

NTQ Book Reviews

edited by Rachel Clements

doi:10.1017/S0266464X2000086X

Wei Feng

Intercultural Aesthetics in Traditional Chinese Theatre From 1978 to the Present

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 277 p. £59.99.
ISBN 978-3-030-40634-9.

Based on extensive research into the intercultural adaptations of western plays in traditional Chinese theatre (called *xiqu* in Chinese), Feng's book offers an insightful analysis of the transformations in *xiqu* since China's reform and opening-up in 1978, as well as a valuable dialogue with and critique of the existing discourse of intercultural theatre studies that has been dominated by the West. Drawing on Bakhtin's dialogism, Young's theory of cultural appropriation, and Nellhaus's concept of agents, Feng carries out a detailed, thorough and provocative examination of some influential *xiqu* adaptations of Shakespeare, Beckett, and Brecht in mainland China and Taiwan over the last four decades.

Feng explores four major types of *xiqu* adaptations of western plays, which are representative of Chinese intercultural theatre in general. First, the overt Sinicization of foreign plays by reducing source text and catering to the aesthetic traditions in the target culture. Second, the fusion of *xiqu* with source text and foreign performance cultures, featuring creative innovation in the process of border-crossing and theatrical hybridity. Third, the pursuit of avant-gardism both in form and theme by reforming *xiqu* under western stimulation. Fourth, the one-sided westernization of *xiqu*, which results in 'the loss of *jingju*'s subjectivity' and turns out to be 'unlike *xiqu*'. Each of the four chapters deals with one major aspect of theatre, respectively: playwriting, performance, scenography, and audience.

In this book, the transformation of *xiqu* is situated not just in the context of East meeting West, but also in relation to the development of *huaju* (spoken drama) in China, which has a history of a little over one hundred years. The two are intertwined: complementary to each other as well as mutually enriching. They are also in conflict as the aesthetics of *xiqu* is 'at odds with the principles derived from realistic theatre'. Consequently, the *xiqu* adaptations of western plays, which are in general under the influence of *huaju*, are challenged by the horizon of expectations of the audience, most of whom have had very limited experience of watching *xiqu* performances and become less

familiar with the performing conventions of traditional Chinese theatre.

In his analysis of individual performance events, Feng takes into consideration various human agents, including directors, playwrights, actors, and audience, but neglects other equally important players such as international theatre festivals, cultural policy, sponsorship, and public diplomacy. His study of the actor-network around the *Shakespearean Handan Dream* in 2016 is exemplary, but it is not adequately applied in his analysis of the other performances.

This book convincingly demonstrates that the Chinese intercultural *xiqu* is diversified and dynamic. The views and arguments provided by Wei Feng on interculturalism in traditional Chinese theatre are valuable and worthy of being reflected upon, not least because this book contributes to a shift in the related theoretical discourse from western dominance to a plurality of different voices in international academia.

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doi:10.1017/S0266464X21000075

Catherine M. Cole

Performance and the Afterlives of Injustice: Dance and Live Art in South Africa and Beyond

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020.

286 p. \$85.00.

ISBN: 978-0-472-07458-7.

Catherine Cole's monograph presents a timely and urgent discussion of live art, dance, and performance in South Africa. She situates her study in the historical context of post-apartheid South Africa, but several key examples and case studies move beyond the country's geographical location to flag their wider relevance and global reach. Cole's main argument focuses on the 'corporeal epistememes' of colonial violence and trauma.

Theoretically, her position appears much indebted to African American scholarship and theorization around racial and social injustices in the aftermath of slavery in the American South. The term 'afterlives', for example, is duly credited to Saidiya V. Hartman's critical work and features insightfully alongside repeated references to Alexander Weheliye's concept of 'hieroglyphics of the flesh'. In Chapter 1, Cole begins her inquiry by looking back to the anti-apartheid era through a close reading of Athol Fugard's *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1974). This reading