

Faraway Settings: Spanish and Chinese Theaters of the 16th and 17th Centuries.
Juan Pablo Gil-Osle & Frederick A. de Armas, editors.
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Miguel de Cervantes, in his own tongue-in-cheek way, writes in a dedicatory letter to his patron at the beginning of Part II of *Don Quixote* that the Emperor of China begged that he be sent a copy and, based on the novel's success, that the Emperor wanted to found a college where the Spanish tongue would be taught. Few scholars have been interested in Cervantes's China reference beyond the fact that Cervantes was joking that his book was so popular that it had reached the farthest place on earth away from Spain. That is, critics simply assume that Cervantes used a common literary trope from the period about China—it was an insurmountably *far* faraway place.

In *Faraway Settings: Spanish and Chinese Theaters of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Juan Pablo Gil-Osle and Frederick A. de Armas take on a daring critical task that undoes the literary trope that China is far away. They collapse the geographic and generic expanse that separates early Chinese and Spanish drama to study both in the same volume.

The preface, co-authored Gil-Osle and Frederick A. de Armas, is followed by eleven scholarly articles with bibliographies divided into four sections: “Theatrical Origins;” “Oneiric Excesses and Theatricality;” “Global Stagings;” and “Sinosphere.” The book also contains a detailed index and over 20 illustrations. Notably, most of the illustrations are in color, including the beautiful cover image from the 2005 production of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *The Fake Astrologer* (*El astrólogo fingido*) in Colombia.

The first chapter by Bruce Burningham reasserts the rise of Spanish theater through the idea of the “jongleuresque,” an idea first developed in *Radical Theatricality: Jongleuresque Performance on the Early Spanish Stage* (2007). The *jongleuresque* refers to the entire mode of popular performance—not just what are considered traditional plays, but circuses, street theater, balladry, mountebanks, acrobatics, etc.—in which the performer and spectator dialogue in a fluid performance—that is, the performer adapts to the changing demands of the viewer who will stay to watch in so far as the performer makes the performance worth watching. Burningham makes the exciting claim that the essential component of *jongleuresque* is shared in the

medieval Spanish and in the early Chinese dynasty performance traditions. The second chapter in *Theatrical Origins* explores *True Account of the Greatness of the Kingdom of China* (*Verdadera relación de la grandeza del reino de China*), the first major work on China written in Spain, based on the soldier Luarca's experience in 1575. Jorge Abril Sánchez analyzes the Chinese performances described in *True Account of the Greatness of the Kingdom of China*. Abril Sánchez explains how the Chinese representation of sophisticated national theatrical performances were designed to show evidence of military supremacy over regional neighbors and were an act that countered the invasion of a competing imperial power.

In the second section entitled "Oneiric Excesses," Frederick de Armas demonstrates the similarities between two contemporary famous playwrights, Lope de Vega and Tang Xianzu. Carmela V. Mattza Su's "Emotion, Object, and Space," like, de Armas, focuses on a work by Xianzu, *Peony Pavilion*. In "Global Climate and Emotions," Gil-Osle examines the planetary impact on literary creation, which he calls Climate Criticism or Cli-Cri, as the connective thread behind the analysis of literary creation in Habsburg Spain and Ming China. For instance, in the early seventeenth century, global temperatures dropped significantly and in 1618 three comets crossed the sky. Gil-Osle looks to unraveling planetary phenomena in earth's history as stimulating extreme emotions connected to expressions in literature, arguing that they played a role in the 1618 composition of the late Ming *Peony Pavilion* in China and *Life is a Dream* in Spain. Whereas de Armas compares Xianzu's *Peony Pavilion* to Lope, in the final essay in this section, Carmela Mattza Su examines its connections with Calderón de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*, focusing on the agency that each writer attributes to his main female character.

The third section "Global Stagings" includes Alejandro González Puche's "Picaresque Theater" which draws from having directed and staged Cervantes's *Pedro, The Great Pretender* (*Pedro de Urdemalas*) with Ma Zhenghong in Beijing. Moving from a stage production in Beijing to Colombia, the second essay examines the staging of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *The Fake Astrologer*. Inspired by their collaboration in Beijing, Puche, the Colombian director, adapted Calderón's play to Cali's stage with stock characterizations from traditional Chinese opera. The next essay by María José Domínguez examines audience reception to the Colombian production of *The Fake Astrologer* codirected by Puche and Zhenghong. The final essay in the section

examines how a Chinese director, Chen Kaixian, adapted Calderón de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*. Kaixian organized the first Spanish troupe in China and the only student group in Asia which only performs Spanish plays. In Kaixian's *Life is a Dream* adaptation, he adds acts in which Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, as well as Cervantes himself, appear. Kaixian also includes the quintessentially Chinese story *Zhuangzi* (about the oscillation between life and dream) into the adaptation.

The final section "Sinosphere" focuses on Japan. Javier Rubiera's "Christian Sacred Plays and Nō style" explores the connection between Jesuit missionary theater and the Nō style of Japanese theater. Examining sixteenth-century letters written by Jesuits (translated here for the first time to English), Rubiera examines Jesuit theater as a vehicle of communication with Japanese culture in the time of Nobunaga (1534-1582) and Hideyoshi (1537-1598). Rubiera shows how Jesuit Spanish and Portuguese theatrical representations reinforced the Iberian evangelistic campaign. Only one of Lope de Vega's plays takes place in Nippon and, in the second essay Claudia Mesa Higuera analyzes that play, *The First Martyrs of Japan (Los primeros mártires del Japón)*. Mesa Higuera deftly discusses the historical context of the play such as its inclusion of the exile of the heir to throne Toyotomi Hideyoshi—including illustrations of two of his portraits. Mesa Higuera also shows how—through a discussion of Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum—Lope uses the play as a way to appeal to the collective imaginary guiding the audience toward the purposes of Iberia's evangelistic campaign.

It is easy to criticize the weak points of studies of this sort. One may point out that the two final contributions on Japanese theater need to be integrated into the collection in a more nuanced way or that the entire study needs more perspectives from Chinese drama scholars beyond that of Ma Zhenghong. But *Faraway Settings* includes new illuminating essays like the one from the co-directors of the Beijing *Pedro de Urdemalas* production, the 2008 adaptation of a Cervantes's play, which will be news and a valuable contribution for those who study the performance of classical Spanish theater. Each individual essay and the volume as a whole open up unexpected and uncanny perspectives shared between Spanish Golden Age theater and Chinese theater.

Like the best comparative literary studies, this study combines two disparate traditions and, in so doing, produces unexpectedly rich paths for future scholarly practice. In short, no comparative study of Ming China and

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Iberian classical theater has never been attempted before. This essential scholarly volume deserves praise for simply having begun this project. It points out connections, both past and present, that will be a catalyst future work in scholarship and theatrical performance.

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