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Book Review：*Gender in Asian Shakespeare: Towards Intercultural Feminism*

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Book review

Gender in Asian Shakespeare: Towards Intercultural Feminism. Roweena Yip. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2025, pp. x + 274. ISBN 978-3-031-89055-0 (hardback).

In the performance contexts of East and Southeast Asia, how can we rethink gender and feminism in adaptations of Shakespeare's plays? Yip's book approaches this question through gender, treating it as an entry point into intercultural performance.

Yip's research is informed by two primary sources. One is her experience working with A|S|I|A (Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive); the other is interviews with practitioners and directors of the works discussed, incorporating practitioners' own interpretations into the study. The author employs intercultural feminism as a critical praxis, placing Asian Shakespearean stagings in a non-hierarchical dialogue with Western feminist theories. As a whole, the book focuses on how these localised Shakespeare productions reconfigure female agency and subjectivity, and incorporate local social contexts.

The book comprises seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research background and its theoretical framework. In Chapters 2–5, it analyses pairs of intercultural Shakespeare adaptations that share comparable features, while Chapter 6 focuses on a single transnational collaboration. Drawing on archival details and her own experiences from viewings, the study interprets works in relation to relevant cultural theories. It first examines the distinctive performative features of each production, then develops a fuller analysis from the perspective of audiences' affective reception. Across the detailed analyses, it combines textual, sensory, and plot analysis with attention to theatrical elements such as music, language, bodily performance, and staging. Chapter 7 synthesizes the main findings and considers directions for future research. The plays selected are mainly those staged between the 1990s and 2018, most of them included in the A|S|I|A archive.

As far as the main body of the book is concerned, Chapters 2 and 3 mainly examine the actors' gendered bodies and the gender roles they perform. Chapter 2 compares the Japanese production Othello in Noh Style (2005) with the Korean production Lady Macbeth (2010). Both works disrupt the original timeline in order to foreground the subjectivity of female characters and give concrete form to the protagonists' memories and psychological experiences. Othello in Noh Style adopts the form of Mugen Noh and a predominantly female cast to shift the narrative perspective to the spirit of Desdemona. Yip analyses how classical dance, bodily movement and voice interact in the production's reconstruction of female traumatic experience. Lady Macbeth incorporates Korean shamanism and exorcism rituals and uses hypnosis to present physicalized memory. Yip examines the way stage choices like the spotlight and actor blocking centre on Lady Macbeth, conveying her control over Macbeth. Yip also includes her own interview with Director Han Tae-Sook concerning the portrayal of femininity in this play.

Chapter 3 shifts its focus to cross-gender performance, comparing two productions of The Taming of the Shrew, one by Kim's Comfunny Theatre Company (2008) and the other by Studio Life (2010). Yip's analysis is grounded in Butler's theory of the cultural construction of gender. In the production by Kim's Comfunny, Yip closely examines the sole female performer, the male performers' exaggerated drag parodies of femininity, and the frequent involvement of audience members throughout the performance. By mocking traditional heterosexual rituals such as courtship and by having actors offer contemporary views on the original work's ending, the production guides audiences to reflect on gender and intimacy. Studio Life's production exhibits features of idol culture and introduces an additional female character played by a male actor in a revised prologue, who frames the play as her dream or fantasy. Yip examines how the production's androgynous cross-gender performance stages gender as fluid and ambiguous, and how this is received by its predominantly female audiences.

Chapter 4 examines two plays that incorporate staged adaptations of Korean shamanism, namely the National Theatre of Korea's Uruwang (2000) and Yohangza Theatre Company's Hamlet (2009) and analyses female characters' performances within ritual. Uruwang combines King Lear with the Korean folk myth Baridegi and centres on Bari's experiences. Through Bari's revival of her father and the Ssitgim-gut ritual, Yip shows how the production shifts its focus from patriarchal authority to a female shamanic community. In Yohangza's Hamlet, Yip particularly turns to the Sumanggut ritual at Ophelia's funeral, studying how shamanic voices and bodily performance create a soundscape that shapes audiences' feelings. Building on these analyses, Yip reconsiders scholarly debates on the Koreanisation of Shakespeare through the affect of han, a historically rooted sense of grief and resentment. She explores how these Korean shamanic performances reconfigure female agency in addressing questions of life and death, while creating affective

connections with audiences.

Chapter 5 focuses on the gender ambiguity of the witches in Macbeth and the incorporation of local folk culture in two adaptations of Macbeth, selecting Dato' Seri (2018) by Malaysia's The Actors Studio and Shakespeare Unplugged 3—Macbeth (2007) by Tainaner Ensemble. In Dato' Seri, Yip analyses how the rewriting of the witches as Bomoh (Malay shamans), alongside reworked cultural markers such as the local language and song, traditional dress and local titles, establishes a native context; she also explores the mixed-gender and ethnic-minority casting of the witch roles. She further links the interaction between the shaman and Lady Macbeth to Malaysian political scandals. The Tainan version shapes the witches into charismatic "Goddess Sisters" and presents gender ambiguity through masks with wrinkles and long beards. Together with Lady Macbeth, they wear red costumes, presenting a dimension of female community. Yip demonstrates that, in both productions, the Weird Sisters' gender ambiguity extends beyond their conventional witch roles in Macbeth and confronts local sociopolitical realities.

Turning finally to Romeo at Julieta: Isang Komedi (1997), a joint production by Japanese and Filipino theatre companies, Chapter 6 extends the book's earlier analysis of gendered performance to the intersections of gender, class, national identity, and colonial history. Yip first reviews the exchanges between the two companies and the historical background of Japan–Philippines relations; she then examines the play's Bodavil form, multilingual character, and, drawing on "Asia as Method," the interactions between the companies and their local communities. She then analyses gendered labour migration in the plot. Finally, Yip reads heterosexual intimacy as figuring both the potential for and the fragility of reconciliation between the two countries, and considers the production's role in prompting audiences to confront historical trauma.

This book uses diverse research materials, including performance recordings and English scripts in the A|S|I|A archive, Yip's viewing experience, scholarly literature, and practitioners' accounts, including previously available materials and interviews conducted by Yip herself. These interviews provide information beyond what can be gained from viewing the performances alone, such as the practitioners' own interpretations or the background of their works. All these materials offer a more comprehensive picture of the productions, encompassing their onstage performances, behind-the-scenes processes, and broader cultural contexts.

Yip's descriptions of theatrical performances and sensory experiences are also detailed and easy to follow. Through verbal description of plot, characters' bodily movements, sound, and stage apparatus, and by presenting official website screenshots at key moments, Yip enables readers who have not seen the performances, or even who do not know Shakespeare's original works, to understand her analysis. This accessibility also lies in the way personal experience is woven into the specialised academic analysis. Chapter 3, for example, opens with

the author's memory of travelling to see Studio Life in Japan before the comparative analysis of the two plays.

The book also demonstrates a broad and flexible use of theoretical approaches. Nearly every work receives a theoretical interpretation suited to it, giving the analysis of plays and audience affect solid support. The book proposes a relatively recent mode of theoretical interpretation, for example, understanding the information behind a work through "intercultural listening," beyond traditional visual interpretation (p. 170).

Although the book offers a rich analysis of gender performance in Asian Shakespeare, several deeper implications invite further exploration. In discussing Dato' Seri, Yip's attention to Malay terminology and local cultural contexts reveals possible sociopolitical allegories. This suggests that similar approaches might uncover further implications in other productions through deeper examination of local languages and cultural contexts. In addition, while the book develops an intercultural feminist framework for certain Asian adaptations, this approach could be more systematically articulated as an applicable method. It would be particularly valuable to clarify how this framework differs from existing Western feminist interpretations, especially regarding female subjectivity.

Overall, this book provides an excellent model for intercultural feminist theatrical interpretation in Shakespeare and a viable path for such comparison that can be applied in future interpretations of other related plays, combining gender characteristics, performance details, and even the social phenomena behind them.