

Introduction: Chinese Culture in Inter-Asia

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Asia is not One; rather, the name “Asia” is nothing but a placeholder of its absence. However, it is the absence of any shared content that makes the coming of Asia possible. The emergence of Greater China in the late twentieth century may not necessarily bring the realization of the promise of an “Asia” closer to reality. On the contrary, a strong Chinese nation in the region could destabilize the existing relationships among the Asian nations and would inevitably introduce cultural and political tensions to the region. The 2004 tsunami disaster in Southeast Asia, however, seemed to bring many Asian countries together: in January 2005, Hong Kong Chinese movie stars, such as Eric Tsang and Jackie Chan, organized a seven-hour television show featuring more than 100 celebrities from various Asian countries to raise funds to aid tsunami victims. So many performers were motivated to participate in the show because it gave them a rare chance to access a huge transnational audience. Without impugning the goodwill of the organizers, we also should not underestimate the skill of the Hong Kong popular culture industry in seizing such opportunities to reinforce its position as an entertainment center in the region. On the other hand, the tsunami disaster has also offered a platform for the governments of China, Japan, and India to compete for leadership in the region by playing active roles in the rescue operation and offering assistance in reconstruction work.

Apparently, Japan is quite desperate to maintain its influence in Asia

and aims to stem China's increasing clout because of China's military buildup and growing economic challenge: in 2004, Japanese destroyers chased a Chinese submarine out of Japanese waters, and Japan accused China of violating its sovereignty and demanded a formal apology; ignoring warnings from China and other Asian nations, the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has repeatedly visited Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine to mourn Japan's war dead (among which are fourteen war criminals); and the Japanese government has been sending more peacekeeping troops abroad and is considering amending the constitution to permit greater military latitude. The recent controversies between the two powers—including, in addition to those listed here, disputed territories in the East China Sea, oil resources, history textbooks, and Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council—are symptoms of the mutual distrust, tension, and entangled relationships inherited from the past. Historically, there have never been a strong Japan and a strong China in the region at the same time. And there are increasing strains of nationalism in both countries (recently conducted polls reveal that the majority of Chinese and Japanese distrust each other's country). How can the concept of Asia be possible if there is a sustained rivalry between the two major powers in the region? Would it be good for Asia as well as the world in the new century if China ultimately resumes its hegemony in the region and returns to a hierarchy of power centered on Beijing?

In spite of the political conflicts and tensions between China and Japan, there is now more mutual influence, exchange, interaction, and collaboration in the cultural realm, not only between China and Japan but also among other Asian nations, than ever before. East Asian popular culture is emerging with a vengeance, and consumers in East Asian nations often find cultural products of other East Asian nations—for instance, South Korean television dramas, Hong Kong movies, and trendy Japanese products—more appealing than those from the United States or Europe. Such cultural bonds, of course, are not unrelated to the workings of the

economy. The impact of global capitalism has gradually tied the region into an integrative economic unit. The anti-Japanese demonstrators in Beijing shouting “boycott Japanese goods” in April 2005 seemed to be blind to the fact that most Japanese items on sale in the mainland are actually made in China, by Chinese workers, often using Chinese-made components. Japanese economic expansion or economic imperialism, accompanied by its cultural influences, is by no means a new thing in Asia. Indeed, many developing and underdeveloped Asian countries have seen postwar Japan’s dramatic miracle growth as an outcome of a different kind of colonialism and exploitation. What’s new, however, is the rapid rise of China since the end of the twentieth century that has created rippling effects in the region and around the world.

The objective of this special issue is to offer an academic platform to analyze, survey, and theorize modern and contemporary Chinese cultural exchanges in this new inter-Asian context. In the spirit of thinking beyond the conventional dichotomy between China and the West and calling attention to the changing relationships between an emerging Greater China and its neighboring countries, we seek to investigate the dynamic interactions between globalized cultures and local hybridizations in the many ways Chinese cultures and Asian cultures interact: the productions, circulations, and receptions of different cultural products; the sharing and the transformation of cultural values and political actions; the more flexible adaptations of ideas and expressions; and the new modes for meanings to arise.

Indeed, this special issue is also a point of departure for effective understandings and critiques of cultural globalization beyond the Eurocentric paradigm. We believe that by seriously investigating Chinese-Asian cultural interactions, scholars of Chinese culture both in the West and in Chinese communities will find new ways of expanding the horizons of their academic fields. In the tradition of China Studies in the West, Chinese culture has often been perceived as an isolated object of investigation, tied to the

hidden political and cultural agendas inherent in the traditions of Sinology and Area Studies, so that the academic motivation behind the study of Chinese culture is mainly to render China “comprehensible” to the West. The differentiation of China from other “areas” is an important presupposition, or aim, of much Area Studies-oriented research. One way to challenge the positioning of “China” as an object of research is to connect it to other cultures that have been understood in similar fashion. In what ways has its interaction with other Asian cultures constantly transformed Chinese culture, making it something fluid and dynamic rather than a stagnant entity? To what extent should scholars of Chinese culture deemphasize the importance and uniqueness of Chinese culture? Why is it assumed that a Chinese scholar can study only Chinese issues? These questions are important to scholars of Chinese culture working in Chinese communities, who are burdened with the demand to legitimize their studies within a larger global academic framework, dominated by the English-speaking scholastic “authority” and Western “universalism.” Scholars in Asia like us are constantly asking themselves how they can escape the hierarchy of “Western theory” over “local context”; we believe that by learning more about the cultural exchanges and globalization within Asia, we can avoid using the West as the only point of reference.

The twelve poems of Ping-kwan Leung featured here under the title “Tasting Asia” originate from an installation art exhibit on which he collaborated with eight designers and eight artists from Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and other parts of Asia. In terms of “foodscape,” the poems reveal that the cultural histories of Asian nations are far more intertwined than might be imagined. The two essential ingredients, spices and rice, with their rich symbolic meanings, constitute the commonality of almost all Asian cuisines. Leung, as a Hong Kong poet of Chinese origin, uses his unique perspective to share his culinary experiences of Asian cultures with readers and pays homage to the diversity of various national foods. The poems were first written in Chinese and then translated or rewritten

by the poet himself into English, which, as Leung explains, is the only language through which he can communicate with other Asian artists. These creative pieces will hopefully generate dynamic alternative views from traditional academic discourse to look into the new connotations of Asia especially through a Chinese literary perspective. Opening this special issue with these poems is meant to provoke readers to think creatively about a possible new Asia.

Arif Dirlik examines the role architecture plays in colonial history by focusing on the case of Shanghai. He discusses how architectural colonialism, along with global modernity, can reshape the everyday life and space of Asian cities, which compete to build gleaming office towers and the world's tallest building. Shanghai is eager to obtain global status through architectural design, particularly in its numerous skyscrapers, and China is also turning itself into a playground for transnational capital to explore and exploit in architectural construction. As China embraces global capitalism and brings its populations into the orbit of modernity, local particularity has gradually been marginalized and eliminated—as seen in the architecture that dominates the skylines of Shanghai as well as Beijing. Dirlik's essay tells us that "rising" China, with its aspirations for globality, is obsessed with building a modernity that has little sensitivity to the immediate Asian cultural contexts. And this is a path many aspiring Asian countries are following.

Although China is culturally uninterested in its Asian neighbors, Chinese films made in Hong Kong have a significant impact on many Asian countries. M. T. Kato's essay on the kung fu films of Bruce Lee, who has been considered an icon of trans-Chinese nationalism, presents a close analysis of their specific visual languages, action choreographies, and the symbolic significations of various weapons used in the movies. Kato sees the kung fu cultural revolution as having a parallel relationship to the surge of student-led nationalist movements for liberation in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines against Japanese neo-imperialism in the 1970s, the

dawn of globalization. Also focusing on films related to Hong Kong, K. C. Lo switches the spotlight to the 1990s, a period in which the interflow of global capital accelerated and there was greater cooperation in Asian film productions, making the representation of an encompassing Asian subject a sensitive issue. Looking at Japan's and Hong Kong's "Asian" movies, Lo discusses the impossibility of representing Asia; yet, in their portrayals of Chinese ethnic particularity, the films demonstrate a paradoxically positive condition for embodying Asia.

Laikwan Pang closely examines the new cinematic brand name New Asian Cinema, a term widely circulated in many film festivals and commercial film markets, and argues how such a new identity and concept can blur and loosen not only national boundaries but also the great divides between high art and mass culture, the opposition between the global and the local. Through discussion of Asian films not confined to the action genre, Pang suggests that violence is much more than simple images or a theme, but rather is a floating signifier that traverses the world and constitutes multiple meanings for elaborate national and cultural interactions.

If violence can travel, so does the movie star. The transnational stardom of Kaneshiro Takeshi, a Japanese-Chinese biracial actor who works in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan, suggests a new sense of fluidity and mobility in East Asia's converging consumer and media cultures under the mechanism of global capitalism. Eva Tsai contextualizes such star mobility within the production and consumption of transnational media culture in the region by closely tracking Kaneshiro's path to stardom in postcolonial Taiwan, global cosmopolitan Hong Kong, and pan-Asianist Japan in order to discover the way in which Asia negotiates its own positionality in the global scene.

Last, but not least, Naoki Sakai draws from his own experiences of editing the multilingual series *TRACES*, which is published simultaneously in Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and English, to bring us back to the problem of the hegemony of the English language that confronts Asian cultural

and linguistic multiplicity. Cultural nationalism is by no means an appropriate answer to Western imperialism. Sakai points out that using English is a strategy that can benefit Asian cultures by engendering multilingual translation of texts in its many languages. In addition to counteracting the hegemonic English language, translation can open up a new arena for political struggle and cultural negotiation, something that resonates with the spirit of Leung's English poems in this issue. Indeed, although it promotes thinking beyond the dichotomy of China and the West by examining Chinese culture in Asia, this special issue does not see the possibility of a pan-Asian cultural entity as a form of resistance against the hegemonic West. Rather, we use it as a springboard to leap beyond binarism in order to think in terms of multiplicities and to seek new becomings and new possibilities.

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