

Renaissance and Reformation

Renaissance et Réforme



Lei, Bi-qi Beatrice, dir. Taiwan Shakespeare Database. Archive

Lia Wen-Ching Liang

Volume 44, Number 2, Spring 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082707ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37534>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Liang, L.-C. (2021). Review of [Lei, Bi-qi Beatrice, dir. Taiwan Shakespeare Database. Archive]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 211–214. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37534>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Lei, Bi-qi Beatrice, dir.

Taiwan Shakespeare Database. Archive.

Taipei: Research Center for Digital Humanities, National Taiwan University, 2010. Accessed 25 November 2020.

shakespeare.digital.ntu.edu.tw.

Taiwan Shakespeare Database (Taiwan Shashibiya ziliao ku) is a bilingual (Chinese and English) open-access online archive dedicated to the documentation of Shakespearean productions in Taiwan. In recent years, Shakespeare has become one of the most performed playwrights in Taiwan as an increasing number of related theatre productions have been launched in various languages and dialects. Yet, given the ephemeral nature of theatre and the short period of performance in Taiwan (usually four performances over the weekend), researchers have to rely heavily on archival studies in order to obtain study materials. In view of such circumstances, the Taiwan Shakespeare Database, the brainchild of Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, offers great value for researchers and students who want to study the unique staging history of Shakespeare's plays in Taiwan.

The database currently features seventy-two productions, ranging from a 1966 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Zhongxiaye zhi meng) by theatre students from Chinese Culture College (now Chinese Culture University) to the Contemporary Legend Theatre's much discussed *King Lear* (Lier zai ci) that was premiered in 2001 and still touring in 2020. These productions can be sorted via source (the Shakespeare play on which the production was based), year of premiere, group, language, and genre. This provides first-time users with a useful way to assess the general composition of Taiwanese Shakespeare productions, and to quickly survey the categories of performances for research purposes. The search option of the database provides a simple breakdown of the search outcome. For example, a search of "Hamlet" will give the following result: "total 9 productions, 129 files from 15 productions," indicating nine productions or adaptations of *Hamlet* are included in the database and 129 files from fifteen productions are related to this version of *Hamlet*. While these fifteen productions are presented in the main body of the page, one can navigate performances and files via filters in the left column, such as the year of the premiere or the language and genre of these productions.

For each production, the landing page has two columns of information. The smaller left column has the production details, including alternative

name (if any), source of Shakespeare's plays, year and place of the premiere, the members of the production team, the language used for the production, the genre of the work, and the rights holder. This column alone illustrates the meticulous efforts of the team behind the database, yet the thoroughness of the archive is even more apparent in the main body of the landing page, which offers many more items: the dream of all researchers. Older productions, or productions with reserved rights, have a photo featured in the introduction section, while fully authorized works have partial or full recordings of the productions. Production background, programs, photos, publicity, news, and reviews are standard sections, while essays, bios, ticket, and sometimes scripts and internal documents can also be accessed. Essential information (date, source, publisher, data type of each and a brief) is available for every single item, making each entry a quotable resource. A visit to the database would thus save many trips to the physical archives.

Sometimes, different languages can become an obstacle to the research of international Shakespeare productions. To overcome the linguistic barrier, the team behind the database has endeavoured to make it accessible for both English and Chinese speakers. Unlike many other websites putting bilingual features mainly in major sections, the majority of the archive is in both languages. For the user, the switch between traditional Chinese and English is effortless, viable in almost every entry. This is a convenient option for scholars who intend to conduct relevant research and prefer to learn about the production in both languages in order to obtain a fuller picture. It even supplies bilingual subtitles for the video recording of the production. The database was originally available in traditional Chinese; it does not provide word-to-word translations for every part of the archive. For example, reviews or bios are well presented in the Chinese version, but in English only abstracts are provided. The imperfection is slight, however, compared to the team's accomplishments, and the materials available bilingually should meet the needs of most academic research.

The database also provides a bigger picture of the recent history of performing Shakespeare in Taiwan. Among the seventy-two recordings, over forty works are student productions mounted within a higher educational institute. From the earliest recordings in 1966 to 1982, the Department of Theatre Arts in Chinese Culture College is the sole production team for Shakespeare performances. From 1988 onwards, more works from departments of English, foreign languages, or drama and theatre in other universities can be observed. This marks a change of curriculum within higher education. As

the first theatre department in higher education, established only after the Kuomintang's control of Taiwan in 1949, the Department of Theatre Arts in Chinese Culture College aims to make its students well versed in both Chinese and Western theatrical practices. According to the recordings and materials from the archive, it is apparent that a study of Shakespeare was emphasized in the department's curriculum even at a time when international interactions had been quite restricted. It gradually became a tradition for the department to produce one of Shakespeare's plays and provide a major resource for the audience to learn about Shakespeare in theatre. Later, coinciding with the lift of the martial law in 1987, many other departments of English/foreign languages started to put on Shakespearean productions for their students' graduation productions, and professionally produced adaptations also emerged.

The 1980s marks a threshold for the trend of performing Shakespeare in Taiwan. Perhaps as a way to understand the canonical status of the Bard, productions mounted by Chinese Culture College were all presented in Western contexts, showing characters in translated foreign names and early modern western costumes. The only exception is their last Shakespeare production, adapting *Merry Wives of Windsor* into the contemporary Taiwanese context. Wang Yo-Hwei, later known as a playwright and actor, and still an active theatre practitioner nowadays, adapted the Shakespeare play into *Touqing ji* (The affair) and turned the Falstaff-based character into a film director, Jia De-an. The linguistic style of this production differed greatly from its predecessors, as it no longer used a translated text but instead re-wrote the play into a story that local audience could easily relate to.

Later in the same decade, Yen Hung-ya, now a famous poet and theatre director, relocated *Hamlet* to ancient China in a production entitled *She Tian* (Shooting at heaven) in 1988 as his graduation production. According to the archive, "[e]mphasizing ghosts, oracles, and violence, the play features a mysterious atmosphere" (*She Tian* entry page, Taiwan Shakespeare Database), these Chinese characters makes it a textbook production of intercultural theatre. Also worth noting is that many members of the production team later became key figures in Taiwan's theatre circles. This is also the decade when the Contemporary Legend Theatre mounted *The Kingdom of Desire* (adapted from *Macbeth*) as their first production in 1986, fusing *Macbeth*'s story with *jinju* and creating a representative work in the history of intercultural theatre. Although the recording is not featured in the database (it can be viewed via

MIT Global Shakespeares), these works in the Taiwan Shakespeare Database provide essential background study for Taiwan's intercultural theatre.

Finally, the database is also a valuable teaching tool, as I have learned in person whenever I teach Shakespeare. It is always the first website I introduce to students while discussing the possibility of contemporary Shakespeare productions, especially in the social contexts of Taiwan. Shakespeare may still sound foreign to many young Taiwanese students, yet the traditional Chinese version of the website helps to overcome the cultural gap. Performance recordings in the database, particularly those adapted into contemporary contexts, also make the study of the Renaissance text less distant. Given the recent surge of Shakespeare adaptations in Taiwan, I hope more productions will be included in the database, which will enrich our understanding of Shakespeare's contemporary relevance, and how different societies utilize and respond to his legacies.

LIA WEN-CHING LIANG

National Taiwan Normal University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37534>

Pacariem, Shech, ed.

Shakespeare in the Philippines: A Digital Archive of Research and Performance. Other.

Quezon City: University of the Philippines Diliman, 2016. Accessed 17 December 2020.

archivingshakespeare.wordpress.com.

Shakespeare in the Philippines: A Digital Archive of Research and Performance was launched by Shech Pacariem in 2016 as part of a graduate school project undertaken at the University of the Philippines Diliman. The site gives its users a look at Shakespeare productions that have been staged by various Philippine theatre companies in the last decade. It began as a general survey of Shakespeare performances and projects in the Philippines and an attempt to collate what materials could be found and accessed, and it continues to function in this manner.¹ Apart from captions and short introductions containing important

1. Shech Pacariem, e-mail interview conducted by Michaela Atienza (10–14 December 2020).