analysis and argumentation, which raises the question of what the role of the historian and scholar should be. While this affords an intimate view of colonial modernity, it perhaps comes at the price of generating more insights from the interviews. Indeed, there is a sense of missed opportunity here, particularly in terms of creating conversations with recent scholarship on memories, kinship, time, and biographies, which could have been pursued in relation to the discussion of the intellectuals’ houses, the various objects they contained, and the different forms of mobility they were embedded in; or conceivably through an exploration of the different temporalities at work when urban intellectuals were coming to terms with colonial modernity. Notwithstanding—or perhaps because of—its shortcomings, *A Certain Age* succeeds in imparting how it feels like to be modern and to grow up in a time full of possibilities.

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NISSIM OTMAZGIN AND EYAL BEN-ARI, EDS.

**Popular Culture Co-Productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia**


There are arguably no reliable figures to confirm the formal and informal, legal or illegal ways popular culture products permeate throughout East and Southeast Asia today. Movies, comics, music, games, television programs, and other popular formats have circulated in large waves from a country of origin to others, subsequently creating industries and producing material for fans and, inevitably, data for academic investigators.

The Internet and translation through subtitles or voice dubbing have facilitated the appreciation and acceptance of most products. But accommodating and eventually incorporating popular cultural fare from a different country into one’s entertainment rituals is not necessarily easy to dissect. The cultural layers presented are varied given different historical perspectives, economic contexts, and social norms.
But the explosion is definitely around, and there is evidence to merit a serious look from popular culture scholars. To name a few, large pockets of Chinese viewers enjoy Japanese anime and manga animation and American TV formats on the Internet, patiently translated by funsubbers who are just as passionate about the formats. Korean TV dramas compete with familiar local programs. Hong Kong kung fu movies maintain their eminent position as popular fare. A male Filipino singer is idolized in Indonesia and has been invited into mainstream Indonesian TV programs.

Those probing for logical and quantifiable explanations why Korean movies and music or Hong Kong cinema have grown in popularity in recent years will probably be disappointed by the articles in *Popular Culture Co-Productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Nissim Otmazgin and Eyal Ben-Ari. The volume does not delve deeply into reasons why Filipino or Indonesian teenagers are ardent Korean telenovela or drama series faithful. Instead, it takes on a more macro perspective as it investigates how market forces with shared interests or shrewd investments have built popular culture industries that are not based solely on one country’s products or tastes of the receiving countries.

The volume is an important contribution to scholarship on Asian popular media from the perspective not only on how forms and texts started or spread in a particular country. A more structural analysis takes place while occasionally peering at possible reasons why audiences have indeed picked up and passionately consumed a popular culture format from another country. The framework of the collection, largely anchored on constructivist theory, serves its purpose because of the relatively large number of areas and subjects to cover. Whereas before popular culture was either marginalized in academic pursuits or understood exclusively using literary textual analysis, *Popular Culture Co-Productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia* attempts to articulate how business interests, the growth of a financially capable middle class in the cities, and the advent of the Internet have combined to capture the interest of patrons in this part of the world. Despite its academic feel, the articles are practically jargon-free and can be understood even by those with no backgrounds or training in popular culture or media studies. This does not make it less of a scholarly contribution but instead allows it to be its great strength. Those interested in the spread of popular culture in a region that has no firm economic ties or frameworks
will definitely find a valuable source without having to grapple with academic gibberish.

The articles are grouped together in three main sections. Otmazgin’s general overview (chapter 2) sets the tone of the discourse on the role of the developing cities of the region and its middle classes to the spiking of consumption of popular culture from different sources. These are best understood through the resurgence of the Korean film industry (chapter 3) and the continued popularity of Hong Kong produced films (chapter 4) that resonate with audiences. Nationalism seems like a logical starting point for the production of popular material that will connect with audiences. For example, Shim explains that Korean cinema resurfaced as first a cultural backstop to the avalanche of Western, particularly American, big budget films that captivated audiences. In time, however, business sense merged with cultural intentions, because Korean entertainment companies understood the potential of Korean-made hits at the box office. This, plus a vigorous effort to promote these films created audiences in Korea and among the thousands who moved out of the country to reside elsewhere in the region.

Despite the intention to elucidate on the structures for the exchange, there are attempts in the collection to comprehend why certain texts do establish a connection with varied audiences who may not necessarily speak the language of the media product being exported. The second section explains how popular formats like Korean pop music (chapter 7) and Philippine media texts (chapter 8) have lined with fans in the region. The K-Pop or Korean pop phenomenon has not only spread to the region but to the United States and other parts of the world. Shin’s contention is that the gradual spread of the fare began in the late 1990s and found its turning point with the performance of Korean bands in China in 1999. The K-Pop phenomenon, like Korean movies, is market-driven and engineered by entertainment companies that target not only local Korean audiences at home but those abroad as well.

The article does not extend itself by breaking down the production elements that help connect Southeast Asian audiences with K-Pop. There is an attempt, though, by indicating that the liveliness of Korean popular music often promoted with good looking young men and women in choreographed sequences do thrill legions of young fans in Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia. Internet access has also assisted in promoting K-Pop
as well as popular young music programs like Music Bank on cable networks in the region.

There are more formal structures for popular culture exchange and acceptance. For example, Tolentino explains that the export of Philippine film artisans to other Asian countries, the production of propaganda films, B-movie co-productions, and, later, the legal export of Filipino telenovelas to other Southeast Asian countries, have created production alliances and networks. Interestingly, language does not seem to hinder the exchange of expertise and one can surmise that English was the preferred production lingua franca. The American influence on Philippine productions and the British impact on other countries helped create a familiar language to work with.

Perhaps the most engaging piece in this section is Nakano’s take on co-production as akin to the first exporting of Japanese rice cookers to Hong Kong (chapter 5). One may dismiss the inclusion of this spirited analysis as an oversimplification of the process and difficulties of exporting not only products but a slice of culture into another country. Nakano patiently takes the reader through the successful, though at times frustrating, exchange between William Mong, a Hong Kong businessman, and Panasonic, the maker of rice cookers. It took a while before Hong Kong locals and the rest of Asia took on to automatic rice cookers until the rice cooking process and results approximated Asian tastes.

The rice cooker metaphor simply organizes understanding that tweaking definitely has to be done before an exported product can be sold successfully. Rice is, as Nakano emphasizes, an Asian staple, and how it is cooked determines how one will partake of a meal. The same holds true for exported popular cultural products: a TV show, comics magazine, or a music CD must touch a nerve despite differences in language or culture. The success of K-Pop is an interesting point along this trend of thought: K-Pop clearly piqued the fancy of young Asian fans who were probably looking for young idols to patronize. K-Pop proved to be rice just the way most Asians want it cooked.

The closing section gives readers a broader, if not balancing, perspective on the subject. The exchange is not always diplomatic and cordial as the successful penetration of the previously discussed formats reveal. Three articles on the controversy of the Yasukuni Shrine documentary made by a Chinese resident of Japan (chapter 9), kung fu heroes in Indonesia (chapter 10), and the Chinese subtitle
groups (chapter 11) point out that despite the best intentions of producers and distributors of media texts, products are still exposed to the sensitivities and polarization that can be caused by production and consumption of such fare.

Film maker Li Ying, a Chinese who had resided in Japan for over ten years, was confronted with mixed responses to his documentary on the Yasukuni Shrine which honors Japan’s Second World War departed. The multi-layered positions of Japanese on the significance of the shrine obviously stirred the reactions to Li’s film which he had believed to be fair given his understanding of Japanese culture. There is also continued concern for the preservation of what is authentic and inherent to a country’s culture. Kelly Hu’s piece on the Chinese fansubbers who translate foreign material from the Internet using subtitles reveals that the author was confronted by a question during an open forum on the subject. The inquirer was concerned that the proliferation and easy access to the material Hu discussed tended to stunt Chinese production creativity and promoted a foreign culture. The journey of foreign material is therefore not an easy one and is filled with concerns about cultural power from another source.

The collection, though, could have struck a stronger balance between the enthusiasm for the subject and the reality of the clear violations of copyrights that majority of the popular culture forms pass through. The issues of piracy and Internet abuse are addressed in the introduction, but one specific article could have investigated efforts by property rights owners to curb the abuses in Southeast Asia. There is a need to see how the owners of the creative and production rights respond to the clear infringements on their properties. This cannot simply be sidestepped by dismissing the issue on the premise that the Internet is difficult to police or regulate.

This spirited volume does not provide all the answers to the inquiries about the organic spread of popular fare in the region. It does not, for example, dissect the role of translated dubbing as a variable for acceptance of TV fare. Popular Korean dramas have, for instance, established a foothold in the Philippines because of the deft translations and nimble voice performances of the dubbers. Nor does it explain at length why kung fu movies long after Bruce Lee or Jackie Chan have made their last installments of the genre remains popular. It is simply not the domain of this volume. Instead, Popular Culture Co-Productions and Collaborations in East and Southeast Asia is a very sound and reliable starting point. The intrepid scholar instead
opens a vault of possibilities for further research into the structures that manufacture and spread the formats. Subsequently, deeper understanding as to why these genres do connect should ensue quite seamlessly.

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