only partial accounts. They would ignore objectives for and attitudes towards the Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival (CUSF) as an opportunity for networking, ‘exchange and fellowship’ between institutions and students from across ‘greater China’<sup>3</sup>. In spite of the emphasis on Shakespeare as ‘one of the greatest masters of the English language’ (Benjamin Wah, Provost, CUHK, video of the eighth festival), ‘the finest writer in the [English] language’ (Mission, n.d.), and on English as the medium of the festival, I will demonstrate ways in which the CUSF, while operating within these constraints, showcased regional, national and local arts and culture, as well as offering a platform for engagement with national politics in greater China.

## Overview and origins of the festival

The CUSF was held annually at CUHK’s Hong Kong campus, from 2005 to 2014<sup>4</sup>. Universities from greater China that wished to enter submitted a video-recording of a team performing a scene from any one of Shakespeare’s plays, in English. This video was used by the organisers to shortlist finalists. Each team was allowed only three actors—so some doubling was usual (that is, an actor taking more than one role in the scene presented). Only undergraduates were allowed in the participating teams: no postgraduates and no previously participating students, ‘in order to maximise the number of students taking part’ (Competitions, n.d.). The festival was open to students and staff (as directors or mentors) from beyond English departments, to non-English majors studying English as an Additional Language as part of a degree in, for example, business or law. Finalists, gathered for a week in Hong Kong, had twenty minutes to stage their Shakespearean productions. Ninety different institutions participated during its ten-year span: seventy-six from mainland China, the rest from Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan (The Festival, n.d, see Olive, forthcoming for the full list). Two inner Mongolian institutions participated but did not make the finals. Over the decade, CUSF grew from twenty to thirty participating universities annually, from ten to twelve finalists, in later years. Almost half of all the participating institutions (forty-four) reached the finals at

least once<sup>5</sup>. However, the CUSF has gained relatively little critical attention (at least in anglophone organs) despite being freely available in its entirety on YouKu (a video hosting service, often termed the ‘Chinese YouTube’)<sup>6</sup>. This is surprising when one considers several ways in which the festival was a big deal. Firstly, its organisers claimed it was the first student Shakespeare festival ever to take place anywhere in China, despite a long history of translation and performance of his works throughout greater China (Hardy Tsoi in the video of the first festival). Secondly, its cost<sup>7</sup>. Thirdly, it was a sizeable undertaking in terms of the length of each festival—as well as the festival’s longevity annually over a decade, the size of the country involved (or countries, depending on your politics) the audiences, and the archives.

From my visit to the English Department at CUHK (as part of that university’s researcher mobility scheme) in 2016 and the accounts of academics from participating institutions, I gained a strong impression that the festival was the creation of Professor David Parker, Chairman (i.e., Head) of the English Department at CUHK when the festival commenced (Li, 2016, pp. 185–186)<sup>8</sup>. There’s a tantalising moment in his opening ceremony speech in the video of the fifth festival where he explains the rationale for the festival: ‘What’s it about? Promoting Shakespeare in the Chinese world. Why do that? I think all of the participants who’ve been working so hard to prepare will discover one very important fact...’. Then the video cuts to further along in the festival. However, the website (perhaps drafted, or at least approved, by Parker) describes the origins of the festival in more collective terms:

The idea of a CUSF had diverse origins. Mr Richard S. Liu first suggested the idea of a Shakespeare Festival. Professor David Parker thought of the idea of a competition among Chinese Universities—taking advantage of the annual Round Table Conference of Heads of English Departments in Chinese Comprehensive Universities, as a way to enrich the network of friendship and cooperation among neighbouring departments. Further ideas were added by the other members of the organising committee, Mr Hardy Tsoi and Professor Jason Gleckman (History, n.d.).

Whether this is a more accurate version of CUSF’s history, or a more diplomatic one, this version of CUSF’s history played a role in checking my inclination to dismiss the festival outright as a neo-colonial project, caused in large part by the dominance of expat academic staff in organising and adjudicating roles<sup>9</sup>. The above site portrays the festival as a highly collaborative, cross-population idea—rather than inspired and implemented solely by the white, expat community. But this is a picture of the festival painted by the organisers: it would hardly be beyond their reach to gloss up the festival as an organic, cross-population collaboration. Hong Kong is notoriously stereotyped as a place where money speaks volumes, so perhaps it is worth considering where the money for the festival came from, as well as who it was run and judged by. Was it financed by ‘outside interference’? In many countries, such projects are sponsored by organisations affiliated or associated with the UK government, such as the British Council, and consequently their colonial overtones are decried (Phillipson, 1992). Funding for the CUSF was, however, apparently obtained from within the Hong Kong community<sup>10</sup>.

## Foregrounding english language and culture

Part of the comprehensive education, championed by the festival’s corporate sponsor, Shun Hing, is figured by the festival as learning English as an Additional Language or, in Hong Kong multilingualism, including English as one of its official languages

(alongside Cantonese and Putonghua, more commonly known in the Anglophone world as ‘Mandarin’). The aims of the festival make abundantly clear that English language learning is valued by the organisers. They state that participation in the festival ‘provide[s] an opportunity for students to display their acting skills in English’ (Mission, n.d.), to master Shakespearean English, but also to engage in conversational English as part of post-show discussions on stage between the emcees and the participating teams, as well as throughout the leisure activities undertaken during the finalists’ stays in Hong Kong. English was not just the language of the festival performances but also the emceeing, the speeches given at the opening ceremony and the festival banquet, the display boards of the Shakespeare exhibition in the theatre foyer, the Powerpoint synopses of the plays, and the official Facebook page of the festival. Professor Benjamin W. Wah’s festival speech arguably attempts to dodge possible indictments of the festival’s English language and literature focus as a form of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992), asserting that: ‘We are the Chinese University and we’re very proud of our name and our identity as a university with our historical roots in mainland China. But we are also strongly committed as part of our foundation to promoting the bilingual and bicultural aspects of education’ (video of the seventh festival).

In terms of bi-culturalism or multiculturalism, the festival’s emphasis on ‘the integration of Chinese and Western cultures in greater China’ was described by Professor Lau at multiple opening ceremonies and on the festival website (History, n.d.). The sense that ‘integration’ of the West into greater China might be an unspoken criterion for productions, beyond the use of English language, seems to be reflected in the knowledge of the cultures of Anglophone nations—beyond narrow ‘appreciation of literature in English’ (Mission, n.d.) specifically Shakespeare (his works, life and times)—that was demonstrated by performing teams throughout the festival. This included teams manifesting the students’ familiarity with Hollywood films of the plays, Western classical, jazz and popular music<sup>11</sup>, regional British accents, US sports uniforms, roller disco, Disney movies, cricket whites and tea dresses (familiar to Hongkongers as virtual British expat uniforms in colonial times, see Theroux). This smacks of the heavy influence of the US, arguably as much as or stronger than that of the UK, in post-handover Hong Kong. However, since other cultures also informed performances, I would suggest describing it instead as an effect of globalisation and as students’ demonstrating their ‘global capital’<sup>12</sup>. Visually alone, Cyprus, Greece, Argentina, the Middle East and Moorish cultures were among the international cultures that I recognised on show. Then again, an emphasis on West-into-East knowledge transfer seems apparent in the exposition of English history, anglophone or European literary critical approaches, theatre-going behaviours by and for these students from greater China. Some of the Shakespearean experts from the West—for example, the judges—demanded that the productions adopt performance norms from Western, particularly Anglo-cultural, Shakespearean theatre: no blackouts (‘in Western theatre...we no longer have blackouts. Now there’s a very good reason for this...it stops the action and it slows everything down’, Tony Turner, video of the tenth festival) and entreaties to treat the verse in a Western way (‘At the Royal Shakespeare Company in England they teach their actors that the intention of the character...is in the stress and the rhythm of the line. You don’t have to look anywhere else to find stress’, Tony Turner, video of the tenth festival). In this section, I have focused on an ‘integration of Chinese and Western cultures in greater China’ that seems weighted towards the Westernisation, specifically Anglicisation, of students from greater China, at least of their Shakespearean, cultural, and linguistic capital. In the next section, however, I deal with the showcasing of cultures from

across greater China within Shakespearean productions, to mainly audiences mainly from Hong Kong and greater China. The next section will, therefore, alternatively highlight the festival as fostering cultural exchange and relationship-building between different areas of greater China, through English and non-verbal media (with a smattering of Chinese languages used in the karaoke—widely perceived internationally as an activity from and typical of the East Asian region, specifically Japan—at the festival banquet, video of the sixth festival).

### Highlighting intra-regional cooperation, competition and Chinese cultures

The aspects related above pulled my critical attention towards the English, European and other Western linguistic and cultural influences in the festival and for the festival participants. However, the second clause in Professor Lau’s definition of the objectives of the festival suggests that such influences are not the only ones that mattered to its organisers. He says ‘The aim of the festival is to promote the study of Shakespeare and Shakespearean plays... *It also helps to foster close links among English departments in Chinese comprehensive universities*’ (video of the fourth festival, my emphasis). Students from greater China rehearsing and performing Shakespeare together is seen by this senior academic from CUHK as an aegis for uniting scholars and students of English literature from across greater China—not between England, or other anglophone countries, and China. He emphasises the importance of trans-Asian cooperation, flows of people and ideas between Asian countries (or areas) highlighted by cultural commentators such as Iwabuchi et al. (2014) and Mahbubani (2018). This stance is echoed in multiple speeches, by multiple CUHK staff, throughout the festival’s decade-long run:

We are proud to welcome students from mainland China and Taiwan. The Chinese University has been very active in strengthening its ties with universities in mainland China. This will be happening even more—more teaching programmes, research programmes, and—very importantly—student exchange programmes with Chinese universities. This is not just a competition but an opportunity for exchange. (Jack Cheng, Pro Vice Chancellor, video of the second festival).

Even better than Shakespeare, though, are the opportunities for the students to build their contact with each other and also to experience intercultural contact. (Jason Gleckman, emcee, video of the second festival).

There is a chance for these young performers from the mainland region to gather together, get to know each other and build some understanding because the teams you see today are from all over the place from various parts of China—so there’s a wide diversity of places represented on the stage today, great example of intercultural communication...The festival is a unique chance for our young local Hong Kong audience to actually see their peers from around China doing Shakespeare. (Jason Gleckman, emcee, video of the fourth festival).

That these aims were achieved is proclaimed by the festival website after its very first year: it remarks on ‘the strong feelings of camaraderie, mutual respect, and enthusiasm among all the participants’ (Vision, n.d.). There is a clear bias in that website, given its necessary role in recruiting participants for future years. However, a sense of successful regional cooperation is additionally expressed by the Director of Northeast Normal University’s *King Lear*, perhaps a member of academic staff at that university,

who stated unprompted (though perhaps not without an eye to the main chance) during the post-show discussion: 'CUHK made us feel at home in its charming campus and charming city. [We] hope some of our students can further [their] studies here then come back to work at Northeast' (video of the sixth festival).

In addition to being a celebration with a regionally uniting force, CUSF had a competitive aspect. That different institutions, arguably even different countries, within greater China, were battling for supremacy is articulated by various festival stakeholders. However, often, as soon as competition is acknowledged, it is brushed aside as less important than collaboration, cast as the means—rather than the end—of the event:

Professor David Parker thought of the idea of a competition among Chinese Universities...as a way to enrich the network of friendship and cooperation among neighbouring departments. (The Festival, n.d.).

The teams are competing for prizes, but even more importantly than a contest, it's a celebration, it's a chance to bring together young people from around this region and allow them to demonstrate their many skills. (Jason Gleckman, emcee, video of the sixth festival).

We think of this festival not so much as a competition but as an opportunity for exchange and fellowship between the students and the universities they represent (Benjamin Wah, video of the seventh festival)<sup>13</sup>.

The repetition noted above suggests that speeches were handed down from one senior official to the next during the festival's span, but there is also evidence that those closer to the festival, such as departmental chairmen, tweaked the words spoken at the opening ceremonies each year. The second chairman to head up the festival, Professor Simon Haines, Chairman of CUHK English department, pitched his speeches to suggest a shift in the focus of the festival: 'What began as an idea of promoting Shakespeare in the Chinese world', he says, has evolved into an opportunity for high school and university student to understand 'how art can be a bridge to a shared world bringing together people who might otherwise never have met' (videos of the eighth and ninth festivals). He follows this by remarking on the growing number of networks and friendships as the size of the festival itself has grown i.e., a greater number of teams, and therefore students, from across greater China, have participated and met. Participants did internalise the organisers' emphasis on regional exchange and showcasing Chinese culture: one team's spokesperson said during the postshow discussion 'We think the Shakespeare festival style is not only a competition, it's more like a bridge that combines the cultures together, multi[ple] cultures together, beautiful gestures like what you saw in our play, body language, music so amazing, way to show China's trad style' (Xiamen University of Technology, video of the tenth festival). Although such honeyed words may have been a calculated attempt to curry favour with the judges and, indeed, the use of previous festival's footage and judges' evaluations by successive teams was remarked on as creating a feedback loop about the festival's objectives and criteria.

In terms of the productions themselves—showcasing different areas of greater China to their student peers, judges and organisers—the festival staged diverse cultures, histories and political struggles through the medium of Shakespeare. Regional theatre traditions, music, architecture, props and costuming from across greater China (including Tibet) were well represented and their incorporation well discussed by teams and emcees in the post-performance segments. The focus of this article is on the politics of the festival as a cultural and educational institution, not so

much the individual theatrical performances therein – so there is certainly scope for a scholar of East Asian theatre, with a much more extensive knowledge of greater Chinese theatre, performing arts and culture than mine, to analyse the local inflections in the festival's performances in the detail deserved. However, some local inflections that were apparent to me as an outsider (in terms of my nationality, ethnicity and discipline) included the figuring of the ghosts of *Richard III's* enemies as *jiangshi*<sup>14</sup> (video of the tenth festival); use of Chinese or Taiwanese musical instruments and styles; modern.

Chinese pop music; or Chinese or Taiwanese opera in the soundtrack. The team from Soochow University (Taipei) patriotically explained the difference in the post-show discussion of their *Henry V* in the video of the ninth festival, adding pointedly, as an oft-colonised and contested landmass, that 'Taiwanese opera is the only form of traditional Taiwanese art that originated in Taiwan, firstly as an entertainment in agrarian times, now as part of its cultural heritage. Props and costumes drew on material culture from greater China, such as bamboo sticks for logs, an abacus, tea ceremony equipment, a Chinese dragon, lanterns, various traditional headdresses, Han dynasty to Republic of China (1912–49) outfits, cheongsam and 'mandarin-collar' jackets for men. Tsinghua University's team explained their decision not to dress *Twelfth Night's* Malvolio, as per Shakespeare's play, not just in yellow stockings, but a yellow outfit from head to toe. They did so invoking Chinese colour symbolism: 'in China yellow is a noble colour. The Asian emperor is dressed in yellow clothing. It shows Malvolio's high ambition to be a noble man, but yellow is also a dirty colour...[it] also has some sexual innuendo and also manifests Malvolio's love for his lady' (video of the tenth festival). The director of Northeast Normal University's *King Lear* similarly explained the symbolism of the snow used in the production as a 'symbol of good fortune' in their corner of China (video of the sixth festival). For one CUHK senior academic, during his speech at the opening ceremony, this use of Chinese material culture and lore testified to the achievement of bilateral, East/West integration in greater China outlined above. Professor Joseph Sung said, 'I was coming here anticipating to see somebody dressed in old Roman empire outfits, or a Venetian outfit, but then I saw some Chinese opera outfits, so then I was thinking 'Am I in the wrong place?' Then there was this TV channel that asked me what is the meaning of holding the CUSF at the CUHK? [I thought] although [we are] called the Chinese University of Hong Kong, we are blending Chinese and western culture, Shakespeare with Beijing opera, or Shakespeare with Chinese opera'. His experience also seems to have challenged his own original assumption that Shakespeare should be materially Western. On occasion, the teams' use of material and traditional culture in the productions engaged with political struggles in greater China. When asked about their choice of 'costumes from Tibetan, Tibetan style', the director of *Macbeth* from Xiamen Uni of Technology stated: 'I like Chinese culture. I would like to make Chinese culture known in the world. Shakespeare is a good vehicle for spreading that' (video of the sixth festival). Intentionally or not, the language used by the director casts Tibet firmly as part of China, not the autonomous nation it wishes to be. It also expresses a pride in Chinese culture and desire to achieve greater recognition for it on the global stage. In response to questions about having a simple set (often associated in the festival with early modern British theatre) but elaborate costumes, another *Macbeth* team, this time from Dalian Maritime University, exhibited similar national pride in localising Shakespeare—as well as a nod to the 'integration' imperative of the festival: 'We wanted a cultural combination. We are interested in Chinese culture and we wanted to express Shakespeare's roles, emotions

and feelings in a Chinese way (video of the seventh festival). Meanwhile, Jishou University's *Romeo and Juliet* arguably foregrounded minority ethnic Chinese peoples using the stilted house architecture, costumes, and singing of the Tu Jia people (video of the ninth festival). Although the team had to fit polysyllabic English words to music originally created for the Tu Jia's monosyllabic language, the production may have been raising awareness of the threat posed to the culture and language of minority ethnic Chinese by the PRC's attempts to foreground a universal Chinese language, Putonghua, and majority Han culture on minorities (Dillon, p. 74, p. 204, p. 212). Taiwanese teams repeatedly staged overtly political productions, including a *Macbeth* that recast the protagonist tyrant as the Taiwanese former President, Chen Shui-bian, convicted for corruption (Lau, 2014). A production of *The Tempest* utilising the Mazu (sometimes romanised as Matsu) festival, a celebration of the Taiwanese goddess and patroness of fishermen, for its setting was explained as promoting awareness of Taiwan's unique culture: 'since we are the only team from Taiwan, we want the audience to see how beautiful Taiwan's culture is and so we took the Mazu festival as our concept...what we present is like a Taiwanese traditional market and so we present a marriage of Taiwanese culture and Shakespeare' (video of the tenth festival). Again, the idea of integration is referenced, perhaps for the judges' benefit, but also, possibly, to suggest that Taiwan's focus on its affinity or relations with Britain over and above the PRC, which refuses to acknowledge the country. Finally, Mike Ingham, directing the Lingnan University team in *All's Well That Ends Well*, also describes Hong Kong's unique cultural identity, which he has also published about at length (2007), in the post-show discussion: 'We [Hong Kongers] can't do the traditional Asian Chinese Shakespeare the way the mainland teams do, and they do it brilliantly, and we like to go for our own style 'cause that's what suits us' (video of the seventh festival). The Hong Kong teams' 'own style' being productions using predominantly modern or early twentieth-century treaty port settings (those of 'cultural melting pots', often former colonial outposts, like Hong Kong). The latter are celebrated by Hong Kong teams in the festival not as sites of national shame, as they are for the PRC, but for celebration (Dillon, 2009).

## Conclusion

This article has explored some tensions between Shakespeare in an undergraduate Shakespeare festival on one hand as a relic (or soft-power continuation) of British imperialism and, on the other hand, as a celebration of culture, experience and identity in greater China, including local, national, regional and global identities. It also suggests that the Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival sometimes provided participating teams and audiences with the opportunity to represent current political issues pertinent to greater China. Whatever the intentions of the founders in 'promoting Shakespeare in the Chinese world', so tantalisingly promised but undelivered in that frustratingly cut video footage, the online archives of the festival make it abundantly clear that the festival did not play out simply as a Western, neocolonial project. Despite the constraints of its focus on the English language and playwright, it contributed to trans-China 'cultural traffic' (Iwabuchi et al., 2014). Beyond its particular case study of Shakespeare in performance and education, this article has built on the Hong Kong-based literary critic Michael Ingham's call for people, internationally, to attend to Hong Kong's quest for a unique, post-colonial identity that is inspired—but, critically, not confined—by its dominant Chinese and British histories. This quest is shared by diverse Hong Kong residents, from pro-democracy protestors in 2019 to popular novelists in

their fiction, before and beyond the 1997 handover (Mitter, Ingham). Furthermore, this article offers a model for critically appraising other institutions and cultural products in Hong Kong—not just Shakespeare festivals—in ways that resist easy binaries of British or Chinese, colonial or indigenous, so prevalent in media discourse around the city in 2019 (Blanchard and Smout).

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## Notes

- 1 There is an echo in saying dedicated to 'seeing the performance of Shakespeare in China' (David Parker, video of the fourth festival).
- 2 Or post-colonial, post/colonial, or, such were the contestations in the field of which we were made aware.
- 3 I use this term throughout, adopting it from the opening ceremonies of the festival. It was used therein by Professor Lawrence Lau (then Vice-Chancellor of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, henceforth CUHK) to encapsulate Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Mongolia, Tibet and China—or 'the mainland', as the People's Republic of China was often referred to throughout the festival, and is common parlance among Hong Kongers generally.
- 4 CUSF ran for ten years (coincidentally, I think, the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth) out of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) with funding from sponsors for participating teams' travel and accommodation, regional masterclasses and workshops for teams and teachers, prizes, including fully-funded trips for the winning teams to the UK (Regional Master class, n.d.). The finals spanned several days each year. Only minimal sets were allowed for the finals, to keep set change times between performances short, but also presumably to ensure parity between local teams and those who would otherwise have had to transport sets across a vast country. Its performances were watched live by tens of thousands of Hong Kong (middle) school children, while other audiences subsequently viewed videos of the performances, broadcast online on YouKu, made by CUHK's audio-visual and technology services. In addition, photograph galleries and documents such as the judging criteria, announcements about workshops, and judges' summations were uploaded to the CUSF website.
- 5 CUHK, Lingnan (another HK institution), Shenzhen, Wuhan, Nanjing and Fudan made the finals of over half the festivals
- 6 When I visited the site in 2016, the CUSF uploads (181 videos) had received a total of thirty thousand views.
- 7 Each year it involved the use of sizeable venues over several days each year, such as the grand Sir Run Run Shaw hall on CUHK's campus with its vast stage and auditorium (often used as a concert venue), as well as residential colleges; funding for around forty people from greater China for travel, accommodation and subsistence in Hong Kong and similar for three (usually international) judges; prizes, including travel to, accommodation and subsistence in the UK for at least four people; a banquet; opening ceremony and foyer exhibition.
- 8 David Parker had previously established an annual drama cup; was known as a patron of the arts in the university and city's expat communities; served as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Man Hong Kong International Literary Festival and the Man Asian Literary Prize. During the festival's existence, Parker founded the cross-institution Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities. Parker had studied and taught at the universities of Adelaide, Flinders, Oxford, the Australian National University and Australian Catholic University. He battled multiple myeloma for two years and died in his hometown of Adelaide in 2015: poignantly, the year after the festival ended.
- 9 The criteria used in judging the performances were broken down thus: acting and directing were worth 30% each, English proficiency 20%, technical arts and stagecraft 15%, and imaginative selection of scene 5%. There were three judges for each festival who additionally ensured that each participating university received feedback, via print and orally at the prize-giving. They are described on the festival website as 'professional experts in Shakespeare from both the academic and theatrical worlds'. Certainly, the festival consistently managed to attract academics and practitioners from the highest echelons of their fields. Some judges made just one appearance, others were stalwarts of the festival: this was particularly true of expat judges who were working professionally in China for extended periods (usually at drama schools and universities). Almost all judges had strong ties with members of the organising committee—a practical necessity when identifying and inviting their possible contribution and not remotely foreign to other areas of academia, from appointing external examiners to organising conference plenaries. One effect of this pragmatic recruitment, however, was that judges were predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon men. Exceptions, notably in the early seasons, include Timothy Bond, an associate artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival—the first artist of colour to serve that festival in an executive artistic position (videos of the first and third festivals), and

- Professor Richard M.W. Ho, an experience actor, director and translator of Shakespeare into Cantonese (video of the second festival). Three women served on the panel: Professor Susan Wofford, former President of the Shakespeare Association of America, for several years at the start; Dr Philippa Kelly, resident dramaturg, California Shakespeare Theatre, and Paige Newmark, artistic director, of Shakespeare WA (Western Australia) at the end of the festival's run. This aspect of the festival is one where it is extremely difficult to deny a strong, colonial and/or anglicising influence (though not necessarily neo-colonial). This has been previously noted by British theatre critic Andrew Dickson, who attended the festival one year (2016, p. 424).
- 10 One sponsor was the Dr Tien Chang Lin technology innovation foundation, whose receptiveness to the original pitch is mentioned on the CUSF website, and the Shun Hing Education and Charity Fund. Chang-Lin Tien was a Chinese-Taiwanese-American professor of mechanical engineering and Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley. The foundation was established by Richard Liu and Leslie Chung, senior university administrators at CUHK, in his memory. It celebrates the achievement of a pioneering ethnically Chinese academic in Western higher education system (the first Sino-American Chancellor in the United States). It aims to support and sponsor academic research and activities. For example, the foundation has also sponsored scholarships and a lecture series at CUHK. The Shun Hing Education and Charity Fund is part of the corporate and social responsibility of Shun Hing group of companies, suppliers of consumer, office and industrial electronic products, as well as a prominent building service contractor in and around Hong Kong. The executive committee of the fund, consisting of the firm's senior management, describes itself as strongly believing 'that the provision of comprehensive education to the younger generation is essential for building a prosperous society' (Our Sponsors, n.d.).
- 11 For example, the actress from Northeast Normal University playing Julia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* quotes Taylor Swift regarding her character's relationship with Proteus: 'this is exhausting. You know we are never, ever, ever, getting back together' (video of the tenth festival).
- 12 Theorised along the lines of Bourdieu's cultural capital but with an emphasis on a transnational capitalist class (Robinson, 2004).
- 13 This is almost word for word repeated by Fok Ta-fai, Pro Vice Chancellor, CUHK (video of the tenth festival).
- 14 Sometimes romanised as *goengsi*, often called 'Chinese hopping vampires' or 'zombies' in English.

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## Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

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