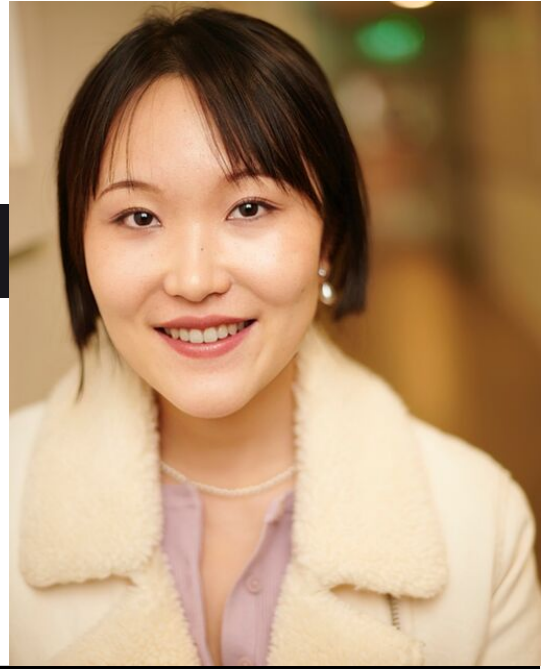


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PROFILE

Project title

Writing Differences: The Politics of Chinese National Identity in Post-Maoist Revolutionary Model Theatre

Supervisor/s

Dr Sarah Grochala, Dr Joel Anderson.

Abstract

This project investigates Chinese national identity (CNI) within the performance and appreciation of revolutionary model theatre (Chinese: 革命样板戏), a cultural form originally developed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The research analyses how revolutionary performances built on the literary, dramaturgical, and scenographic elements of *jingju* (traditional Beijing opera, Chinese: 京剧), as well as its performance style and stagecraft, to assert a connection with traditional Chinese values, within which it located a nexus of communist signs and symbols to generate Chinese national identity that exceeded but were aligned with Maoist ideology. The project traces the ways in which these features of the form developed historically and conducts a survey of recent and contemporary productions, analysing their adaptations as a form of national melancholia, which remains unacknowledged, unmemorialised, and unmourned, thus forming a traumatic tumour in urgent need of recognition and reparation. The study more broadly analyses the key discursive contexts of revolutionary performances and the nexus of cultural consumerism, political propaganda, and lived experiences of the national identity it occupies. This research develops a dialogue between revolutionary performances and the lived discourses of CNI and enables us to track the historical development of governance and its relations to the shifting ideological projects of the Chinese Communist Party. Through autoethnographic practice-based research, this project explores creative ways to counteract the affective violence of totalisation and historical dislocation to replace feelings of alienation, anxiety, inadequacy, and insecurity with a sense of value in identity. It discusses the psychological concepts of creativity and worldmaking as a way of reparation for national melancholia and reflection on the official/unofficial historical narratives. Through an investigation of critical perspectives on historical trauma and repressed memories, this project also challenges the prevalent Western narratives that portray political China simply as an authoritarian regime.

Profile

Prior to joining Central, I completed a BA (English Language and Literature, Chinese Literature) at Tsinghua University in China, specialising in theatre in the Victorian era and *Yuanqu* (Chinese: 元曲), a form of Chinese opera from the Yuan Dynasty. I am currently a PhD candidate and visiting lecturer at Central, and an Anglo-Chinese playwright based in London. My work focuses on the political structure of playwriting and dramaturgy, and contemporary political theatres in Sinophone contexts.

Practice

As a playwright:

2017, Beijing, *The Hurlyburly World*: a post-modernist play to explore the relationship of fiction, authenticity and trust in theatre. (The first prize of the 2017 Chinese New Playwright Competition; the 2018 Best New Playwright Award)

2021, London, *The Outsiders*: a live streaming play to explore the language's functions in storytelling.

2021, London, *During the Break*: a postcolonial play invited to the Kensington and Chelsea Culture Festival to perform in Chelsea Theatre.

2023, London, *When You Are Looking at Me*: a sci-fi musical. Studio Theatre.

As a fiction writer:

2020, *The Red Elephants*: a dystopia sci-fi story, which was published in *The Space of Memories*.

2021, [Break It](#): website game with a relentless goal of breaking up couples with the surreal exploration of the player's (inner) world.

Teaching

I teach, supervise and tutor a range of Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses at Central, covering playwriting practice and theatre criticism. Recent units I have worked on include the unit Playwriting in Practice on the BA Writing for Performance and BA Theatre Practice, as well as Critical Contexts on MA Writing for Stage and Broadcast Media.

Conference Presentations

"Collectiveness, Fanaticism and Nostalgia: The Politics of Chinese National Identity in Revolutionary Model Theatre", International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) Annual Conference, University of Ghana, July 2023.

"Writing Differences: National Melancholia as An Unresolved Trauma", Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) Annual Conference, University of Leeds, August 2023.