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To cite this article: Helen Hok-Sze Leung & Christine Kim (2019) Editorial introduction: inter-Asia beyond Asia, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 20:2, 159-161, DOI: [10.1080/14649373.2019.1614349](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2019.1614349)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2019.1614349>



Published online: 27 Jun 2019.



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EDITORIAL



Editorial introduction: inter-Asia beyond Asia

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In a lecture given in Vancouver, Canada in 2016, Chua Beng Huat noted that the original intellectual vision and political commitments of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies (IACS) were not necessarily tied to the geographical reach of Asia, but rather to the ethics and practice of inter-referencing, which are applicable to decolonial projects elsewhere in the world (Chua 2016, 9). Other scholars closely involved in IACS have also emphasized the necessity of juxtaposing Asia with other comparable regional conceptions (Budianta 2010) as well as developing robust comparative methodologies that reach beyond established national or regional configurations (Niranjana 2015). This underlying, yet arguably unrealized, imperative to go beyond Asia underscores particular problems of uneven knowledge production and circulation. The IACS project has promoted the decolonization of structures of knowledge by centring local knowledges since the late 1990s. And while the project has produced influential cultural critiques of colonialism, nationalism, Cold War history, globalization, gender and sexuality, and popular culture as they pertain to Asia, its intellectual impact globally has not received the sustained scholarly attention it deserves, especially when compared with theoretical approaches such as postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, much of which originated from the work of US- and UK-based scholars. In this special issue, we begin to explore the new kinds of questions and projects that IACS could generate for research on contexts beyond Asia and for scholars based outside of Asia.

To approach the question of “Inter-Asia beyond Asia,” we understand translocal studies

of cultural phenomena within the geographical imaginary of Asia – which IACS has so richly developed in the past two decades – as much more than case studies. Instead, we view this cultural research as the ongoing development of inter-referencing as a methodology with immense potential for research on contexts beyond Asia. Chen Kuan-Hsing describes “inter-referencing” as “simply saying, let’s put all these different places with reference to each other and something may emerge and new questions can be posed” (Lee et al. 2019, 345). Inspired by this playful, experimental spirit, we held a workshop in 2018, to engage key ideas from IACS in a city that is usually not considered part of Asia, with scholars whose research involves locations both within and outside of Asia. The participants, who are currently based in Australia, Canada, and parts of Asia but whose personal and professional trajectories traverse other parts of the world, were principally concerned with issues of colonial histories, migration, diaspora, mobility, and cultural flows. The workshop was convened in Vancouver, Canada: a city with deep, intertwined histories of settler colonialism, racial exclusion, and significant Asian migration. Perched on the Pacific coast, the city is in such close proximity to Asia that it is regularly touted as an “Asia Pacific gateway.” At the workshop, we focussed our efforts on resituating and realigning our intellectual, historical, and political points of reference through an engagement with issues relevant to the local venue as well as with each other’s research contexts. Elsewhere, we have referred to this kind of discussion as a “minor transpacific” framework (Kim et al. 2018), which

produces reading practices and cultural analyses that are shaped by an oceanic – rather than national or continental – imaginary (see also Probyn 2016; Wilson 2017; Mawani 2018). Within this framework, the venue of Vancouver is reoriented from its position on the margin of Canada’s political centre and the Atlanticist world, and rethought as part of the Asia Pacific. This repositioning enables us to interrogate the boundaries of “Asia” and the “West” and to note instead the multidirectional global flows as well as the various, layered, and intertwined colonial histories that continue to shape the city and its generations of migrant populations – from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere – who are now living alongside Indigenous peoples. Inspired by the transpacific dynamics of its location, the discussion from the workshop has resulted in this special issue, which explores key ideas in IACS as they apply to research on and beyond Asia, and in relation to adjacent intellectual frameworks including transpacific, diasporic, Indigenous, and postcolonial studies. It brings into conversation scholars who have previously been involved with IACS (but whose scholarship involves locations outside of Asia) as well as scholars who are new to IACS.

IACS’s emphasis on decentring the West has posed a series of questions for many of the authors in the issue: How does decentring the West affect those already marginalized in the West? How do we decentre the West from within the West? How do narratives of multiple Asias and their legacies in various imperial, colonial, and Cold War formations affect diaspora communities outside of Asia? Through case studies of cultural research, the special issue explores these questions through inter-referencing contexts in and beyond Asia. Three common thematics emerge from the articles in this special issue. First, the circulation of everyday objects, images, and cultural practices across unexpected contexts – such as military archives of the Pacific War that are located in Australia and the U.S. (Attewell and Attewell), the choreography of North Korean mass games that travelled to Guyana during the 1980s to the early 1990s (Kwon), and queer films that circulate in festivals across East Asia and Hawai’i – provide insight into previously unacknowledged histories and solidarities. Second, intersecting colonial histories produce complex

feelings – from the Asian American returnee’s ambivalent empathy for the North Korean refugee (Wang) to the “bad feelings” that animate Asian-Indigenous relations (Diabo) to the way Han racism constrains Afro-Asian domestic intimacies (Li) – which find complex expressions in literary works and provide the affective basis for an embodied form of pedagogy in racialized classrooms (Park). Third, the documentation and analyses of how diaspora communities in Australia (Khoo) and Canada (Kim and Lee) negotiate narratives of Asia through cultural activism and academic institutionalization within and beyond the constraints of national discourses demonstrate that a conversation between IACS and diaspora studies is vital and necessary.

In addition to research articles, our special issue also encourages creative exploration as well as collaboration and dialogue between established and emerging scholars. To that end, we have included a visual essay by Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist David Khang, which features images from his performance project *The Wrong Places*. Khang’s art asks us to contemplate the surprising resonance when “wrong places” – such as, for example, Cypriot and Korean histories of division – are juxtaposed alongside each other. We invited Canada-based scholars with research interest in transnational, postcolonial, migration and diaspora studies to engage with IACS through their own research in a roundtable discussion (Troeng, Diaz, Campbell). We also included a group conversation amongst different generations of scholars to explore the resonances of the inter-Asia project outside the geographical boundaries of Asia (Lee, Chen, Gunew, O’Brien, Yue).

We hope that this special issue meets the challenge that Chen (2016, 113) identifies for IACS’s future: how to “work together to create conditions for our disconnected communities to interact and intersect.” The conversation we started here is meant to be continued in the future, hopefully in unexpected configurations and in many more “wrong places.”

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the support provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Simon Fraser University’s Department

of English, Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Office of the Vice-President Academic, and David Lam Centre. Without their assistance, it would not have been possible to host the "Inter-Asia Beyond Asia" workshop that led to this special issue.

Notes on guest editors

Christine Kim is Associate Professor at Simon Fraser University. Her teaching and research focus on Asian North American literature and theory, diaspora studies, and cultural studies. She is the author of *The Minor Intimacies of Race* (University of Illinois Press, 2016) and co-editor of *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora and Indigeneity* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012). Christine is co-director of SFU's Institute of Transpacific Cultural Research. Currently she is working on a SSHRC funded book-length project on representations of North Korea, cultural fantasies, and Cold War legacies.

Helen Hok-Sze Leung is a Professor in the Department of Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies and the co-director of the Institute for Transpacific Cultural Research at Simon Fraser University. She has published widely on Asian cinema and queer cultural productions and is the author of *Undercurrents: Queer Culture and Postcolonial Hong Kong* and *Farewell My Concubine: A Queer Film Classic*. She co-edits the *Queer Asia* book series (Hong Kong University Press) and serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* and the *Asian Visual Cultures* series (Amsterdam University Press). Her current research projects include a SSHRC-funded project on *Transpacific Film Cities*; a study of film sound and queer/trans cinema; and a co-authored project on queer Asian knowledge production.

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