

# Inspiration that Henrik Ibsen Brings to People: Illustrated by the Example of the Satyagit Ray's Film Version and the Stage Play Version of An Enemy of the People

Ng Siaw Hung

**Abstract**—Henrik Johan Ibsen had varying degrees of cross-cultural influence in different fields. Around the May 4th Movement, many playwrights and writers were deeply affected by him and their works all had an image of Ibsen, during which there was a boom in introducing Ibsen into China and impacted the whole Chinese society. Many Chinese dramas like *Thunderstorm* written by Cao Yu and romantic dramas by the founder of Chinese modern drama, Tian Han were inspired by Ibsen. Besides, Ibsen also influenced Eugene O'Neill, the father of American drama, who was once considered receiving the permanent inheritance, family-themed stories and hereditary guilty, from Ibsen by some critics. Ibsen's influence went far beyond, taking the famous Bangladeshi director Satyajit Ray as an example, he adapted the script and made a film in 1989 based on Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, which was recognized as a great work by public. In addition, in 2018, the overseas cruise of *An Enemy of the People* performed by the famous German troupe, Schaubühne Berlin, which was founded in 1862, has inspired fans all over the world.

**Index Terms**—Henrik Ibsen, an enemy of the people, satyajit ray, schaubühne Berlin.

## I. THE BACKGROUND OF *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE*

The *An Enemy of the People* written in 1882 was the representative work of Ibsen's "Drama of Social Problems". The story took place in a small town with hot springs as the center of tourism, where Doctor Stockmann found that the sewage from factories poisoned the spring and turned the bathing pool into a "hotbed of infectious diseases". The main character Dr. Stockmann was a good doctor who was noble and honest and cared about the benefit of all human beings, however a naive scientist who was not worldly at all at the same time. For the sake of Patients' safety, he proposed a proposal to renovate the spring bath pool and planned to announce it on the newspaper.

While tourism was the mainstay industry in the town, his scientific advice had great conflict with the interests of most residents in the small town. He was therefore against by most liberals and was declared as "an enemy of the people" at the lecture. However, he did not yield. Not only did he fight against bureaucratism and philistinism, but also prepared to bring up those street children with his own son to train them into free and noble people.

Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People* is a great work that fights for the freedom of truth. In Ibsen's opinion, a person was responsible for himself as well for others [1] and he believed

that drama was the only effective way to spread his ideas to the audience. His writing career began under the impact of the international revolution. His romantic dramas were full of patriotism and national spirit, in which he narrated anecdotes of the past in alluding to the present for the sake of educating Norwegians in his living period. This work not only effectively conveyed Ibsen's concepts, but also successfully influenced many playwrights. Owing to the cross-cultural communication, more than 100 works were influenced by Ibsen.

## II. THE FILM VERSION OF *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* BY SATYAJIT RAY

The director from the east, Satyajit Ray, adapted the drama *An Enemy of the People* into the Indian film version *Ganashatru*. Ray has great reputation in India, who is known as the master of Indian films and the founder of the new wave of Indian films. The whole film lasts 99 minutes starring Dhritiman Chatterjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, Subhendu Chatterjee.

The background was modified to an India town and the main character was still a doctor, Gupta. People in the town were infected with cholera by drinking the holy water in the temple and Dr Gupta believed that this tragedy had been caused by the water pipes in the temple and suggested that the temple be closed for maintenance. The doctor's brother, Mr Nisith, an entrepreneur, denied this statement and rejected the proposal to close the temple. The doctor who cared about the human rights still used his willpower to pursue the truth and resist. After being forbidden to publish his thoughts in the newspaper, he had to make a public speech, however being interrupted by entrepreneurs and harassing people. Human beings were manipulated by those emotional religious sentiments and became impulsive idealists. Irrational thinking and angry emotions not only obscured their cognition but also broke down their pursuit of truth.

Obviously, regardless of the basic structure or the theme, Ray's adaption still followed the main purpose of the original. In the film, Ray reinterpreted the theme of *An Enemy of the People* in Indian context. When handling the plots, Ray also presented the difference between East and West. We can therefore see how Ray's adapted script was inspired by Ibsen from following several aspects.

### A. Ecological Awareness and Social Responsibilities

*An Enemy of the People* is a typical drama focusing on ecology which discloses both ecological and social issues. At the time of the 100th anniversary of Ibsen's death,

students from the Institute of Drama and Film of Nanjing University performed a play called *An Enemy of the People* [2], which mentioned Ibsen from the aspect of environmental protection and eco-criticism. This was a very interesting play within a play whose practical significance not only revealed the serious environmental crisis we facing today, but also satirized the selfishness of those social rights activists.

Yang Yingping, in his article *An Enemy of the People and the Ecological Drama in the New Era*, [2] discussed the representative drama of Ibsen from the perspective of ecology. It was human's mission to protect the environment, the homeland of mankind, which also indicated Ibsen's thoughts was ahead of his time.

When Ray made the film in 1989, it had profound meaning for the Indian people who were suffering from the catastrophe by Pupa Chemical Plant in 1984. [3] The author believes that the drama based on environmental pollution can make them resonate or still be afraid. The cholera in the film was the beginning of the destruction of the environment. In the era of Ray, the issue of ecology existed and Ibsen's sense which was nearly a hundred year ahead his time was proved true. What Ray presented in the film is a new type of realism and a stream of consciousness that reflected society. He not only brought out the warning of environmental problems, but also showed the ills of the people's concept in dealing with them.

On the one hand, Ibsen emphasized the necessity of the development of personality, while on the other hand, he opposed the unrestricted personality development. [1] Ibsen believed that a person was responsible for himself as well for others, therefore, the role of doctor created by Ibsen was responsible for society and also a person who insisted on the truth. Ray retained this noble role to expressed the respect and expectation of Indian society for this profession. The role of doctors is easier to be accepted since doctors have been interpreted from the ancient times as the savior of the worldwide human beings.

Even if the doctor has high social status, he will be challenged by society, which indicates the difficulty of shouldering social responsibilities. At the end of the play, Dr. Stockmann told his families: "Yes, I even dare to say that I am one of the most powerful people in the world, however, what I found was I am the most isolated one as well." Also, he showed his silent resistance through raising some street children.

The one called the most powerful and most isolated who represented shouldering social responsibilities was adapted to a person was persecuted as the enemy of religion in Ray's film. In the Indian version, Ray arranged an awkward scene that doctor's families ran away when the spotlight broke dramatically, which made people feel disappointed about social responsibility. Then, while the doctor heard about that his daughter was fired, and the landlord no longer renewed his contract, there was a group of young people came to show their support and approval. Finally, he sighed with satisfaction, "I am not alone any

more." Blending with Ray's own understanding about Ibsen's original work, the adaption was milder and more traditional in dealing with this conflict. Ibsen inspired Ray's artistic expression on the theme of the whole play and Ray, who depended on his artistic literacy, coherently presented the play, which injected fresh blood and stronger expressiveness into the Indian version of *An Enemy of the People*.

#### B. Conflicts of Values and Religious Feelings

Wang Xiaolan pointed the conflict between "moral man" and "economic man", in her thesis on *An Enemy of the People*, which deeply reflected the social and spiritual state of Norway in the 19th century. [4] We can also interpret Ray's adaption from this perspective.

Whether it was Ibsen's work or Ray's adaptation, characters could be distinguished to "moral man" and "economic man", those with social responsibility and those only care about economic interests. The climaxes of both drama and film were the conflicts between "economic man" and "moral man" because of economic interests, which was an example of conflicts of values to show their real moralities.

Ray extended Ibsen's dramatic effect. [5] There was no doubt that from the perspective of Ray, people are emotionally when the conflicts intensified. Inspired by Ibsen, Ray added social responsibilities related to Indian religious feelings. Ray arranged his brother to have a provocative speech at the lecture, which was a success. The conflicting images of the film immediately evoked a more radical opposition, which not only captured the hearts of people, but also blinded those ignorant believers.

Religion has been a sensitive subject, since ancient time. Ray's adaption set the temple as the location of the incident, and the development of the story was more anticipating. Then, doctor's brother used religious feelings to provoke the public's emotions, which was a good way to cover up the facts. Most citizens would not challenge the religion, nor will they believed that there was a problem with the water source of the temple where they worshiped for many years, while in Hinduism, water and flowers were the most basic cult products. Ray related "water source" and religion, which was the biggest highlight in the adaptation of the script.

These poor and ignorant people confused the facts and beliefs. The doubt of the fact might challenge the belief model from ancient time, they therefore were led by their unreasonable feelings. The chaos in the film also symbolized their confused thoughts and choosing to believe or not should be after rethinking. In this film, Ray added the challenge of the Indian faith which added another truth that should adhere to in *An Enemy of the People*.

### III. STAGE PLAY *AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE* BY THE GERMAN DRAMA TROUPE SCHAUBUHNE BERLIN

German director Thomas Ostermeier and Schaubuhne

Berlin troupe performed the drama *An Enemy of the People* in Singapore on May 11st and 12nd, 2018. The play began with a technology subtitles "I am what I am" and a relaxed guitar sound came from behind, in Dr. Stockmann's home, bringing out a naughty feeling. The setting was the dinner table, everyone was eating spaghetti and drinking wine. There were many daily scenes like Stokerman quarreling with his wife and coaxing baby. At this time, the editor of People Herald, Hoff Star, went home and chilled for a while. The Doctor took the letter from his wife, Katrina, who had thought it had not arrived yet. Katrina said: "The letter was at the bottom under the leaflets." This also seemed to mean that the facts were always ignored. The doctor sent the seawater samples to the outside of the town for inspection and finally were confirmed to be contaminated as there had been many victims before. This long-awaited report finally found out the criminal of the accident. After getting the approval from the doctor to publish it, the journalist, the editor and the doctor embraced each other.

They all know that this was a big news. As a doctor, the truth must be published to prevent more people from being victimized while as a media practitioner, it was a headline news. Standing on the standpoint of justice, this news must be released. At that time, Peter, the doctor's brother, mayor and chairman of the bath committee, walked into the house and attempted to persuade everyone not to disclose the truth. He warned everyone with family, family's reputation, and even the livelihood of the whole town, as the beach was the source of income of everyone living here. However, the doctor would not compromise, and their conversations ended in disputes.

The second act: The relaxed music started, and the stairs were set up to modify the location to People Herald editorial office. The sofa was moved aside to make space for actors' movements, and two desks were in the center of stage where the editors were working hard. Then, doctor's brother Peter walked into the stage, taking off his coat, began his endless lobbying, which was almost an instinct of a politician and convinced the editor who originally insisted on justice. Once the news was announced, towns nearby would set up new bathing pools soon, which would bring an unacceptable consequence and nobody wanted their benefits to be affected, furthermore, Hoff Star was the chairman of the committee, as a result, at that moment, everyone was axe-grinding and changed their sides, and the doctor was left alone. Suddenly, the doctors came and Peter quickly hid in the room and didn't want his brother to know that he was here. As the doctor entering the editorial office, the atmosphere here was subtle, the editorial director was wiping the table, and the journalist was pretending to work hard, however, Peter's coat was forgotten on a chair which has already been seen by the doctor. Peter had to show up. It was thought to be a war between the brothers but there was a scene of funny chasing to return the coat that eased the serious atmosphere. Then, the play was stuck in the constant disputes.

The third act: The actors all turned into painters and painted the stage background in white. When the actors were painting, audience sitting in the front pulled a white cloth to avoid soiling the clothes which indicated the organizer's carefulness and way of changing the screen was very novel

for its feeling of real. When the audience were waiting, it seemed that they were also paying attention to everything on the stage. The doctor held a citizen conference to persuade the public to support the closure of the bathing pool. This scene was the finale of the doctor's speech. The powerful and profound speech attracted everyone's attention. This part was Ibsen's political ideals the people should struggle for the truth, representing the concept of "the most powerful person in the world was the most isolated person". The water in the baths was contaminated, and the spiritual worlds of human beings were poisoned as well. This was the core value that Ibsen wanted to express in his script. Fortunately, the theater arranged actors of editors and reporters to interact with the audience, which completely broke the language barrier. Later, the editor jumped onto the stage to attack the doctor: "His lines were misleading, why did all of you still agree with him? Who agreed with the words of such a crazy extremist?" This scene came unexpectedly and everyone stunned. This was a drama without fixed line that audience could involved, and there were many surprising conversations.

(Main idea)

Editor: Why do you agree with him? He said that he wants to dismiss everyone!

Audience: Because we are our own enemies.

Audience: You can't take his words out of context.

Editor: I believe in the system of capitalism and believe in the benefits that material brings us.

Audience: None of this is true.

Editor: What is the truth? The truth is living satisfactorily, enjoying a comfortable life in such a beautiful environment.

Audience: You are now switching the concept as all politicians do, we are now talking about water pollution. (Everyone laughed and the topic was brought back to the sewage.)

Audience: We invite you to experience it yourself, go together, see if you can come out?

Editor: It's Ok after a while.

Audience: No, we have to go now.

Editor: I have to check my clothes.

The final act: The doctor continued to struggle for the truth, what constituted the majority and what was majority? Citizens did not accept and degraded the doctors, by making him a "public enemy", and threw black, yellow, and gray sewage bags to him. At that time, the music started, and doctor seemed to be more lonely with the whole body stains. The doctor who was rejected by all the people was later dismissed by his brother Peter and his wife also lost her job and they were unaccepted by the community that the landlord no longer rented house to them. In a moment, was this the public enemy of the people? Doctor's father-in-law used the savings of the couple to buy them the bathing pool. This ending seemed to be a little ridiculous. At the end of the play, holding the contract of the bathing pool, the two of them looked at each other without words. At this moment, the curtain gradually darkened.

The actor answered a curtain call three times and everyone cheered for this unique performance. This kind of conversation was free, and wiped out extremely precious sparks. Ibsen's script in 1882 was the earliest open-ended script. In addition to revealing the various sociality of the

characters, the play also disclosed a huge conflict between heart and mind. Today, in 2018, there was such an interactive performance in Singapore, which was fortunate.

Earlier before, on September 6, 2018, the Schaubuhne Berlin, with Ibsen's famous drama *An Enemy of the People*, toured China, was expected by Chinese drama fans. However, after three performances in Beijing, the other two performances planned for Nanjing were cancelled. The reason was that the part of the drama that interacted with the audience broke through the red line of Chinese speech control.

The director of the Schaubuhne Berlin, Tobias Veit has gone to many countries with this play. All the audience could see the image of their countries and the times. Though the reaction in the interaction part were different, the appeals and voice showed from was surprisingly the same. The suspension of *An Enemy of the People* was a great regret for Nanjing fans. People are pursuit their ideals and the enemy of the people who has walked in the opposite direction for so many years finally see the dawn. Can people adjust themselves?

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Ibsen create a new era of drama in modern time. Friedrich Engels once described Ibsen in his letter as adding his own personality into the world he create with motivation and independence,<sup>[1]</sup> which was the main thought in *An Enemy of the People*. On the aspect of chasing the truth, even the most lonely person in the world will become the most powerful person. In the adaption by Ray, people can feel that how the phenomenology in the movie exposes something common, close to us but is hidden. [6] These allow the audience to see that things seem to happen and feel the process itself. Many years have passed, but Ibsen's inspiration to people is everlasting. The stage drama scripts adapted by German

dramatist Thomas Ostermeier always reveal a profound theme and create typical characters. These characteristics often make a creation more unique. Stage performances are creating their own unique stage space because of various restrictions but films are using technology and scripts to form stories. Stage plays create a sense of conflict and can produce special effects in a short time. Dramatists are good at using contingency to create an atmosphere to concentrate on the effects of the performance. These skills are reflected in the works of Ibsen's adaptation. This allows us to deeply understand the various forms of drama, existing in the form of performance aesthetics, which is not only a multi-culture, but also the essence of Ibsen's creative spirit.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Ibsen Four Drama [M], *People's Literature Publishing House*, 1978.
- [2] Y. P. Yang, "An enemy of the people and the ecological drama in the new Er [J]," *Jiangnan Forum*, 2012.
- [3] India Bhopal Gas Leak Case. (2015). [Online]. Available: <http://baike.baidu.com/view/3735497.htm>[J/OL]
- [4] X. L. Wang, "The conflict between moral man and economic man and Its contemporary significance [J]," *Drama Literature*, 2010.5
- [5] C. Yan, "Satyagit: Pioneer of modern Indian cinema [J]," *Chinese and foreign Cultural Exchanges*, 2006.01
- [6] M. Chen, "Film and television culture," Beijing Broadcasting Institute Press [M], vol. 6, no. 96, p. 103, 2001.



**Ng Siaw Hung** studies the Chinese literature in Nanjing University China, and focusing on Indian Literature, major research for Munshi Premchand works (1880-1936). And currently she is a doctoral candidate at Peking University China in Indian Literature. She is currently working on some classical Malay literature which is influenced by Hinduism.

She also maintains a keen interest on the historiography of China's ancient academics. Her current project is on South East Asia (Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia) ancient academic culture. She has authored 2 papers in China-South East Asia Conferences (GuangZhou China, June 2019) and Visiting Program for Young Sinologists (XiAn China, Sept 2018).