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Directing Dramas is Returning Hometown: Reading Lin Zhaohua's *The Cherry Orchard* from the Perspective of the Taoist Freedom, *Xiaoyao*

Drama Yönetmenliği Yurduna Dönüyor: Lin Zhaohua'nın *Vişne Bahçesi*'ni Taocu Özgürlük, *Xiaoyao*, Perspektifinden Okumak

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Abstract

Born in 1936 and starting to produce little theatre praxes in 1982, Lin Zhaohua is the first Chinese theatre director who could be considered the predecessor of most other Chinese directors after the proclamation of the 1978 Reform and Opening-Up policy. His adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* premiered at the Northern Theatre of The Central Academy of China in 2004, rehearsed again in 2009, and was subsequently invited to the 2009 Singapore International Festival of Arts. The paper aims to add a footnote to Lin Zhaohua's contemporary adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* from the Chinese philosophical arguments of the Taoist freedom, *xiaoyao*. The raised auditorium and the lowered stage ceiling of this production which provide the audiences with a vast scope tally with the precondition of being *xiaoyao*. The overlapped spaces and simultaneously uttered texts in Lin's adaptation resonate with a feature of *xiaoyao* that every individual is equal in the state of freedom. The dynamic stage, designed by Lin and Yi Liming to visualize the psychological state of Lyuba, parallels the way of pursuing *xiaoyao*, "depending on nothing". The essay argues that Lin's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* is not only an experimental production but also resonates with the ideas of Taoism.

Keywords: Lin Zhaohua, Anton Chekhov, *The Cherry Orchard*, Taoism, Interculturalism

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Öz

1936'da doğan ve 1982'de küçük tiyatro pratikleri üretmeye başlayan Lin Zhaohua, 1978 Reform ve Açılım politikasının ilanından sonra ortaya çıkan diğer Çinli yönetmenlerin çoğunun öncüsü olarak kabul edilebilecek ilk Çinli tiyatro yönetmenidir. Anton Çehov'un *Vişne Bahçesi* uyarlamasının prömiyeri 2004 yılında Çin Merkez Akademisi Kuzey Tiyatrosu'nda yapılmış, 2009 yılında tekrar prova edilmiş ve ardından 2009 Singapur Uluslararası Sanat Festivali'ne davet edilmiştir. Bu makale, Lin Zhaohua'nın çağdaş *Vişne Bahçesi* uyarlamasına Çin felsefi argümanı Taocu özgürlük, *xiaoyao*'dan bir dipnot eklemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu prodüksiyonun seyirciye geniş bir alan sağlayan yükseltilmiş salonu ve alçaltılmış sahne tavanı, *xiaoyao* olmanın ön koşulunu sağlamaktadır. Lin'in uyarlamasında üst üste binen mekânlar ve eşzamanlı konuşulan metinler, *xiaoyao*'nun bir özelliği olan özgürlük ortamında her bireyin eşit olmasıyla örtüşmektedir. Lyuba'nın psikolojik durumunu görselleştirmek için Lin ve Yi Liming tarafından tasarlanan dinamik sahne, *xiaoyao*'nun peşinden gitmekle, "hiçbir şeye bağlı olmamakla" paralellik gösterir. Bu makale, Lin'in *Vişne Bahçesi* uyarlamasının sadece deneysel bir yapımla olmadığını, aynı zamanda Taoizm'in fikirleriyle de örtüştüğünü savunur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lin Zhaohua, Anton Çehov, *Vişne Bahçesi*, Taoizm, Kültürlerarasılık

Introduction

Due to the Cultural Revolution, China was isolated from the world from 1966 to 1978; it has re-participated in the international communication since 1978 when the Reform and Opening-Up policy was proclaimed by the former Premier Deng Xiaoping. Lin Zhaohua, the initiator of the little theatre movement in China and one of the few whose productions were invited to perform in the West in the 1980s, is usually considered one of the most influential Chinese theatre directors not only inside but also outside China in the last 47 years (1978 – 2024). As Erika Fischer-Lichte comments, "Not only is [Lin Zhaohua] the first Chinese director participating in such a collaborative creation between China and the West, but also were some of his productions, in subsequent, staged in Germany. He is prestigious in Germany" (2019, p. 18). Since the 1980s when he just started his career in theatre directing, Lin has kept adapting the foreign canonical plays written by some distinguished playwrights such as William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, among others, from a Chinese perspective. It seems that Lin's intention of Sinicizing foreign plays emerged about 20 years earlier than the publication of the manifesto-like essay on new-interculturalism in 2011 when Penny Farfan and Ric Knowles encouraged the intercultural performance "that did not begin or end with Western modernism, and does not simply involve Western appropriations of the Other" (n.p.), or around 30 years

earlier than the time when a Chinese scholar, Wang Ning, suggested that China should transform from a “country consuming cultures” to a “country producing cultures” (Peng, 2008, p. 4). However, Lin’s adapted productions are usually studied from the perspective of experimentalism due to their seemingly modern theatrical forms and contents, while the Sinicized features, which should be endowed by the location of China, where they were produced as well as by Lin, who has the background of traditional Chinese cultures, are often ignored. As Tian Min puts forward, “‘intercultural theatre’ [is a] process of displacement and re-placement of culturally specified and differentiated theatrical forces, rejecting any universalist and essentialist presumptions” (2008, p. 2). Hence, it is nearly impossible for Lin to keep the original ideas of foreign plays while adopting these texts in his own cultural context.

Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard*, the stage of which was designed by Yi Liming and Tan Shaoyuan, premiered at the Northern Theatre of The Central Academy of China in 2004, rehearsed again in 2009, and was subsequently invited to the 2009 Singapore International Festival of Arts. The performance is a recreation of Anton Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* which depicts a story happening in Russia at its turning point from a feudal serf society to a new one, which denoted the embryo of capitalism, when two landowners, Lyuba Ranevskaya and Gayev Ranevskaya, suffered from the decline of the power of the old aristocracy and were expelled from their family estate. Talking about his directing aesthetics, Lin confesses that “[directing] dramas is returning hometown” (Zhang, 1995, p. 41), which reflects his interest in directing with indigenous Chinese cultures. Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* is supposed to feature traditional Chinese cultures as well but was discussed by some scholars merely on its implication to the dilemma of some Chinese intellectuals in modern Chinese society or on the experimental arrangements of onstage space (Peng, 2008, pp. 101-6). A spectator even complains that she fails in figuring out any traditional Chinese features after watching this production (Tan, 2009a, n.p.). It is widely acknowledged that Lin’s directing aesthetics are greatly influenced by the traditional Chinese Opera, yet, the researches on the influence of Chinese Opera to his productions are numerous and he has mentioned frequently the Taoist arguments in his texts. Hence, I aim to work on a parallel research and read Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* from the perspective of an indigenous Chinese philosophical school, Taoism – particularly its arguments on

freedom, *xiaoyao* – rather than the Chinese Opera, which has been studied too many times, in order to add a footnote to the studies of Lin's *The Cherry Orchard*.

Lin Zhaohua's Absorption of Taoist *Xiaoyao*

Born in Tianjin in 1936, Lin Zhaohua was deeply influenced by traditional Chinese cultures during his childhood, which resulted in his interest in indigenous Chinese philosophies – particularly Taoism. Considering his confession in an interview, it can be said that Taoism consciously or unconsciously affected his ways of directing dramas to a large extent: “Laozi and Zhuangzi, [the founder of Taoism and one of his most prominent successors], inspired me and instructed me to see a new view of theatre” (Lin, 2014a, p. 62). More specifically, he learnt Taoist Kong Fu – *ziwu gong* (子午功) – in 1976, deployed the idea of Taoist *yin* and *yang* to depict the birth of the universe in his *Wild Men* (1985), learnt dialectics from Chapter Twenty-Two of *Dao De Jing* – the Taoist masterpiece written by Laozi, and cited Taoist argument of “existence comes out of non-existence” to express his idea of “expressing anything by empty stages”, etc. (Lin, 2014a, p. 71; Lin, 2014b, p. 81, p. 144). These arguments and experiences might encourage Lin to decorate his productions with his understanding of Taoism.

Taoism is one of the oldest indigenous Chinese philosophies initiated by Laozi and Zhuangzi during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period (770BC – 221BC). As a philosophical school incepted in a turbulent age, Taoism focuses on how an individual lives a free and peaceful life rather than pursues secular achievements such as political power or material profit. Among almost all the Taoist arguments, the idea of Taoist freedom, *xiaoyao*, could be one of the most applicable concepts to depict Lin's directing aesthetics. *Xiaoyao* first appears in the first Chapter “Wandering Where You Will” (*xiaoyaoyou* 逍遥游) of *Zhuangzi* to elaborate on the ideal freedom of Taoism but exists throughout the Taoist texts as Bertrand Russell asserts, “Lao-Tze's [or Laozi's] book, or rather the book attributed to him is very short, but his ideas were developed by his disciple Chuang-Tze [or Zhuangzi], who is more interesting than his master. The philosophy which both advocated was one of freedom” (1922, p. 188). Laozi does not coin the concept *xiaoyao* but his texts establish a foundation for the birth of Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao*. He argues:

Colour's five hues from the eyes their sight will take; Music's five notes the ears as deaf can make; the flavours five deprive the mouth of taste; the chariot course, and

the wild hunting waste Make mad the mind; and objects rare and strange, sought for, men's conduct will to evil change. Therefore, the sage seeks to satisfy (the craving of) the belly, and not the (insatiable longing of the) eyes. He puts from him the latter, and prefers to seek the former (Chen, 2020, p. 104).

This text proves that Laozi's sage does not have desires for the external world so that he can detach himself from the external harms and live according to his own will freely. Zhuangzi further develops Laozi's ideal state of detachment. First, he uses the vast vision of *peng*, an imaginary bird-like creature, to express that people will be apathetic about the external world if they have a very broad scope of vision, because everything seems too small and the same to him which cannot arouse any interest. Second, he takes a symbol of the harmonious melody played altogether by various hegemonic natural sounds to elaborate on the free will of every individual. Third, taking freedom as the ultimate pursuit, Zhuangzi despises the psychological dependence on profit, power, and fame as these short-sighted desires will disrupt his real thoughts and block his way towards freedom. Taking Chen Guying's argument as a conclusion of *xiaoyao*: *xiaoyao* is mainly designated to denote "an individual's psychological state that is free from being offended by anything external when he has broken through the limitations of desires such as financial profit and political power" (2019, p. 3). Thus, *xiaoyao* denotes a psychological state that is devoid of any social restrictions. These features of *xiaoyao* will be introduced in detail in the subsequent parts and applied to interpreting Lin's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*.

The features of *xiaoyao* parallel Lin's life from three perspectives. Firstly, Lin insists on directing performances according to his own will instead of the audiences'. Confronted with the question, "Have you ever thought about catering to the interest of the spectators [in order to make more benefit]?", Lin answers without any hesitation, "My dramas would not deserve any appreciation if I did so" (An & Lin, 2004, p.67), which clearly shows his insistence on his own directing aesthetics regardless of others' comments. Secondly, Lin's creation is not restricted by the Chinese authorities. In pursuing the innovation of theatrical forms freely during the 1980s when only socialist-concerned Stanislavski's acting system was allowed in *huaju* (Chinese spoken drama) productions staged at the Chinese State-owned theatres, Lin was one of the first group of Chinese theatre directors establishing his personal theatre studio. As he confesses, "In my studio I have freedom. I'm not using State money, so the rules are different. I

don't have to go through endless committees. I make the decisions myself" (Entell, 2002, p. 37). Thus, he becomes free from the political requisites. Thirdly, the influence of *xiaoyao* also reflects itself in Lin's directing aesthetics as he equally deploys the aesthetics of the traditional Chinese theatres and that from abroad, and frequently mentions his pursuit of initiating a kind of free performance in which every form, regardless of its cultural origin or social function, could be adopted to reach his targets as he puts forward, "Expressing the reality', 'expressing the essence', idealism, materialism, symbolism, absurdism, modernism, post-modernism, and even post-post-modernism, etc. [I] ask all of them to stand around me, waiting for the birth of babies—I create my theatre aesthetics" (Lin, 1998, p. 10). He concludes, "Freedom is my view of theatre" (Lin, 2014b, p. 58). Lin, according to his attitudes towards personal desires, socio-political restrictions, and directing aesthetics introduced before, consciously or unconsciously pursues freedom which is rather synonymous with Taoist *xiaoyao*. Thereafter, the Taoist *xiaoyao* might also unconsciously influence Lin's adaptation of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (2004). A Chinese scholar, Gu Chunfang, has already associated its scenery with a Taoist argument, "The world and I came into existence together, and all things with me are one" (p. 23), so as to interpret the harmony constructed onstage. In his biographical book, *Comic Book of Lin Zhaohua: Directing Dramas*, Lin cites a review in which freedom is praised as one of the emblematic features of the performance, which might indicate that he is proud of succeeding in expressing his understanding of freedom as well (Lin, 2014b, pp. 329-330). These pieces of evidence could provide the leeway to interpret Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* from the perspective of Taoist *xiaoyao*. In this study, I will attempt to examine the performance of the production according to the precondition, feature, and method of pursuing *xiaoyao*.

Vastness – The Precondition of Being *Xiaoyao*

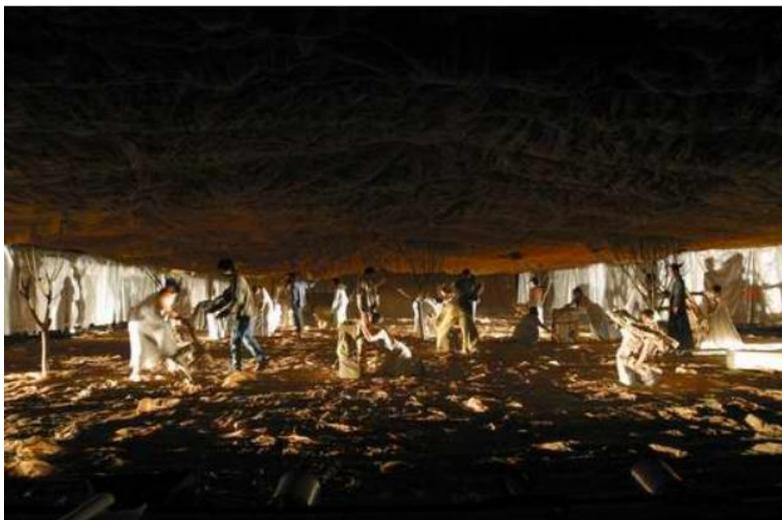
Aiming at interrogating Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* on its actor-spectator space from the angle of the precondition of being *xiaoyao*, vastness, I would like to first define in general the origin and manifestations of this Taoist argument. As for the precondition of being *xiaoyao*, Zhuangzi in the Chapter "Wandering Where You Will" makes use of 2 allegories to illustrate it. On the one hand, *peng*, the representative creature of *xiaoyao*, is an imaginary bird evolving from an imaginary fish, *kun*. The fish must "rise

to fly in the air” to evolve into the form of *peng*, in the process of which the behaviour “fly” and what it indicates – “rise” – are the cores of Taoist freedom, *xiaoyao*. “Such a ‘fly’ behaviour makes it possible for us to overlook the world, so that we can have a viewpoint outside this world” (Chen, 2019, p. 5). On the other, a cicada and a young dove are compared with *peng* to display their ignorance. The cicada and the young dove are deployed to refer to those who know little about the world. Wang Zhongyong conveys:

From Zhuangzi’s point of view, the ordinary people, due to their limited scope of vision and shortage of knowledge, are doomed to know nothing about the logic of those who approach Tao, [the origin of cosmos and the principles of nature] (1980, p. 152).

By depicting the differences between these two groups of creatures, Zhuangzi concludes, “Those who have little knowledge about the world are inferior to those who know a lot” (Chen, 2019, p. 13), which would insinuate that the quantity of the acquired knowledge could be the criterion dividing the state of being *xiaoyao* or not. Further, according to Wang Bo (2004, p. 115), the scope of vision is actually the key to manifesting or symbolizing this precondition of pursuing *xiaoyao*. Thereafter, the vast scope could be used to symbolize enough knowledge, the precondition of pursuing *xiaoyao*, while the narrow scope could refer to the lack of knowledge, representing the confined psychological states. The vast scope and narrow one could be respectively deployed to illustrate the lifted auditorium and suppressed stage of Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard*.

Lin’s theatrical space, potentially revealing the actor-spectator relationship, in his *The Cherry Orchard* might resonate with the manifestations of the preconditions of pursuing *xiaoyao*. The auditorium is raised to provide a panorama for the spectators. The staff install scaffolds on the first floor of the auditorium and no spectator is allowed to sit on the first floor to appreciate the drama. Hence, the stage extends horizontally to the first floor of the auditorium and the audiences, “the number of whom is reduced to dozens, should watch the drama from the second floor” (Lin, 2014b, p. 322). In contrast, Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* has a 2-meter-tall stage on which the branches of several cherry trees are thrust into the yellow-burlap-made “sky” (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 1. The servants of the mansion are cleaning the furniture out from the house and cherry orchard.)

What is staged in front of the spectators is “a quite narrow interlayer that seems to be blocked by two thick layers of the soil” and some relatively taller actors/actresses have to duck their heads while walking. An anonymous spectator even repeats “oppressed” four times to describe this stage in his/her review article (Liu, 2014, n.p.). What does Lin intend to express by deploying this complicated actor-spectator space design? According to his personal comprehension of *The Cherry Orchard*, “Chekhov stands at a high position, witnessing the countless changes that occur in the secular world. The world is always changing to be better or worse...Chekhov, with a sharp scalpel, calmly dissects every character composed by himself” (N.A., 2004, n.p.). I would rather see this text as Lin’s personal interpretation or imagination of *The Cherry Orchard* rather than Chekhov’s idea. Such a kind of calmness is what Lin wishes to acquire and transmit to his audiences by means of raising the auditorium. On the contrary, the psychological suppression of his characters could also be noticed as Lin conveys:

[What I wish to reveal by this compressed stage is that] human beings are actually suffering in such a kind of compressed living condition. Even the [cherry] trees could get thrust through that ceiling, but humans are incapable of achieving so” (2014b, p. 322).

Thereafter, the lifted auditorium enables the spectators of Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* to acquire a view as *peng* looking at the secular world from high above, which endows them with a psychological state of being calm and careless; while the lowered ceiling of the stage forces the characters or actors to share a resemblance with the cicada

and young dove in Zhuangzi's allegory who are spiritually confined due to their narrow scopes.

Meanwhile, as “the character whose performance almost occupies the same time as the protagonist, Lyuba, on Lin's stage” (N, A., 2009, n.p.), the “eternal student” (Chekhov, 1977, p. 265), Trofimov, could contribute to the analysis of this production from the perspective of *xiaoyao* as well¹. The interaction between Trofimov's body language and the onstage space reflects its similarities with the precondition of pursuing *xiaoyao* more explicitly. Opposite to Lyuba, who has been to Paris to see the outside world on her own and is still restricted between the ceiling and the floor of the stage, Trofimov has never gone outside the town, where the cherry orchard is located, but is capable of moving freely up and down the ceiling of the stage without any limitations (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 2. Lyuba is talking with Trofimov.)

His freedom of breaking through the restrictions of the stage could be attributed to his carelessness about the trifles in the mansion and his broad horizon of the world. Trofimov is set by Lin to run around the stage with his arms stretching as a flying bird when he tells his beloved Anya, “All Russia is our orchard. The earth is so wide, so beautiful, so full of wonderful places” (Chekhov, 1977, p. 269). Analyzing this scene from the perspective of Taoism, Trofimov is synonymous with *peng*, psychologically wandering freely without any restrictions. Climbing beyond the restriction of the ceiling and overlooking the events happening on the stage could be considered the causes of

¹ I will cite the texts of Chekhov's script at first in that Lin Zhaohua did not change too many words of *The Cherry Orchard* but used different ways to present them. The new texts in Lin's production will be cited directly from the DVD of Lin's works, *Lin Zhaohua xiju zuopin ji [Theatre Anthology of Lin Zhaohua]*.

his *xiaoyao*, which are shared by the spectators as well. Accordingly, examining the actor-spectator space from the perspective of the precondition of pursuing *xiaoyao*, vastness, I argue that the audiences of Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* acquire the vast scope of vision and careless attitude of *peng* and the characters who are limited by their narrow vision are as miserable as the cicada and young dove. The limited vision and knowledge lead the characters to pay too much attention to superficial interests and treat these interests as the most valuable things in their life. They are pitifully restrained by their little knowledge. The calmness and carelessness brought by the vast scope of vision could enable the spectators to free themselves from the desire for superficial profit, fame, or power.

Equality – The Feature of *Xiaoyao*

In addition to the analyses in the first part of this essay that the actor-spectator relationship in Lin's theatrical space could be interpreted to tally with the Taoist arguments on the precondition of pursuing *xiaoyao*, the onstage performance might resonate with the feature of *xiaoyao* – equality. "Equality as the feature of *xiaoyao*" is an idea explicitly elaborated in the second Chapter "Working Everything Out Evenly" (*qiwulun* 齐物论) of *Zhuangzi* and should be traced back to the Taoist ontological idea written in Chapter Forty-Two of Laozi's *Dao De Jing*: "Out of Tao, One; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe" (Chen, 2020, p. 225). Laozi's philosophical presumption of the evolution of the world – that everything has the same origin and evolves into different forms – denotes an argument that things, even though appear variously, should be equal to each other in essence. In the Chapter "Working Everything Out Evenly", Zhuangzi deploys sounds to symbolize and develop Laozi's argument on the equality of things. Zhuangzi classifies the sounds of the world into three types – heaven's sounds (produced by winds), earth's sounds (produced by caves), and humans' sounds. He believes that humans' sounds are inferior to heaven's sounds in that humans' sounds are usually evaluated hierarchically while heaven's sounds, though different to each other, exist equally and work altogether to compose harmonious melodies. As the natural phenomena are usually what the Taoist philosophers encourage humans to learn from, Zhuangzi's depiction of the heaven's sounds insinuates not only the equality of things but also that of thoughts as Wang Bo puts forward, "The core of [Zhuangzi's] equality is not that of things but that of hearts [or thoughts]" (2004, p. 75). That is to say, Laozi's ontological

text establishes the foundation of Taoist equality and Zhuangzi's symbolized sounds amplify the gamut of equality from things to thoughts. How do their arguments on equality appear to reflect the features of *xiaoyao*? Fang Dongmei further interprets, "Zhuangzi, in Chapter Working Everything Out Evenly, aims to convert the real freedom to common equality – the common equality of thoughts" (2012, p. 240), because the inequality of thoughts could easily lead to the psychological suppression of those who hold so-called inferior thoughts, which appears similar to the inequality of things. Hence, Taoist freedom, *xiaoyao*, could only be achieved by dismantling the "[psychological] boundaries" among individuals constructed by "personal desires" or "hierarchical thoughts", which manifests itself as the equality of things and thoughts (Fang, 2012, p. 240). The pursuit of equality of things and thoughts could be found respectively in the overlapped spaces and simultaneous utterances in Lin's *The Cherry Orchard*.

The overlapped spaces as well as simultaneous utterances in Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* coincidentally demonstrate the feature of *xiaoyao*, equality. I will start with the overlapped spaces on Lin's stage that might tally with the Taoist equality of things. Reading Chekhov's original script, the story of the drama is set at the turning point transiting from feudal serf society to a new one where some corrupt customs remained. It is noteworthy that the boundary between the houses where the nobles enjoy their life and the cherry orchard where the serfs work are clearly mentioned by most of the characters in the script. For instance, the merchant Lopakhin, who aims at solving the economic crisis of the cherry orchard, suggests that the landowners Lyuba and Gayev should cut down the cherry trees, build summer houses, and lease them to the ordinary people. He depicts a prosperous scenery in which numerous "summer people" will not need to be restricted at their balconies to drink tea, but will be able to farm their little acres, and then the cherry orchard will become prosperous...However, his kind suggestions are sharply refused by the landowners. The brother Gaev scolds him, "That's all rubbish" and keeps showing off his nobility with a bookcase that was made a hundred years ago (Chekhov, 1977, p. 250). It seems that he feels offended when he hears that other people entertain their summer on his land. Edward Soja, in his *Postmodern Geographies*, puts forward that "[s]pace in itself may be primordially given, but the organisation, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience" (1989, pp. 79-80). Lopakhin imagines and praises the

prospective scenery in which all the ordinary individuals could live equally and freely, but, for the nobles, the depicted scenery denotes the deprivation of their rights in their own space. As Lyuba confesses, “If there’s one interesting, in fact quite remarkable, thing in the whole county it’s our cherry orchard” (Chekhov, 1977, p. 249). The existence of this beautiful cherry orchard marks their aristocracy so that the other summer houses are considered a humiliation to their status. In the original script, there is a redline clearly lying in between the space of nobles’ houses and that of the cherry orchard.

The stage of Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* is designed in a contrary way. The space of the houses and that of the orchard mingle with each other, thereafter, it would be difficult to figure out where exactly the characters perform. On the soil-like stage grow not only eight bare cherry trees which indicate the space of the orchard but also a dust-covered piano, an exquisite desk clock, a bookshelf, a cabinet, some pillows, quilts, tables, and chairs (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 3. Lyuba is walking to talk with Trofimov. A closet, a quilt, and pillow can be seen on the stage.)



(Figure 4. More pieces of furniture can be seen in the orchard.)

These pieces of furniture which mark the space of houses are interspersed on the soil-like stage and even some of their bottoms are embedded into the 'soil' made of yellow curtains. It seems that the onstage space is deliberately arranged by Lin to dismantle the wall dividing the houses and the orchard as well as the hierarchical boundary segregating the serfs and the nobles. When Anya, Lyuba's daughter, sleeps, she is sleeping in the 'soil' of the orchard. Meanwhile, the serfs are walking around the furniture of the house as well. The serf owners and serfs are seemingly living in the same space, which marks the equality of their identities. This space design coincides with the Taoist argument of the equality between things in which human identities are included as well. The Taoist equality reflected in this mixed space challenges the hierarchy of serfdom and further denotes the prosperous freedom of ordinary people in the new age. Such an end that people's identities are equally weighted could be further discovered with regard to the overlapped texts on Lin's stage.

The simultaneously uttered texts staged in Lin's adaptation could provide more details to prove the production's resonance with Taoist equality. In Chekhov's script, only two lines are written to describe the noisy mansion when Lyuba, her daughter Anya, and their servants come home, "The noise offstage become louder. A voice is heard: 'Let's go through here . . .'" (1977, p. 243). However, in Lin's theatre, two of these lines are expanded and added with more utterances: while Lyuba's adopted daughter, Vayra, and the others are running to welcome Lyuba, the merchant, Lopakhin comes to the front of the stage to give a soliloquy about his 15-year-old recollection of Lyuba at the same time (Lin, 2012, n.p.). In the depth of the stage, Vayra and Lyuba are chatting with each other and are walking into the underground space of the stage. All these characters are expressing their feelings simultaneously. Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* is just like what a review writes, "With voices unclear and muffled whenever the actors venture into the further corners of the stage, there is some confusion at times" (Tan, 2009b, n.p.). These utterances overlap with each other regardless of orders, so the servants' excitement of welcoming Lyuba, Lopakhin's happiness at recollecting Lyuba's childhood, Anya's reliance on her mother, Vayra's ecstasy for welcoming her mother, and Lyuba's love for her room are presented together in a chaotic but equal situation. As we can see, the word "noise" written in the script of *The Cherry Orchard* probably only denotes a slice of stage direction, but this

concept staged in Lin's theatres could be interpreted as a series of simultaneously uttered ideas expressing their ideal lives or worries (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 5. Lopakhin is recollecting while the maids in white cloths are greeting Lyuba who is talking about her room underground at the same time.)

According to the Taoist argument, “heaven’s sounds” are different from each other but equally cooperate to create a harmonious melody (Chen, 2019, pp. 39-40). The Taoist ideal humans’ words shall equally collaborate to create a sphere of freedom as well. When Lyuba’s nostalgia and Lopakhin’s recollection are woven with each other, a Taoist melody-like conversation is performed as their hierarchical identities diminish and only their personal feelings sprout. No conflicts about social strata and money could be found in these texts, but instead, a cozy atmosphere is formed. Everybody is enjoying himself/herself in expressing his thought freely. A similar method is applied to a specific dialogue between Anya and the maid, Dunyasha, as well:

DUNYASHA Yepikhodov – you know, the clerk – proposed to me just after Easter.

ANYA Can you talk about something else? [Tidying her hair.] I've lost all my hair-pins. [She is very tired and is actually swaying on her feet.]

DUNYASHA I really don't know what to think. He loves me so much, he really does.

ANYA [Fondly, looking through the door into her room. My own room, my own windows, just as if I'd never been away. I'm home again! I'll get up tomorrow and run straight out into the orchard. Oh, if I could only go to sleep. I didn't sleep at all on the way back, I was so worried² (Chekhov, 1977, p. 244).

² On Lin's stage, Anya could not look “through the door into her room” as there is not any well-constructed room on the stage.

The Taoist melody could be considered to exist in this dialogue as well. The texts on pursuits and worries between Anya and Dunyasha are staged by overlapping rather than offending each other in Lin's adaptation, which might denote the equality of their thoughts – the thoughts of a naive aristocratic lady and of a maid – that no hierarchy would exist during this turning point from a society of serfdom to that of a new age. Anya's and Dunyasha's overlapped texts bear resemblance to the Taoist "heaven's sounds" that might be considered the natural and ideal situation among humans which break through the hierarchical speeches between their identities. According to the analyses, the overlapped space and simultaneously uttered texts embodied in Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* parallel the feature of *xiaoyao*, equality, delivering the theme that everybody's identity and arguments should be equally treated to construct a state of freedom. Everyone, thus, has the free will to think, speak, or do regardless of the restrictively hierarchical rules endowed by the societies where they are living.

Depending on Nothing – The Method of Pursuing *Xiaoyao*

After elaborating on the relatively static features of the theatre space, I intend to further interrogate the dynamic scenery of Lin Zhaohua's *The Cherry Orchard*. The changes in the scenery could be interpreted to resonate with the Taoist arguments on the method of pursuing *xiaoyao*: "depending on nothing". "Depending on nothing" is an ideal psychological state proposed by Zhuangzi in the subsequent paragraph of the allegory concerning *peng*, cicada, and young dove, in the Chapter "Wandering Where You Will". Songrongzi (around 400BC – 320BC) and Leizi (around 450BC – 375BC) who were usually depicted as paragon-like figures caring less the external temptations are criticized by Zhuangzi as those who still have things to depend on. Only those who "do not have desires for personal assertions, political achievements, or public fame" could reach the Taoist psychological freedom, *xiaoyao* (Chen, 2019, p. 18). Ordinary people's psychological dependence – particularly on external things – is named by Zhuangzi as "*da*" (待), which according to Chen Guying's elaboration, results in self-confinement that "souls cannot control themselves or stay calm" (2019, p. 20). Xu Fuguan further illustrates this concept from an individual's perspective, "The reason that humans are suppressed and restricted is that they are unable to control themselves but are involved in external things. Involved in external things, [humans] might be restrained or even manipulated. Such involvement is named '*da*'" (2001, p. 347). Thus, "*da*" could be considered the antonym for achieving the Taoist *xiaoyao*.

Fang Dongmei illustrates the relationships between “*da*” and humans’ self-improvement: “If a man does want to reach the state of being spiritually free, he must get rid of ‘*da*’! How can he reach this state? It asks him to make himself a sublime pursuit and to be the master of his spiritual universe” (Fang, 2012, p. 237). This argument of making a sublime pursuit echoes Ye Xiushan’s vivid delineation of those who succeed in reaching the psychological state of *xiaoyao*. Ye confides, “The possibilities of changing variously are just attributed to the status of staying at the centre of an empty space” (1995, p. 147). That is to say, depending on nothing or getting rid of “*da*” is the method of pursuing *xiaoyao*, which is specifically manifested by the status of staying at the centre of an empty space. The change from the state of “depending on something” to that of “depending on nothing” could be adopted to interpret the scenographic change of Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* in which the stage gradually transforms from a complicated one to a bare one.

Considering her experience of losing her mansion, the landowner Lyuba, in Lin’s adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard*, could be analyzed from the Taoist arguments on the method of pursuing *xiaoyao*. The scenography of this production is elaborately designed by Lin to be a dynamic stage around Lyuba so that her psychological state is visualized. The parallels between Lin’s Lyuba and the Taoist “depending on nothing” first reveal themselves in a complicated scene in the first three acts of the praxis where five of the stage’s walls (three vertical walls, ceiling, and floor), except the wall between the audiences and the stage, are designed as special floors to help visualize the recollections of Lyuba. During her recollections, the props, or even characters, “grow” from these walls (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 6. The cabinet, mentioned in Fig 3 can be witnessed slowly “growing” from the floor on the left of the picture.)

A lot of the legs of little girls which stretch out from the left and right sides dance altogether to indicate her past when she could dance happily with friends around. The director “changes many clips of the heroine’s realistic performance to psychological recollections” (Lin, 2014b, p. 324), and visualizes them through scenography. The props moving in and out from all directions are used to visualize the restrictions of memory and the items connected to Lyuba’s past. It seems as if she could not escape from the prisons built by these memories of her past whenever they have changed for decades. Moreover, a specific scene exposes the restriction of the cherry orchard to her from the past to the present. When Chekhov wrote to Stanislavski, a beautiful scenery occurred to his mind. He wrote:

... I intend to begin writing the play on the 20th of February and I can finish it on the 20th of March. It is right there in my mind. *The Cherry Orchard*. A four-act play. In Act One, a number of cherry trees can be seen through windows. There is a white garden where all the women are also in white dresses... (Chekhov, 2016, p. 85).

The scene imagined by Chekhov might imply that the consciousness of Lyuba has already gone through time back to the orchard which was located in the past. What she can see through the windows is not that in the present. In the script, the playwright adopts merely two sentences of hers to explore the connections between her and “the women in white”:

Look! Mother’s walking in the orchard. In a white dress. [Laughs happily] It’s Mother.”
“There’s no one there, I just imagined it. On the right at the turning to the summer-house there’s a little white tree which has leant over, it looks like a woman” (Chekhov, 1977, p. 253).

This woman in white only appears in her mind and text, and cannot be performed onstage or seen by the spectators. However, in Lin’s adaptation, those imaginary women in white are set to wander in the depths of the stages, which might be set to express more of Lin’s personal understanding of this play. These phantom-like women are deployed by Lin to insinuate the beautiful cherry trees with numerous white blossoms and Lyuba’s mother, who walked through decades ago. These figures could construct a sharp contrast with the dried-up cherry trees on the stages which might symbolize the present orchard, and both are utilized to stage simultaneously the present and the past. The connection between Lyuba’s present and her past is physically strengthened. Such scenery presents altogether the present body of Lyuba

and the consciousness which is still left in the past, which could unveil the fact that the restrictions to her consciousness affect her physical body and behaviour in the present. Lin's scenographical delineation of Lyuba's psychological dilemma bears resemblance to the situation of those who could not get rid of the psychological burden of "dai". These things and people could be considered as the visualized "dai". If individuals cannot psychologically get rid of their "dai" – the connections with the outside world, even though such a kind of world only exists in their memories – they will find that the seemingly abstract memories may become concrete and affect their presence. Due to her longing for a return to her aristocratic and wealthy childhood, Lyuba keeps depending on her past, which is opposite to the Taoist arguments of pursuing *xiaoyao*, and could hardly get rid of it by herself.

The change of time from the period of serfdom to that of a new age enables Lyuba to get rid of the psychological restrictions brought by the cherry orchard. The scenery of Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* accentuates the process of her psychological state converted from "depending on the past" to "depending on nothing", which parallels the process of an individual pursuing *xiaoyao*. According to the DVD of Lin's *The Cherry Orchard*, Lyuba is surrounded and blocked by numerous props and people stretching from almost all directions when she indulges herself in the memories of the past, while the whole stage, including the domestic furniture as well as other characters, is removed gradually at the end of the drama (Lin, 2012, n.p.). No sounds of chopping down the cherry trees that might arouse gentle melancholy appear at the end of the performance. The empty stage depicted at the end resonates with the advocacy of Trofimov, "But if we're to start living in the present isn't it abundantly clear that we've first got to redeem our past and make a clean break with it" (Chekhov, 1977, p. 269). Sitting in darkness with nothing around, Lin's Lyuba is calm, relieved, and optimistic about the future (Lin, 2012, n.p.).



(Figure 7. People “grow” from the floor.)



(Figure 8. Every piece of furniture is removed from the stage. Lyuba is sitting in the darkness to say goodbye to her cherry orchard and her past.)

Incorporating Lyuba’s optimistic performance with the props withdrawn from the stage, Lin underscores Lyuba’s isolated psychological state which is synonymous with the free figure, depicted by Ye Xiushan and illustrated in the first paragraph of this section, who is staying in an empty space and is able to change or move in any direction. In other words, Lin’s delineation of Lyuba at the end of his production could be interpreted as an ideal Taoist individual who depends on nothing, hence, this character reveals the infinite possibilities that would be embedded in the future with positivity instead of negativity. Accordingly, deploying a dynamic scenery to depict Lyuba’s psychological experience from “depending on the past” to “depending on nothing”, Lin’s *The Cherry Orchard* resonates with the way of pursuing Taoist *xiaoyao* in which people psychologically and gradually release themselves from the restricted connections with the external world and reach the state of freedom. Once she is passively detached from the past, symbolized by the cherry orchard and old mansion, she will find that the freedom of pursuing infinite possibilities lies in front of her.

Conclusion

Due to his cultural background, Lin is neither able nor willing to direct a completely non-Chinese-featured production. Meanwhile, Lin rejects explicitly adopting the indigenous Chinese cultures without any modifications in his creations or recreations as he agrees with Gao Xingjian's ideas about the deployment of *xiqu* (Chinese operas), the most influential traditional Chinese arts, in his spoken dramas: "Adopting the exaggerated and stylized features of Chinese operas in the production of contemporary Chinese dramas is nonsense" (Lin, 2014b, p. 65). Hence, Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* cannot be treated merely as an experimental production the aesthetics of which lacks the indigenous cultures or caters to the interest of the audiences outside China who have little knowledge of the Chinese culture. The above interpretations of Lin's *The Cherry Orchard* from the perspective of the Taoist freedom, *xiaoyao*, reflect the parallels between the performance and the precondition, feature, and method of pursuing *xiaoyao*. The raised auditorium and lowered ceiling of Lin's adaptation reflect the contrast between *peng* and cicada, resonating with the precondition of Taoist freedom from the perspective of the actor-spectator relationship. The overlapped space and simultaneously uttered texts bear resemblance to the equality of things and thoughts, the feature of *xiaoyao*. Lin's scenery visualizes the psychological state of Lyuba and pictures the process when Lyuba breaks through her psychological restrictions, which resonates with the way of pursuing *xiaoyao* in which the Taoist figure is converted from "depending on something" to "depending on nothing".

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