



**Fuyubi Nakamura, Morgan Perkins, and Olivier Krischer, eds., *Asia through Art and Anthropology: Cultural Translation Across Borders***

London: Bloomsbury, 2013. xvi + 206 pages. 15 b/w and 32 color illustrations, list of images, index. Hardback, £70.00; online price £63.00; paperback, £22.99; online price £20.69. ISBN: 9780857854483 (hardback); 9780857854490 (paperback).

*ASIA THROUGH ART AND ANTHROPOLOGY* is an ambitious project in two ways: it covers a vast geographical area marked by great diversity, and it applies the anthropological method known as cultural translation to art history. Given the book's broad subject matter, art and cultural products in modern Asia, it would have been easy to generalize a variety of artworks into a historical narrative: the negotiation between premodern traditions and Western/colonial influences. In this familiar narrative of dichotomy, the voices of individual artists tend to be obscured in a nationalized history of art. However, this book carefully avoids such generalization by focusing, for example, on translation of the cross-cultural experiences of individual artists (Part I), on artists' voices regarding their relationships with languages (Part II), and on cultural products and their nationality in the colonial/postcolonial context in Asia (Part III). The resulting book becomes a rich presentation of intercultural experiences across Asia.

In the first article, John Clark establishes a framework for understanding the diversity in modern Asian art. After summarizing the history of cross-cultural interactions—not only inevitable Euro-American influences, but also inter-Asian relationships—he focuses on the mobility of artists. This approach is effective because artists and their products move transculturally today; subsequently, their nationalities can no longer work as the sole labels for understanding their works. Should we find an alternative label? Is it their ethnic origin? Is it their place of training or work? But these labels are also often indeterminable. Instead of asking these questions, we could examine, with Clark's notion of artists as moving subjects, how this mobility works for an artist and their relationship with native, foreign, host, or adopted cultures. Clark's argument would benefit from more illustrations of the artworks he mentions, but this chapter helps us make sense of these complicated interactions in a historical context.

Reading with the Clark chapter in mind, I found that the rest of Part I offered a vivid presentation of artists' experiences as they moved across various political and cultural contexts. All the authors are especially careful not to present a "big picture"; instead, they focus on the particularity of the individual cases they selected. They clearly show how different factors combine to create the diversity of modern Asian art in different locations. For example, Clare Harris's chapter focuses on contemporary Tibetan artists, who are confronted with questions of their cultural identity through Chinese interventions in Tibetan culture and Western expectations of "Tibetanness." In the case of Hanoi artists, Phoebe Scott depicts how modern Vietnamese artists strive to establish a national aesthetic while negotiat-

ing with Chinese, Japanese, and French influences. Natalie Seiz deals with foreign-trained Taiwanese female artists' experiences upon their return. In a departure from the intercultural issues that these chapters explore, Morgan Parkins focuses on an artist in China, the premodern cultural center of Asia. Despite China's seemingly solid cultural identity, the examined artist, Lin Haizhong, struggles to reconnect himself to China's cultural past because of disruptions caused by the Cultural Revolution. These artists' cultural positions are not stable within national boundaries. The chapters examine how these artists' national, cultural, and even ethnic identities oscillate, and how this oscillation helps them create a rich web of art in Asia.

The second part is the most powerful as it creates space for the direct voices of three visual artists: Phaptawan Suwannakudt, Savanhdy Vongpoothorn, and Chihiro Minato. They share a certain interest in languages, words, and letters as representations of their cross-cultural experiences, but employ different approaches to them. Language plays a different role in each artist's works. First, Suwannakudt uses her native language, Thai, as a visual material in her works and exhibits her pieces in a place where that language is not used. Without being read, the language works as an opaque screen between her and her viewers. The second artist, Vongpoothorn, explores an interesting property of a language that allows it to be interpreted, cited, reinterpreted, translated, and moved across cultures. Then, she takes up Braille, the system of tangible letters, in Vietnamese in her works. The last artist, Minato, focuses on another type of letters as physical objects, movable type for letterpress printing, which is disappearing today. These three chapters are a powerful testimony to the transcultural lives of the artists. In addition, they were among the artists who were featured in the exhibition curated by Fuyubi Nakamura, one of the editors of the book, in 2010 at the Australian National University. Her primary interest and expertise in the visuality of written languages are best reflected in this part. The reader should also see the catalogue of the exhibition for additional photos (NAKAMURA ed. 2010).

The third part deals with the relationship between cultural products and the question of "nationality." All authors here investigate the process through which cultural products are transplanted from a culture to obtain a new form and meaning in another culture. Again, this part focuses on the particularity of the individual cases, while as a whole representing the lively mapping of cultural interactions. Christopher Pinney investigates Indian popular photos, Barbara Hartley examines the idealized Chinese landscape in Japanese imagination combined with the experience of war, David Teh looks at Thai movies' popularity on both sides of the national border between Laos and Thailand, Masafumi Monden explores the Japanese "Lolita" fashion and its transcultural nature, and Catherine Diamond looks at the theatrical products of "Asianness." In contrast to the first part, many products examined in this part were created by anonymous people within a local culture as a result of adaptation of a foreign culture. The authors read in these products what happened to cultures on, around, or across the national borders and argue that the dynamics of transcultural interactions disrupted the stability of "national cultures."

In closing, I would like to point out that Australia has become a center of Asian art studies. The majority of the contributors have been based in Australia at some

point. In addition, most chapters were originally presentations from the conference, *In the Image of Asia: Moving Across and Between Locations*, held at the Australian National University in 2010. These studies may have been encouraged by the diversity of the country. Altogether, this book's extensive subjects and the contributors' ambitious approaches testify that Australia is an intriguing place to study Asian art and cultures.

Overall, although the book includes a wide range of cases of cultural translation, the chapters are carefully chosen and thoughtfully arranged into three parts (visual art, artists' voices, and cultural products). The book conveys the power of cultures to move, translate, and adapt. This is an important source not only for art historians, but also for anyone interested in the reality and diversity of Asian cultures today.

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REFERENCE

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