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The summary of the doctoral dissertation
‘The postmodern world in the work of Meng Jinghui’

The dissertation entitled ‘The postmodern world in the work of Meng Jinghui’ has been written under the supervision of Professor Lidia Kasarełło.

The primary goal of the dissertation is to analyse the work of Meng Jinghui (孟京辉) and his output as a director and playwright. The author argues that the oeuvre of the artist is deeply rooted in the aesthetic conventions of postmodern art, which is apparent in several layers such as the theatrical, literary and social aspects as well as the choice of subject matter.

The policy of opening up initiated by Deng Xiaoping brought about rapid changes in post-Mao China. The ‘cultural fever’, the Tian'anmen Square Massacre and the extremely fast economic growth, which cost the lives of so many people, had a tremendous impact on the development of culture in the 1980s and 1990s and left its mark also in theatre. The circles of the Chinese spoken theatre (*huaju*) did not fail to notice the reforms, buzzwords and slogans, the political and social campaigns, the rapidly changing circumstances and the eugenic attempts at defining the new Chinese man.

The dissertation in hand reveals the postmodern categories apparent in the theatrical circles of China and the time when the plays under consideration were written and staged. The main characteristics of postmodernism in Meng’s work as a playwright and director include the following: intertextuality, the correspondence of theatrical arts, experimenting with conventions, linguistic stylizations, *postmodernity and its discontents* and postdramatism.

Meng Jinghui has been fascinated with the aesthetics of the Theatre of the Absurd, the formal foundations of Grotowski’s theatre and the experiments of some European theatre artists (particularly of the 1950s-1970s such as Handke, Ionesco, Beckett and Fo). His theatre has been by far the most distinct theatre of China of the early twenty-first century. The road to his immense popularity was far from easy and led him through the hardships of China in the earlier decades. The 1990s are deemed by critics to have been the most appreciated period of Meng’s work and constitute the primary research material for this dissertation. To this end, the attention of the author has been focused on these realisations which have proved to be the milestones in Meng’s output: *I*

love XXX (1994), *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* (1998), *Rhinoceros in love* (1999) and *Two Dogs Views' on life* (2008).

Meng Jinghui has an entirely postmodern approach to artistic work and is open to bold experiments with theatrical forms and texts. The dissertation aims to discuss this work by making use of various tools developed in the fields of sociology, theatre and literary studies. The principal tools include (in order of appearance):

- emotional capitalism by Eva Illouz
- the postdramatic form of performance and text according to Lehmann and intertextuality
- the carnivalization of language and the theatrical carnivalization according to Bakhtin and his commentators
- the Other in the postmodern society, the man of the outside according to the sociological theory of Zygmunt Bauman

The dissertation includes translations of three widely acclaimed plays by Meng Jinghui which hitherto have not been translated in Polish.

The dissertation is composed of seven chapters. The first two present the history of Chinese spoken theatre with particular emphasis on avant-garde and *wayward* theatre of which Jinghui is representative. The second chapter offers a definition of Meng's art which escapes attempts at simple categorizations.

Chapter three provides an analysis of the play and performance *I love XXX* of 1994, which has proved to be the most important manifesto in China's postdramatic theatre.

The fourth chapter describes the play *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* by Dario Fo. The performance was a brief foray into communistic art. The dissertation observes the uncommon blend of Western (*commedia dell'arte*) and Chinese aesthetics (*huajixi*) drawing on the example of buffoon theatre.

The following chapter focuses on the greatest commercial success in the history of Chinese spoken theatre (*huaju*), i.e. *Rhinoceros in love*. The authors of the play draw attention to the fortunes of individuals who can hardly cope with the rapidly changing world. This phenomenon is discussed from a number of standpoints including the theory of emotional capitalism in times of free market economy by Eva Illouz.

The final chapter, which presents a discussion of the play *Two Dogs' views on life*, draws attention to the topos of the Other in the postmodern era which, according to Bauman, is a source of discontent. This part of the dissertation includes an attempt at defining the new China, the new

Chinese man and the elements of social eugenics emerging in Chinese society.