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The feeling of being watched: lived Confucianism and theatricality in Kuo Pao Kun's mid-1980s monodramas

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ABSTRACT

The first plays Kuo Pao Kun (1939–2002) wrote after being released from detention in 1980 coincided with a concerted effort by the Singapore government to formalise the Confucian basis upon which it claimed that Singapore society and its increasing economic success were built. Kuo was no traditionalist, but *The Coffin is Too Big for the Hole* (1980) and *Confucius in Singapore* (1981) explored the tension between the traditional and the modern.

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Notes

1 The Shared Values are: Nation before community and society above self; Family as the basic unit of society; Community support and respect for the individual; Consensus, not conflict; Racial and religious harmony (Lim and Tan [2015](#)). For a Confucian critique of the Confucian basis of the Shared Values, see Tan ([2012](#)).

2 In terms of Anglophone scholarship, see, for instance, the collection in which Tamney's own claim appears (Yang and Tamney [2012](#)), as well as Bell ([2008](#)), and the essays collected in Hammond and Richey ([2015](#)) and Billioud ([2018](#)).

3 "Make sure you are not being dishonest with him [your Lord] when you stand up to him" (The Analects 14: 22). Hereafter, I will follow convention in referencing cited Analects only by the relevant chapter and section.

4 The baldest articulation of this hierarchy in The Analects states: "Let the ruler be the ruler, the minister the minister, the father father, and the son son" (12: 11).

5 See, in particular, the Tables outlining mourning wear for various family members, as determined by their relation to the deceased, in The Sacred Books of China ([1966](#), 209). One further notes that funeral rites take up 50 per cent of Chu Hsi's Family Rituals ([1991](#)).

6 Kuo's play The Eagle and the Cat (1997) reiterated the point through a telling inversion, when the unnamed narrator states near the beginning of his fantastical story that "It should have been a dream. Because something like that couldn't have happened in this world. And yet it was definitely not a dream" (Kuo [2012](#), 115).

7 A distinctive Singaporean monodrama, representative of a resource-rich, multiethnic, and ultimately fatalistic Nanyang Nakan (that is, Singaporean) came to thought.

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Paul Rae is Associate Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Melbourne. He has published widely on contemporary theatre and performance theory, with a focus on the Asian region. He is author of Theatre & Human Rights (2009) and Real Theatre: Essays in Experience (2019), and a former editor of the journal Theatre Research International. He is at work on two new books: Performing Islands and Mousetraps: Adventures in Theatrical Capture.

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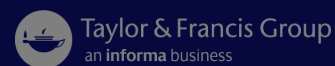
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