



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN

Alexa Alice Joubin is Professor of English, East Asian Languages and Literatures, Theatre, and International Affairs at GW, and an affiliated faculty member of both the Sigur Center and GW Institute for Korean Studies. She also serves as founding co-director of the Digital Humanities Institute. At Middlebury College she holds the John M. Kirk, Jr. Chair in Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Bread Loaf School of English. She has served as director of graduate studies and graduate job placement director in the English Department. Alexa is a fellow of the GW Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration Initiative (Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs).

Alexa's publications cross several disciplines. The following profile focuses only on Alexa's contribution to Asian studies and omits her work in early modern and Shakespeare studies.

A part of Alexa's teaching and research focuses on race and gender, disability studies, Asian-European cultural exchange, Sinophone and Chinese theatre and film, globalization, translation theories, and intercultural theatre. Ethics and diversity are key elements in Alexa's classroom. Some of her courses have an Asian studies component, and she welcomes students from the Elliott School of International Affairs and in broadly-defined Asian studies. For example, her new graduate seminar in spring 2019, "Screening Race and Gender," will examine racialized, disabled and gendered bodies on screen. She engages with sustainable intellectual and cultural diversity in her teaching.

Alexa's latest book is entitled *Race*. It is part of Routledge's New Critical Idiom series. Co-authored with postcolonial theorist Martin Orkin, this is a major new work in the field, because it draws on culturally and historically diverse materials, particularly non-North American and non-Western European case studies at the intersections of gender, disability, and race. If race is a central part of human identity, can one own or disown one's race? To which community would a multiracial person, immigrant, or diasporic subject belong? How do ideas of race intersect with gender? What future is

there for race as a viable analytical concept? The book argues that ideas about race rely on epistemologies of otherness—the location-specific formation and dissemination of knowledge. From Israel, South Africa, Germany, France, South American colonial history, India and British expatriate culture to Asian-American history and Japanese and Chinese mythologies; from Black Lives Matter movements to #MeToo movements, the book close reads a wide array of examples from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries.

At Sigur Center, two grants have enabled her to embark on new projects. The first is entitled *The Complete History of Chinese Thought: Five Tragicomedies* by Stan Lai. As an artist who has made important contributions to the formation of diasporic cultures, Taiwanese-American playwright Stan Lai (LAI Shengchuan) was born into a diplomatic family in Washington, D.C. in 1954 and brought up bilingually in D.C. and Taipei. Lai's cross-cultural experience urged him to express the tensions between tradition and modernity. He directed David Henry Hwang's adaptation of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (San Francisco Opera, 2016). This project is the first English-language book-length translation and study of Lai's representative tragicomedies. Lai is known for his witticism and ability to address politically and socially sensitive topics such as the identity crisis of Taiwan—a postcolonial island torn by nativist sentiments and nostalgia toward mainland China and the Japanese colonial legacy. Taking a cue from the title of one of his plays, *The Complete History of Chinese Thought*, the book presents five of Stan's most successful plays. These plays trace the trajectory of Lai's career and overarching goals in theatre, and put the English readers' hand on the pulse of modern-day Taiwanese and Chinese societies.

The second Sigur grant supported Alexa's research on one of the latest and most compelling cases of Sino-Western cultural exchange: *The Politics of Commemorating Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare as National Poets*. 2016 marks the quatercentenary of Tang (1550-1616) and Shakespeare



Alexa's new book, *Race*

(1564-1616). The two national poets have since become the vehicle for British and Chinese cultural diplomacy and soft power. During Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2015 state visit to Britain, he quoted *The Tempest*, "what's past is prologue", to British Prime Minister David Cameron, and urged the two countries to "join hands and move forward" despite the antagonistic history between them including the Opium Wars. This research project examines Sino-British festivities and performances. Using Tang and Shakespeare as contrasting case studies in which each country's soft power is configured differently, this project analyzes the organizing principles and unspoken assumptions about Ming and world literatures as exemplified by the commemorating projects. In analyzing cross-cultural performances that mix and reimagine Tang's and Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies, this project finds that the rediscovery and marketing of national poets is a politically expedient tool for reaffirming nationhood on the world stage.

Alexa was recently interviewed by the *Economist* and *Washington Post* on the commemorative activities to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of Tang Xianzu and Shakespeare and on screen representations of Shakespeare's biographies.

Sigur Center has played a key role in Alexa's community service and outreach effort. On November 19, 2019, she is co-organizing a LGBT-themed film screening and lecture. Two Taiwanese documentary filmmakers will visit GW to discuss their films *Lesbian Factory* and *Rainbow Popcorn*. The directors are migrant worker activists, and they followed a group of Filipina migrant worker organizers and their tumultuous same-sex love relationships. The films bring together migrant labor activism with queer love to unpack the multi-layered texture of our globalized moment.

Among her new areas of research are Japanese and Korean performance cultures. Alexa recently gave a public presentation before the revival of Yukio Ninagawa's "cherry blossom" *Macbeth* during the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center New York. She also gave a paper on Ophelia as an assertive victim in Asian films at the Société Française Shakespeare conference in Paris earlier this year. As part of her work to promote Asian studies in the greater Washington, D.C. area, Alexa has given presentations at the Smithsonian's Freer and Sackler Gallery (on Akira Kurosawa's films) and at the Cinema Club in Avalon Theatre on Kore'eda Hirokazu's *After the Storm*. She has worked as an interpreter at the FilmFest DC, the city's annual film festival.

Among other grants, Alexa received an American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) research fellowship and an ACLS Frederick Burkhardt Fellowship for her first and second books on performances and diasporic appropriations of Shakespeare. She has received the Modern Language Association's Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies and International Convention of Asian Scholars Colleagues' Choice Book Award for her book on two centuries of Sinophone and Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare.

As Alexa's work addresses the global south as well as transpacific cultural flows, she maintains ties with institutions on both sides of the Atlantic and Pacific. For example, she served as distinguished visiting professor at Seoul National University and Yonsei University in Seoul, South Korea. She was also appointed honorary research fellow at Donghua University, Shanghai, ACLS Visiting Scholar at Beijing Normal University, and honorary graduate faculty at the Institute of Literary Theory and Aesthetics, Shandong University, China. She has served as a consultant or external evaluator for Universitetet i Bergen, Norway, Ritsumeikan University, Japan, Shakespeare in Asia Theatre Festival, Aichi, Japan, Freie Universität Berlin Verflechtungen von Theaterkultur, Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, and other institutions. In her outreach work, Alexa has testified before congress in a congressional briefing on the humanities and globalization.

As the book review editor for *Chinese Literature Today*, Alexa is always on the lookout for new books to review and loves to hear from potential reviewers. As part of her service to the scholarly community, Alexa served as vice president of the Association for Asian Performance which is the oldest scholarly organization dedicated to the study of Asian performance, and vice president of the Mid-Atlantic Region Association for Asian Studies (MARAAS, established in 1971) which is a branch of the national AAS.



Alexa Alice Joubin speaking at "The Power of Arts: Censorship and Free Speech" at the British Ambassador's Residence in Washington, D.C. Left to right: Jonathan Hsy (GW faculty), Michael Witmore (director of the Folger Library), Alexa Alice Joubin, Colin Warner, and Emily Lathrop (GW doctoral student).



THE ASIAN CONNECTION

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues, Students, and Sigur Community Members:

Welcome to a new semester and academic year! The 2018-19 academic year promises to be an exciting one at the Center and has already gotten off to a fantastic start.

It is my great pleasure to share with you some outstanding news regarding the Center. I was recently informed that the Sigur Center, in partnership with the Institute of Korean Studies, has been awarded BOTH a National Resource Center (NRC) and Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Title VI award for East Asian Studies by the US Department of Education on behalf of the university. While the Center has applied for this funding in the past, and has won the FLAS, this marks our first success with the NRC. The recognition of our programmatic excellence significantly enhances our reputation and funding resources. It reflects the scholarly excellence and public outreach which has long been a hallmark of the Center's collective intellectual life. Additionally, the Center's success in this Title VI application was due to the outstanding efforts of its staff - namely Associate Director Deepa Ollapally, Program Associate Miriam Grinberg and Program Coordinator Richard Haddock. On behalf of all of us who will benefit from both the NRC and FLAS awards, my thanks to them.

We are nearly halfway through the term; our calendar of events for the autumn semester is very busy and quickly filling up. I encourage you to regularly check out our upcoming events on the Sigur Center homepage. As in years past, our programming runs the geographical breadth as well as temporal depth of Asia, ranging from a speech by Mr. Yuko Edano, the head of Japan's Constitutional Democratic Party - one of the country's main opposition parties - to a talk on the intellectual life of Taraknath Das, the Indian nationalist during his time in the US at the beginning of the 20th century. I look forward to personally welcoming you to our events during the coming year.

Apart from our public programming, the Center will welcome an impressive, revolving roster of visiting scholars during the upcoming year. These individuals include advanced graduate students, recently minted PhDs, senior academics, journalists, government officials, and politicians. I encourage you to keep any eye on our website to see who is currently at the Center and engage with them both at our events and individually.

Please do come along and participate in our events, as well as take advantage of our resources - electronic, physical and intellectual. I wish you a good start to what I hope will be an outstanding year for all of us.

Best regards



Benjamin D. Hopkins, Ph.D. (Cantab)
Director of the Sigur Center for Asian Studies

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