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East Asian Popular Culture and Inter-Asian Referencing

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In the last two decades, we have witnessed dramatic developments in the production of media cultures and their transnational circulation in many parts of the world. East Asia is one of the key regions in which these alternative cultural expressions flourish, in which cultural mixing and corporate collaboration are intensifying, and in which intraregional consumption has been set in motion. Such cultural dynamics have illuminated new kinds of cultural creativity and connection, and have advanced them beyond national borders. This chapter argues that the exploration of intraregional interaction through inter-Asian referencing is one significant and innovative approach for making sense of the rise of popular culture flows and connections in East Asia. This reciprocal cross-border learning process enables us to develop a nuanced comprehension of East Asian experiences and allows us to critically reconsider approaches and theories that are derived from Euro-American experiences. Furthermore, inter-Asian referencing is significant because it has become an integral part of the production and consumption of popular culture in the region. As such, inter-Asian referencing is not just a matter of academic theorization but is now part of media producers’ and consumers’ mundane practices of meeting Asian neighbors, sensing other Asian modernities, and promoting cultural exchange. This chapter suggests there is great potential in the transgressive cross-border dialogue that East Asian popular cultural flows and connections have been fostering as well as points out the challenges posed by market-driven cultural globalization.

**De-Westernization and beyond**

While the necessity of de-Westernizing academic knowledge production in media and cultural studies has been long advocated (e.g. Curran and Park 2000), it seems to be attracting renewed academic attention. This has much to do with the recent rise of non-Western countries such as China and India and the reappearance of some deep-seated issues regarding the de-Westernization of academic knowledge. For example, the announcement for a conference titled “Beyond ‘Center’ and ‘Periphery’: (De-)Westernization in International and Intercultural Communication,” held in 2011 at the University of Erfurt in Germany, states the purpose of the conference as follows:

As part of the globalization discourse, emerging research areas such as India, China, Africa or Latin America, once deemed peripheral, have increasingly come into focus.
However, the available methods and analytical models turned out to be insufficient for explaining media use or media effects in those regions. But does a genuinely non-Western type of media and communication research truly exist? Ironically, even the critical examination of Western models and the call for the “de-Westernization” of media studies have largely been voiced by Western researchers. And on the other hand, is the dominance of Western theories and methodological approaches primarily rooted in cultural imperialism, or have these research paradigms evolved and proven fruitful in many cases of international and intercultural communication studies? After all, the paradigms emerging from the Euro-American space have been subjected to critical analysis and improvement rather than outright rejection.

(Conference of the International and Intercultural Communication Section of the German Communication Association 2011)

Being open and critical, the conference statement displays some important issues regarding the de-Westernization of knowledge production. First of all, it underscores a problem with the prefix de-, which tends to indicate rejection and carries an “either–or” inference (Sabry 2009). It is indeed unproductive and even absurd to think that the application of theories derived from Euro-American experiences to non-Western contexts should be totally rejected. Theory has a translocal, if not universal, applicability. But being conceptualized based on experiences and realities of a particular location in a specific historical situation, theory always requires a subtle spatiotemporal translation whenever we apply it to a concrete phenomenon in a specific context. This is true even with the application of theories to the context in which those theories were originally conceptualized, much more with different sociohistorical contexts. In this sense, it is incongruous to put any spatial and geographical adjective to theory. There are no genuine Western theories any more than there are genuine Asian theories. It cannot be denied that theories derived from some Euro-American experiences predominate in the production of knowledge in the world, and the Anglophone hegemony in academia has further pushed this tendency. If we looked at the major theoretical references in media and cultural studies research in Asia (including mine), we would never fail to realize the weighty presence of academic concepts and theorization by scholars working in Euro-American contexts such as Hall, Foucault, Butler, Said, and so on. However, this does not necessarily signal the uncritical one-way application of “Western theories” to other contexts. Rather, as is clearly shown by the recent development of media and cultural studies research in non-Western regions, such references are more likely to be a display of the provincialization of “Western theories” through critical translation (Chakrabarty 2000). The creative practice of appropriating and translating theories derived from experiences of Western societies can be a useful way to understand what is going on in non-Western regions. Moreover, such critical interrogation and innovative application is helpful in refining and further developing theories derived from Western experiences, as well as in constructing innovative theories derived from non-Western contexts if they are combined with subtly nuanced examinations of specific non-Western experiences. This kind of engagement with “Western theories” needs to be clearly differentiated from the automatic one-way application of theories derived from Euro-American experiences or the parochial claim of establishing “Asian theories” vis-à-vis “Western theories.”

However, while much is made of the self-critical call for the de-Westernization of knowledge production by various scholars around the world, provincialization is not easy either, as we are all implicated in a firmly structured uneven binary of “Western theory and non-Western derivative experience,” hence the call for de-Westernization. Especially pressing is the question of reciprocal listening. What is at issue here is how cultural studies scholars working in
Euro-American contexts read works produced in other contexts, which can be contrasted with the way cultural studies scholars working in non-Euro-American contexts read works produced in Euro-American contexts. Those works typically have a broader audience and are regularly used as theoretical references. Raka Shome (2009, 700) points out in her critical discussion of the internationalization of cultural studies that even when “non-Western theories” capture international attention, they still tend to be considered as a revisionary moment for the original Euro-American ones, which “implicitly re-iterates the otherness of the international in relation to the US/UK axis of cultural studies.” A turn to “the ex-periphery” thus often indicates the underlying perception of a temporal gap in the guise of an appreciation of a critical application of theories derived from Western experiences to non-Western contexts. Daya Thussu (2009) argues that academic institutions and researchers in Western countries often deal with non-Western cases as an alibi for their internationalizing posture without truly earnest efforts to go beyond the existing West-centric hierarchy in knowledge production. In this regard, attending to what happened to the rise of “the ex-periphery” in the past would be beneficial. The rise of India, China, Africa, or Latin America is indeed a matter of immediacy now, but has a similar call for de-Westernization been made regarding the rise of Japan, Hong Kong, or South Korea in the last twenty or thirty years? If so, what has been discussed and whether and how have we not succeeded in de-Westernizing the production of knowledge? A serious effort of historization would rescue the current call for the de-Westernization of knowledge production from becoming a never-ending project that ultimately upholds the continuing hegemony of the Euro-American production of knowledge.

Scholars working in Euro-American contexts and those working in other contexts are all responsible for reproducing this politics of not listening. In respect to this, the irony in the above conference announcement’s statement that “the call for the de-Westernization of media studies has largely been voiced by Western researchers” raises some intriguing points. It suggests that scholars working in and on non-Western contexts are as responsible for a politics of not listening as those scholars who mostly read theories and research developed in Western countries and uncritically apply them to non-Western cases and contexts. It can also be argued, however, that the irony actually implies the disinclination of scholars critically working in and on non-Western contexts—regardless of their nationality or ethnicity—to engage in the existing framework of de-Westernization. They might prefer to avoid the fallacy of claiming to use a “pure” non-Western theory or wish to stay out of a structural predicament that challenges them with the imperative to learn from other experiences in a reciprocal and dialogic manner. At the same time, we should not ignore the fact that there have actually been many calls for de-Westernization by scholars working in non-Western regions in the last decade or so (e.g. Erni and Chua 2005). And there have been some deliberate attempts and practices that address the issue in the field of media and cultural studies by researchers working in and on Asia that do not refer to the term de-Westernization. One such crucial approach is inter-Asian referencing.

Inter-Asian referencing aims to advance the innovative production of knowledge through reciprocal learning from other Asian experiences. It is a self-critical strategic call to activate dialogue among scholars and hitherto internationally unattended scholarly works from and about Asian regions (though still mostly limited to English-language works, which is a pressing issue). The intention is to reverse the globally structured collusive disinclination to seriously attend to non-Western research, but it is not a closed-minded regionalism. Hitherto underexplored intraregional or inter-Asian comparison would be highly meaningful for understanding the modern trajectories of Asian countries in a new critical light, as it is based on shared experiences of “forced” modernization and less hierarchical relationships than the prevailing West-Asia comparison, which is based on an assumed temporal distance between them. Inter-Asian referencing
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neither aims to elucidate modern Asian experiences in essentialist terms, nor attempts to draw a contrast to or separate from Western and other non-Western experiences. By reengaging deep-seated Western inflections on Asian experiences, an inspired inter-Asian comparison and referencing aims to refreshingly elucidate and theorize specific processes in which the experiences of Asian modernizations have been formulated, whereby the production of knowledge derived from Asian experiences leads to the articulation of visions and values translocally relevant for transmuting not just Asian societies but also for other parts of the world. As such, inter-Asian referencing must be distinguished from parochial regionalism as it does not exclude researchers working in and on contexts outside of Asia nor does it underestimate the significance of transnational collaboration with scholars in other locations. It can be considered a productive detour to provincialization.

Inter-Asian referencing

Reflecting on the substantial development of the study of East Asian popular culture, Chua Beng Huat (2010; 2011) proposes that cultural studies scholars working in Asia should make conscious efforts to advance inter-Asian referencing in a more deliberate manner. He contends that localized (re)conceptualization and theorization in Asian contexts with refined uses of local terminologies and concepts rather than straightforwardly using English concepts is a necessary first step. Inter-Asian referencing renders such concepts not just unique to one particular (non-Western) location but translocally applicable. One example he refers to is Sun Jung’s (2011) conceptualization of “mugukjeok” (a “positive quality of mobility, of being unbounded by nations”) in the South Korean context, which he thinks offers more relevant nuances than an English term such as transnational (Chua 2011, 44). Jung develops the concept by referring to the notion of mukokuseki, which I conceptualized in the Japanese context. As I discussed elsewhere (Iwabuchi 2002, 28), “mukokuseki literally means something or someone lacking any nationality, but also implies the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features.” Such erasure is intentionally or unintentionally made in the processes of cultural mixing and the juxtaposition of multiple “local” and “foreign” elements (the term mukokuseki was first coined in the early 1960s to describe a new action-film genre in Japan that parodied Hollywood Western films such as Shane). I used the Japanese concept to discuss how some Japanese animations and video games that did not really represent any tangible ethnocultural characteristics of Japan had become well received in many parts of the world. Referring to my conceptualization of mukokuseki, Jung (2011) further develops the notion in her analysis of the rise of South Korean popular culture, using an equivalent Korean term, mugukjeok. Jung explicates the process of cultural mixing and transculturation of “Koreanness” (especially in terms of masculinity) in South Korea and discusses how it enhances the cross-border mobility of South Korean popular culture, including pop stars and films. Jung’s inter-Asian referencing expands the notion of mukokuseki in two interrelated senses. First of all, it makes the conceptualization translocally relevant and applicable to a wider range of popular culture. More significantly, it also shows how attending to a similar but different experience in East Asia generates a sophisticated understanding of the interaction between transculturation and cross-border mobility of popular cultures, which is in turn applied and further developed outside South Korea (and not limited to Asia). It is this mutual learning process that enables inter-Asian referencing to contribute to the innovative production of knowledge.

In order to make such inter-Asian referencing more active and systematic, it is necessary to historicize whether and how popular culture production, circulation, and consumption have been materializing a cultural geography of East Asia. As Younghan Cho explores in the previous
chapter, the historicization of East Asian pop culture in terms of its colonial connections as well as the influence of Hong Kong and Japanese popular culture on other parts of East Asia in the last thirty to forty years is crucial to fully comprehend the commonality and specificity of the current popularity of South Korean popular culture. Spatiotemporal comparison with other East Asian popular cultures and the examination of inter-Asian influences would urge us to consider the Korean Wave, among other East Asian counterparts as an “iteration” of East Asian popular culture. That the idea of iteration, which is repetition with a difference, is important to deessentialize and radically pluralize the conception of “region” is as clearly expressed by Gayatri Spivak (2008) who argues that “different histories, languages, and idioms ‘that come forth’ each time we try to add an ‘s’ to the wish for a unified originary name” (quoted in Duara 2010). The idea of iteration urges us to make sense of East Asian popular culture not as a uniquely national phenomenon but in terms of “the historicity as well as the multiplicity of East Asian pop culture” (Cho 2011, 388).

Two issues that the historicization of East Asian popular culture would productively elucidate are cultural mixing and adaptation, themselves products of two associated processes: East Asian popular culture’s negotiation with American counterparts, and the interchange between East Asian popular cultures. East Asian popular cultures have long dexterously hybridized local elements while absorbing American cultural influences. Analysis of these processes is crucial in order to avoid advancing either an essentialist view of Asian values and traditions or a simplistic view of American cultural domination. It shows at once the operation of global power configurations in which Euro-American culture has played a central role and the active cultural translation practices in the non-West. As Doobo Shim discusses in the next chapter, cultural hybridization is a customary practice in the production of East Asian popular culture. East Asian countries have subtly hybridized American popular cultures in terms of production techniques, representational genres, and comparative consumption (Lee 1991; Iwabuchi 2002; Shim 2006), but a comprehensive examination of similar and different experiences of negotiation with American popular culture in, for example, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea, has not yet been conducted. Instead, we still find the repeated statement that Asian popular cultures “translate Western or American culture to fit Asian tastes” (Ryoo 2009, 145). A more substantial comparative analysis would explicate the continuum of cultural mixing and adaptation in East Asia, including issues such as the production of something new through creative translation, the selective appropriation of Western cultures, the subtle reformulation of local cultures, the replication of cultural products based on global mass culture formats, the reessentialization of cultural difference between the West and Asia, and the nationalist discourse of the excellence of cultural indigenization (Iwabuchi 2002; Cho 2011).

Cultural mixing and adaptation have also been occurring among East Asian popular cultures, which can be seen especially in the region-wide influences of Hong Kong, Japanese, and, more recently, South Korean popular culture. As East Asian popular culture markets become synchronized, as producers, directors, and actors work across national borders with increasing frequency, and as capital continues to flow around the region, cultural mixing and adaptation have in fact become conspicuous constituents in the production of popular culture in East Asia. Remakes of successful TV dramas and films from other parts of East Asia are frequently produced, especially using Japanese, South Korean, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese media texts, and Japanese comic series are often adapted into TV dramas and films outside of Japan. Analysis of the dynamic processes of intertextual reworking and inter-Asian cultural adaptation intriguingly exposes both commonality and difference in the constitution and representation of East Asian modernity.

A prominent example is Meteor Garden (Liuxing Huayuan), a Taiwanese TV drama series adapted from the Japanese girls’ comic (shōjo manga) series Boys Over Flowers (Hana yori dango).
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The drama series became very popular in many parts of East and Southeast Asia, so much so that Japanese and South Korean versions were later produced. Most recently an unofficial Chinese version was also created. This chain of adaptations of the same story, which itself has been widely read in East Asia, shows some kind of regional sharedness. It is a story about confrontation, friendship, and love between an ordinary female high school student and four extraordinary, rich, and good-looking male students. While the representation of beautiful boys in each version is a very important factor in its popularity (Jung 2010), the common motif—the narrative of shōjo, which Choi Jinhee discusses in detail in this volume—also travels well across East Asia and Southeast Asia. As Lan Xuan Le (2009, 35) argues, the shōjo narrative mostly "revolves around the border crisis when shōjo heroines symbolically cross out of girlhood—the heroine's first love." She maintains that it is "an ambivalent and resistant genre that narratively and stylistically defers incipient womanhood—and its attendant responsibilities—by maintaining the open-ended possibility of adolescence" (2009, 82). However, inter-Asian adaptations of the shōjo narrative also engender divergence. Among other narratives, such as family relationships and masculinity, an intriguing difference is discerned in the representation of the agency of the adolescent heroine. As the fanciful and nostalgic representation of female agency in negotiation with adolescent transition is a key to the genre, "the shōjo heroine is always, in one way or another, active, agentic, and engaged against both the villains of her narrative and the social ills that created them" (Le 2009, 35). However, in the South Korean version of Boys Over Flowers, the agency of the young protagonist is, as Le argues, overwhelmed by the "spectacles of suffering' which marks the heroine's 'enunciative passivity'" (43). This divergence from the original story and the other two versions of the drama series can be explained by the predominance of melodramatic narrative in South Korea, which has been historically constituted through its traumatic experiences of Japanese colonialism, postwar turmoil, and brutally compressed modernization. Nevertheless, despite the differences that are articulated in the country's specific sociohistorical context, each drama "remains definitely Asian in its inflection" as all versions still share "the imagery of Asian modern" that is narrated through the experience of female adolescence (Le 2009, 115). Inter-Asian adaptation works as a channel through which the intricate juxtaposition of the specificity and commonality of East Asian modernities is freshly articulated.

Popular culture and cross-border dialogue

Even more significantly, inter-Asian referencing has also become an integral part of people's mundane experience of consuming popular culture. In East Asia, the consumption of TV dramas, films, and other forms of popular culture from other parts of the region has become more commonplace in the last twenty years. For the most part, this development was something that the producers were not conscious of and did not account for in the production process, since popular culture has long been produced chiefly for national audiences. However, popular cultures have transcended national boundaries to reach unforeseen audiences via free-to-air, cable, and satellite television channels. Underground routes such as pirated VHS tapes and DVDs, unauthorized downloads, and Internet streaming have also been major vehicles facilitating East Asian popular culture flows and connections, as Kelly Hu discusses in Chapter 4. In recent years, increasing numbers of popular culture products have been produced and internationally coproduced to target those international audiences. While Internet sites and various social media are undoubtedly the most immediate vehicles for the transnational mediation of popular culture, the official inter-Asian circulation of TV programs, films, popular music, and comics has significantly facilitated cross-border exchange. Many studies have examined how inter-Asian popular culture consumption has brought about new kinds of cross-border relationships and
changes in people’s perceptions of self and other (Asians), particularly their similarities and differences—self-reflexively, sympathetically, or orientalizingly—on a scale that has never been observed before (e.g. Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Iwabuchi 2002, 2004; Kim 2008). The mutual consumption of popular culture has created an opportunity in which the understanding of other societies and cultures dramatically deepens and improves, and common sociocultural issues and concerns are sympathetically appreciated and shared by many people in the region.

As a corollary of the advancement of cultural globalization, as Ien Ang and Jon Stratton (1996, 22–24) argue, we have come to live in “a world where all cultures are both (like) ‘us’ and (not like) ‘us,’” one where “familiar difference” and “bizarre sameness” are simultaneously articulated in multiple ways through the unpredictable dynamic of uneven global cultural encounters and are engendering a complex perception of cultural distance. East Asian media and cultural connections have promoted this sense of cultural resonance among the people in the region who meet their cultural neighbors vis-à-vis a common but different experience of constructing a vernacular modernity. Similar and dissimilar, different and same, close and distant, fantasizing and realistic, all of these intertwined perceptions subtly intersect so as to arouse a sense of cultural identification, relatedness, and sharedness in the eyes of East Asian people. The mediated encounter with other Asian modernities makes many people in East Asia mutually appreciate how the common experiences of modernization, urbanization, Westernization, and globalization are similarly and differently experienced in other East Asian contexts, which leads to the realization that they now inhabit the same developmental time zone with other parts of East Asia.

While it is highly questionable whether the consumption of East Asian popular culture engenders an East Asian identity (Chua 2004), people now have a much wider assemblage of resources for reflecting on their own lives and sociopolitical issues, although the national mass media are still the most powerful in this respect. Sympathetic watching of Japanese or South Korean TV dramas has, for example, encouraged audiences in various East Asian countries to have a fresh view of gender relations, the lives of the youth, and issues of justice in their own societies through the perception of the spatial-temporal distance and closeness of other East Asian modernities (e.g. Iwabuchi 2002, 2004; Kim 2008; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008). Even though the sense of nostalgia, which is often evoked by the consumption of popular culture from other Asian countries, might reproduce orientalist views of other Asians as “not quite as modern as us” by equating “their” present with “our” past, nostalgia also might work to evoke self-reflexive thinking. Inter-Asian media and cultural connections thus work as a great opportunity for many people to critically review the state of their own culture, society, and historical relationship with other parts of Asia. Popular culture plays a significant role in constructing the national public. Many studies have shown how the mass media, such as film, radio, and TV, have constructed imagined communities and the public sphere on a national level. However, as popular cultures of various places regularly cross national boundaries, transnational media flows are also playing a significant role in this process. The circulation of Inter-Asian popular culture has gained increasing significance as it provides an ever-wider range of resources for people’s public engagement in everyday life. People’s participation in the public realm via the media is not just limited to a Habermasian public sphere, but mundane meaning construction through media consumption is an indispensable part of it (Livingstone 2005). Emotion and affection are also vital to people’s participation in and belonging to society, and the consumption of popular culture plays a significant part in constituting the cultural public sphere, which “provides vehicles for thought and feeling, for imagination and disputatious argument, which are not necessarily of inherent merit but may be of some consequence” (McGuigan 2005, 435). It would be premature to observe the emergence of cultural public spheres in East Asia, but inter-Asian referencing
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via East Asian popular cultures has significantly brought about cross-border dialogue: dialogue, not in the sense of actually meeting in person to talk to each other but in the sense of critically and self-reflexively reconsidering one's own life, society, and culture, as well as sociohistorically constituted relations with and perceptions of others.

This emerging landscape of people's mundane experiences of inter-Asian referencing is reminiscent of the sense of pleasurable surprise that Japanese thinker Takeuchi Yoshimi perceived when he first visited China, a sense that triggered the formulation of the idea of “Asia as method,” which resonates with the idea of inter-Asian referencing (see Chen 2010), as detailed below. Unlike his experience visiting Euro-American countries, he was then very much impressed by his observation that people's thinking, feeling, and experiences in China looked very familiar (and different) to those in Japan, as both shared a “catching-up” position and mentality characteristic of their developmental temporality vis-à-vis Western counterparts. This sense of pleasant surprise has also pushed the development of academic research on popular cultures in East Asia during the last twenty years. However, this time, that sensibility was not just derived from researchers' self-critical observation of other Asian societies. Rather, researchers, including myself, have witnessed how media and cultural connections prompt many people in the region to perceive something similar and different in the composition of modernities of other Asian societies. The development of East Asian media and cultural connections thus does not display the possibility of inter-Asian referencing merely as a method to produce alternative academic knowledge but as a historic opportunity to engage people's cross-border dialogue as everyday practice, which inspired researchers avidly document, interpret, and problematize.

Conclusion

The rise of East Asian popular cultures and regional connections has indisputably become a significant field of academic analysis, and the approach of inter-Asian referencing effectively contributes to enriching our comprehension of cultural globalization from East Asian experiences. Given that the translation of theories derived from Western experiences in a non-Western context still tends to be confined to a West–Rest paradigm, inter-Asian referencing strategically strives to go beyond this predicament by promoting dialogue among diverse voices and perspectives derived and developed in East Asian contexts. In reworking the notion of “Asia as method,” which Takeuchi Yoshimi put forward in the early 1960s, Chen Kuan-Hsing (2010, xv) offers a succinct recapitulation of the idea: “using Asia as an imaginary anchoring point can allow societies in Asia to become one another's reference points, so that the understanding of the self can be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt” and this will lead to the construction of “an alternative horizon, perspective, or method for posing a different set of questions about world history.” This chapter also argues that the issues that inter-Asian referencing highlights are not limited to the transcendence of the Euro-American dominance of—or the parochial regionalism/nativism in—the production of knowledge. Inter-Asian referencing also elucidates the advancement of cultural translation and adaptation as well as people’s cross-border dialogue, which popular cultural connections have been cultivating as mundane practice. Thus inter-Asian referencing, in its full sense, calls for researchers working inside and outside of East Asia to take such dynamic interactions seriously.

One key question left unexplored is the analytical unit of inter-Asian referencing and exchange. As Cho (2011) argues, the cautious use of “national culture” is necessary in the theorization of East Asian popular culture. Certainly, the idea of the nation does not necessarily demand a “suppressive or even fascist enforcement that erases the diversity and multiplicity of different locales” (2011, 390). The nation-state is still significant as an analytical and
contextual unit as it exerts a considerable institutional, relational, and affective power in the articulation of East Asian popular culture and its regional circulation and connection. However, the risk involved even with a cautious deployment of “methodological nationalism” should be taken seriously as well (see Wimmer and Shiller 2002). We need to be watchful of whether a nation-centered analysis of East Asian connection and exchange might lose sight of the ways in which the highlighting of “national-territorial” similarities, differences, and interactions works to dampen our attention to sociocultural marginalization within and across the nation. This is an especially pertinent reminder as Ulrich Beck (2006, 29) argues, a “container model” of mutually delimiting national societies persists in the analysis of globalization as the presumption of a mutually constitutive dichotomy of the national and the international makes one apt to take “the global as the maximum intensification of the national” and such conception tends to overlook intraregional and intranational disconnection and disparity. Thus, a nation-based approach of inter-Asian referencing is strategically worthwhile as long as we fundamentally problematize the supposition of the “national culture” as a unit of cultural connection and diversity, while at the same time not discounting the relevance of a national framework to the promotion and governance of cross-border exchange or its potential to either enhance or overpower cultural diversity within and across national borders.

As popular culture’s cross-border flows and connections are never free from the structural forces of market, industry, and the national dominant under the global power configuration, we need to keep on asking for what purpose and for whom inter-Asian referencing can be a useful method and whether and how East Asian popular culture engenders cross-border dialogue. If we take seriously the significance of inter-Asian referencing as a matter of the mundane promotion of mediated cross-border dialogue and its potential to transcend the exclusionary force of controlling national–cultural borders, it is required for researchers to more rigorously and interrelatedly examine the regional and national insensibilities, disconnections, divides, and marginalizations that East Asian popular culture connectivity has also been generating—an issue to be further discussed in the final section.

References


