

Editor's Note

The opening essay by Ori Sela in this issue of *Transcultural Studies* represents the journal's first foray into the field of philosophy, a discipline not often addressed from a transcultural angle. While natural scientists have, by and large, come to accept the social and cultural dimensions of their trade, many philosophers remain reluctant to embrace the situatedness of their endeavour, insisting instead on an emphatically defended separation between systematic and historical studies of philosophical problems. Even philosophers of culture, operating under the suspicious gaze of their less conciliatory peers, rarely attempt to blur this anxiously policed boundary. One reason for this intransigence may, paradoxically, lie in the remarkable growth of "comparative philosophy." Since its modest beginnings in mid-twentieth-century North America, comparative philosophy has established itself as a sizeable sector of the global philosophical economy, with a sustainable infrastructure of dedicated chairs, specialised journals, and professional associations. Yet, this success has come with a price: few comparative philosophers have withstood the temptation to mobilise reified notions of culture to bolster their claim that cultural differences are of systematic significance, above and beyond the immediate concerns of an ethics of recognition. Only in recent years have such exercises been supplemented by research that focuses on actual philosophical encounters. Sela's article, which traces two distinct phases in the introduction of European philosophy in China—the seventeenth and late nineteenth century, respectively—is part of this on-going reorientation. It demonstrates that a reconstruction of the concrete circumstances under which specific texts and ideas migrated between Europe and China reveals more about the reasons for success or failure than even the most sophisticated speculations about the alleged structural deficits of the Chinese language or a supposedly incurable addiction to an impotent tradition. Thus, Sela's contribution underlines the virtues of a transcultural approach that does not reject comparative questions but instead translates them onto a level of concreteness that allows for empirically grounded answers.

In a similar historiographic move, Yue Zhuang aligns her investigation with those recent studies that search for more plausible interpretive frameworks with which to uncover specific European strategies of interpreting texts and artefacts from Asian civilizations, and which elicit responses that do not readily fall into the explanatory moulds of romantic idealisation or imperialist epistemic appropriation. This story too is about the "encounter between Europe and China," about the ways in which perplexing alterity could take hold of collective imaginations in a distant locality. Much has been written about the role of Chinoiserie in shaping artistic fashions and consumer cultures in Europe during the age of commercial capitalism. Yue Zhuang takes her enquiry beyond the immediately visible gestures of appropriation

and emulation of Chinese objects, teahouses or gardens, to investigate a deeper engagement with the often less easily decipherable articulations of Chinese culture. The author's approach seeks to recover the more indirect modes of recasting alien, seemingly opaque, texts and images into familiar models and thereby deploying them to shape emergent discourses of European modernity. The article reads the descriptions of oriental landscape in William Chambers' *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* in conjunction with Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime and beautiful to demonstrate how exotic landscapes, which connoted "luxury," could effectively be harnessed as a medium to proffer arguments about values of virtuous citizenship in a burgeoning commercial society. The Chinese garden served as an allegorical medium to rehearse the discourses of the Scottish Enlightenment on a range of subjects from physiology to martial virtue and commerce theory. Zhuang's exercise suggests that specifically grounded and close readings of materials not only bring to light the plurality of active engagements produced within individual encounters, but could contribute to refining our paradigms of investigating transcultural relationships as they stretch across many historical periods and spaces.

In the imaginary geography of globalisation, treaty ports are seen as contact zones *par excellence*. However, Mio Wakita's study of commercial souvenir photography in late nineteenth-century Yokohama reveals that these supposedly open cities may play a more ambiguous role in global circulations. The port's rapid development in the late 1860s attracted not only merchants, missionaries, and mercenaries, but soon also aroused the curiosity of tourists from Japan and abroad. Domestic travellers came to the city to experience "the world," while members of the emerging tribe of foreign globetrotters flocked to Yokohama to catch an authentic glimpse of the "real Japan." Yet, both groups had to revise their expectations due to the shifting forms of cultural "disconnectedness" that separated the city and its inhabitants from the rest of Japan. Wakita reveals these ruptures by tracing changing photographic representations of this peculiar site of transition and transience in the works of two local studios. Her study reconstructs the initially parallel and later competing cultures of commercial image making and consumption among the Japanese and foreign communities until both were rendered obsolete by technological development. The invention of the Kodak #1 in 1888 ushered in the age of the amateur photographer and paved the way for a still more disconnected tourist gaze that was informed more by clichés and popular discourse than by personal experience. By examining the interconnected movements of people, images, objects, ideas, and practices *in situ*, Wakita nuances our understanding of the forms and functions of commercial souvenir photographs and enriches our picture of the complex site to which these visual representations were tied.

While practitioners of literary studies were among the earliest to respond to the challenges posed by global mobility to their disciplines, earlier paradigms such

as comparative literature or an inclusive world literature are now being enriched and supplemented—perhaps even with the effect of undermining the premises of “inclusion” as a pedagogical and analytic move—by a transcultural perspective that seeks to recuperate and analyse specific literary articulations of “neo-nomadic” sensibility. Arianna Dagnino has chosen a structural and systematic approach to this problematic by proposing a heuristic model for literary studies constituted by five factors: “time”, “context”, “practice”, “meaning” and “agency”.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue reveal how different disciplines search for nuanced and empirically substantiated ways of theorizing the transformatory potential of transcultural connections, with all their unpredictable inflections. We wish you instructive reading and look forward to your feedback.

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