

*Trans-Asia as Method: Theory and Practices*

Edited by JEROEN DE KLOET, YIU FAI CHOW, and GLADYS PAK LEI CHONG

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This slim volume is a welcome contribution to the ongoing and increasingly widespread effort to decolonize knowledge production in a globalized world. It is a timely critical engagement with the earlier endeavors of Asian scholars, particularly those related to "Asia as Method", an intellectual and political project advocating a paradigm shift for Asian studies from the "Asia-West" binary framework to "inter-Asian referencing" in order to disrupt Western epistemological dominance while forging regional integration and solidarity. Why is it necessary to expand the critical domain of "Asia as Method" into "Trans-Asia as Method" at the present historical juncture? What are the possible configurations of the trans-Asia project? These two questions are the driving force behind the current volume, aptly edited by Jeroen de Kloet, Yiu Fai Chow and Gladys Pak Lei Chong.

*Trans-Asia as Method* comprises an introduction, a coda, and nine chapters written by international scholars based in East Asia, Australia and Western Europe who come from diverse disciplines, including cultural studies, Asian American Studies, film and media studies, and theatre studies. Compelled by acute observations of contemporary social realities, the contributors problematize the term "Asia" and especially the presumed boundedness of the region in its many manifestations. Together, they push the methodological and disciplinary boundaries of Asian studies and the burgeoning field of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies.

The first three chapters of the volume reflect on the necessity and analytical potential of the "trans-Asia as method" paradigm. Koichi Iwabuchi, considering the increasing cross-border flow of capital, people and media cultures in a globalized and technologically advanced world, conceives the trans-Asian approach as not only an academic methodology instrumental to theorizing transnationally shared matters from Asian contexts but also as a tactical approach to actualizing Asia as "a dialogic communicative space" (p. 28). Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet point to the new analytical avenues opened up by the trans-Asia project through a careful exploration of the signification of "trans" in "trans-Asia". They emphasize that prefixing Asia with "trans" is a necessary maneuver to combat parochialism derived from national or regional frameworks. Relatedly, the trans-Asia project invites examination of locally grounded, intersectional experiences and issues which are often excluded from the geopolitical purview of Asia. Beyond transcending borders and transgressing boundaries, mobility encoded in "trans" also signals the possibilities of transformation. Ien Ang's chapter probes into the conceptual premises and potential limitations of trans-Asia projects. Through a comparison between "trans-Asia" and "trans-Europe", it points out that trans-Asian approaches are predicated upon a *virtual* pan-Asia, a regionalized imagination that

"does not only have a liberating potential by dissolving internal borders, but can also have exclusionary effects by tightening its external borders" (pp.72-73). Hence, Ang calls for embracing not only trans-nationality but also trans-regionality.

The rest of the volume is an eclectic collection of essays showcasing diverse practices of the trans-Asian method and exploring the conceptual possibilities inherent in the prefix "trans-" in "trans-Asia". Chih-Ming Wang introduces the life and work of Taraknath Das, an exiled Indian revolutionary and a civil rights activist in North America during the early twentieth century. Das envisioned the struggle for India's independence as constitutive of and expedited by the pan-Asian community's decolonization effort. Wang argues that Das's transpacific journey and pan-Asian thought reveal that Asia, being more than a cognitive category, could be "a *transportable* and *transformative* affective frame of mind that urges one to attend to crosscurrents, conjunctures, and unexpected encounters" (p.92). Soyoung Kim reflects on her documentary project, the *Exile Trilogy*, which focuses on the Korean diaspora in Central Asia and Russia, whose migration and social practices are conditioned by the Cold War and its aftermath. Kim's work weaves together history, gender, and artistic imagination, constructing a diaspora archive and encouraging readers to understand the Trans-Asia trajectory as "mediatic-historical-affective events" (p.99). Rossella Ferrari's chapter presents a relational study of Chinese and Peruvian theatrical performances of *The Crowd*, a contemporary dramatization of factional violence in Chongqing during the Cultural Revolution. This intriguing study of the play's transcultural trajectory sheds light on unexpected emergent sites of knowledge production through a minor transnational perspective. Stevie Suan's chapter invites a rethinking of anime, a transnationally produced cultural product that is nevertheless often defined as Japan's national brand. In particular, it explores the logic of copying in sustaining the innovation and unique identity of anime across Asia. Transgender identity in a trans-Asian context forms the focus of Jiyu Zhang's contribution. The trans-Asian referencing approach not only enables Zhang to examine three disparate, situationally grounded (trans)gender practices but also alerts her to the problematic valorization of mobility in the current formation of identity politics. Eschewing methodological nationalism, Gladys Pak Lei Chong's chapter compares young people's dwellings in Beijing and Hong Kong, offering insights into diverse subjectification process within a nation-state.

The proposed trans-Asia as method aligns with the concepts of "minor transnationalism" and "relational comparison", embodying the "epistemic disobedience" called for by Walter Dignolo. It avoids the pitfall of establishing an alternative center or imposing an Asia-centric perspective. However, it is regrettable that most empirical case studies in the volume are still anchored in East Asia, as research projects rooted in Southeast Asian societies — where linguistic, ethnic, and religious borders intersect and transgress in daily life, and affective communities responding to the new international order are in the making — would be highly welcome.

Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the three editors have curated a rich collection of essays that will be valuable to graduate students and scholars in cultural studies and Asian studies, and anyone interested in charting new connections and interactions between Asia and the wider world.

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