

Gender, Text, Performance and Agency in Asian Cultural Contexts

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1. In this issue we explore the way in which texts, in the broadest sense of the word, can be sites for performing gender, and the way that they can function to facilitate or limit the exercise of female agency. In defining 'text' and 'performance' as foci of our investigation, we have sought to incorporate scholarship that considers issues of gender in many different kinds of texts, and understands 'performance' either in the general sense of 'performance arts,' or in its Butlerian sense of 'corporeal theatrics,' or in some combination of both of those meanings.^[1] By specifying 'in cultural contexts,' we are interested in scholarship that reflects some of the diversity of and within Asian cultures, as well as scholarship that is aware of its own cultural and historical positioning in relation to its subject matter.
2. The papers collected in this issue examine texts from China, Japan and Indonesia. Some look at the construction of gender in the performance arts of theatre and ballet and in the related field of film, while other papers explore the world beyond literature and art and examine the significance for gender of a wide variety of texts ranging from Buddhist mandalas to oral laments and legal codes. With their broad diversity of subject matter and approaches, the papers collectively offer a rich contribution to both theoretical and practical studies in the field.
3. Although the papers offered here cover a wide variety of cultural contexts and many different kinds of texts, it is notable that in considering issues of gender and performance, each of the papers also directly or indirectly contributes to a key theoretical debate in contemporary women's studies, that is, to the relationship between 'structure' and 'agency' (or the limitations of this dualism as an analytical tool) in determining the way in which gender is performed and choices are made by individual women. Before moving on to discuss the particular contribution of each paper to studies in the field we will briefly overview the concepts of agency, structure and performance in feminist scholarship.

Agency and structure

4. The enactment of women's 'agency,' that is, the empowerment of women to make their own life choices and voice their own desires and protests, or to use bell hooks' phrase, simply 'the ability to act in one's best interest,'^[2] has been a common, if implicit, ideal of feminist thinkers and women activists. The nature of autonomy and agency and if and why women have lacked them, however, have been the source of significant contention, and have been debated in varying forms across the fields of philosophy, the social sciences and literary studies. In the classic view of early Western feminists, women are oppressed by patriarchal structures, internalise their subordination and inferiority, and become incapable of functioning as rational agents.^[3] Their initial cultural subordination leads them to exhibit the negative traits for which women are despised: passivity, weakness, irrationality, indecisiveness and so on. They must be liberated from patriarchy so that they too can become rational, self-determining beings like men. The basic premise of the argument—that women as a group are often controlled and limited by oppressive social and ideological structures—has remained a starting point for feminist thinkers, but the overall argument has been modified and questioned in important ways. Scholars have come to highlight class, race and national cultural divisions between women and to question the privileging of male values, the degree to which women are indeed silenced by patriarchal structures, and, ultimately, the validity of gender categories and identities that are seen as unstable and discursively constructed. The debates surrounding each of these issues contribute important insights to the analysis of gender and culture that are relevant to our discussion of the studies in the current issue.
5. Patriarchal social and cultural structures privilege traits defined as masculine and devalue those defined as feminine. At the same time they label as abnormal or unnatural men and women who do not exhibit their defined gender traits. Women are thus trapped in a situation

where they are either feminine and inferior (subjective, emotional, timid, relation-oriented and so on) or unnatural (objective, rational, self-oriented). For early feminists, the way out of this trap for women (other than by internalising their subordinate status and accepting the status quo) was to free themselves from the shackles of femininity, to adopt masculine values and characteristics and to enter the male world. Counter arguments, however, challenge the desirability of aspirational masculine identity/identities and demand a revaluing of feminine identity 'as a locus of suppressed yet genuine values and as a desirable form of relationally-grounded selfhood and subjectivity.'^[4] Both of these strategies may be useful in particular contexts, but both also create potential difficulties. The former, although liberating for some women, supports the masculinist values that have oppressed women and still leave most of them discursively labelled inferior, while the latter runs the risk of simply reiterating essentialist assumptions about gender difference, thereby leaving the gender hierarchy intact.

6. The second area of contention is the challenge to the view that patriarchal societies and cultures render women silent and passive, arguing that women find voice even where those structures are at their most oppressive. Foucault's conceptualisation of the nature of power included the idea that wherever there is power, there is resistance. Hegemonic discourses are constantly subverted and destabilised from within and from without.^[5] This concept has encouraged women's studies scholars to locate and champion examples of female resistance and agency from within patriarchal structures. This refocusing includes the identification of actions that directly resist hegemonic controls, and the reinterpretation of existing behaviours and actions to show that they are in some way (including morally, psychologically or emotionally) empowering for women. An example of the former could be the 'blue stocking' societies of women resisting arranged marriage who swore themselves to lifelong spinsterhood in southern China in the nineteenth century, while the latter might include the sense of moral superiority of a veiled Islamic woman. This approach gives recognition to aspects of women's agency that have previously been unrecognised or concealed. It is important, however, that the case for female agency not be overstated and the significance of structural constraints and determinants be given adequate recognition. For example the 'choice' of poor, unskilled, women rendered unemployed by China's post-Maoist reforms to work in the sex industry might be better understood not so much as agency but structurally created necessity.
7. Issues of class, race and culture in feminism were first brought to the fore by black American feminists in the 1980s. The 'second wave' feminism of the 1960s and 1970s had been dominated by middle-class white women who had assumed that they spoke for all women with whom they shared a universal female identity.^[6] Black feminists such as Barbara Smith, however, transformed feminist thought by raising an awareness of differences between women.^[7] At first this was understood in terms of racial and class differences between women in the West: but under the growing influence of post-colonialism,^[8] and Third World Feminism,^[9] western feminist scholars were also made aware of the dangers of assuming that the lives of women from other nations, cultures and religions could be analysed on the basis of western culture and experience. On the contrary, it came to be accepted that the lives and actions of women from other nations or cultures could only be understood when considered in relation to the complex matrix of culturally specific social, political, religious, class, gender and other power relationships and structures within which they were positioned.^[10] Although concepts of any kind of stable identity were subsequently challenged and destabilised by postmodernist and poststructuralist theory, in terms of conducting practical research into other cultures and societies, the insights of these concepts of situated identity are a valuable reminder to researchers to remain vigilant to their own cultural biases and assumptions, as well as sensitive to the complexity of their subjects.
8. The questioning of the validity of gender categories and identities by postmodernists has been considered to be of ambiguous value by some feminist scholars, but embraced by others.^[11] On the one hand, as Stephanie Riger argued, 'to assume that women have no voice other than an echo of prevailing discourses is to deny them agency and, simultaneously, to repudiate the possibility of social change.'^[12] On the other hand, the destabilisation of all categories and the contingency of all meaning, further reinforces the need to understand women's lives in multiple contexts, as well as alerting us to the possible invalidity of the very concepts we are applying in different cultural contexts. Are concepts such as 'self-determination' and 'freedom of choice' for example valid in cultures that value collective interests above those of individuals whether male or female?

Performance

9. 'Performance' in this collection is used in two different but often interconnected ways. The first meaning is that of 'performance art' such as that presented on a stage or screen, but also extending to other kinds of non-literary performance such as religious proselytising or bridal laments. Performance art may be significant for gender studies in a variety of ways and scholars may ask such questions as who is the creator / director / writer of the text and why has she or he constructed it in this way? Who are the performers and why? Who is being represented in the performance, how and why? Does the content of the text resist or reinforce the dominant gender discourses of society? What about other semiotic elements of the performance such as costume or kinetics? How does the work impact on the gender beliefs of its audience? Does it raise questions about the very issues and categories we are using to investigate gender in this context?
10. In the Butlerian sense, gender performance is a type of 'corporeal theatrics,' in other words it is an illusion of a gender essence that is acted out by individuals in accordance with cultural and contextual expectations. Butler's concept of gender performance can be applied to both performance arts and other kinds of texts as a way of investigating them as cultural templates for gender performances that are being promoted within those texts. Butler's insights lead to the questions what is the nature of the illusory gender essence that is being performed, and what does the performance reveal to us about the contextual frameworks that shape it?
11. The papers in this collection engage with and illuminate many of these issues in new ways. They divide equally between literary and non-literary texts, providing a substantial contribution to scholarship in both areas. Some papers engage directly and self-consciously with theoretical discussions of performance, gender and agency, while others illuminate the area even though they do not directly deploy those specific concepts in their analysis. We provide an overview of the contributions of each paper below.[\[13\]](#)

Overview of the papers

12. We begin the collection with [Lyn Parker's](#) 'To cover the *aurat*: veiling, sexual morality and agency among the Muslim Minangkabau, Indonesia,' in which Parker explores the meanings of the *jilbab*, or Islamic veil, for the women who wear it in that Indonesian province, and how the subjectivity and agency of its wearers are entangled with larger discourses. Parker's paper begins with an insightful discussion of understandings of agency that will have relevance to many scholars of gender studies particularly those working in cross-cultural contexts. Rejecting Foucault's notion of power as divorced from intention, she argues for the consideration of personal intentions as necessary for the understanding of acts such as Islamic veiling, so as to acknowledge their significance as acts of 'self-production.' Agency should not be seen merely as resistance to relations of domination, but should be regarded inclusively as 'a capacity for identity- and meaning-making, a capacity for pragmatic response, and, in some contexts as the ability to act.' Parker argues that Western feminist concerns with individual freedom and autonomy need to be subordinated to understanding as natural 'the worldview and cultures within which our subjects of research are embedded.' While emphasising subjective intention and personal and psychological outcomes as indicative of the exercise of agency, however, Parker also warns of the importance of the researcher distinguishing between the intentions and outcomes of action as perceived by the subject and the effects of that exercise of agency on broader social structures as interpreted by the researcher.
13. Parker's case study of women and veil-wearing incorporates all of these concerns. Her interviews with young Muslim women reveal that many experienced wearing the *jilbab* as a source of personal status, pride, security and moral safety, outcomes that deny the simplistic Western model of the veil as merely the site of the oppression of Islamic women by Islamic men. She also analyses the broader structural outcomes of the adoption by schools of the veil as school uniform, also recognising that it legitimates Islamic constructions of femininity and takes away the agency of individual young women, who become obliged also to wear it outside of school hours and cannot decide not to wear it. The respectability gained by its wearers, however, also allows veiled women in Minangkabau to enter public life and employment in a way that might not otherwise be possible. Parker's elaboration of the complexity of the issues of agency that surround veiling provides a model of self-aware cross-cultural scholarly practice.
14. Theoretical understandings of agency and how they can be incorporated into research in culturally sensitive ways are also a significant concern in the second paper, [Anne McLaren's](#) study of bridal laments in eastern central China, 'Competing for women: the marriage market

as reflected in folk performance in the lower Yangzi Delta.' Bridal laments in the Nanhui region near Shanghai were performed in the home of the bride-to-be in the days before she left for the wedding and a new home under the authority of her husband's family. The content of the laments included both the bride's protests and expressions of anxiety, and her thanks to each of the members of her family. Additional specific laments were performed at various times during the farewell ceremony and continued until the groom's house came into view at which time they had to stop or else bring bad luck to her new home.

15. McLaren's analytical approach echoes the theoretical deliberations of Parker's paper: In analysing the significance of the laments in terms of women's agency and identity construction, McLaren is careful to understand her subject as positioned not just within Chinese traditional culture, but within the very specific socio-economic environment of the Nanhui region. In this way, she is able to offer a more nuanced analysis of the contradictory implications of the bride's protests and accusations—in an environment in which female infanticide was normal, a bride berating her father for not killing her at birth carries with it the knowledge of her special value because she must have been treasured to have survived. Similarly, McLaren notes that the bride's praise of the cotton-weaving skills of the senior women of the groom's family implies the understanding that in future she too will acquire those skills together with the recognition and status they will bring her in the groom's family. The lament directly exposes the commercial side of marriage through its direct criticism of the dowry and bride price, and McLaren sees this as a form of female agency that functions to undermine patriarchy. However, the complexity of the nature of the lament is highlighted by the irony of the fact that such an act of subverting patriarchy takes place as the bride is in the process of submitting to arranged patrilocal marriage.
16. From the focus on issues of agency in the first two papers, the next paper turns to a case study of one of the many structures that shape gender identity and gender agency. [Helen Creese's](#) paper 'The regulation of marriage and sexuality in precolonial Balinese law codes,' examines the sections of the written law texts in use in Bali in the late nineteenth century that deal with marriage and access to women. By analysing the details of both the offences listed and the severity of the punishments stipulated, Creese is able to offer new insights into the regulation of gender relationships and the position of women in Balinese society of the time. Creese's analysis shows that women were locked into a subordinate position in the gender hierarchy through regulations such as those that permitted women to marry only men of equal or higher caste; or fines that accorded women half the value of men. References to 'the (male) who has rights of ownership' over the woman, and the highly transactional nature of reparations for illegal sexual access to women all point to the commodification of women as objects for economic exchange. On the other hand, Creese also finds that the legal codes offered women some room to exercise agency: women had rights to property and inheritance, a degree of autonomy in marriage arrangements and the right to initiate divorce proceedings. Creese's analysis illuminates the way in which public texts such as legal codes can contribute to the formation of female subjectivity through their implicit positioning of women and evaluation of their social worth. The study is also an example of how unconventional data sources can provide significant new insights into the lives of women.
17. Our next two papers examine two very different types of Japanese images and their significance for our examination of gender and performance. In 'Performing the nation: magazine images of women and girls in the illustrations of Takabatake Kashō, 1925–1937,' [Barbara Hartley](#) examines the complex ways in which popular visual culture established templates for female gender performance that promoted the conservative gender norms of the national authorities while also eliciting a sense of freedom in the viewing subject. Hartley identifies five major constituents of Kashō's material that enabled it to function in this way: 1) the presence of the gorgeous; 2) the ability to embrace the West and dispel its threat; 3) the creation of Arcady in the city; 4) sporting and naked girls as symbols of national health and hygiene; and 5) the presentation of the privileged homemaking girl. Linking Hartley's work to other studies in this issue, we can surmise that modernising societies dominated by patriarchal cultures seem often to focus and resolve anxieties about the moral dangers of modernisation through the bodies of women. Lyn Parker's study of veiling in Minangkabau, for example, noted that the motivation for making the *jilbab* compulsory in schools was social concern over the deteriorating morals of young people. Hatley's paper noted a similar phenomenon affecting broader Indonesian society.^[14] While Hartley has correctly traced the origins of Kashō's images to the specific historical and cultural discourses dominating Japan at the time, her findings may have cross-cultural relevance for societies undergoing transition into modernity. While assuaging patriarchal anxieties by emphasising the traditional essence of the modern woman and bringing the traditional woman up to date, thereby effectively conflating the two groups, the performance template ignores the lived reality of both the traditional and the modern woman, and while feeding a fantasy of

femininity and opulence, ignores the identity conflicts experienced in real life.

18. While Hartley's paper shows how images can function to structure and control gender performance in line with dominant ideologies, [Alison Tokita's](#) paper 'Performance and Text: Gender Identity and the Kumano Faith,' investigates how, on the contrary, images (picture preaching) may have been used by women of medieval Japan as performative texts to subvert the dominant Buddhist ideology by claiming female space within religious structures that explicitly consigned women to a degraded status. Tokita seeks to recover the lost 'voices' of the travelling *bikunu* (nuns) of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through an examination of the mandalas they used as both cue and illustrations for their preaching. She concludes that the *bikunu* made a significant contribution to the spiritual welfare of women at the margins of society and preached messages of hope for women, counteracting the inherent misogyny of the Buddhism of the era with the positive attitudes to fertility, birth, sexuality and motherhood that were inherent in Japanese indigenous religions.
19. [Ana Dragojlovic's](#) paper 'Performing Balinese femininity in migration,' moves the focus of our exploration of agency, structure and performance onto subjects operating in cross-cultural environments. Dragojlovic examines the ways Balinese women with non-Balinese husbands living in the Netherlands structure their gender identities in a constant process of negotiation with Balinese and Dutch cultural expectations. The Balinese women who wished to break away from the Balinese gender ideals for women found themselves in conflict with both the local Balinese community, and with those whose expectations of Balinese women were based on Western stereotypes of the placid, domesticated Asian women. In theoretical terms, we could argue that the paper shows how subjects adjust the content of their gender performance to suit their positioning within conflicting cultural discourses and their own desire and ability to conform with or reject those discourses.
20. Papers in the second section of this special issue cover a diverse range of performance arts in China, Japan and Indonesia including traditional and modern theatre and opera, ballet and film. The switch to the consideration of literary and art topics adds several new dimensions to our scholarly analysis of performance, structure and agency. Contributors in this section engage not just with analysing the representation of women in performance art, but also consider the agentic aspects of the participation of women in theatrical/film production and performance itself, as well as the effects on gender performance of ideological structures that may be embedded within artistic forms and genres themselves.
21. In the first paper in this section, 'Performing gender in Maoist ballet: mutual subversions of genre and ideology in *The Red Detachment of Women*,' [Rosemary Roberts](#) examines the performance of gender in one of the best-known of the radical Maoist 'model works' of the Cultural Revolution period, the ballet *The Red Detachment of Women*. Roberts draws on the contemporary theories of gender and dance of Judith Hanna and Raymond Burt to conduct her analysis, first using examples from the performance practices of traditional Chinese theatre to establish the validity of the theory in the Chinese cultural context. By analysing the kinetic coding of gender in a scene of the ballet, Roberts illuminates the complex interaction between the Maoist ballet's revolutionary ideology of gender equality and the choreographic conventions of classical Western ballet. Her analysis shows that on one hand the classical representation of the female in Western ballet was radically challenged by Maoist ballerinas who performed gun drills and grenade practice, and by choreographic innovations such as the substitution of classical ballet's soft open fingers with a clenched fist. On the other hand the Maoist ballet adopted many of the choreographic conventions of classical ballet that had embedded within them kinetic codes for a gender hierarchy in which women were subordinate to men. Roberts' paper provides us with the insight that the very artistic form through which the radical ideology that sought to establish new templates for gender performance was expressed was itself imbricated with ideological structures that shaped and limited the way it was used to perform gender.
22. [Junko Saeki's](#) paper, 'Beyond the gender dichotomy: the cross-dressing tradition in Japanese theatre,' investigates the performance of gender in Japanese theatre. Taking an historical approach, Saeki shows how androgyny and cross-dressing were an important part of ancient Japanese myth and ritual in which androgyny was a marker of supernatural spiritual power, and the very act of cross-dressing was seen to confer mystical powers upon an individual. Saeki goes on to investigate three main aspects of gender, performance and theatre in traditional and contemporary Japanese theatre: issues surrounding the staged performance—how is gender performed?; issues concerning gender and the performers—how were performers controlled and regulated on the basis of gender?; and issues of gender in society—what was the relationship between theatrical performance and gender performance in off-stage society? Did on-stage gender transgression and ambiguity

translate into tolerance for gender role transgression and ambiguity in broader society? What were the implications of that for the roles of women? Saeki concludes that the effect of cross-dressing in theatre is itself paradoxical and ambiguous: it simultaneously shows the possibility and impossibility of transgressing the male/female boundary, since the theatrical effect of cross-dressing is itself dependent on the stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, despite its attempts to go beyond them.

23. The next two papers, by Barbara Hatley and Lara Vanderstaay, both examine works produced by women. As such they introduce issues of not just how 'woman' is performed in literature and art, but also how the woman writer, director or actor herself might gain a sense of agency or challenge social expectations for female gender performance through her act of artistic creation.
24. [Barbara Hatley's](#) paper 'Hearing women's voices, contesting women's bodies in post new order Indonesia,' looks at both of these issues in the context of contemporary Indonesian society. Hatley takes a broad, inclusive interpretation of agency to mean 'a heightened ability to interpret subjective experience and social conditions, a sense of self-expression and 'capacity for identity and meaning-making.' In contrast to Lyn Parker's earlier focus on issues of agency for women who have complied with veiling requirements, Hatley turns her attention to women who have protested against Islamic religious controls, and who have sometimes been attacked by radical Muslim groups. She investigates the questions: To what extent are such experiences reflected in the performances of such women? How does their work reflect on women's perception of and response to social changes? What differences can be seen in the type of agency expressed in different theatrical genres and by individual performers? Focusing her attention on the relatively new phenomenon of all-female theatre troupes as well as examining the confrontational plays of prominent political activists, Hatley details a wide variety of innovative women's theatre practices through which ordinary women are finding voice. Hatley finds that most women's theatre, despite challenging gender conventions, generally expresses a sense of agency that is celebratory rather than confrontational.
25. The issue of the expression of women's agency as articulated in women's film is taken up in [Lara Vanderstaay's](#) paper 'Female consciousness in contemporary Chinese women director's films: a case study of Ma Xiaoying's *Gone is the One Who Held Me Dearest in the World.*' Vanderstaay proposes a definition of female consciousness in film as 'a female perspective that is manifested through the technical aspects of film including narrative, camera shots, framing and *mise en scène* with that perspective emphasising the agency of women rather than objectifying them.' Using these elements as the framework for her analysis, Vanderstaay investigates the ways in which narrative focus centres on the female characters and marginalises the role of males; camera shots position women to dominate the screen without objectifying them, dialogue reinforces emotional bonds and relationship-centred subjectivities; scene selection can function to subvert the clichés of classical male-centred cinema and so on. Vanderstaay's perceptive analysis suggests to us that women's film can invoke female agency at multiple levels: through the expression of agency of the director as she deploys filmic techniques that challenge and subvert male-centred filmic norms; through direct expressions of female agency and resistance by characters in the film and through the facilitation of a sense of agency in female film audiences—if only in Hatley's sense of heightened ability to interpret subjective experience.
26. The final two papers again examine closely related subject matter, but in ways that illuminate different aspects of the relationships between female agency and social and ideological structures. Papers by Tomoko Aoyama and Joanna Izicki both examine the relationship between child and family as expressed in performance art that reflects on the processes of personal and social recovery from the devastation and chaos of the late-Second World War bombing of Japanese cities.
27. [Tomoko Aoyama's](#) paper, 'Performing father-daughter love: Inoue Hisashi's *Face of Jizo*,' analyses the father-daughter relationship as portrayed in Inoue Hasahi's play first performed in 1994. In the play the daughter, Mitsue who lost her family and friends in the explosion of the atomic bomb three years earlier, is hesitating to pursue happiness with a young man, Kinoshita. Her father appears as a ghost and over a period of the four days represented in the four acts of the play, is able to persuade her to leave the past behind and move on with her life. He diagnoses her problem as a case of 'guilt ridden survivoritis'—the guilt experienced by survivors of disasters in which their loved ones have died—and lovingly supports her and encourages her to restore her aspirations for the future, while also urging her to make sure that true knowledge of the horrors of the atomic bomb is passed on to younger generations. The father turns out to be not quite a ghost, but in fact a manifestation

of the split persona of the daughter, in which she plays a passive role to her father's active, persuasive role. Aoyama analyses in detail the ways in which the play makes its sensitive exposition of father-daughter love, and reads the fact that the father is a manifestation of the daughter's mind as a sign of her active agency. In the context of the preceding discussion of the relationship between female agency and ideological structures, however, an alternative reading of the father-daughter relationship in the play is also possible: that is that for the daughter who finds herself psychologically unable to exercise agency it becomes necessary to invoke patriarchal structural authority by fantasising the existence of her father. Her fantasy of his encouragement and permission then allows her to be free to exercise agency over her future. Hence as well as a symbol of her freedom and agency, the father could also be seen a symbol of her continuing psychological subjection to the constraints of patriarchal structures.

28. The final paper of our collection, 'Singing the orphan blues: Misora Hibari and the rehabilitation of post-surrender Japan,' examines the complex role of the orphan as agent in post-war Japanese film. [Joanne Izbicki](#) identifies the trope of the orphan in the films of occupied Japan as serving as sign, metaphor and solution for major disruptions to Japanese society caused by the war, that is, the disconnection of the repatriated Japanese soldier from civilian society, and the disintegration of the pre-war conception of the family—materially through the loss of family members, and ideologically through the collapse of the pre-war metaphor of the state as family. Izbicki traces the way in which the triple functions of the trope are fulfilled through the character of the child, Mitsuko, in the 1949 film *Kanashiki kuchibue* (Mournful Whistle), illuminating the way in which the child is portrayed as astutely manipulating situations and people to achieve morally sound and happy outcomes that result in the rehabilitation and saving of the adults and, by analogy, the healing of the nation. The agency of the child recreates a new family, but as Izbicki points out, this is not the patriarchal family of pre-war Japan, but a reformulation of the family, based on more egalitarian family relations that are centred on the child. Interpreting Izbicki's findings in the light of our framework of agency and structure, we can say that in *Mournful Whistle*, the child exercises agency in order to recreate social and ideological structures which are, however, modified in the process.
29. The papers in this collection illuminate many aspects of the relationship between gender, text, performance and agency in the context of the cultures of China, Japan and Indonesia. They show that women may exercise or experience a sense of agency in many ways through many different kinds of text and performance, and that social, ideological and cultural structures may limit agency, but that there are many instances of their being resisted, subverted, modified or appropriated. The diversity of the research findings in these papers highlights the need for scholarships to remain highly sensitive to situational context, not just at the macro-level of national cultures, but at the micro-level of where individual texts and performances are situated culturally, ideologically and socially, and to remain attentive to the ambivalent nature of many aspects of gendered experience.

Endnotes

[1] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and gender subordination,' in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 300–15.

[2] bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, Boston: South End Press, 1990, p 206.

[3] The classic representative of early Western feminism is Mary Wollstonecraft, especially *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982 (rpt); This is also the thrust of Simone de Beauvoir's feminist classic, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, London: Picador, 1953 (first published 1949).

[4] Diana Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror, Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 4.

[5] Quoted in Sandra Lee Bartky, 'Agency: what's the problem,' in *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995, p. 183.

[6] Some of the major representatives of second wave feminism include Betty Frieden (*The Feminine Mystique*, London: Gollancz, 1963), Mary Daly (*Gyn/ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Boston: Beacon Press; Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1978), and Adrienne Rich (*Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, London: Norton, 1973).

[7] A key early text was Barbara Smith, *Towards a Black Feminist Criticism*, New York: Out and Out Books, 1981; also see Barbara Smith, *The Truth that Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender and Freedom*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998.

[8] Key texts include Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, and *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1993.

[9] Key texts include Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.

[10] For an excellent discussion of issues of understanding of agency in cross-cultural contexts, see Lyn Parker, 'Introduction,' in *The Agency of Women in Asia*, ed. Parker, London: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005, pp. 1–25, pp. 1–16.

[11] Two of the representative postmodernist feminists are Judith Butler and Donna Haraway. Representative works include Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex,'* New York; London: Routledge, 1993; and *Gender Trouble :Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1999; Donna Hanaway, *Simions, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association Books, 1991.

[12] Stephanie Riger, 'Epistemological debates, feminist voices: science, social values, and the study of women,' in *American Psychologist*, (June 1992), p, 737, quoted in Judith Kegan Gardiner, 'Introduction,' in *Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Gardiner, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, , pp. 1–20, p. 9.

[13] Eight of the papers in this collection were presented at a workshop entitled *Gender, Text and Performance in East and Southeast Asian Cultural Contexts*, held in July 2006 in the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland. The workshop was run with the support of the Australian Research Council Asia Pacific Futures Research Network and the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies. It was co-convened by Tomoko Aoyama, Helen Creese, Barbara Hartley and Rosemary Roberts.

[14] Indian women's studies scholars have examined similar phenomena in Indian culture. See for example the study of Indian women in TV advertising in Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women*, London: Routledge, 1993. Rajeswari discusses the way images of the 'good' modern Indian woman relieve anxieties about uncontrolled 'bad' modern women by combining traditional roles with modern trappings: the role of the housewife is glamourised while the modern professional woman is always depicted as simultaneously being the ideal housewife and mother (pp. 129–35).

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