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***Chinese Shakespeares: Two Centuries of Cultural Exchange.* By Alexander C. Y. Huang. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. Pp. xi + 350 + 26 illus. £58.50/\$84.50 Hb; £18.50/\$26.50 Pb.**  
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Liam E. Semler

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## Book Reviews

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Huang's monograph exemplarily demonstrates the dynamics and theoretical alertness of a flourishing research field: Shakespeare in Asia, its history, theory and practice, which surges ahead with new scholarship and online resources such as the Shakespeare Performance in Asia (SPIA) Web project, on which Huang is a collaborator, and the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (ASIA). He commences with a detailed explanation of the complexities of intercultural analysis that refuses to simplify the 'other', the 'exotic' or the 'universal', and instead sets up a chronological series of spatially and temporally localized case studies that enable multiple notions of China and Shakespeare to illuminate one another. These reveal that Shakespeare is a complex participant not only in the aesthetic and generic frameworks of *xiqu*, the Chinese opera (*jingju* or Beijing opera being one of many forms), and *huaaju*, the Western-influenced spoken drama from 1907 onward. He also remained prominent through oscillating periods of cultural control and relaxation including the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), the Soviet influence of the mid-twentieth century, the repressive decade of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and the liberating possibilities of the post-Mao era. The case studies present evocative readings of cultural events and texts (translations, performances, films) that exemplify the mutually defining interactions of Shakespeare and China.

The story begins with China's enduring, panegyric response to the idea of Shakespeare and the nineteenth-century urge to find an equivalent genius, a 'Chinese Shakespeare', via whom to evolve a modern national identity. The first substantial translation of Shakespeare arrives by proxy in an anonymous Chinese rendition of

Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1903), followed soon after by the hugely influential classical Chinese version by Lin Shu and Wei Li (1904), which sought to align Shakespeare with traditional Chinese storytelling via, for example, an emphasis on fairies and Confucianism. The mediated appropriation of Shakespeare, as a factor in 'translated modernity' (p. 114), continued in the 1930s with Lao She's 'New Hamlet', in which 'Hamlet embodies the problems of a hesitating, modern China poised in search of new identities amid competing visions of modernity' (p. 90), and also in silent films such as Bu Wancang's *A Spray of Plum Blossom* (1931), which turned *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* into a blend of chivalric romance and exploration of the 'new woman'. Later chapters explore, for example, *Hamlet* performed in a Confucian temple in 1942, presenting the prince as a negative and positive exemplar to Chinese suffering under Japanese aggression, Ma Yong'an's blackface *xiqu Othello* (1983) and Wu Hsing-kuo's solo *jingju Lear Is Here* (2000). They serve as rich focal points for concluding analyses of intercultural politics, self-expression and aesthetics.

Kennedy and Yong's collection, in contrast to the depth of detail in Huang's treatment of Chinese Shakespeares, delivers a smorgasbord of essays on Asian Shakespeares that remains tantalizingly suggestive as it must remain unable fully and comprehensively to cover the incredible multiplicity of the field. Similar theoretical nuances as they pervaded Huang's book are explored directly in the editors' introduction as well as the final section of essays, which includes John W. P. Phillips's probing of the multivalent term 'fix' as a way of airing the fluid problematics of intercultural Shakespeare performance, alongside Rustom Bharucha's forceful 'attempt to de-canonicalize two monolithic entities – "Asia" and "Shakespeare"' (p. 253) that includes, once more, his vivid engagement with earlier publications, here by Ania Loomba and John Russell Brown.

The diversity of the collection can be only be hinted at by pointing to a few samples: John Russell Brown's reflective piece on his experiments as director bringing alive the precepts of 'the *Natyasastra*, the Sanskrit treatise on acting and the staging of plays that is more than two thousand years old' (p. 29) in the performance of Shakespearean drama; Richard Burt's exploration of 'the Shakespeare-play-within-the-Indian-film genre' as a way of raising questions about transnationalism, translation and mediatization; Minami Ryuta's account of *Twelfth Night* as it appears in the *shojo manga* (manga for girls) version by Morikawa Kumi (1978) and the all-female *Epiphany*, the 1999 stage production by Takarazuka Revue Company, directed by Ono Takuji; and Yong Li Lan's discussion of Ong Keng Sen's fascinating and internally multicultural and multilingual adaptations, *LEAR* (1997–9), *Desdemona* (2000), and *Search: Hamlet* (2002). Together, Huang's monograph and Kennedy and Yong's collection provide a valuable introduction to the ongoing process of problematizing theoretical and transcultural assumptions about both Shakespeare and Asia. Global Shakespeare is richer now – in performance, text and analysis – than it has ever been, and one feels we are only just beginning to comprehend and articulate with suitable clarity the 'Asian' contribution as it codetermines the uncontainable shape of modern Shakespeare.