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Reading Li Kotomi: Acts of Witnessing in Times of Global Violence

A hybrid *u:japan* lecture by Grace En-Yi Ting

Thursday
2026-06-18
18⁰⁰~19³⁰

李琴峰さんを一人にしない

We stand with Li Kotomi

我們絕不會讓李琴峰孤單一人



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In my reading of a 2024 novel titled *In the Nation Blessed by the Spiritual Power of Language* (Kotoba no sakiwau kuni de), I reflect upon Taiwanese lesbian author Li Kotomi's depiction of a year of calamity for a fictionalized version of herself named L, who goes through the trauma of being outed as transgender after winning a prestigious literary prize in Japan. I analyze Li's narrative strategies involving the depiction of xenophobic and transphobic hate speech from social media, digressive passages teaching readers about LGBT+ histories and transgender issues, and her reclaiming of Shinto beliefs and traditions.

As MeToo movements continue to call for urgency in dealing with gender-based violence around the world, the stories of Li and her protagonist offer a necessary critique of mainstream narratives concerning what constitutes gender-based and/or sexual violence. Feminist narratives of MeToo often center violence experienced

by cisgender, heterosexual women, and trans-exclusionary radical feminists refer precisely to the vulnerability of such women as their reason for attacking transgender women. It is crucial to resist such conceptions of vulnerability and violence and adamantly reject the targeting of transgender and queer "others."

In a time of global transphobia, I argue for the need to hear stories such as Li's, which take place in contexts of Japan and Taiwan on the periphery of Anglophone discourses. What does it mean as a literary studies scholar to witness transphobia and gender-based violence in these times? What might transnational, translingual literary criticism do to address such narratives in solidarity? I consider what it means for marginalized academics to try to engage directly with lived experiences of suffering and trauma in environments with freedom of speech under constant threat.



Grace En-Yi Ting (she/they) is an assistant professor of gender studies at the University of Hong Kong specializing in queer feminist approaches to Japanese studies, particularly women writers and girls' culture. Her recent work engages with frameworks of Global Asias by reorienting Japanese literature through transnational flows of queer/feminist texts and politics circulating between Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Asian America. In addition, they have written book reviews for *Asymptote*, *World Literature Today*, *Words Without Borders*, *Cha: An Asian Literary Journal*, and *The Japan Times*. As a literary translator, in 2026, she was selected to work on a hybrid translation from Japanese/Chinese to English under "Literature from Taiwan" for the ALTA Emerging Translator program. As a crip non-binary queer feminist, they believe in the importance of creativity, labor, and solidarity extending beyond the academy and its norms.

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