

The Leaning Tower of Pisa: New Production of National Theatre of China Reflects upon Marriage Life

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“Marriage life resembles the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which keeps leaning, leaning, but never falls down.” On October 21st, 2016, *The Leaning Tower of Pisa* produced by National Theatre of China premiered in the small theatre of National Theatre of China. In depicting the quarrels between one couple, the play reflects upon the truth of marriage life with realist approaches. After watching the performance, the audiences could still think it over in retrospect.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa is written by Russian renowned playwright Надежда Михайловна Птушкина, translated by Wang Lidan, professor of Nankai University, directed by Wang Jiannan, director of National Theatre of China and Zhai Xiaoxing and Zhao Rui star in the play. The main story follows that in an ordinary day, an ordinary family, and a rupture between an ordinary couple. The play traces the trials of life into the real definition of “love”. The couple who have been put up with each other for years, finally get into the heart of the other side, and they have new understanding and discoveries about each other.

Надежда Михайловна Птушкина is a Russian modern playwright, famous for her unique portrayal of love and marriage between wife and husband. Many of her works center around two persons, and she employs unique context and relationship to express her understanding of love and marriage. Director Wang Jiannan said that *The Leaning Tower of Pisa* is through a small unit of society to reflect the freedoms of individuals and social nature of marriage life. The dialogues are full of life, among which lots of are pet phrases of the audiences. According to Director Wang Jiannan, marriage should be established upon love, and the essence of this whole play is “Marriage life resembles the Leaning Tower of Pisa”. In the end, the wife plans to take flight to pursue her ideal happiness, and the marriage might be continued, verified or ended, which leaves an endless space for the audience to imagine.

Zhai Xiaoxing and Zhao Rui who star in the play are classmates from 1994-1998, in The Central Academy of Drama in China. In the entrance examination, they were divided into one group to act a couple by chance. Though it has been the first time for them to cooperate again after graduation, they understand each other very well. Many people think that as they have been known each other for years, it must be very easy to rehearse, but Zhai Xiaoxing said, “Since the very first day I got the script, we have held different stands, and been through a hard time to before reaching a perfect state.”

Faced with different standing points by the two actors, Director Wang Jiannan said that both the director and two actors need to overthrow the previous inherent thinking in order to maximize more possibilities of the characters and the drama itself. For the second creation of *The Leaning Tower of Pisa*, it is not only a rehearsal, but

also a laboratory and a seminar, which enables this play to find more resonance among Chinese audience.

As to their feelings towards this play, the actor and actress responded that “very real and full of life”. For Zhai Xiaoxing, who has been married for over 10 years, said, “Only the family in harmony could everything prospers. A couple in a family bears too many important responsibilities. This work enlightens me and sheds new lights upon the issues concerning raising children and taking care of old parents for me. ” Zhao Rui holds that “just as what Leo Tolstoy said, ‘the happy families are the same; however for those unhappy, there are varied misfortunes’, I strongly feel that some feelings could not be expressed with words. No matter in love or in hatred, people’s longing for happy life is always insistent”.

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