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Isa Huiling Liu Telling Her Encounter with Theater Arts

YingMingTheater (Here after YMT): How did you first get interested in theatre and acting? Do you remember the first show? What was the most impressive thing about that experience for you?

Isa: Because I have liked acting since I was a child, I participated in the school's dance club and drama club when I was young. But my first exposure to theatrical performances was in 2013. At that time, Instituto Cervantes Being recruited some Spanish students through a cultural project to carry out an experimental theater. The play was an original Spanish play, and the roles were refined by each of us in the process of workshop practice again and again. In order to exercise my Spanish ability,

I participated in this project. This made me feel the charm of drama creation, which made me love drama. My first public performance was at Beijing Language and Culture University. Although I was very nervous before going on stage, when I stepped on the stage, I forgot the sense of urgency and quickly entered my role and enjoyed being noticed even more. What impressed me most about that experience was that I remembered the use of the Spanish subjunctive past perfectly. Because I have this grammatical point in my lines, I don't lose points on this grammatical point later.

YMT: You went to Shanghai after graduating from university. How would you describe the cultural and artistic atmosphere of Shanghai? During this period, you participated in many art festival performances. What accumulation of performance experience did you have during this period?



Isa: I was in Shanghai roughly from 2014 to 2018. I think Shanghai is a very tolerant city. There are audiences for different types of performances there, and there will always be audiences. Whether it is cultural activities organized by embassies and consulates or performances organized by underground enthusiasts, they will be tolerated by this international metropolis,

and I have also seen the diversity of Shanghai. Moreover, many international artists choose Shanghai as their first stop when they visit China. Personally, I think this is the bonus of living in Shanghai. My real contact and development of art performance was in Shanghai. At the beginning of 2015, I joined the Choir of Cervantes (Coro Cervantes) and got introduced to contemporary dance. One of the people I really want to thank is Kiven, who once made an announcement about the World Short Film Festival, when Marceau, a contemporary dance teacher at East China Normal University in Shanghai, wanted to recruit some amateur dancers for the festival, I was lucky enough to be chosen. Only then did I understand that no matter whether you were born in a major city or not, as long as you have love and dreams in your heart, you can do things well.

Later, I was also exposed to non-professional drama. The Shanghai Non-professional Art Festival was my most important attempt, and it was recommended to me by Kiven. The city of Shanghai offers opportunities whenever and wherever, and also offers me many opportunities. I was honored to participate in the “Peep”, a play organized by the director of Drama club in Donghua University. My role was projected through light and shadow, and I use body language and light and shadow effects behind the curtain to promote the development of the plot. The show “Peep” shows a big star who was eroded by a big dye vat in the entertainment industry, and finally engulfed by public opinion, and the Internet violence killed him.

**.... offers opportunities
whenever and wherever.**

YMT: What challenges and difficulties have you encountered in theatrical performances? Do these accumulations and challenges inspire you to think about new questions?

Isa: Now that I think about it, no matter what challenges and difficulties I encounter, I can be good at seizing opportunities, and all I meet are good groups to complete work together. And, I also gained a lot of first-time acting experience. The challenges and difficulties for me are more of a time aspect, because theatrical performances require a lot of practice and rehearsal, and are basically unpaid performances. Because of the influence of my parents, I chose to study foreign languages as an undergraduate. However, in graduate school, I always wanted to study a subject that I liked. For several years after graduating with my undergraduate degree, I pondered this question and searched for the answer. Only you know what you truly love. But I'm just more than willing to devote all my spare time to rehearsals and performances and enjoy every minute of it. When I'm performing, my body is hot because I know that's what I love.

YMT: How do you evaluate the difference between domestic and foreign theatre arts? What are your expectations and prospects for the development of drama in China?

Isa: I think that although the development of domestic avant-garde theater is relatively lagging behind when many people come into contact with foreign theater culture, more people will like theater, and it will develop in a good direction. In particular, some domestic parents are good at cultivating children's interest in drama and laying a solid foundation for the future development of drama in China. I came to London, England, and found that theatre is a way of life for the British. Regardless of the size of the theatre, the British are willing to buy tickets for it, which they call "spiritual consumption". The difference is that, in China, drama is still regarded as a hobby, while abroad, people are more inclined to regard drama as a habit.

Study in Columbia, Photography © Huiling Liu





Volunteer in Africa, Photography © Huiling Liu

YMT: You studied in Colombia for half a year, and then went to work in Africa for two years after you returned to China. Please share these two overseas experiences.



Volunteer in Africa, Photography © Huiling Liu

Isa: These two periods of overseas living experience were huge cultural shocks for me. Previously, I was influenced by that open attitude when I lived in Shanghai, so I was full of curiosity about the new environment and new culture, eager to learn and understand. When I was studying abroad in Colombia, the first city I lived and studied in was Cartagena, a city on the Caribbean coast. I live next to the house of Gabriel García Márquez, where Márquez completed the book “One Hundred Years of Solitude”, and I couldn’t be more excited. Cartagena’s instruments and dances are very lively and exhilarating. Salsa music is played in restaurants and canteens passing by, and I am so happy that I twist to the music. Don’t be shy, no one cares how well you dance.


Volunteer in Africa

Later, I went to work in Equatorial Guinea, Africa. The biggest entertainment for local children is dancing. I also joined a group of children and rehearsed with them every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 6:00 pm until 8:00 pm. After prayers, we walked home together. Those dancing times are always the happiest. We even went to the US embassy in Equatorial Guinea to perform together. As a volunteer sent by the Chinese government to Africa, I learned about some Chinese aid projects in Africa in advance. For example, since the 1950s, every province in

China has supported a country in Africa. Guangdong Province is responsible for the country of Equatorial Guinea, which is also the only country in Africa that uses Spanish as its official language. So I had the fate to come to this country, mainly doing some work in Spanish translation and medical services. People in these places see us as things of art, as life, and live happily every day. Of course, the domestic square dance is also very happy. Happiness is an attitude towards life, but it is expressed in a different way.



Volunteer in Africa, Photography © Huiling Liu



YMT: Your previous work experience is mainly related to language and translation. Why did you choose to embark on the new track of “professional performance”? How do you understand the different options for “non-professional” and “professional” performers?

Isa: It is not accidental to embark on the road of “professional performance”, but a qualitative change after a bit of foreshadowing and accumulation. I always do every major life turning point with no regrets. Nine years ago, I had an important relative who died of cancer when he was 28 years old, and he still had many unfulfilled wishes. It hit me hard at the time. I think I don’t want to have regrets in my short life. I just do what I want to do, and I like to perform.

Photocopy © Karsten Thormaehlen



LOVE IN

A FALLEN CITY

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experience would be enough to support me in another track, so I decided to apply for a postgraduate degree in acting. “Non-professional” to me means academic background, and it is also an amateur in the usual sense. “Professional” for me first is the recognition of academic qualifications, and second is a guarantee of employment. My personal choice is to receive systematic performance training to become a better performer.

YMT: What are the specific requirements for applicants for the MFA program of the East 15 Acting School in London? What qualities, potential, and experience do you think played a decisive role in the school’s admission to you? What advice do you have for students preparing to apply for MA/MFA?

Isa: British schools do not pay special attention to the professional direction of the undergraduate stage. Some students study law, marketing, and different majors. However, they all have the accumulation of performance experience. When applying, you need to write your own artistic resume. At this time, past performance experience is a plus. Every actor must have their own unique highlights.

I am among the many applicants, and my past multicultural background may be a plus for me. What is decisive is that the audition is the monologue of preparation. During the interview, excellent English pronunciation, hyphenation, breathing, emotional expression, facial expression control, body language, etc. are all conditions for admission. Although it only requires a 1-minute presentation, it takes time behind the scenes to ponder a lot of things, practice repeatedly, and form muscle memory. It is also necessary to invite a performance coach for one-on-one guidance half a year in advance and choose a monologue that suits you for practice. Students who want to apply for MFA in Europe and the United States must take the time to read the application conditions clearly. Even if they ask an intermediary to help apply, they must know the terms that they should know. For performance schools that start in the fall, the application channels are generally open in October and November of the previous year, so you can try to be early rather than late.

YMT: How did you adapt to your professional training in London for a year? Do you like the curriculum of East 15 Acting School? What is its biggest feature? How do you understand your professional growth and breakthrough? In the next year of study, what areas do you expect to improve in yourself?

Isa: The performance training at East 15 Acting School is very strict and intensive. We started training at 9 in the morning and didn’t finish until 6 in the afternoon, and the classes were full from Monday to Friday. For example, in a 90-minute acting class, we usually have three acting classes in a row. Before rehearsing the script, the teacher will ask us to familiarize ourselves with our roles and their backgrounds and characters in advance. We must pay more attention in class. Some of my classmates are undergraduates from the Central Academy of Drama of China, and they also feel that the intensity is more reinforced than the training in the Central Academy of Drama. Adapting to the weather in the UK, eating reasonably, getting enough rest, refueling and exercising are great ways to deal with high-intensity training. The words are not rough. In the UK, it is especially easy to be depressed because of the weather. The dopamine secreted by exercise can help to adjust the state of depression.

Compared with the courses of several other schools in London, East 15’s courses are more comprehensive, including stage performances and film performances, which are very suitable for learners like me who have switched from amateurs. The biggest feature of the international postgraduate class is, of course, that you can see the performances of actors from different countries. The tutor will also allow and support each actor to present himself to the greatest extent. Talking about my own growth and breakthroughs professionally, I have challenged many different types of roles during the year. There are little girls in their 20s, old women in their 60s, young children, boys over patterns, and so on. A mentor’s rating from good to excellent is a visible improvement. I have improved a lot more in the speed of role building than in the past, and I am more proactive and constantly thinking about how to shape roles. In the next study, I look forward to doing more self-building in self-confidence. Because, I always feel that the opponent is very strong, so I put a lot of unnecessary pressure on myself, which will greatly affect the final stage presentation.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a brown hat, a long fur stole, and a black lace cape, is looking to her left with an open mouth. In the background, a man in a military uniform is partially visible.

Don Juan Comes Back from the War



YMT: What kind of work do you want to do after graduation?

Isa: In my motivation letter, I mentioned that I want to be a performance artist who is concerned about social issues. I look forward to participating in a topical drama that responds to social issues like “Parasite”, resonates with audiences, exposes social facts, and triggers change. A wild idea is that I hope that I can cooperate with UNESCO to expose the shortcomings of the world’s education and culture in the form of drama.

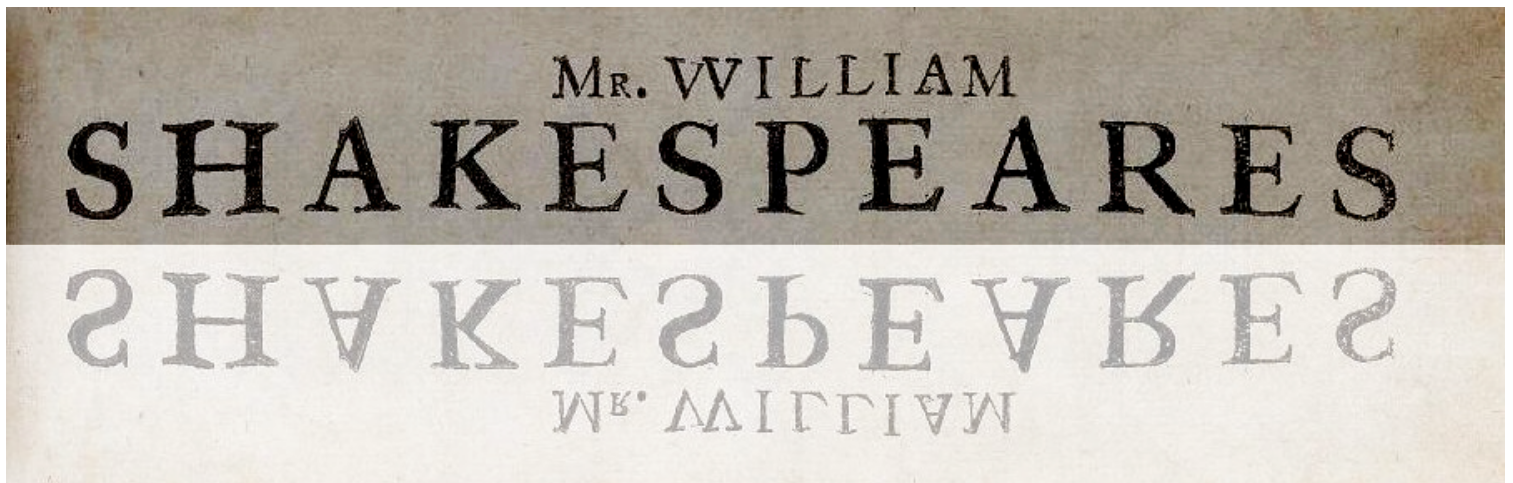
YMT: Can you talk about your practice and experience at the Globe Theatre?

Isa: Rehearsing at the Globe Theatre was an unforgettable experience for me: For the first 3 weeks we read the script in school, and for the last 5 weeks we rehearsed at the Globe Theatre. Although Shakespeare's plays are more than 400 years old, they are always innovating. Since there are more than 40 international students, we were divided into 3 groups of a dozen people. The script our group performed was "Winter's Tale". I think the directors of the Globe Theatre are very creative. They use all the space of the Globe Theatre as if they have opened the door to a new world. There are so many points that can be used in the environment and space, and the vivid image of Shakespeare's play can be performed, which makes the audience feel not bored.



© Huiling Liu

I played three roles at the time, and the center of the stage was reserved for the actors in this scene. The actors waiting for the stage were scattered in the dark corners of the stage, so they would not feel confused when changing scenes. For me, this form of performance in which all actors are on the stage at the same time is a very new theatrical experience. The boundary can be done on the stage, and the scene change can also be done on the stage. What a fantastic idea.



YMT: Do you have any plans for your future career?

Isa: I think that being too old to be an actor is a limitation of domestic concepts. People of different ages and genders in foreign countries can engage in drama-related occupations, which are more influenced by different concepts in domestic and foreign. If it were me, since I chose the road of theatrical performance, I would go on unswervingly. For future career planning, I may be an acting teacher, an actor all the time, or a staff member behind the scenes. I will also make Plan A and Plan B for my career road. There should not be too many limitations in the acting industry. ■

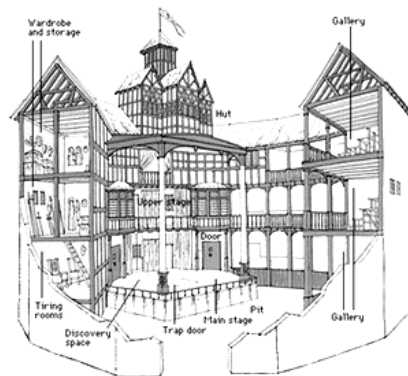


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