



**Editorial:  
Cultural Translation and East Asia:  
Film, Literature and Religion**

**Kate Taylor-Jones and Yan Ying**

*Bangor University, Wales*

Email: [k.taylor@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:k.taylor@bangor.ac.uk)

Email: [y.ying@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:y.ying@bangor.ac.uk)

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## Abstract

This introduction offers a discussion of the aims and objectives of this *JOMEK Journal* special issue, which is devoted to *Cultural Translation and East Asia: Creativity, Film, Literature and Religion*. We debate why this topic is timely given the ever increasing visibility of East Asian Cultures in the West and focus on how the act of translation is important in any cultural interaction.

## Contributor Note

Kate E. Taylor-Jones is Senior Lecturer in Visual Culture at Bangor University, Wales. Her research concerns the visual culture of Japan, South Korea, and gender in visual culture. She has published widely on a variety of topics, including colonial Japanese and Korean cinema, cinema and landscape in East Asia, and domestic violence and the sex trade. She is the author of *Rising Sun, Divided Land: Japanese and Korean Contemporary Filmmakers* (Wallflower Press, 2013), co-editor of *International Cinema and the Girl* (Forthcoming: Palgrave Macmillan) and an ARHC funded monograph study *Divine Work: Japanese Colonial Cinema and Its legacy* is forthcoming from Bloomsbury Press.

Yan Ying is Lecturer in Translation Studies at Bangor University, Wales. Her research interest focuses on cultural translation particularly as manifested in immigrant writings. Her recent publications are a special issue of contemporary Welsh literature in Chinese translation and 'Migrating Literature: A Case Study of Geling Yan's *Banquet Bug* and Its Chinese Translations' *Meta*, 58 (2). She is also an active literary translator. She has translated Jack Kerouac, Marilynne Robinson, Martin Amis and many others into Chinese.

## Introduction

It is fair to say that in the last few decades, translation and translation studies have achieved a visibility and level of engagement hitherto unprecedented. 'Translation Studies' in all its various forms and guises is now a recognised and widely taught academic discipline, with, like all academic disciplines, endless debates about the discipline's various approaches.

The context in which this special issue came to life was an international conference in 2012 held at Bangor University, focusing on Cultural Translation and East Asia. We were amazed at the breadth and depth of the studies presented, engaging with the topic from more angles than we, the editors/organisers, could ever have visualised. From traditional academics to filmmakers to professional translators what became clear was that the interdisciplinary potential of this topic spoke to those who engaged with East Asian studies around the globe, from a variety of disciplines. One thing we decided as editors was that we would give up-and-coming academics a chance to work on and develop their work in the public arena. We wanted to encourage those at the beginning of their careers to take their first steps on the often heart-breaking road of academic life, firstly via conference presentation and then by publication.

It was also important to us to allow creative practitioners to voice their opinions and ideas. Practice-based and practice-led research is an important trend across all arts and humanities academic disciplines, and since cultural translation is ever a practical arena, we wished to ensure this approach was directly engaged with. Therefore this issue is a blend of established and up-

and-coming academics (including PhD students), and representatives from different fields, including creative writing, film and literature.

As global subjectivities increasingly become the mode of being for many via interacting economic and communication systems, the role of translation and the role of culture in all their forms have come to the fore in discussions. As Deleuze and Guattari ask, 'how many people live today in a language which is not their own?' (1986: 19). The act of translation is not only a key requirement of this global citizenship, to enable mutual intelligibility between different languages and cultures but also for the larger processes of cross-cultural hybridisation and the increasing destabilising of traditional marks and reconstruction of new and different types of identity. Translation is therefore not only the site of the individual translator, focusing on the act of translating a text from one tongue to another, but also for the large cultural moment which emerges through not only the global flow of people (exiles, emigrants, migrants, travellers, refugees) but also via film, literature, fashion, music, merchandise and art.

Globalisation has not rendered the concept of culture obsolete; rather the symbols and systems with which people communicate have changed and altered to fit this new mode of being. In this way cultural translation has become a practice of everyday life in both the national and the international experience. Even in the most turbulent and extreme spaces of the globe, Stuart Hall's 'systems of shared meaning' (1997) are still articulated and developed in myriad ways. The process of cultural translation is often captured via artistic articulations in the imaginative practice

of verbal and visual cultural production, and it is with these acts of imagination and creativity that this special issue engaged.

East Asia itself has become a highly visible presence in the Western cultural imagination. Film, art and literature are all areas where engagement with East Asian products and approaches has grown exponentially. As Hunt and Leung state in reference to East Asian cinema: 'it has arguably never had a more visible presence in the West than in does at present' (2008: 2). In terms of wider media interplay there have been a series of studies that have begun to try to explore and explain the new modes of communication between East and West (Adachi 2012; Hunt and Leung 2008; Lau 2003; David and Yeh 2008; Katzenstein and Shiraishi 2006), and given this level of cultural engagement, translation studies' academic focus on East Asia has also grown. In the last decade studies on Japan (Sato-Rossberg and Wakabayashi 2012; Levy 2011), China (Wang and Sun 2008), Hong Kong (Chan 2001) and South Korea (Kim 2011, 2013) have all been released into the English Language academic market.

Given the current debates about the lexicography of cultural translation it is important to offer a few words in the approach we encouraged the writers for this issue to take. We focus on material and physical movements, the crossing of borders, spaces and places. For the writers in this issue, contact zones become the space from which they all create, be it creative writing, film, literature or religion. This is not an ethnographic study; our writers are not describing or attempting to offer a description of a 'foreign' culture. Nor are the approaches taken based on the descriptive paradigm: we are not

mapping or describing problems, processes, causal relationships or other existing phenomena. Rather, we are crossing cultural borders and exploring the processes of cultural hybridity, which take place in the various acts of cultural translation that we focus on in this special issue. As Will Buckingham notes:

Whether it is a non-China specialist from the West writing a novel based on the *Yijing*, or an impromptu football match between members of a mosque in Yorkshire and the group of right-wing English nationalists who have turned up outside to protest, or the craze for Latin dance amongst the urban socialites of Hong Kong, cultural translation goes on all the time, simply by virtue of the fact that the worlds in which we live are complex, diverse and endlessly intermingled.

It is this cultural intermingling, this endless convergence that the 2012 conference on the topic and this special issue on Cultural Translation and East Asia is aiming to explore and develop further. Throughout the issue we hope to show that via a focus on cultural translation in all its forms we can see a global space that offers us a musing on the 'concurrent matrix of differences as well as similarities and it is in this dialogue that new connections can be made' (Taylor-Jones 2013: 12).

The articles are highly varied and unique in their individual approaches. Will Buckingham provides a wonderful discussion of how the artist can approach this notion of cultural translation. In his literary engagement with the *Yijing*, Buckingham offers a vision of the writer as cultural translator as he tries to mediate a complex text from another time and space into the current day. The reader is taken on a



lyrical journey into the world as the writer endeavours to learn a new language in order to be able to engage with, and link into, the narratives and sentiments of a classic work of Chinese literature. The aim is not 'understanding' in the purest sense of the word, as Buckingham notes the aim is 'more a relationship'. It is this focus on relationship, to China, to the text and to the writer, that the end creative text allows us, the reader, to explore and feel.

Rebecca Ehrenwirth takes this literary focus in another direction in her examination of Hong Kong literature. Firstly Ehrenwirth asks how do we in fact define Hong Kong Literature? Is it language, location or inspiration? Ehrenwirth focuses on those Hong Kong writers who have chosen to write in the English language and via her examination of their respective literary works, including poetry and novels, she focuses on how border crossing with all its potentials and pitfalls can lead to a unique literature experience. In addition, Hong Kong itself, a place heavily influenced by different nationalities, various cultures and individualities, offers a space where these experiences can be negotiated and explored.

From the experience of Hong Kong writers who are so often marked by their 'otherness' in the various spaces into which they move, to the perception the West has often maintained of the Eastern 'other', Gina Plana Espinet offers a study on the presentation of China in British documentary films. Plana opens up the important question of how long standing patterns of representation can affect and impact on the interplay between nations and cultures. As Plana notes, 'biased media practices can hinder the path to mutual comprehension' and in order to fully understand this barrier we must first

understand the nature of UK documentary films' political and cultural aims when they produce products pertaining to China.

Film continues as the focus in Gavin Wilson's examination of the role of film festivals in the film culture of South Korea. Seeing film festivals as the site of the transnational and transcultural he focuses on two specific examples from 2011, the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) and Seoul International Extreme-Short Image & Film Festival (SESIFF). For Wilson, the various products that are examined offer us a 'lack of specificity' that results in them embodying only a 'vague use of visual and aural signifiers, from which the audience can only derive a partial sense of identification with their stylistic and aesthetic components'. It is this lack of specificity results in a new and unique engagement with relation to Korean identity and film culture.

Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas presents a unique debate on the notion and definition of creativity and creative work. Her debate on global creativity as 'a vital economic imperative' focuses on how the engagements between East and West open up new lines of creative opportunity and potential, despite the continual threat of mis-communication and the possibility that creativity will be 'lost in translation'. For Radclyffe-Thomas, this negative possibility can be countermanded by seeing translation in all its forms, 'not as product but as ... practice' (Maier 1995: 31) and remaining empathic to the various nuances and approaches that mark cross-cultural creative practice.

Jane Park's article offers a wonderful example of the complex interplay between East and West as played out via the bodies of selected East Asian actors.

Park debates the 'success' of an Australian film, *Mao's Last Dancer*, based on the life of a male Chinese diasporic ballet dancer, and then the 'failure' of Korean stars, Jeon Ji-hyun (Gianna Jun) and Jung Ji-hoon (Rain), performing representations of 'oriental style' in the Hollywood blockbuster films, *Blood: The Last Vampire* and *Ninja Assassin*. Her examination of the way East Asian stars are internationally created and consumed illustrates the complexities of cross-cultural translation and the continued existence of cultural and national differences in a supposedly swiftly globalizing world.

The last paper of this special issue offers a more reflective and contemplative examination of the interplay between East and West. With his focus on the dialogical exchange between Asian Dharma traditions and Western philosophical traditions, Edwin Ng's engagement with the notion of intellectual hospitality opens up new avenues of connectivity between East and West with a shared focus on incalculable alterity. This sense of otherness allows us to debate fully the complex mutable and fluid relationships that emerge in cultural translation in all its various forms and guises.

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To submit a paper or to discuss publication, please contact:

Dr Paul Bowman: BowmanP@cf.ac.uk

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