

Book Review

***A Korean Approach to Actor Training.* By Jeungsook Yoo. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017; pp.xi + 133. £29.99 paper.**

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Jeungsook Yoo's *A Korean Approach to Actor Training* provides a valuable insight into a specific meditation form, *Dahnhak*, and the development of performance scores for three productions: *The Bald Soprano* (2004), *The Water Station* (2004) and *Playing 'The Maids'* (2013-16). Through her exploration of *Dahnhak* meditation and a Korean shamanistic dance form *Salpuri*, Yoo provides us with some insights into East Asian self-cultivation and ritual practices from a more Taoist perspective. Although not directly aligning her work to the mindfulness debate, Yoo helps to map out some of this territory through her embodied experiences of these forms and also in her application of these techniques into performance training. In the introduction Yoo asserts that her intention is to articulate 'a theory of practice of contemporary acting and actor training from a Korean and more broadly East Asian perspective based on the bodymind monism and the embedded paradigm of *ki*' (1). An East Asian perspective of *ki* is the main premise of the book, where *ki* is considered as 'the basic element of the universe, therefore, everything living or non-living in the universe is a different manifestation of one *ki*' (70). Rather than attempting to provide an overview of these terms and a wider cultural exploration of Korean contemporary actor training, Yoo uses her specific embodied experiences to navigate the interior work of the actor through the use of specific East Asian technologies of mind and body.

In Chapter One, 'Toward gained nature in artificiality', Yoo positions her artistic identity as a Korean actor exposed to aspects of traditional Korean culture alongside Western paradigms and Western actor training methods. Inspired by the intercultural and psychophysical performer training of Phillip Zarrilli, her teacher since 2001, Yoo draws on her experiences of *Dahnak* meditation and its potential as a psychophysical actor training method. Yoo provides an insight into the importance of *ki*-training within this form and also more generally within traditional East Asian culture. Yoo asserts that *ki* 'contributes to the formation of the bodymind monism by being a linking state between the body and mind' (4). Drawing on the work of Japanese philosopher Yasuo Yuasa (2004) and his view of meditation as a 'technique' to master body and mind, Yoo highlights the importance of cultivation and the 'knowledge that can be gained through empirical engagement in practice' (9). Through a phenomenological exploration of what is learnt and accumulated through such meditation forms, Yoo goes on to explore the application of these techniques in the creation of performance scores in later chapters.

Chapter Two, 'Recovering sensitivity toward mastery', introduces and explores *Dahnak* – a Korean meditation form developed by Seung-Heun Lee. Yoo provides a brief historical and contemporary perspective of this form within the wider Korean culture of '*ki*-training' (12). Through explorations of the main principles of *ki* alongside explanations of the practice, Yoo provides an insight

into the qualities of energy cultivated through long-term engagement with this practice. Through developing a stronger sensitivity to one's relationship to *ki*, Yoo explores this practice as a way to train the mind and body cultivating 'sensitivity to and mastery of the bodymind, and the ability to embody relaxed concentration, *jigam* state, emptiness, no-mind and no-self.' (29).

In Chapter Three, '*The Bald Soprano: Forming an active-passive relationship*', Yoo explores aspects of a production undertaken at the University of Exeter as part of a module led by Professor Phillip Zarrilli. With reference to Zarrilli's well-documented psychophysical actor training approach which includes *hatha yoga*, the Indian martial art *kalarippayattu*, and the Chinese martial art *taiqiquan* (Wu Style), Yoo provides a personal account of working under the direction of Zarrilli within this particular context. Through a phenomenological account of the training, rehearsal process and performance, Yoo provides insightful approaches to the sensitisation to and exploration of *ki* in relation to text and language, as well as the application of the 'active-passive state' in relation to working with her fellow actors and the audience.

Chapter Four, '*The Water Station: Moving ki in inner and outer space*' explores the non-verbal performance score of Shogo Ota as performed by Yoo in 2004 and 2015 under the direction of Zarrilli. Drawing on the wisdom of ancient Chinese medicine, Yoo frames her exploration of *ki*-flow within the body alongside discourses of the meridian channels. Through a detailed analysis, Yoo presents her experience of performing the role of The Girl focusing on a specific use of awareness and the particular design and experience of *ki*-flow for this role.

Chapter Five, '*Playing 'The Maids': Tuning emotional ki*', explores the international collaboration of theatre companies, the Llanarth Group (UK), Gaitkrash (Ireland), Theatre P'yut (Korea) and two independent artists, Jing Hong Okorn-Kuo (Singapore) and Adrian Curtin (Ireland), through the making of a production using Jean Genet's *The Maids*. Within this particular context and drawing further on her experiences of acting under the direction of Zarrilli, Yoo focuses on the embodiment of emotion using the concept of Korean *Han* and *Salpari* dance. Following a brief exploration of these particular concepts and their traditional technologies, Yoo articulates her experiences of playing Claire and her approach to the performing of emotion.

A Korean Approach to Actor Training maps out a particular embodied experience of actor training and contemporary acting. Yoo has provided the reader with a phenomenological account of her experiences alongside small shards of Korean and East Asian cultural traditions, concepts and practices which she uses effectively to contextualise her work for a Western audience. The intercultural approach of the book suggests that it will appeal to a wide range of audiences including those interested in psychophysical performance and embodied practices. The specific articulation and focus on *ki* within this context will also appeal to those interested in martial, healing and meditation practices.