

## **Authenticity in Theatrical Designs – What Does it Mean?**

IFTR conference proposal

By Ming Chen

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This paper examines the evolution of the meaning of the word *authenticity*, with regards to the field of theatrical design, and explores the various directions that this word may take us in our contemporary theatre practices.

Utilizing design examples from different periods, the author investigates the multifarious connotations of *authenticity* by placing the word in its historical and cultural contexts. In the past, *authenticity* has been used to refer to the degree to which a design 1) truthfully represents the playwright's idea of the setting, 2) realistically portrays the historical and geographical environment in which the action of the play occurs, or 3) honestly reflects the designer's subjective feeling of the objective world. It has even been used to refer to 4) how accurately a local theatre company mimics a Broadway design in its production. In the minds of our contemporaries, *authenticity* has taken on yet a new meaning.

Since our contemporary notion of *authenticity* involves the contextualization of theatrical design, the core of this paper is focused on the probing of the term *site specificities* (or *in situ*) and its diverse implications for theatrical design. This paper attempts to map out the range of problems faced by modern theatrical designers regarding the issue of *authenticity*, which include (but are not limited to) researching the historical, social, and geopolitical context in which the design will be interpreted, searching for a space to fulfill the needs of a particular production, adapting a design to a specific physical theatre, mobilizing and utilizing local resources and materials to construct the design, recognizing the implications of designing for a touring show, and being able to understand one's audience.

This paper will be presented on PowerPoint. Therefore, a computer with a CD or DVD drive, PowerPoint presentation software and a projection system will be necessary.

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## Ming Chen

Born in Shanghai, China, Ming Chen obtained her two Master's degrees in Stage Design and Production from Shanghai Theatre Academy and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively. She is currently a full professor and resident scenic designer at Kennesaw State University in the U.S. Her designs have been seen at the PQ Stage Design Exhibition 1986 (*Titus Andronicus*, co-design with Hu Miaosheng, Liu Guocai), in professional and academic theatres, such as the Alliance Theatre of Atlanta, 7 Stages, SUNY at Buffalo and Cornell University, and most recently at the Shanghai International Arts Festival (date?) and Shanghai Theatre Festival (date?).

She has published numerous articles and translations in both Chinese and English and has contributed to the publication of three books on theatrical design and visual art.

As the Director of several cross-cultural projects, she, along with her project teams, has received external grants and funds from the National Endowment of the Arts, the Georgia Humanities Council, Cultural Services of the French Embassy, the French Consulate in Atlanta, the Coca-Cola Foundation and the Sino-American Education Consortium.