



# THE (UN)MAKING OF A NORMATIVE EAST ASIAN FACE:

*YELLOWFACE, PLASTIC SURGERY, AND WUKONGIST CASTING*

## **Dr. Sissi Liu**

Visiting Scholar of East Asian Studies  
Brown University

Thursday February 21, 2019

12:00 PM to 1:30 PM

Gerard House 101 (54 College Street)

*Please RSVP at [tinyurl.com/EACLiu](http://tinyurl.com/EACLiu)*



*Sponsored by the East Asia Colloquium*

**BROWN**

The first talk of the semester in the East Asia Colloquium series is by Dr. Sissi Liu of Brown University, entitled "The (Un)Making of a Normative East Asian Face: Yellowface, Plastic Surgery, and Wukongist Casting" on **Thursday, February 21, from 12 to 1:30 pm in Gerard House 101**. Lunch will be provided. The abstract and poster for the event, as well as Dr. Liu's bio, is provided below.

**The (Un)Making of a Normative East Asian Face:  
Yellowface, Plastic Surgery, and Wukongist Casting**

**Sissi Liu, Visiting Scholar of East Asian Studies, Brown University**

Outside East Asia, especially in Western Europe and North America, a normative East Asian face exhibits stereotypical racial features and often oscillates between a subject of ridicule—particularly in yellowface performances—and a site of fame and fashion, as exemplified by Sandra Oh and others. In East Asia, normative East Asian faces have, since the mid-20th century, increasingly reflected Euro-American aesthetic standards, rendering popular plastic surgical procedures of blepharoplasty (double eyelid surgery) and rhinoplasty (nose bridge reconstruction) as well as media appearances of Eurasian performers. What makes a face East Asian? What constitutes a normative East Asian face, and for whom? Who may put on an East Asian face onstage, and whom may an East Asian face portray? An East Asian face is not always born, but rather socio-historically fabricated through the practices of yellowface and its many variants, or technologically made using plastic surgery. Intersecting East Asian studies with performance studies, American studies, critical race theory, and theatre history, this lecture historicizes and proposes a theoretical approach to the making and unmaking of a normative East Asian face. The first half of the talk examines how such faces were constructed primarily in Europe and North America and their circulation to and from East Asia in three loosely chronological stages. The second half explores the ways to unmake or deconstruct normative East Asian faces using the method of Wukongism—a conceptual framework informed by Sun Wukong the Monkey King narrative.

Dr. Sissi Liu is a scholar-artist whose work centers around modern and contemporary US and East Asian cultural production across multiple media, including musical theatre, dance, digital performance, comic books, and visual arts and design. Her book

manuscript, *Shapeshifter Consciousness: Wukongism as Method for Asian/American Performance*, offers one of the first conceptual frameworks informed by an East Asian narrative to examine cross-cultural theatre and performance. Her research is published or forthcoming in venues such as *Performance Research*, *Studies in Musical Theatre*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *Performance and Spirituality*, edited volumes *iBroadway: Musical Theatre in the Digital Age* and *The Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*. As a theatre practitioner, she has dramaturged and directed at the Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, Time Square Alliance, PS122, Martin E. Segal Theater, among others. She is a classically trained pianist and composer, and holds a PhD in Theatre and Performance from The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

If you would like to attend the event, please RSVP by filling out [this form](#) by **Monday, February 18, at noon**. The form is also available at [www.tinyurl.com/EACLiU](http://www.tinyurl.com/EACLiU). We appreciate your cooperation in helping us get an accurate headcount and dietary information for the talk.