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Comic Book Adaptations of Shakespeare in Korea: History and Context†

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Abstract

The presence or introduction of Shakespeare into the condensed imaginary world of cartoons and comic books is a fairly recent phenomenon in Korea, compared to a somewhat long history of reception of Shakespeare on stage. Comics were commonly regarded to be a product of lowbrow subculture, and most Koreans took Shakespeare only as an iconic equivalent of the dramatic creation. In the 1960s and 70s, Korean comics became heavily influenced by an influx of the Japanese comics, or manga, and TV animation series including *Iron Arm Atom* and *Candy*. Today, many Korean comic books of Shakespearean adaptations are still under this influence. Unlike other Shakespearean comic books and mangas popular in the Western world, the Korean publishing market mostly targeting young children for their elite education is seen as a unique characteristic. This paper introduces a brief history of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare in Korea and examine the socio-cultural context in which these adaptations are commercially appropriated and educationally circulated.

Keywords: *Shakespeare, Korea, Comic Books, Glocalization, Cultural Studies, Manga, Youth Education*

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한국의 셰익스피어 만화 각색: 역사와 배경

김 강

국문요약

셰익스피어는 세계화의 추세 속에 런던의 글로벌 극장을 벗어나 유럽과 미국에 이어서 아시아의 다양한 문화적 장면에도 등장한다. 한지역의 문화상품이 세계화를 표방하면서 나타난 트렌드의 하나는 상품의 상업적 수용과 문화적 토착화에 기인한 세방화의 노력이다. 최근에는 영미문화권을 중심으로 서구의 만화시장에 일본스타일의 망가 셰익스피어가 대중적이며 상업적인 기반을 다지고 있다. 반면에, 셰익스피어가 한국의 연극계에 수용된 역사와 견주어 봤을 때, 만화라는 상상력이 압축된 지면에 그가 등장한 것은 아주 최근의 현상이다. 한국만화의 시작은 <학원>처럼 10대용 잡지의 출판에서 비롯됐다. 잡지의 주된 대상은 1950년대 초 한국전쟁 후 황폐한 문화환경에 처한 중·고등학생을 포함하는 청소년층이었다. 당시의 만화는 주간이나 월간지 형식의 연속간행물로 발행되었다. 한국에도 근대적 차원의 만화양식이 소개됐지만, 셰익스피어가 만화의 소재나 주제로 등장하는 경우는 거의 예외적이었다. 한 예로, 셰익스피어의 비극 <로미오와 줄리엣>을 각색한 듯한 <노미오와 주리혜>는 대중의 관심을 유혹하기 위한 제목의 재활용에 머물렀다. 각색의 본질적인 차원에서 원작과 대상이 지녀야 할 '상호텍스트성'은 결여된 작품이었다. 한국에서 만화는 저급한 하위문화상품으로 취급됐지만, 식자층은 셰익스피어를 연극적 창조력을 대표하는 상징적 우상으로 여겼다. 1960년대와 70년대에 들어서 일본과 정치적, 문화적 교류가 활발해진 후 한국만화는 일본만화 혹은 망가와 <우주소년 아톰>과 <캔디>와 같은 일본 TV만화 시리즈의 유입으로 지대한 영향을 받았다. 이러한 흐름은 일본의 '소녀만화'의 독특한 작화 형식과 콘텐츠가 한국의 '낭만만화'와 '명랑만화'에 이식되는 결과를 낳았다. 셰익스피어의 희곡을 각색한 한국만화는 여전히 그러한 영향을 답습하고 있다. 서구에서 대중적 인기와 더불어 연구와 비평의 대상으로서 주목받는 셰익스피어 만화 시리즈나 셰익스피어 망가와는 다르게 한국만화는 셰익스피어를 청소년대상의 진학용 학습자료로 활용한다는 점이 색다른 문화적 차이이자 특징이다. 본 논문은 셰익스피어 산업의 세계화와 현지화에 기인한 한국 셰익스피어 만화의 역사를 살펴보고, 그 만화들의 상업적 활용과 교육적 소비와 관련된 사회문화적 배경을 고찰하고자 한다.

주제어: *셰익스피어, 한국, 만화 각색, 세방화, 문화연구, 망가, 청소년 교육*

I. Introduction: Global/calization of Shakespeare

It is plausible that any approach or understanding of glocalization can be compared to a mathematical equation, in which we can possibly solve out a complicated function made of the variants of fixed, unchanged, and hence indigenous cultural products, although it had previously been created in different times and places. No matter where it might come from, whether academic or theatrical circles, one representative example could be telling of all the attempts of recent critical and theatrical approaches to multi-faceted Shakespearean scenes in such globalized Asian countries as China, Japan, Korea, and India. Recently they got gathered all together into the big umbrella of "Asian Shakespeare." Throughout the region a large number of Shakespearean adaptations – or local, “tacky” Shakespeares in terms of reproduction – are continuously on the make by taking advantage of mass media technologies such as film, musical, TV drama, and, especially recently, cartoons and comics. Shakespeare is departing the original borders of the polygon-shaped Globe Theatre building near the Thames in London, England to a much wider world of geo-cultural diversity.

Metaphorically speaking, globalization is the loss of nationality of things in a native culture. As the world grows global and consequently universal in the result, a certain product of cultural popularity in a certain country necessarily gets a good chance to be exported. After being internationally deconstructed and remade, the product is given its final price of commodification in accordance with the appreciation of commercial value that the product has newly acquired on the global market. This is a typical process of commercial reproduction of a cultural product or, I would say, “the process of cultural refurbishment,” through which cultural origins and identity continues to be redefined by diverse courses of reception and circulation in a given society or nation.

In the same vein, Shakespeare seems to have been stripped of his authentic Englishness in process of multi-lingual translations and multi-cultural adaptations of his works into foreign cultures for centuries across the world. Michael Bristol, a prominent American scholar of Shakespeare, asserts in the first line of his introduction from *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* that Shakespeare is "an American Institution." Bristol goes further on his argument, proudly citing "The Folger Shakespeare Library" sit elegantly in front of Capitol Hill in Washington D. C., being an exceptionally Americanized symbol of Shakespearean Study (Bristol 1990, 1). Taking the connotation of the word 'institution' into account as a system and place, we can easily recognize that the Folger Shakespeare Library functions as more than a library, as in a place for holding collections of diverse Shakespearean documents. Rather it is a manufacturing factory to deftly reproduce different kinds and levels of discourse and practice related to almost every field of Shakespeare industry. Here the newly-processed products of Shakespeare are clearly branded as “Made in USA.”

It is noticeable that with the advent of the twentieth century a globally cultural phenomenon previously called the “Shakespeare industry” seemed to get far more Anglo-Amercanized to such a considerable extent that a great number of modern cinematic remakes of Shakespeare's plays have been made in Hollywood. Having

already headquartered its central engine in Hollywood and its power lines connected to New York, the “Americanized” Shakespeare industry is now flexing its muscles in a world reproduction center of Shakespearean cultures, which produces huge profitable commodities. Such geo-cultural changes orchestrated by American cultural capital have actualized a variety of heterogeneous, hybrid styles of “local” Shakespeare across the globe. Recently a booming global market of "graphic Shakespeare" publications is one such cultural practice that needs further critical discussion (Grande 2019, 1).

Talking about Shakespeare and comics at the same time seems to be an uneven, or to borrow a word from John Donne scholarship, “metaphysical” combination of the two cultural products that are completely different from each other in terms of form and content. Shakespeare represents a gigantic icon of theatrical highbrow culture and comics are that of graphic subculture. Comics are generally regarded as a quite readable and enjoyable medium even for adults. But it is unquestionable that main target of their consumption is children. Given that most of the readers of comics are children, critical approaches to comic book adaptations of Shakespeare should necessarily be conducted within the context of Shakespearean adaptations for children, which I take was arguably pioneered by and passed down up from Charles and Mary Lamb.

Here I would argue that their *Tales from Shakespeare* was the first “localized” attempt of its kind in that the book turned the traditional target of consumption of Shakespeare from adults to younger generations. Since the book was published in 1807 in a different way of retelling Shakespeare's dramatic narratives, younger generations which had long been disregarded as target readers, largely due to the content and message set for grown-ups, have started emerging as new potential customers of a niche market. As far as reading comics is regarded to be a certain kind of education that uses descriptive picture panels and illustrations in order to have readers get an easier understanding of the story, it has a strong affiliation with painting, an age-old educational method in history.

However, notwithstanding its strong emphasis on an educational function, comics are definitely required to be entertaining and recreational. These features of comic books make them to be taken as a branch of subculture or youth culture being mostly consumed by children and young adults. This is why most of the academic scholars are reluctant to include comics into the scope of their serious research and critical discussion. As Richard Burt once said in *Unspeakable ShaXXXspeares*, it is unavoidable to blame [Shakespearean] comics made of pictures "in foolishness or literally in stupidity” as just for kiddies (Burt 1998, xiii).

Like comics, Shakespeare or Shakespeares in a plural form, as a term connoting a variety of types of Shakespearean interpretations and reproductions, cannot be confined to one single category for analysis or discussion. As Michael Bristol points out, Shakespeare is still taken as a great symbol of complicated cultural values, and should be distinctively understood in much broader and substantive contexts (Bristol 1990, 19). When it comes to the term “Shakespeare” in a traditional or conventional sense, it is a clearly cultural sign that connotes cultural privilege, exclusion, or hypocrisy. Shakespeare is a metonymy of highbrow culture and ivory tower and at the same time,

a leading engine of the contemporary popularization of literature that is presently highly prolific, especially in the fields of film and other visual media of graphic/pictorial imagination. So by relocating Shakespeare in the category of an elaborately localized culture in Korea, this paper will trace out a brief history of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare in the nation and examine the socio-cultural context in which these adaptations are commercially appropriated and educationally circulated.

II. Comics in Korea

Now let's move on to a brief history of comic book adaptations of Shakespeare in Korea. The introduction of Shakespeare into the condensed imaginary world of cartoons and comic books is a fairly recent phenomenon, compared to a relatively long history of reception of Shakespeare on stage in the country. The comic book adaptations of Shakespeare are one aspect of Bardbiz, which had already been flourished in England and America decades ago. Particularly, a great range of Shakespeare comic versions have been on the market during the first decade of the 21st century and are becoming popular among ordinary young readers and even in the secondary education curriculum. Sadly enough, however, Shakespeare comics in Korea have not as yet been seen as a serious subject of critical approach or analysis. It simply means comic adaptations of Shakespeare in Korea are not as popular as they are taken both as a serious topic for academic discussion and a popular medium of cultural products. Shakespeare is just "an upstart crow" (Rowse 1963, 97) in the Korean publishing market. It looks like it is flying up in the sky, but it will be hard to sustain its full vitality for survival as it has been in the theatre.

It is generally said that the first appearance of Korean comics in a modern sense began with the publication of so-called “high-teen”' (or teenager's) magazine titled *Hakwon* (simply meaning a “school”). Its main target of consumption was young readers of the early 1950s such as middle and high schoolers, as few recreational opportunities existed for the younger generation in the devastated country after the Korean War. They were printed in a weekly or monthly serialized form, a very popular format at the time.

However, Shakespeare has been a rare subject for comics and cartoon magazines on the book market ever since the waves of modernization and mass-production hit the comic book industry in Korea in the 1990s. In Korea, comics have undeniably been taken to be a representative product of lowbrow subculture. Those who wanted to read or felt interest in any kind of comics were censured for being childish or immature. For most ordinary Koreans, Shakespeare is not so much a symbol of global cultural capital as an isolated icon of the theatrical world. Here Shakespeare is a man of the stage, not a man of pictorial imagination.

As the nation rebuilt and modernized after the war, the Korean comic industry became affected in the 1960s and 1970s by the influx of Japanese popular culture including Japanese music, fashion, comic books, and TV animation series such as *Iron Arm Atom* (or *Astro Boy Atom*) and *Candy*. At that time Korea was seeking to reestablish econo-political ties with Japan under the prodding of general-turned-

president Jung-hee Park, the father of disgraced former president Keun-hae Park.

Amid a wide range of contemporary Japanese cultural contents which flooded into Korea, especially notable was the influence of Japanese “Girls' Comics,” whose content and drawing style became a platform for the birth of "Romantic" (or Sensational) Comics in Korea (Sohn 2005, 42-43). Today, many Korean comics adapting Shakespeare are still subject to their enduring influence. Such “Romantic Comics” became very popular between the early 1960s and the mid 1980s. It was not until the early 1990s that creative original Korean style comics progressed to be on par with its counterparts from Japan and other countries.

One of the most popular cartoonists at the time was Hee-ja Um (Figure 1). She made her debut with the comic book *A Star of Happiness* in 1963, still considered her magnum opus. She continued to work on other important comic books such as *The Daughter of an Aristocrat* and *Aria on a G String*. Um was accordingly dubbed “the god mother of the Korean romantic cartoons” (Um 2008, 5).

Figure 1. Cover Page of *A Star of Happiness* by Hee-ja Um

As the titles of her comics suggested, Um intended her works to be viewed by her target readers as highly romantic and high-class. among target readers. Almost all of the young female characters, including the heroines, have the idealized bodies of Western girls. They look very tall and thin and have big rounded eyeballs with long eyelashes, a sharp and high nose, and a face of sadly tearful expression, all characteristics that Oriental females would be unlikely to attain in actuality.

In addition, the image of a twinkling star is commonly put in each eyeball to suggest the female characters’ purity and innocence. Innocent virginity coupled with a Western body type appealed to male readers during early puberty. Because most Korean adults now in their forties and fifties grew up under the influence of Japanese style comics and TV animations, any genuine versions of Korean comics look somewhat unfamiliar and rudimentary to their eyes. Romantic stories telling of sad and desperate love affairs became unavoidable sweeteners in life’s black coffee that, it can safely be assumed, drove the heavily pounding hearts of young readers.

The princess-like girls' image also gained huge popularity among young girls. So, other comic artists were willing to imitate the drawing style from Japan as a standard technique for their graphical expression (Figure 2). However, such physical appearance or morphology is not Korean or Oriental in any traditional sense, but rather a typical Western one. These Japanese styles and techniques applied to Girls' (or teenagers') and Lady Comics made a crucial influence on the establishment of the popular trend of Korean comics in those days.

Figure 2. Cover Pages of *Girls' Magazine* with Titles in Chinese and Korean

It is commonly said that the first amalgamation of Shakespeare and comics was *The Barnyard Hamlet*, published in 1916. It was a simple recreation of *Hamlet* into a tragedy of farm animals. In 1941, Gilberton Publishing Company published Alexander Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* as the first of its Classics Illustrated comic series. Since then, comics and classical literary works have started being combined on paper. With the first publication of an "illustrated adaptation" of Shakespeare's plays by Gilberton in March 9, 1950, Shakespeare comics gained commercial momentum on the market (Wetmore 2006, 175).

In Korea the first comic 'appropriation' of Shakespeare could be traced back to 1965, when *Nomio and Julihae* was published in a serial format in a monthly magazine entitled *Girls' Magazine*, fifteen years after the first encounter of Shakespeare and comics in the outside world (Sohn 2005, 46). As surnames, No and Ju are not so popular in Korea in comparison with other common ones, such as Kim, Lee, and Park.

Nomio and Julihae was originally illustrated as a cartoon series by Ki-joon Park. He must have taken the title from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. He seemed to make a pun on the names in compliance with the Romanization of the Korean alphabet. Thus, it could not possibly be defined as a 'comic adaptation or graphic appropriation' of Shakespeare, because the cartoon appeared poised to use the very name of Shakespeare for commercial attention, taking advantage of the characters' popularity only. In a broader sense, adaptation requires more a significant degree of transformation in its content and form.

Focusing on the daily life of the middle schoolers at home and in school, each episode tells a story of possible chance of puppy love between No and Ju, whose family

has just moved into No's village. To our surprise, despite the title the story has no reference to the original *Romeo and Juliet*. In the cartoon, the relationship between No and Ju is of close friendship rather than of a tragic love affair.

The cartoon format is thirty picture panels over four pages in length. One large panel consisting of two small ones is given at the head for the title and artist's name along with an introductory illustration (Figure 3). From 1966 on, Sang-moo Lee, a junior cartoonist to Ki-joon Park, took the pen and monopolized huge popularity among young readers until 1980, a challenging period of political and social unrest in the wake of the assassination of Jung-hee Park by his KCIA director Ji-cheol Cha.

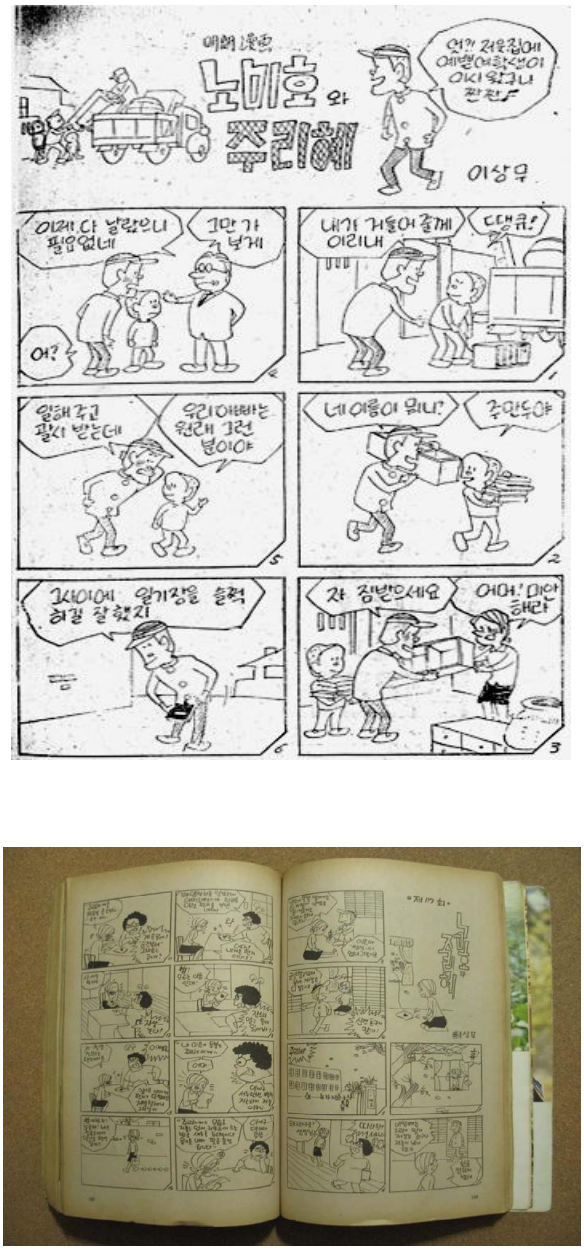

Figure 3. *Nomio and Julihae* by Sang-moo Lee, *Girl's Magazine*, Nov, 1966

Throughout the sixty year history of Korean comics, Sang-moo Lee was recognized as a pioneering cartoonist who had first paved the way for the cheerfulness and gaiety of Korean comics in that he depicted in his cartoon panels of the everyday life of ordinary young students in a quite bright and cheerful way, hence seen hopeful and positive. Young characters are mostly depicted good-natured and innocent, but sometimes behave like naughtily. Cartoonist Lee tried to catch a glimpse of some of the political and social situations in the 1970s through an imaginary world that he has created in the cartoon.

Nevertheless the regimen of the outside world leaked in: Nomio was frequently seen wearing a Japanese style school cap in a tight uniform, while Julihae had bobbed hair and a girl's neat uniform. Until 1987, all primary and secondary schools in Korea were under the forced control and management of the Korean Ministry of Education, which rigidly enforced school regulations. Boys and girls were segregated by gender with no exceptions. They were still forced to wear school uniforms transplanted into modern Korea during the Japanese colonial rule. Boys wearing the school cap and shoes assigned by school authorities and a neatly trimmed hair style were under military-like surveillance. Under such an oppressive social atmosphere, personal intercourse or relationships between the two sexes became fraught. Those who tried to violate the “unwritten” codes of conduct in school were regarded as disorderly students and made the object of educational discipline.

But Nomio and Julihae, as the leading characters, to some degree challenged the social code like their original counterparts in *Romeo and Juliet* and provided students with both a sense of secret amusement and a place for emotional relaxation. Some episodes were colored with allusions of and expectations for young love so that they can be read as a sort of “subversive” text of deviation and “'anti-sociopolitical” sentiment of young Korean people, through which they were able to escape from the social pressures of the oppressive political system.

As Stephen Orgel suggests in his article “Shakespeare Illustrated,” the cartoon worked as "an eye-witness sketch" that realistically showed youths’ problems and other ongoing serious problems in Korean society (Orgel 2007, 67). Unlike Shakespeare's original play, *Nomio and Julihae* never die for their star-crossed love. That is one of reasons why this cartoon has been called “a comic of gaiety.”

III. Graphic Shakespeare In and Out

It was not until the early 21st century that comic adaptations of Shakespeare seemed to be revived on the Korean book market. Shakespeare has long been a cultural product exclusively for Korean stages and musicals. Even though there have been various printed versions of Korean translations (Shin 1988, 34), his plays were significantly consumed as a classical symbol of high culture in the theater and in academia, the subject of performance and research. Korean theater circles have always been the place in which commercial appropriation of Shakespeare was quite available. In Korea, there have been no Shakespeare-related mainstream popular culture in television dramas, K-pop, advertising, or films. Instead the recycling remains centered

in certain types of publication, mostly story books and comic books for children for the sake of educational purpose, even though Shakespeare is not a subject of obligatory reading, only an optional one at every level of education.

It is well known that Korean society has fierce competition so as to keep up with the speed of rapid globalization to be an advanced country. Among the struggles that Koreans have to take in to survive in society, getting successfully admitted into the prestigious 'SKY' colleges (an acronym for Seoul National, Korea, and Yonsei Universities) is of great importance in life. The success could be compared to securing a gold medal in the “Olympics of survival of the fittest.” Gold medals mean enough pension for life. Potential candidates must earn the highest scores at the Korean SAT competition, write essays, and endure difficult interviews. They are required to read a long lists of books of literature, philosophy, history, and religion and so on, so as to fully arm themselves with the knowledge base necessary for the written and oral tests. Thus, condensed or abbreviated texts are effective weapons for potential examinees. A variety of forms and sizes of Shakespeare tales and comic books started gradually coming into the market, largely thanks to the competitive educational environment for a good college in Korea.

Under such social and educational contexts, comic adaptations of Shakespeare and other classics became an educational toolbox. Their *raison d'étre* has been to help students memorize or epitomize crucial knowledge in a very limited time rather than to develop liberal learning at an early age. Since Shakespeare was being popularized for educational purposes rather than commercial or cultural ones in Korea, it is not unfair to see Shakespeare, a representative cultural icon of the world literature, still kept on a dark dusty book shelf in the library attic. Here Shakespeare became material for “comics of learning or essay writing” with other famous men and women from history including Einstein, Hitler, Thatcher, and Bill Gates. For school children, they are just "cribs" that enable them to study with more speed (Perret 2004, 72).

Comic book adaptations of Shakespeare in early 21st century Korea involve a small number of small-sized companies headquartered mostly in Seoul. Large companies tend to pay little attention to this trend for the market size is very limited. In the Western hemisphere, big names with financial support and international distribution network are common, such as Spark Notes, Cliff Notes' Wiley Manga Edition, Stone and Books, Lucent Books, Graphic Planet, Baron's Graphic Classic, Black Dog's Graphic Shakespeare Library, Classical Comics, and Selfmade Hero. There, Shakespeare comics have recorded a huge increase in consumption and reception in the recent decades.

According to search results using the phrase “Shakespeare and comics” on Yes24.com, Korea's biggest online book seller, the total number of the Shakespeare comic editions published up to date is 26. The results are divided into three categories: comics by Korean cartoonists, comics by foreign cartoonists, and a four tragedies-in-one edition. The number of editions that belong to each category is 19, 6, and 1 respectively. Subjects and number of editions (marked in a parenthesis) under the comic books by domestic category are Shakespeare as the author (4 versions), *Hamlet* (5), *King Lear* (1), *Romeo and Juliet* (7), *The Merchant of Venice* (2), and *The Taming*

of the Shrew (1). Under the foreign cartoonists, including artists from France and Japan, are *Hamlet* (1), *King Lear* (1), *Romeo and Juliet* (2), *Richard III* (1), and *The Tempest* (1). Four tragedies-in-one edition is only 1 kind by a domestic artist. As seen in the list, the most popular subjects of the cartoons in Korea are *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* for their established reputation and appealing dramatic narratives. Only 7 out of the 38 plays customarily attributed to Shakespeare are on the market in comic form.

Japan's strong influence on the genre is still apparent in the Shakespeare adaptations. As in other cartoons, almost all the female characters in Korean comic adaptations of Shakespeare appear very "womanly," whether young or old, while their physicality and body shapes are undeniably Western, or like cross-dressing Kabuki actors: they are tall and thin with long eyelashes and delicate fingers. The appearances of Romeo (by Soo-yeon Won, Figure 4), Hamlet (by Kyung-a Choi, Figure 5), and even nasty-tempered Petruchio (by Ho-kyung Yeo, Figure 6) and stubborn father-king Lear (by Young-hee Kim, Figure 7) have feminized, even girlish figures.

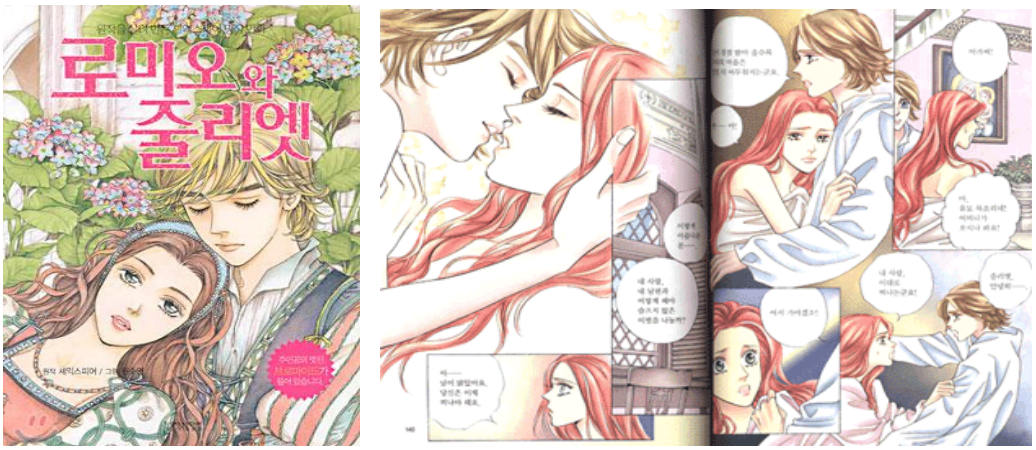

Figure 4. *Romeo and Juliet* Illustrated by Soo-yeon Won, 2003

Figure 5. *Hamlet* Illustrated by Kyung-a Choi, 2003

Figure 6. *The Taming of the Shrew* by Ho-kyung Yeo, 2004

Figure 7. *King Lear* by Young-hee Kim, 2003

Hamlet's girlish figure looks inspired by *The Drama of Vengeance*, a German silent movie directed by Svend Gade that was released in 1920. Fragments posted on YouTube switch between funny and weird. Its shocking plot reveals that Hamlet is originally born as a girl, but the secret has been kept due to royal succession laws, in case of her father's death in battle. Hamlet also hides a strong sense of affection toward Horatio. It is also worthy to note that Danish “actress” Asta Nielson took a leading role of “feminine Hamlet” in the film (Crowl 2008, 5-6). In contrast, the Hamlets in the No Fear Shakespeare graphic novel of 2008 in the U.S.A. and the Manga Shakespeare version of 2007 in the U.K. have a much clearer sexual identity.

But the leading female characters in all Asian comic Shakespeare retain a very strong sexual identity by noticeably emphasizing their breasts as big and round. As seen on the panel of *Romeo and Juliet* by Soo-yeon Won in Figure 4 above, the emphasis on women's physical appearances seems to have fused the conventional style of Japanese manga and traditional way of Japanese dressing, in the case of kimonos that have tight

and wide belts under the breasts to emphasize them. Mangas are a text of public voyeurism, of female objects to be seen, both for adults and children.

In terms of attire, cartoonists tend to imitate the conventional dressing style of medieval or Renaissance England as well as a touch of Japanese visual conventions. Dialogue in speech bubbles combines lines of Shakespeare with archaic expressions such as "Your/His/Her highness," "My liege," and "Please dear."

Lastly, another characteristic of Korean comic adaptations of Shakespeare is their conservative character, compared to the creative transformations in other media. Contemporary musical renderings of some of Shakespeare's plays in Korea have become “Koreanized” to a large extent, as vividly witnessed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Jung-ung Yang of Yohangza Theatre Company, while comic adaptations of Shakespeare seem to be very hesitant to challenge. Many comic panels faithfully follow the original storyline and time order of Shakespeare's plays as printed.

Renaissance attire, archaic language, unchanged plot, identical time setting, and Japanese comic style figures are common features of Korean comic adaptations of Shakespeare. Very different have been the ten works to date of the Manga Shakespeare project, published by Selfmade Hero in the U.K. For examples, the manga recreation of *King Lear* is set on “the American frontier during the colonial wars of the 1750s between the French and British settlers, and Iroquois Confederacy” (Ilya 2009, 2). Macbeth, a great warlord, appears to desire “to rule as king in a future world of post-nuclear mutation” (Deas 2008, 1). And *Hamlet* is set in “the year of 2107 when global climate change has devastated the Earth. This is now a cyber world in constant dread of war. Prince Hamlet of Denmark has come home to face an uncertain future” (Vieceli 2007, 1). In sharp contrast, the book cover of Korean *Hamlet* by Kyung-a Choi promises “a comic of Shakespeare's masterpiece made of and saving every touch of the original" (Choi 2003, back cover, Figure 8).

Figure 8. Back Cover of the Korean *Hamlet*

IV. Conclusion: Shakespeare Comics for All

In comic book adaptations of Shakespeare, visual and verbal translations coexist. Visual translation is much more freely made in the comics than in film. Comics are the medium in which various contexts of visual translation could be made. But in terms of the presentation of characters of dramatis personae, comics have their inherent limitations, because in comics, characters should be depicted through their facial expression which was already fixed at a stage of sketching by a cartoonist. So, within the first few pages of a comic book, characters of vice and virtue are apparently distinguishable by their typical depiction of appearances. It usually continues to be unchanged to the last page.

Most recent comics internationally published have in common a few conspicuous features which distinguish them from most previous attempts. First, their comic writers and publishers appropriate the Japanese comic tradition and even label their works as manga, following the original name. Recent Shakespeare manga are drawn in a real Japanese style by illustrators who were born or educated in English-speaking countries and later learned the Japanese manga tradition. The second trait is the scope and size of publications, which is targeting the global market. Another characteristic of Shakespeare comic book publications is the emphasis on its educational intent, which claims that Shakespeare comic books will expand the range of Bard readership and eventually lead young readers to the world of original Shakespeare texts and productions (Nam 2012, 268).

Comic book versions of Shakespeare's plays not only inform, but also interpret, verbally and visually, blatantly or subtly, drawing images coded in the panels. While the medium and audience make adaptation necessary, intelligent cutting can clarify as well as condense, and imaginative artwork can convey some of the play's complexity and depth by suggesting more than is said. Because the reader must actively cooperate in giving a comic book imaginary life, when the artist successfully catalyzes interaction between word and picture, careful observing challenges thought. A panel or page from a comic book version of Shakespeare can become an enjoyable means of helping any level of student across the world grasp that a single text may be interpreted several ways, that the text itself is an interpretation, and that the culture of the time or place influences the shaping and understanding of the text. Used imaginatively, comic books can help them begin to recognize critical problems and theoretical concerns for their own sake. As Marion D. Perret asserts, today, students may learn to appreciate Shakespeare's artistry by a similar interpretive decoding of the written text “by reading a scene carefully, then reflecting upon how this is translated into a visual medium that simplifies and clarifies,” (Perret 2004, 91) then turning back to study the verbal medium, bringing with them an increased awareness of what makes Shakespeare, as even his rival Ben Jonson fully acknowledged, not of an age, but for all time.

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