

## BiMoo's “Flower and Sword” Shapes Identity and Expression

*Between shadow and light, Wake Forest's Chinese theatre group's revival unearths the painful beauty of finding one's path.*



Child (Alina Du) and the ghost of their father (Trevor Zhi) wrestle with the past. (Photo courtesy of Mike Liu)

A striking red and black glow bathed the stage, illuminating painted masks, as the pulse of a haunting melody hung above the audience.

Wake Forest's Chinese Theatre group, BiMoo, brought “Flower and Sword” to life in the Ring Theatre on March 4-5. Against a visually arresting backdrop, the story unfolded as a powerful exploration of truth and identity — all in Mandarin.

The play, directed by Tracy Xie ('28), used a four-person cast to depict a compelling tale. Summoned to a grave, they encounter the ghostly presence of their mother, father and father's friend — each offering conflicting accounts of their past and the circumstances of their deaths. As the child struggles to piece together the truth, they seek guidance on how to navigate their own life. In a compelling 40-minute performance, they are left grappling with the haunting question: Where is my way?

Beyond its gripping narrative, the production was entirely brought to life by Chinese students, who handled everything from design to stage management to board operation. It also marked the long-awaited return of BiMoo, whose last performance was two years ago.

Professor Rob Eastman-Mullins helped spark BiMoo's revival.

"He told us that there are now more Chinese students doing theatre together than he had witnessed in his time, so he encouraged us to gather all these people and revive this club," said Liwen Zhang ('27), one of the group's co-presidents and the show's sound and projections designer.

The result was a production that not only displayed Chinese talent on campus but also reignited a creative space for international students to tell their own stories. "Flower and Sword" explored the challenge of choosing between two diverging paths — a theme that resonated deeply with the cast and crew. It examined the challenges international students face when navigating the ties to their home country and their university environment.

"The play resonates with us, and while not everyone on this campus may feel this emotion, we do," Xie said. "We wanted to share that feeling and help others understand it."

Despite casting the show just a month ago and beginning set construction only two weeks before the performance, the team worked tirelessly to bring the play to life.

"The last week leading up to the show, everyone was working so hard," Zhang said. "Every designer, crew member, actor—we built the set, painted the floor and hung masks all in such a short time."

Alina Du ('28), who starred as "Child" in the show, had no prior theater experience. Though initially hesitant to participate due to her engineering studies, she is glad she did, especially appreciating the camaraderie among the cast and crew.

"I'd never feel tired during rehearsals because I saw how hard everyone worked, even when I wasn't at the theater," Du said. "When I was gone, they were painting the floors, hanging masks, making sound effects. I'd go for rehearsal and I'd see a totally different stage than what it looked like the last time."

As the show's sound and projections designer, Zhang played a key role in deciding which lines to translate into English and display on the walls. Initially, she prepared slides for every single line in the play — 422 pages of text.

With the inclusion of the entire script, there was a risk: "actors could skip lines and it might distract the audience," Zhang explained. "Besides, some of the plot can be inferred through actions alone."

Ultimately, Zhang selected only the most crucial lines and a few personal favorites, balancing clarity with artistic expression. Looking back on the production, she called it a transformative experience.

“There can be pressure in other theater groups for international students, as there’s often an inherent sense of being a minority, not at the center of the group,” Zhang said. “But this club provides a space for students who may not feel comfortable stepping into that space. I’m so glad we started this.”

As the final curtain fell, “Flower and Sword” left behind more than just a story — it offered a space for voices to be heard and for a community to find its way home.



The cast and crew of Flower and Sword. (Photo courtesy of Mike Liu)