

**TRANSCRIPT
OF**

DESCENDANTS OF THE EUNUCH ADMIRAL (2015): POST SHOW DIALOGUE

Presented by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay
as part of *The Studios: fifty* season (2015)
1 May 2015 at Esplanade Theatre Studio

With director Jeff Chen, assistant director Andrew Sutherland,
performers Jean Ng, Koh Wan Ching, Lee Wei Ting (trombonist),
Najib Soiman, Nora Samosir, and Timothy Nga.
Hosted by Tay Tong

Transcribed by Licia Sucipto

Published on 9 February 2017 on www.esplanade.com

Notice:

This document is transcribed from a video recording of the event.

Minor edits have been made for clarity.

At some points of the discussion, members of the panel adopted a manner of speaking that reflect the colloquial way English can be spoken and understood in Singapore. We retained these instances as-is within the transcript.

Every attempt has been made to ensure the factual accuracy of statements made during the event. Any transcribing error, omission or mis-transcription is inadvertent. The statements, views and opinions expressed during the event and within the transcript do not reflect the official standing or position of The Esplanade Co Ltd.

This transcript is made available for personal or research use only. No part of this transcript may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means without prior written permission and proper attributions. All copyright and intellectual property rights within this document, without limitation, are retained by their respective owners.

Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral is written by the late Kuo Pao Kun.
It premiered in 1995.

For more information, please contact slicia@esplanade.com.

Tay Tong (TT): It's a pleasure to be here. My name is Tay Tong, and I'm the Managing Director of TheatreWorks¹. And also, I was the producer for the first version of *Descendants (of the Eunuch Admiral)*. So this evening, I'm supposed to be facilitating this post show dialogue, but basically, what I'm going to do, is actually to get everybody who is involved in the process of making this fabulous performance this evening to actually share with you their thoughts.

So first of all, introductions are in order. To my right, my immediate right, is Jeff Chen, the director of the piece. [audience applause] Next to him is Andrew, who has been assisting him in the directing. And then after Andrew is Wei Ting, who is our wonderful trombonist. Then, one of the performers and collaborators, Wan Ching.

And then to my extreme left, none other than Jean Ng, Nora Samosir, and of course, Tim (Timothy) Nga. [audience applause]

So I think that—um, [performer Najib Soiman walks onto stage, Tay Tong laughs] and none other than Najib. [audience applause]

So actually, I was very curious about how Jeff would approach *Descendants*. Throughout the entire period of his rehearsals, I've never talked to him. I didn't ask him how the show was coming along, what were his ideas and his concepts. I did not read any of the reviews, I did not speak to anybody prior to this evening. I personally am pleasantly surprised, because I never quite expect this drama, this campiness [laughs] to be here on stage. Um, so I think that time—I'm curious actually, Jeff, *what* [audience laughter] made you do this play? *Why* did you do what you did? [laughs]

Jeff Chen (JC): A bit about the process. Chong Tze Chien, who's from—who is festival director for this festival², approached me last year. And he gave me a choice of 50 plays from Singapore English language theatre to choose from. And then I looked at the list of titles.

And I said, "Tze Chien, um, I think I would take *Descendants*."

And he said, "Why?"

I said, "I think that's the only one that I'm capable of doing. The rest I don't know how to do." [audience laughter]

As a director, I have a love-hate relationship with text, okay. And I usu—my interest does not lie with well made plays. So I really like text that's open for interpretation. So out of the fifty plays, this one is the most open text. And also because I remembered watching as... I think, [points at an audience member] at your age [audience laughter]. A lot of my students are

¹ A theatre company in Singapore.

² Jeff was referring to *The Studios: fifty* season as a festival. Chong Tze Chien was the co-curator for the season together with Esplanade's programming team members: Rydwan Anwar, Joyce Yao, Marlene Ditzig and Fezhah Maznan.

here today. So I remembered watching *Descendants*, Keng Sen³'s *Descendants*, in Victoria Theatre, (...) followed by Pao Kun's Chinese version (of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*) when I was about seventeen, eighteen.

So it left a very lasting impression. At that age, I really couldn't grasp a lot of the meanings. But over the years—I'm forty this year, when I look back at it, and I read the text again, a lot of meanings, new meanings, emerge for me, you know, after living life. More. So for me it's a really attractive text, and it's a really wonderful opportunity to contribute my work to this festival.

TT: Well, actually you've not quite answered the question! [audience laughter] [laughs] I'm sorry! Because you just gave us a very incisive, you know, good introduction about how it got to this stage, but you have not told us what you *did*. Why did you do what you do with Pao Kun's text, which is beautiful.

JC: Okay. I like to take big risk. As a director, I always like to take big risks, and early on in my career, I failed a lot of times *lah*, okay. I always thought I succeeded, but other people didn't think so, right. [audience laughter] But I've always liked to take big risks, okay, I always like to take big risks. And I'm most interested in the possibilities of theatre. And I always would like audiences—if you tell me tonight, you know, that "I didn't think theatre could be like this", I would be very happy. Yeah, I would be very happy. Because all the time, I'm challenging myself. I'm thinking. I grew up in the theatre, you know, I grew up by doing all these assembly plays and all the straight plays, you know, and all the social conscious plays with TNS⁴, you know. But as I grew older, I started to be more interested in what are the possibilities of theatre, you know. So that's where I'm coming from.

And when I looked at the text, right, I had to think about how I would interpret the text. How do I interpret the text differently for an audience. So that is constantly what I'm thinking about when I come up with concepts. Yeah. [To Tay Tong] Does that answer your question?

TT: Yes... [laughs] Well to a certain extent yes. Because I think I had the privilege of watching your earlier work, which was *LIFT*⁵, and when you talked about the different ghosts that have come back from your previous productions, it is very clear there's some kind of template that is happening [Jeff nods]. So actually, the next question is more for the performers and the collaborators. Did you all think that you contributed much as actors? Okay, it's not to be rude or anything. Because the thing is that we are all so used to the fact that actors have to say, you know, to deliver speech, right? But in this evening performance, there's none of that. But what was happening on stage, we were hearing these wonderful voiceovers from very familiar voices, ranging from Remesh⁶, to Sasi⁷, to Swee Lin⁸, Kay

³ Ong Keng Sen. Artistic Director of TheatreWorks, who directed the premiere production of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* in 1995.

⁴ Abbreviation for The Necessary Stage, a Singapore theatre company.

⁵ *LIFT: Love Is Flower The* is a TheatreWorks production directed by Jeff Chen, which premiered in 2013.

⁶ Remesh Panicker. A Singapore actor and voiceover talent.

⁷ T. Sasitharan. A Singapore theatre educator and director of Intercultural Theatre Institute.

⁸ Neo Swee Lin. A Singapore actress.

THE STUDIOS: *fifty*

Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral (2015): Post Show Dialogue

1 May 2015, Esplanade Theatre Studio

Siu⁹, Janice¹⁰, Ivan¹¹, Meng Chue¹², et cetera et cetera. And then, what we are watching on stage is a staged vision of performers *really* giving their hundred percent in creating another kind of image. So I'm curious, for all the five performers on stage, what was going through your mind? What was the rehearsal process like for you guys? Did you all have the recording that was going on, during the rehearsals?

Nora Samosir (Nora): This is not the first time that I'm working with Jeff. So for me to answer is actually a bit easy *lah*, because I've worked with him before. I think it will be more interesting to hear from Wan Ching and Tim. [audience laughter]

Because I know Jeff's methodology. Essentially Jeff wants the actors to play. He gives you a frame. You know, "This scene, I just want these things in the scene, and then you decide how you're going to get there."

So it's like, as far away from Stanislavski¹³ as you can get. You know, the motivation *lah*, arc *lah*, all that, don't have. [audience laughter] No, none of that.

Jeff is interested in a certain thing happening in a scene, like *that* thing has to happen. *How* it happens, is up to the actor to find. And if you feel desperately that you need to have a reason why you are doing the actions that you are doing, then you create your own scenario *lah*, you create your own narratives in your head, you create your own drama. But that's not what Jeff will give you, because Jeff will not give you any drama, *at all*.

And then, he told me that I only have to do two things in this play. And I didn't—I don't think [Jeff laughs] it's the standard that he wants. [points at Jeff] He's already giggling. I only have to do two things in this play. I have to write backwards, and I have to make a balloon poodle. That's *all* I need to do in this play. [audience laughter] And I hope I succeeded.

[Audience Applause]

Come on, Tim. Newbie!

Timothy Nga (TN): So I got involved in this through a Facebook message [audience laughter]. Literally. He sent me a Facebook message that says, "Hello, Tim!"

And then he asked me if I want to be a part of this. I heard a bit of things about Jeff Chen. I had seen *LIFT*, and I thought, heck, why not, you know. I'm kind of bored. Ya, literally, why not. Sometimes you do, right.

So the rehearsal was really like, "Okay, so you enter the room, and I want you to make a

⁹ Lim Kay Siu. A Singapore actor.

¹⁰ Janice Koh. A Singapore actress.

¹¹ Ivan Heng. A Singapore actor and theatre director, and Artistic Director of W!ld Rice, a theatre company in Singapore.

¹² Lok Meng Chue. A Singapore actress.

¹³ Nora was referring to the Stanislavskian classical approach to acting, which requires performers to thoroughly analyse a character's motivation in order to act.

phonecall, [laughs] and then Wan Ching is going to come in..." It's really like that. Then we do *lah*, then he (would say), "Er, don't want. Do again. Don't want. Do again."

And it was like that. And then the next day we came in and... I think the next week we came in and, "So now, here are these mannequin limbs. Do something with them." So we just play, play, play, play, play... and after three days, we had what you saw, in its basic shape, and then we spent the rest of the time just honing it.

At no point—what I really appreciate is that at no point did Jeff tell us his intention, or what the imagery is supposed to be. He left it to us to work it out. And it was okay if we had something different, which is quite a wonderful gift for an actor, to just... especially here, I think. In Singapore. I don't know about elsewhere, I don't have a lot of experience working elsewhere, but I find that here, this is a wonderful kind of openness and spaciousness which we often lack. As a country, not just in the arts scene.

Koh Wan Ching (WC): Because we weren't very sure what was the big picture, because we were devising along the way also—sometimes I also don't know if he has the big picture [audience laughter], so to stay very involved, I was trying to find as many things to work with as possible, like the actors who are not there, as in the voice actors, the music, the composer, architecture, time and space... Yeah. So I was trying to... hang on to as many things as possible.

Najib Soiman (Najib): Actually, we don't only learn to do *this*... [audience laughter] We were sent for a workshop, sculpting a lot of things from flowers to butterflies. And in the end, *this* is what I do [audience and performers laugh and applauds]. That's where the director's got the power *lah*.

I've done *Descendants* before. The version (which was interpreted by) Alfian Sa'at¹⁴, which was in Malay. So when I was told that I was going to do *Descendants* again, I was so excited, because it was one of the plays that I love so much. So when I came for rehearsals—the journey of the rehearsals, all that, they have already told you, it's like Jeff will be like, "I show you what you do." And after that he'd stop, and he will say, "Okay, Najib, your turn."

Then I was like, "Huh? Do what?" [audience laughter]

"Do *lah!*"

But at first I was very afraid. We seldom go through that process. So for me it's like, okay, if I *kena rembat*, I anything *lah*, whatever *lah*¹⁵. But like they said, the text is ongoing, we hear the voicovers—(we) try out best *lah kan*, to relate. But cannot relate one, (it was) very hard. So whatever—balloon *lah*, whatever, we go ahead with it *lah*.

¹⁴ A Singapore playwright.

¹⁵ *Kena rembat* is a Malay expression that literally translates to "(get) whacked". In this context, Najib meant to say, "If I did this wrongly and get criticized, so be it."

So it's very exciting. Like (the strength of an actor), dialogues, he took it away from us. So it's like something—your strength, he took it away. So how (do) you want to handle that now. *Pandai-pandai lah*¹⁶!

TT: So Jean! Jean, how did you handle it?

Jean Ng (JN): [inaudible]

TT: No, no. I'm sure you have something extraordinary to tell us.

JN: No, I don't. Basically I just told Jeff, "I will walk with you, just tell me what, when [Nora turns to Jean and whispers something]. Don't tell me too last minute but, you know, I will walk with you. I..." [laughter from some members of the panel] Because, not that I trust him in the sense that... Um... Well, I trust that it will always be an interesting process with Jeff. That it will be... very inspiring. It may fail very miserably and people might hate it and all that, but I know that it will be a ... (worthwhile) process to work with him. That was all.

Yeah. What I did is very self explanatory what... [audience laughter]

TT: It was a fabulous show, thank you. [Nora whispers to Tay Tong] Oh, definitely. So now we're all very desperate to hear what the audience think. The floor is now open for any comments, any questions, for anyone of the artists or creatives sitting here.

Audience 1 (A1): Jeff, were you the one who did *Asian Boys Volume 1*¹⁷?

JC: Yes.

A1: I want to tell you that it is still one of my all-time favourite plays. I'm not much of a theatregoer, but I think I have to persist in asking the Tay Tong question, why you did what you did, and I think, point-blank, I should ask you, why did you choose to have this sexual depiction of the play?

JC: I think a lot of people didn't pick out this thing about the text, right. Usually people would take a look at it from a very—how *Descendants* is a social or a political allegory, right? And for me, I picked out that the text is actually very phallogocentric. Right? It is constantly, over and over again, mourning the loss of the phallus. Yeah.

So for me, that's why there is all these, you know, castration... I mean, even structurally. The play progresses until a certain point where there was a break, right? And then the house light comes on. To a certain extent, the structure of this piece of work is also fractured. And then there's repeatedly, there's constantly there are a lot of phallus, and all these are fake phalluses, they are not the real thing. Yeah. So for me, if you ask me about why I did what—

¹⁶ *Pandai* is a Malay word that literally translates to "clever". In this context, the expression means "go figure".

¹⁷ *Dreamplay: Asian Boys Vol. 1* is a play written by Alfian Sa'at and premiered in 2000 at The Necessary Stage Black Box.

because for me that's a very vague question because I did a lot of things *leh* [audience laughter].

A1: So what inspired you? What inspired you to take on this vision?

JC: I think that, like, why I take on this right, I think as I get older, why are a lot of things within Pao Kun's text resonates with me, is that I feel like I am the eunuch. Yeah. So I'm starting to feel very disempowered. And I'm becoming... so I can feel for that. Yeah. So that's what entices me to do this play.

A1: My second question, I'm a bit shy to say this, this is my first time watching a Pao Kun play, I've never actually read or watch any of his plays before. So would you say that um, the play was written at a time where there was kind of a critique on Singapore's social system, or the regimented system of Singapore?

JC: (...) Yeah, I think that... you know Corrie¹⁸? Corrie, in her review today, in the Straits Times¹⁹ right, she ended with something like, Singapore has really changed, but it's still the same. Or something like that, right. So I think that—this is what, twenty over years ago...

JN: Twenty. 1995.

JC: ...1995? So, how many years ago is that... Twenty years! [audience laughter] Yeah! So, twenty years ago right? And now, have we really moved beyond? And for me I feel, you know, I think Singapore is really like an imperial court, really, and there is only one—it's still like that, I think. And a lot of people are still eunuchs, okay. So that's one level of reading it, as an allegory of Singapore society. But if you were to blow it up bigger, then you realise actually all human beings wherever you are, are being oppressed by some kind of a system, as long as you live within human society, there are *rules*, right?

Has anyone—I always recommend this book to my—very cynical, shouldn't recommend books to my students okay. There's this book, I think you all have heard about it right, *48 Laws of Power*? No? You go read it! Yeah. [audience laughter] *48 Laws of Power* right, apparently all these management people read it, and it's quite true. 48 laws and the first law, it says, never—if you want power, this is the book, that you have to get and read and learn the 48 laws, in order to get power. Right?

So the first rule, if I remember correctly, is never outshine your master.

[Momentary silence, followed by audience laughter] Right?

So there is this, sort of like a... And this book is not written by a Singaporean, right, it's written by an American, right? So it's either you are sort of—you could say that the ideology in Singapore is very oppressive, but if you are not oppressed by Singapore, you are oppressed by corporatism. Then you're oppressed by—you can even be oppressed by

¹⁸ Corrie Tan. A Singapore journalist and arts reporter.

¹⁹ Singapore's national daily broadsheet newspaper.

democracy. Which can be very oppressive. Right?

But Pao Kun choose to use the loss of the phallus as a metaphor for this disempowerment. For me, that's very strong.

A1: One final question. The video, was that an—

JC: Ah, no. The video is rated G²⁰. It is rated G. [audience laughter] G. Not even PG²¹. G!

TT: G for Genitalia? Or G for... [audience laughter]

JC: No! G for General!

[Audience applause and laughter. Jeff laughs and shook his head.]

No. Rated G for General. General audience.

TT: *Oh okay*. Unlike your ROI, CSR—okay, next question please.

Audience 2 (A2): Just now Tay Tong asked Jeff about his creative process with the actors and the collaborators. So I'm curious with the process with the designers. So if any of the designers are around, is it possible to also enquire...

JC: If you came last night—usually nowadays it's like that, it's like industrial protocol standard. So usually the opening night, the designers would be here. Then after that, they *zao*²². [audience laughter]

But anyway, what would you like to know about the...

A2: So I gather that the process with the actors and the collaborators was very freeform. You gave them very general directions and then left them to play. With the designers, was there—was it also similar or...?

JC: It was quite similar. Okay, there are certain things la. This set is a fixed set. It's already fixed, that means it is a recycled set design. It's recycled. It was first used in this space by *Twelve Angry Men* by Nine Years Theatre²³. And then after that, I bought over the set, stored it for nine months, and used it for my production over at TheatreWorks, *LIFT*. And then, after that it was dismantled, throw away. Throw away already, this time round when I

²⁰ A G (General) rating advisory for video or film in Singapore indicates that the themes presented are suitable for viewers of all ages.

²¹ A PG (Parental Guidance) rating advisory for film and video indicates that the themes presented should be suitable for viewers below 13 years old and, according to the Board of Film Censors' Classification Guidelines provided by the Media Development Authority, "special attention should be paid to their impact on children".

²² *Zao* (走) is a Hokkien word which literally translates to walk. In this context, it is also appropriated to a Singlish expression meaning "leave".

²³ Commissioned and performed in 2013 as part of Esplanade's *Huayi Chinese Festival of Arts*.

decided to do *Descendants*, I called Chee Wai²⁴ and said, “Hey, let’s build the same set again. Do you still have the drawings?” He said, “Yeah.” So this is an exact replica of that set again. So this is the third time that this set design is being used.

So that’s for set. And then for sound, I think—I work with Jeff²⁵ and—the sound and light sort of go together. I don’t like to micromanage people. Yeah, I don’t like to be micromanaged, so I don’t micromanage. So I just give them roughly certain things that I want, and within those parameters they will come up with something and then we would discuss further. Usually, that’s how we work. Yeah, have I answered your question?

TT: ... sort of [laughs]. We’re moving on to the next question.

Audience 3 (A3): This is with regards to the recording of the original text. You have had many practitioners coming in to record the text so were they allocated these portions, or did they pick, or—and also what’s the rationale of using a child for the final monologue?

JC: First, I casted them. I casted the sixteen voiceover talents and again, I don’t know *lah*, I’m very fortunate. I’m always very fortunate. You know how I hold all these people in high esteem, all the VOs, the sixteen VOs. As well as all my actors here. You know, I’m constantly amazed by why these people want to work with me. But I’m always very fortunate. Everytime I make a casting call right... I mean, you know, I just... over Facebook—Facebook very useful [audience laughter].

One night over Facebook, I said, okay *lah*, I ask Ivan. Ivan Heng. I said, “Eh Ivan ah, I’m doing this show. Can help me record VO?”

“For you, anything, darling.” [audience laughter]

[Jeff plays an expression of shock]

So I casted them, okay, that answered your question, right?

The other question was why the young child was used for the last VO. Okay. The young child is actually Lucas Yeo, who is Janice Koh’s son. What was the last voiceover for you? What was it about? What did you get?

A3: Well, um, from the original text that I read, I get mostly the sense of... hopelessness?

JC: You felt that it was hopelessness?

²⁴ Wong Chee Wai, the set designer for this production of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral (2015)* and *Twelve Angry Men (2012)*.

²⁵ Jeffrey Yue, a Singapore sound designer who is part of the collective Ctrl Fre@k.

A3: Yes. And um, especially in—I mean with regards to Zheng He²⁶ it came about as a very—implied this meaning of being very lost, of cultural dislocation.

JC: Okay. Cultural dislocation. We're culturally dislocated, right? Culturally dislocated. And if you take the text as allegory of Singapore, as Singaporeans, we are culturally dislocated and we are socially, politically disempowered. And if I were to place the text, the last text about this, you know, looking into the future, "The market is calling me," and it is read by a child, what am I actually saying?

[Silence, followed by audience laughter.]

So um, yeah... so for me—usually I don't like to give, you know... it will lock down your ... [gesture] Ask my students *lah*, it will lock down your imagination. Usually I like to let you sort of think about it. But for me, really, it's a child. It's a direct comment. Do we want this for our children? It is a very direct reading, interpretation. We are descendants of the eunuch admiral. So our children are... [pause] descendants of the eunuch admiral? [audience laughter]

TT: Over there, that gentlemen.

Audience 4 (A4): So I see you use a lot of props and visuals to show different emotions at times, but what's with the inflatable duck, chicken thing at the end? [audience laughter] Is it, like, did you have the prop? Or was it something you just wanted to add in for fun? Or is it to end off with a bang?

JC: Some people think it's a duck, some people think it's a—I don't know *lah*, turkey, whatever *lah* huh. [audience laughter]

What do you think?

A4: I'm guessing it's just the element of fun, but ... but what's your response to that?

JC: So, it is an element of fun? [To another audience member] You think it is an element of fun? [audience laughter] Huh, [name redacted]? I'm conducting class. [Jeff calls out to another student in the audience]

Again, okay, if I tell you what I think, again, it will lock down, it will restrict your imagination, you know. Yeah, there may be multiple readings and interpretations. I have my own. Yeah.

TT: But I must say that I just love the campiness of tonight's work. I love it, it's fabulous. The sequins and the feathers, and everything else.

Andrew Sutherland (AS): It's "high-camp".

TT: It's "high-camp". [audience laughter] Okay, we have time for two more questions or two

²⁶ Reference to Admiral Zheng He (also: Cheng Ho), the main subject of *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*.

more commentaries, so anyone? Someone behind...

Audience 5 (A5): Hi, thanks for the great performance. I just wanted to ask, the props, was it—did you decide like, certain props or all the props at the start and then told the actors to play with it or was it developed during the process?

JC: What kind of—which props are you referring to? Give me examples, I'll tell you where it comes from. [audience laughter]

A5: Er, that pink thing.

JC: Oh that thing there! That thing is Um, I'm completely accountable for it. [audience laughter]

So, yeah, that thing there is actually a punching bag *lah*, You know, those use for [punching gesture] right? So it's used for punching bag. And for me, I had a very strong visual image of something heavy, going up and down like piling, and really hitting the ground with some force *lah*. That was the visual impetus. So if you ask me about that prop then, yeah, I asked them to get the prop, and then asked my costume designer Anthony²⁷ to dress it up.

[Audience laughter]

TT: He did well.

JC: He did well.

TT: [laughs]

JC: So, the other props are like... the other props are like, if you asked about the balloons? Yeah. So the balloon is... at my work place, I was inspired by my work *lah*. [audience laughter] Why you all laugh?

No, but one day—don't want to tell you where I work [audience laughter]. But anyway, one day when we were all very busy, then they said that, "No, we must go downstairs *now*. *Must!*"

Then I said, "Why? We got a lot of work to do."

"No. For welfare, you must go downstairs."

"Okay."

So I put aside my work, and then so I went downstairs, and all these very unwilling colleagues all sit around.

²⁷ Anthony Tan.

“For your welfare, we have gotten somebody in to teach you all how to do balloon sculpting,”

[Audience laughter and applause]

So I spent two hours *lah*, for my welfare, to learn balloon sculpting.

TT: But, you did benefit from it.

JC: Yeah, yeah! I did, I did! Actually I engaged the same instructor [audience laughter]. I got her card. So I engaged the same instructor, her name is Auntie Pinkie, okay. We sort of engaged her and then she came and gave a workshop to my actors. Yeah, that’s why they could do it.

TT: Okay. One more comment or one more question please. Any last question?

Audience 6 (A6): I just want to ask, for you—based on what the actors have told us so far, it seems to be very much about the process of creation. For you then, Jeff, would you say that the work was more about the process? Or was it more about the final results or the big picture in the end?

JC: I think my... like, what was it? What it just now, somebody said [rhetorical musings]...

All my works are parts of my process. It’s a *really long* process. Yeah. Okay. And there are parts—it’s always work-in progress. Okay? That’s why you see things that are from my previous productions. And certain things keep coming back. You know. Those people that are familiar with my work if—so maybe next year, usually very busy, usually just one production I can do a year, look out for my show and then next time you might come and you might see the same set again! [audience laughter]

And then you might see certain things that you saw today. And there might be something new, or maybe something that you saw today was developed into something else. Maybe the punching bag becomes something else. So my work are all sort of part of a—my very long process, yeah.

A6: Okay, sorry. Maybe I’ll clarify a little bit. Is it more about the process, or the storytelling? Because, I mean, you took a very, very famous script, and then you sort of created it into this sort of party, almost. So is the story still very important to you?

JC: There wasn’t like... for me, Pao Kun’s text was not a *story* per say. Because when you used the term story right, actually Pao Kun’s text really didn’t—they were all fragments, right, so they were all fragments. Some of them can’t even be constituted as story in the way that, you know, that we would use the term, or narrative or...

There weren’t even characters. Um... yeah. Not in the way that, you know, mainstream plays are. So actually, you are asking—if I could try to understand a bit more of your question, are you asking me whether I am trying to say something, or is it part of a very

insular artist process that I'm more concerned about? Am I very interested about articulating something to the audience? Is that what you're trying to...? Yes, I am. [audience laughter]

Yes. Yes, I am. And yes, yes, I am.

It's just that perhaps, I... I speak in a different kind of language, or maybe my images... you know, if you ask me to sort of tell you like why I did certain things or what certain—the whole play can be completely ... it's not just irreverent party. From the very beginning all the way to the very end, right, it's just... you can—certain parts is visual images [sic] that if you think a bit more about it, you would understand. And certain things right, for me—okay *lah*, I give *lah*, I give.

[Audience laughter]

TT: You don't have to.

JC: I don't have to, but okay. Like if I tell you that Pao Kun's play *ah*, is all about like, um, people being oppressed within a system. A system that does not except difference. A system that does not accept—you're different? No, you have to conform. The whole thing is about that. You know. You're born, the system would massage your balls. Right? Slowly massage your balls. You don't feel it. You don't feel it, you even find it comfortable and pleasurable, right? Right or not? [To his students in the audience] Kids? Right or not? [audience laughter]

Hah? If my assignment descriptor didn't write clearly, you all come and like, "How come? You didn't write—what is the marking rubric?"

See how the system has completely made your sense—your creative ability completely impotent? You cannot think for yourself, you have to keep on having all these guidelines? Right? Comfortable, pleasurable and all that stuff.

But anyway, going back to how you have to conform. The scene, some of you might "hahaha", find it very funny. [Jeff stands up and demonstrates] Nora comes in with a basket of balloons. Right? And then she proceeds to, with a lot of pride, show these—Jean and Najib, that she can really make a poodle. She's quite skilful at making a poodle, no?

[Audience laughter and cheers for Nora]

Right, she's quite skilful at making a poodle, she shows it to Najib and Jean. What was their reaction? They also say, eh? Jean immediately picks up a balloon. And she thinks, "I can also do it!" And she do it [sic]. And then she realises that she can't, she can only make this [Jeff raised a balloon that had been sculpted into a phallic shape]. And then Nora is so proud, "I can make a poodle!"

And then Jean takes another balloon, and tries to make again, and then, "Hey, I can't make it."

THE STUDIOS: *fifty*
Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral (2015): Post Show Dialogue
1 May 2015, Esplanade Theatre Studio

Is this nice [referring to the phallic sculpted balloon]? Poodle nice, right?

But I can't make it. So?

Poke her poodle *lah!* [audience laughter] Poke her poodle, right?

And then, she [referring to Nora] disempowered, subjugated ... what happened? She tries to make a poodle again, she can't. She can only make [shows the phallic sculpted balloon].

[Audience applause]

Right? So is this the kind of society that we want, whereby individual talents are not being appreciated? We constantly try to make them eunuchs, to conform. Everybody just make *this lah*. Good *lah hor*, right? So, have I sort of answered the question? Yeah? Thank you.

TT: Finally we got an answer. Okay, I just have to... I guess this only leaves me one thing that I think Jeff and his collaborators were able to make the work they way they did it primarily because I personally believe that Pao Kun's script for *Descendants* is such a beautiful piece of writing that it really allows very individual interpretations of the script. And it's not every script that we come across that allows us to do that. So sitting there, I really missed Pao Kun's writing, yeah?

So on that note, thank you very much for being here with us. But please, another warm round of applause for everyone, all the artists here.

[Audience applause]
