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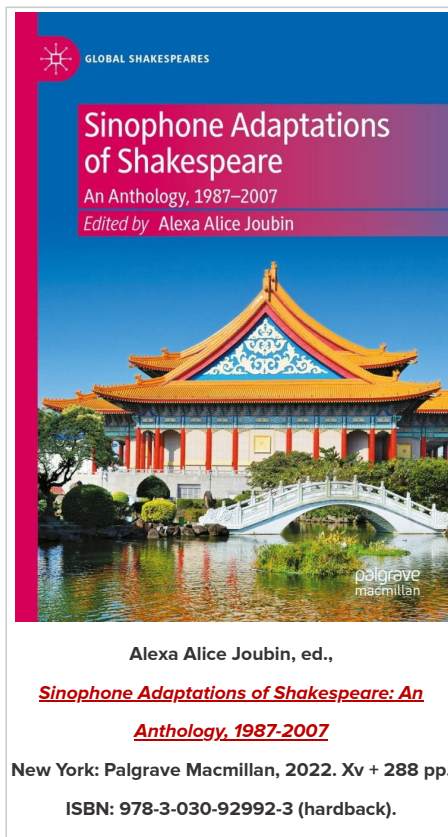
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Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987-2007

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Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare: An Anthology, 1987–2007 is a compelling collection of English translations of seven adaptations of Shakespeare’s tragedies in several stage genres from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. These works, which span two decades, not only transcend national and cultural boundaries but also remap Shakespearean and Sinophone literature. The anthology makes an important step toward remedying a problem in both Sinophone studies and Shakespeare scholarship: the scarce availability of primary research materials on East Asian adaptations of Western classics.

A comprehensive introduction by Alexa Alice Joubin gives readers an overview of adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays in the Sinophone world. It points out the significance of this anthology—that “Sinophone Shakespeare’s rich range of interpretative possibilities have much to teach us about non-Anglophone understanding of Shakespeare and Sinophone performance practices today” (2). Each adaptation offers a unique lens to understand new aspects of timeless Shakespearean classics, including

Hamlet, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. The plays selected for translation were staged in multiple traditional and modern performance genres, from Chinese opera to *huaju* spoken drama.

Joubin's general introduction is not simply an overview of the plays in the anthology; it offers a critical reading of the adaptations in the historical contexts of the Sinophone world from 1987 to 2007. As Joubin explains, these were important years: in 1987, Chairman Deng Xiaoping affirmed the "socialist market economy" as the guiding principle of China's development, and the Nationalist Party lifted martial law in Taiwan. Twenty years later, in 2007, the first competitive election for Chief Executive signaled major changes to Hong Kong's political culture. The historical context explains the selection criteria and timeline of the Sinophone Shakespeare and provides very helpful background knowledge on the history of Sinophone theatre. Joubin also clearly explains the contrasting approaches to the tragedies as highlighted in each of the book's three sections: post-socialism and metatheatres; innovations in *kunqu* opera and Taiwan's avant-garde theatre; and collectivism (Confucianism) and individualism (Zen Buddhism) in the so-called "modern" Beijing opera. These approaches align with the playwrights' ideologies and historical background.

Joubin's book includes eight chapters, which are divided into three sections. Each section focuses on one of three of tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*. "Organized thematically to address the cultural exigencies between 1987 and 2007" (2), this collection offers rich educational materials for students of theatre, Sinophone, and Shakespeare studies. Each section presents a pair of Sinophone plays inspired by or based on one Shakespearean tragedy. In Section One, "Existentialist Questions in Post-Socialist China and Post-Martial-Law Taiwan," Lin Zhaohua's 林兆華 *Hamlet* in Beijing (translated by Steven L. Riep and Ronald Kimmons) contrasts with Lee Kuo-hsiu's 李國修 parody, *Shamlet*, in Taipei (translated by Christopher Rea). Section Two, "Bewitched by *Kunqu* Opera and Avant-Garde Theatre," introduces readers to the creativity and innovation in a *kunqu* opera version of *Macbeth* by Huang Zuolin 黃佐臨 in Shanghai (translated by Siyuan Liu), and a feminist musical of *Macbeth* in Taiwanese in Tainan by Lü Po-shen 呂柏伸 (translated by Yilin Chen). Section Three, "Self-Identities in Traditional and Experimental *Jingju* Opera," turns to two contrasting versions of *King Lear*: a Confucian Beijing opera in Shanghai directed by Ouyang Ming 歐陽明 (translated by Dongshin Chang) and a Buddhist solo performance in Taiwan by Wu Hsing-kuo 吳興國 (translated by Joubin). Last, but not least, a seventh play is offered in the Coda. This play, entitled *To Be or Not to Be* and written by Liu Qing 劉擎 and Tao Jun 陶駿 and staged in Beijing in 1986 (translated by Lia Wen-ching Liang), serves as an appropriate conclusion to the volume, because it is a "bricolage" (263) of iconic characters and motifs from *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. In addition to Joubin's general introduction, there are short introductions to each play. The varied dramatic genres are presented in very readable translations that will enrich English literary and Sinophone studies classrooms.

One of the main contributions of the anthology is its use of the concept of the Sinophone to deconstruct the Western-centric focus of Shakespeare scholarship. To do so, the anthology features multilingual and polyphonic Sinophone works that question the place of "Anglo" and "Sino" in world theatre. As Joubin argues, "in contrast to the term 'Chinese-speaking,' which presupposes the central position of China as homeland in a settler colonial mentality, the

Sinophone is a more inclusive notion that points to a network of cultures” (7). The adaptations staged in Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, and Tainan, reflect theatre practices in multiple cultural locales where multiple cultural practices coexist (8).

Joubin translates Wu Hsing-kuo’s solo Beijing opera adaptation of *King Lear* in chapter 7. ([The full video is available as part of the MIT Global Shakespeare Learning Modules](#), which includes useful study questions.) Joubin successfully and succinctly renders the verse into English without cumbersome footnotes. Her translation is remarkable. For instance, Joubin translates 朋友 as “companion,” rather than the potentially misleading word “friend,” to effectively convey King Lear’s mental stage in his speech: “憤怒！瘋狂！驕傲！任性！他們都是我的好朋友！” (“Rage! Madness! Pride! Eccentricity! They are my companions!” 253). Through her translation and curation, Joubin presents the multi-faceted plays engagingly in both traditional and modern interpretations and in both verse and prose. The diverse dramatic styles this book covers serve as a testament to Shakespeare’s global influence, while showing how translation and adaptations are a formidable force shaping Sinophone cultures.

What strikes me the most is the local qualities that these adaptations bring, such as in *Shamlet* by Lee Kuo-hsiu in chapter 3, which inserts location-specific references and jokes. *Shamlet* also brings plenty of stage improvisation to the original play, some of which is shown in the script. This example deconstructs the status of Shakespeare as a sacred, canonical text by providing alternative and irreverent interpretations of the famous tragedy. Works in the Sinophone compel us to rethink the center of “Sino”/China. *Shamlet* and other examples in the book draw our attention to the nuances of Sinophone drama.

This anthology makes for a great teaching tool, as several of the plays can be viewed on an open-access performance archive—the [MIT Global Shakespeares](#) that was founded by Joubin and Peter S. Donaldson. The book combines the quality of accessible language and rigorous scholarship. The available research materials Joubin provides transcend the traditional boundaries of genres and languages.

While the anthology is an enriching resource of Sinophone adaptations, it is not without its challenges. Some plays may be more accessible to readers with a background in both Shakespeare and Sinophone culture. For instance, the last play in the anthology, *To Be or Not to Be*, is a postmodern allegory that encompasses elements of all four tragedies. It is “built around the conceit of the Modern Man wandering into a graveyard to converse with the Shakespearean protagonists—resurrected from the state of a statue” (16). Readers would need basic knowledge of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, to fully grasp the Chinese playwrights’ allusions. However, this potential barrier is mitigated by the editor’s efforts to provide context and guidance in the introduction of the book and each chapter. To provide “an alternative perspective” to the state-sponsored productions during the 1986 festivals in Beijing and Shanghai, “six budding actors” put on this play in front of a small audience (263). As Liang explains in her translator’s short introduction, the play captures “creativity that may otherwise be lost to historical grand narratives” (264). Indeed, as Joubin cogently argues in her general introduction, *To Be or Not to Be* “makes links between the dramatic situations faced by the tragic heroes and modern Chinese social conditions” (16).

Sinophone Adaptations of Shakespeare is a great resource for scholars, teachers, students, and enthusiasts. Its exploration of cross-cultural and artistic reinterpretation breathes new life into Shakespearean classics. This book draws a new landscape of Shakespearean and Sinophone literature across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

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