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Original Research Article

Interpretations of Shakespeare on the Asian screen: Chinese, Indian, and Japanese films

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ABSTRACT
This article explores our understanding of Shakespeare's "modernity," which is dynamic and ever-evolving and further enhanced by cross-cultural alterations of form, substance, and character. It does this by subtly fusing Occidental text with Oriental vision. It evaluates Asian (Chinese, Indian, and Japanese) film adaptations of Shakespeare plays in order to show how the desire in recreating these works has been maintained by elements that are enduringly universal. Stated differently, it explores the ways in which stories have changed throughout time and space, presenting fresh viewpoints, presenting various "voices," and reiterating particular feelings that are unique to that field.

1. Introduction

As "the act of returning and rewriting" adapts itself "to present contingencies and situations," Margherita Laera characterizes adaptation as a "kind of interpretive intervention." Judy Wakabayashi claims that as a result of cultural exchanges with the West, Japanese, Chinese, and Indian perspectives on translation have become more familiar with the concepts of originality and derivativeness as well as respect for the authority of written texts [1]. Importantly, Hutcheon states that adaptation is "extended intertextual engagement" and that we experience them as "palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation." In A Theory of Adaptation, Hutcheon describes adaptation as "as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-) interpretation and then (re-) creation," which she claims has been called both "appropriation and salvaging," depending on individual perception.

Shakespearean play adaptations for other cultures are just one of the numerous examples of the Bard's enduring appeal. The environment is merely a responsive and ever-changing stage; human behavior patterns' stability is what keeps the Pangea together. The delicate balance between order and chaos, morality and extravagance, pragmatism and whimsy, lighthearted and somber, and love and hatred is always teasingly tenuous [2]. We can't help but feel a connection to these characters because they embody a larger-than-life "humanness" that speaks to the core of our own identities, whether they be the mercurial Lear or the vacillating Hamlet, the cynical Melancholy Jacques or the fatally ambitious Macbeth, the farcical Falstaff or the green-eyed Othello. Shakespeare uses his pen with an almost prophetic sheerness in his probing examination of human intractability and intractable humanity; as a result, the very personalities of his characters, when transplanted and reflected into a relocated spatiality and re-historicized temporality, show little to almost no change. Shakespeare's plays are now "fluid and plural," as Poonam Trivedi describes it, absorbing and merging into a multitude of diverse cultures rather than being set and solid. Edward Said made the renowned claim in Orientalism that: "*rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interestingways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow*."

Shakespearean theater has a long history in Asia, whether it is through the "Xiqu" Opera in Singapore or mainland China, Noh in Japan, or the incorporation of Indian traditional elements into the Shakespearean style. Shakespeare's relevance was notably highlighted by Wole Soyinka, who also mocked Arabs who would appropriate Shakespeare by asserting that he was actually an Arab named "Shaikh Zubeir" (or variations on that name) [3].

2. China (The two hamlets)

The Banquet (2006) is a highly stylized, opulent setting in which the Hamlet tragedy is reintroduced in fresh allegories and rehistoricized inside a wuxia universe. It moves forward in a rhythmic slow motion that seems to be foreshadowing the approaching devastation and death. The drama creates the impression that the mysteries and complexities are being untangled, but in the process, it draws more and more knots that eventually choke out all of the characters. The ferocious worrying, deep reflection, and ear-splitting ruminations of Wu

Luan (Prince Hamlet) regarding duty, honor, resistance, and survival are realistically shown in the conflict-ridden 10th-century China, near the end of the Tang dynasty. Ambition is stronger than blood, life is erratic and susceptible, and things might turn violent if one lacks discernment and awareness. The movie is "sometimes poetic but sometimes tries too hard in its attempts at poeticism," according to Molly Hand.In neither a religious nor metaphysical sense is the ghost a concerning presence. Furthermore, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not present, nor is Horatio. Wu Luan does not soliloquize and divulges little in conversation because he has no pals with whom to confide. By substituting family ties and easing tensions, it also gets around the Oedipal-incestuous relationship, Hamlet's sexist treatment of Ophelia, and the ghost of Hamlet's father [4].

Rather than rebelling, Hamlet chose to wear his insanity as a "mask" to help him escape. Wu Luan dons a real mask in The Banquet, which highlights the distinction between the ego and the shadow. By placing Hamlet outside of the court and not in a university, but rather in an outdoor theater where he divulges himself into the realm of theatrics, director Feng Xiaogang subverts the playwright's philosophical musings. Wu Luan is, nevertheless, a recluse with a polished mind—weary, unassuming, retiring, and submissive, much like Hamlet. According to Foucault, this portrayal predicts his eventual disillusionment and fatalistic farcicality. "*…madness fascinates because it is knowledge…all these absurd figures are in reality elements of a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning*."

The beautiful setting quickly turns into a murderous scene with two squads of killers—one ordered by Emperor Li (Claudius) to murder and the other by Empress Wan (Gertrude) to protect Prince Wu Luan. Ben Logan notes that Shaolin martial artists were also opera performers, demonstrating the long history of concomitance in Chinese culture with the masked theater. The mask serves as a cultural artifact, disguise, metaphor, and costume. In A Dictionary of Symbols (1958), J. E. Cirlot recommends: "*All transformations are invested with something at once of profound mystery and of the shameful, since anything that is so modified as to become 'something else' while still remaining the thing that it was, must inevitably be productive of ambiguity and equivocation. Therefore, metamorphoses must be hidden from view—and hence the need for the mask. Secrecy tends towards transfiguration: it helps what-one-is to become what-one-would-like-to-be…*"

The mask "transports an actor to the highest state of his art," according to Wu Luan. Happiness, rage, despair, and delight are all just written on his face when he isn't wearing a mask [5]. However, a brilliant artist may reveal the most nuanced and secret feelings to the audience by donning a mask. Wan offers an alternative explanation, stating, "*Your sorrow, anger, bitterness and uncertainty are there for all to see ....*" You believe that wearing a mask will improve your artwork. Utilizing your own face as a mask is the ultimate level. That's when the imitation is finished. The sword is an open barrier against bodily harm and a mental choice to defend the soul, if the mask is like the passive protection of a chrysalis.

Oscar Wilde penned: "*…there is no such thing as Shakespeare's Hamlet. If Hamlet has something of the definiteness of a work of art, he also has all the obscurity that belongs to life. There are asmany Hamlets as there are melancholies.*" In *Prince of the Himalayas* (2006), The Tibetan Hamlet, Prince Lhamoklodam, falls into the abyss of death, but not as "passion's slave," but rather as a man who longs to be freed from the searing pain of betrayal. He is unable to overcome the emotions that are rising and upsetting his internal balance, even as he resists taking action [6].

As Hui Wu states, "*While Feng Xiaogang identifies China with ancient civilization, Hu Xuehua identifies Tibet with glorious nature*." The snow-covered mountains and glistening lakes, as well as the customs of sky, fire, and water burials, all maintain a spiritual equilibrium.

On the other hand, the microcosm of human connections presents a more turbulent landscape, complete with misplaced identities and a catastrophic error of judgment (hamartia) resulting from innocent ignorance (the Himalayan Hamlet turning into an idealized representation of Aristotle's tragic figure). *Prince of the Himalayas* is a sermon that concludes with a Buddhist vision of love and philosophy, whereas *The Banquet* is a psychological dissertation that is an adaptation of Kydian anarchism. The sorrowful theme of the latter, however, is not ended by death but rather is resurrected with the birth of Lhamoklodam's son, suggesting that the cycle of samsara remains unbroken [7].

3. India (Macbeth, Othello, Hamlet)

According to Julie Sanders, "*…adaptation and appropriation are fundamental to the practice, and indeed, to the enjoyment, of literature*." The Bard's influence and adoption in India has grown significantly, particularly in regional theater, thanks to his timeless themes of kingly strife, forbidden love, and religious strife.

Shakespeare is reinterpreted, modernized, marketed, and indigenous in Vishal Bharadwaj's version, making political points that should be interpreted in the context of the times. With his films relocating to the contentious diaspora and underworld sectors, Bharadwaj aimed to subtly balance realism and melodrama while incorporating as much dirt and gore as possible to jolt his viewers out of their comfort. Unlike the more elegiac, symbolic antiquity of the other movies, the sense of bitter apocalyptic ends depicts a world where corruption is all-conquering and lawlessness is the rule [8].

Maqbool (2003), the first book in his trilogy, is based on the story of Macbeth and has a similar degree of obscurity, with its characters living off of superstitions, depravity, and a purposeful, conscious Machiavellianism. Maqbool was at the epicenter of a conflict between love and ambition; his murder of Abbaji, a father figure to him, verged on patricide, and his love for Nimmi (Lady Macbeth) appeared to be the result of an oedipal complex.

Two corrupt, psychic police officers named Pandit and Purohit are the reincarnation of the three "Weird Sisters." Poonam Trivedi draws attention to the ironic meaning in their names: Purohit, which means "a family priest" in translation, is "*a sanctioned practitioner of religion with immense power wielding capacity in society*" while Pandit (a scholar specialised in Sanskrit and Hindu philosophy) is "*a producer of knowledge: one who is entrusted with the task of rationalising*" thereby reinforcing their status and clout. Collectively, they predict bad luck by consulting the "kundal," an Indian astrologer's horoscope grid. The video highlights the multi-ethnic, multifaceted nature of its people and is full with indigenous signifiers. Blair Orfall states: "*Like many contemporary film adaptations of Shakespeare, Maqbool uses no Shakespearean language. Instead, regionalized Urdu,*

which requires a bit of effort from Hindi viewers, marks the characters' Muslim identity and social world. The film is filled with Islamic signifiers, ranging from clothing and eating and fasting practices to a dramatized trip to a darga, or Sufi temple, which includes a religious musical sequence.

Similarly, in Omkara (Othello), the coarse language, profanity, and misogynistic comments represent the backwoods, illiterate status of his people. The gangs exude a smell of alcohol, sexism, and criminal violence that they can't contain when things go out of hand. Instead of being an outsider, Langda (Iago) is one of Omkara's own in this situation; he takes his cue from his criminal group and exacts his revenge by methodically carrying out his designs while using Dolly (Desdemona) as the pawn. This is where "caste," rather than "race," determines cultural purity and privilege. The movie also examines the varying roles of victim and perpetrator, with one group enforcing dominance and retaliation against the other. The repeated reminders of Omkara's heritage as a member of a half-caste strike a deep chord with prevailing prejudices in Indian society and heighten deeply rooted worries about miscegenation [9].

The dominant, conservative nature of Indian patriarchs is similar to that of Shakespeare's fathers, and they find it extremely difficult to accept that their daughters will love someone else instead of them. Consequently, they misuse their political authority over their daughters, acting in a coercive and destructive manner.

Desdemona determines her fate, will, and existence with Othello through her connection with the marginalized and racialized "Other." The alienation is particularly obvious in Omkara, where family and society reject Dolly and her decision, which was a private household affair, and turn a blind eye to it. Like the despised father, Othello/Omkara expects complete control and unwavering loyalty from Desdemona/Dolly, and he is ready to dump her at the first hint of suspicion. Avows Marjorie St. Rose:

"*Othello's blackness in no diminishes his power over Desdemona-in an almost perverse it increases it. Desdemona's pariah status leaves her totally unprotected by the patriarchal power of Venice, her father, or her kinsmen. She is therefore totally at the mercy of Othello, to whom she has given absolute power to decide her fate by the rebellious act of marrying him… The pathos of Desdemona's position is that she has simply exchanged one sort of dependence on a man for another*."

According to *Haider* (2014), the dilemma that each person faces serves as a metaphor for the whole condition of affairs. There are both intra- and intercommunal conflicts, as well as debates, conspiracies, and martyrs hanging over everything. This is explained by Samik Bandhopadhyay, who notes that it "allows Death itself a presence in a political scenario through unexpected transitions from the farcical to the melodramatic to the discursive to the fantastic to the grimly naturalistic." As a coping technique, Haider (Hamlet), caught between government-run forces and the counter-insurgency, is forced to act rashly, showing signs of insanity, and waiting for his chance to kill his father's attacker. Nothing he does can prevent his tragedy or ease his own suffering, but it appears as though he is at war with the vagaries of fate and burdened with demanding justice [10].

Here, Ophelia is dutifully empowered (though she ultimately gives in to grief), while Polonius is an experienced actor trained in self-serving techniques, such as "*a cyclops with one eye,and that eye placed in the back of his head*" (Coleridge). With all its overtones of suicide and bloodshed, the sight of the grave-diggers conveys a droll morbidity about their situation because it is viewed through the eyes of someone whose feelings of disgust have become numb. They carry with their profession, singing and excavating as they always have, and they are accustomed to death and fear [11].

4. Japan (Macbeth and king lear)

Shakespeare is "written back" by Akira Kurosawa's empire through an analysis of his "so many separate selves" (Harold Pinter) in Throne of Blood (1957) and Ran (1985). Throne of Blood's blinking contrasts of light and dark, or Ran's "blood-stained painting," as Kawamoto Saburo dubbed it, are only two examples of how Kurosawa brings to life the poetic sobriety and visual delicacy that are characteristic of Yamato-e scrolls. Both the discussion scenes and the battle events, in which soldiers crash down slopes in a shower of arrows, elegantly replicate the sheer translucence, bright yet placid aspect. Knowing that the Japanese have a tendency to treat Shakespeare with insight, Minami "*as source material rather than as authority*" and how playwrights do not "*read Shakespeare for contemporary meanings, but they write contemporary meanings into Shakespeare*."

By placing the action on bare thresholds, adding chorus sequences (which act as both fable and interpreter), and using theatrical stylization of manner—in which facial expressions were caricatured as noh masks—Kurosawa revived the tradition of "noh" within the Shakespearean panorama of feudal Japan. In Throne of Blood, Asaji (Lady Macbeth), whose conflict is more interior, has a slower, more deliberate walk and a frozen, furtive look (shakumi), in contrast to Washizu's (Macbeth) rough dance-like movements and his puckered façade (typical of the heida mask) [12].

As its name implies, Throne of Blood alludes to the savage politics that warlords engage in in their quest for power and dominance. Kumonosu-jo, or "The Castle of Spider'sWeb," was its original title, and it conjures up images of murder and ambush. Cirlot says in his writing: "*Because of its spiral shape, [the cobweb] also embraces the idea of creation and development—of the wheel and its centre. But in this case death and destruction lurk at the centre, so that the web with the spider in the middle comes to symbolize what Medusa the Gorgon represents when located in the centre of certain mosaics: the consuming whirlwind. It is probably a symbol of the negative aspect of the universe, representing the Gnostic view that evil is not only on the periphery of the Wheel of Transformations but in its very centre—that is, in its Origin*."

In the moment where the silk-robed witch mumbles her oracular oration at her spinning wheel, deceiving the two samurai into a maze of fog and wildness, the picture of a mandala is likewise recreated. Despite being human, the witch appears to be more of a seamy phantom of the mind ("we dream of what we wish"), which serves to emphasize that the witch was only the unsettling shadow of Washizu's inner aspirations [13]. The Japanese Macbeth is based on the

mythological traditions of shuramono and senki bungaku, which sing of the fleeting glory of combat and insurrection. In contrast to Macbeth, where Macduff's victory signals a temporary restoration of order, in the Japanese Macbeth, the cycle of mutiny and treachery revolves continuously. The conclusion of Kumonosu-jo retraces Shakespeare's original in that it delves deeper into the fallibility and malleability of human nature; the samurai, or "gokenin," were obligated to their lord not just by military customs and property connections but also by familial piety and gratitude. As Washizu is the first to break the "Bushido" samurai code, karma comes back to haunt him, and his death takes on the appearance of a socially sanctioned execution. Similar to Shakespeare, Kurosawa uses nuance and ambiguity to both engage us intellectually and emotionally while presenting the situation of circumstances, rather than approaching it as a political activist or pamphleteer [14].

Gunji Masakatsu believes that, particularly when it comes to bad characters, the manner in which a character dies in kabuki is far more significant than the dramatic story point of the character's actual death. Washizu is trapped in a little space of action and circumstance, while Kurosawa's Lear is in a catatonic state, abandoned in his own world with nothing but his remorse to comfort him. Samuel Crowl reflects: "*Lear and Macbeth are a study in contrasts: expanse and impasse; expression and repression; wasteland and labyrinth. Lear opens up and out; Macbeth constricts and closes in. Lear overflows; Macbeth contains. Both plays are driven by power and appetite but from widely divergent engines. Lear is a lightning bolt; Macbeth runs on alternating current. Both feed upon the body of the king and transform the sacred into the profane. Lear's terror is reflected in the universe; Macbeth's in the mind…If Throne of Blood seems permanently shrouded in fog and mist and rain, Ran is conceived all in vivid colors: blue, green, red, yellow, and black*."

In Ran (a word meaning "turbulence"), Kurosawa pushes the conflict between the father and his children to the background and centers the action on his power battle with Lady Kaede, his daughter-in-law, who takes on an avenging role. But catastrophe happens when retaliation breeds more retaliation. Tragic events, on the other hand, imply loss, a disruption of the natural order, and both internal and exterior disarray [15]. The moment where Hidetora Ichimonji (King Lear) plods across an infinite field of outgrown reeds whirling in lunacy, like blades or tentacles, is one of the most memorable. He is accompanied by the menacing beat of his own faltering heart. As G. Wilson Knight noted: "*a tremendous soul is, as it were, incongruously geared to a puerile intellect… Lear is mentally a child, in passion a titan*."

Lear's sole friends on the heath are a madman and an idiot, much like in the play; his pride fortress is in ruins [16]. Lear is a broken but still sane individual. The visuals are giddy; a conscious craze endures throughout the heaving, tension, and conflict, and occasionally, physical tension that is excruciating [17]. His face appears ghostly, tormented by the apparent phantom of senility and shaken by betrayal by his own blood. Furthermore, a sign of his psychosis is the clinical narcissism that clouded his assessment: "*self-attachment is the first sign of madness, but it is because man is attached to himself that he accepts error as truth, lies as reality, violence and ugliness as beauty and justice*." (Foucault, Madness and Civilization) His control over this universe, both mentally and physically, is hazy in the back of his consciousness; his abuse of power appears to retaliate against him in a ferocious carnage [18]. The vibrant color scheme of the movie gleams as clouds of fire rage above the fighting troops. According to Stephen Prince, these sequences represent the pinnacle of Kurosawa's cinematic skill:

"*These images have a ferocity, a dynamic rhythm, and a compositional richness that nothing else in the film attains. Ironically, Kurosawa musters his greatest energy for the bleakest and most unsparing section of the film.*"

5. Conclusions

As Marjorie Garber correctly stated:

"*The word "Shakespearean" today has taken on its own set of connotations, often quite distinct from any reference to Shakespeare or his plays… 'Shakespearean' is now an allpurpose adjective, meaning great, tragic, or resonant: it's applied to events, people, and emotions, whether or not they have any real relevance to Shakespeare*."

Ben Jonson's verse "He was not of an age, but for all Time"—which is appended to the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's Plays—best captures the problem of Shakespeare's modernity. His deliberate dramaticization of storylines reveals a more comprehensive viewpoint on society, calamity, solitude, and social graces while highlighting hard realities in the context of an enduringly modern condition of affairs. Shakespeare thus "holds a mirror" (as his immortal brainchild Hamlet said we need to) to the physical and mental spasms, and he perceives dead ends, contradictions, and inevitable outcomes as essentially components of the ultimate truth. As Kenneth Muir pointed out "*the subtlety of his [Shakespeare's] characterization survives the process of translation, the transplanting into alien cultures and the erosion of time*."

Although reality is fluid and changeable, the religion of reason, the tragic consequences of human experience, the self's prison, and the persistently existential problems of absurdity and loneliness are all examined in their most overt and plain forms. According to José Angel Garcia Landa, Shakespearean cinema versions have "*multiple intertextual dimensions, connecting them — unlike most adaptations, or remakes — to the original text, to previous films of the same play and to stage productions, which in turn have an intertextual history of their own*".

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