



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

The Spectre of Europe: Knowledge, Cultural Studies and the 'Rise of Asia'

Chow, Y.F.; de Kloet, J.

DOI

[10.1177/1367549413501475](https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413501475)

Publication date

2014

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

European Journal of Cultural Studies

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Chow, Y. F., & de Kloet, J. (2014). The Spectre of Europe: Knowledge, Cultural Studies and the 'Rise of Asia'. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 3-15.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549413501475>

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

The spectre of Europe: Knowledge, cultural studies and the 'rise of Asia'

European Journal of Cultural Studies

2014, Vol. 17(1) 3–15

© The Author(s) 2013

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1367549413501475

ecs.sagepub.com



Yiu Fai Chow

Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Jeroen de Kloet

University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Abstract

This introduction starts with an exploration of the ambiguity of the idea of Europe. In particular, two tropes – Europe-as-theory and Europe-as-power – continue to haunt knowledge production and cultural studies in Asia. How to proceed? What should cultural studies do if it is to embrace this historical conjuncture of shifting modes of knowledge and power production, how to deal with its Anglocentrism and Eurocentrism? While this special issue allies itself with attempts to unsettle Eurocentrism in knowledge production, it is not making any plea for regionally-rooted practices or theories. It argues for better understanding, dialogue and cross-fertilisation between cultural studies and area studies. The former needs the latter's sensibility to spatial and cultural context as much as the latter needs the former's theorisations. This introduction is an opening. It opens up not only to the ensuing articles but, more importantly, an occasion for the inevitable encounter argued for in this special issue.

Keywords

Area studies, Asia, Asiacentrism, cultural studies, Europe, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, Occidentalism, postcolonial theory

Universalist arrogance serves only to keep new possibilities from emerging, since it allows only one set of accepted analytic language to enter the dialogue and is itself a product of a specific set of historical experiences. (Chen, 2010: 245)

Corresponding author:

Yiu Fai Chow, RRS608, Department of Humanities and Creative Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University, Waterloo Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Email: yfchow@hkbu.edu.hk

[T]here is no 'context' anymore, other than cascading glimpses of splintered Othernesses on the world screen of mechanically reproduced imagery. In this world the glimpse, like the sound-bite and the after-image, is where the action is, Dada-like impulses of Othernesses hurled at disconcerted beings splayed open to the future. (Taussig, 1993: 249)

Looking after Europe

This special issue aims to look after Europe in the sense of being concerned with what Europe, and more generally, 'Western theory', has to offer in this conjuncture. It also aims to look after Europe in the concomitant sense of looking at a world after Europe, and seek what trajectories outside of Europe are possible, desirable and feasible. While this special issue allies itself with attempts to unsettle Eurocentrism in the domain of knowledge production, particularly in cultural studies, it is not making any plea for regionally-rooted practices or theories per se. We try to walk on a tightrope; we are interested in provincialising cultural studies, but at the same time are aware of the problems of parochialism. Are we to believe in an Asian retreat to local knowledge and indigenous theory? Are we already living in a world after Europe, after a shift of theoretical and empirical paradigm that even the critique of Eurocentrism, or, in Ien Ang's witticism, Europe-bashing (1998: 76) has become passé? We do not think so. Taking Europe as power, and Europe as theory, we argue for better understanding, dialogue and cross-fertilisation between cultural studies and area studies. The former needs the latter's sensibility to spatial and cultural context, as much as the latter needs the former's theorisations. Therefore, we take this introduction as an opening. It opens up the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* to the ensuing articles informed by the authors' experiences with Asia, as well as an occasion for the inevitable encounter that we argue, and have been waiting for.

That the special issue in the end appears in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, rather than *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Boundary, Traces* or *positions*, underlines our wish to speak to Europe, to proceed in the current historical conjuncture of rapid geopolitical changes which may propel a changing mode of knowledge production in 'the Asian century'. To mention something of the obvious, regional and global economies have been so differently configured in the new century that the wealth and power imbalances between foreign observers and native informants, between those who study and those who are studied, particularly in the East Asian area, have morphed into quite a different scenario, impacting on how knowledge in the field is being produced (see Miyoshi and Harootunian, 2002; for a discussion on the persistent inequalities in the South East Asian area, see Heryanto, 2007).

In this introduction, first we will discuss the ambiguity of Europe, which is neither here nor there. What is Europe to us? Why is it ambiguously there? Second, we ask ourselves how to move on, and what has been done already. Then, what should cultural studies do if it is to embrace this historical conjuncture of shifting modes of knowledge and power production, how to deal with its Anglo- and Eurocentrism? Finally, how to read the special issue?

Of course, Europe is not one – or in the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty:

there were and still are many Europes, real, historical, and fantasised. Perhaps the boundaries between them are porous. My concern, however, was the Europe that has historically haunted debates on modernity in India. (2000: xiv)

The colonising spectre of Europe remains a paramount global presence. As Partha Chatterjee argued two decades ago, in his critique on Benedict Anderson:

Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (1993: 5)

Furthermore, a conflation of 'Europe' with 'the West' is highly problematic: other studies have analysed how it is often that the US academy makes, for example, French theory global (see also Kuipers in this issue).

For us, 'Europe' refers, first, to the role that European theory continues to play in global knowledge production and, second, to the role it has played as a colonial power – a role that remains relevant until today, as Chen Kuan-hsing argues so convincingly in his *Asia as Method* (2010), echoing the position of Chatterjee. Both tropes – Europe-as-theory and Europe-as-power – continue to haunt knowledge production and cultural studies in Asia. As Chakrabarty (2000) argues, if Europe is both indispensable and inadequate, this special issue testifies to that indispensability and inadequacy.

For the two authors of this introduction, such ambiguous entanglement with Europe is as personal as it is political. Allow us to foreground our speaking positions in order to elucidate the urgency, for us, to initiate a conference, and subsequently this special issue. For Yiu Fai Chow, his growing up experience, particularly that of education, in Hong Kong when it was still under British colonial rule meant that he became familiarised to things loosely considered British, European or Western as much as, if not more than, things Chinese, Asian or Oriental. Embedded in the logic of cultural imperialism, this process of Europeanisation was not only considered natural, but actually preferred. In 1992, Chow migrated to the Netherlands, where he continued to 'naturalise' himself culturally, ultimately in terms of nationality. At the same time, he was increasingly aware of his otherness. During his PhD period, Chow was one of the few 'ethnics' minorities in his research school. Similar dynamics of ethnicisation and marginalisation flared up at conferences prefixed with 'European', where white academics dominated. For all that Europe speaks to him, or in him, to the extent that he was staying there for decades and making it his home, he feels something not unlike what Ien Ang wrote on her migration experience in the Netherlands: 'I never *quite* became a "real" European' (Ang, 1998: 80; emphasis in original).

Jeroen de Kloet experiences this European indispensability and inadequacy in different ways. Born and bred in the Netherlands, white, having a typical Dutch name, de Kloet might not have to question his Europeanness, if not due to his research interest. Unlike Chow, he was interpellated not so much by who he was, but by what he did. For his PhD project, he chose China as his research site. Since then, his academic work almost always has been preoccupied with China or Asia in general. Based in Amsterdam

and operating not primarily in the field of area studies, he is confronted with similar dynamics of marginalisation when he must explain *Super Girls* or Korean Wave to his colleagues, while he is expected to be informed of the latest trends as well as the general history of Western popular culture. In other words, if Chow never quite became a real European, de Kloet became not quite the real European that he ever was.

In short, our biographies, whether understood personally or politically, have been urging us to deal with the spectre of Europe. Again, given our biographies – we are not quite the ‘real’ Asian either – we understand that Asiacentrism is as untenable as Eurocentrism, and the appeal to rethink knowledge production and cultural studies is not only directed towards Western scholars. Elsewhere, we have taken up our struggle with the entanglement of Europe and Asia by comparing the grunge band Nirvana’s album *Nevermind* with the cinema of Zhang Yimou, thus pushing at the boundaries of comparative research and forging unexpected alliances (de Kloet and Chow, forthcoming). It will be published in the Chinese language, addressing a somewhat different readership in a volume edited by a fellow contributor to this special issue, Kwai-Cheung Lo. As far as this special issue is concerned, the authors and their narratives included are wrestling with a Europe that, despite or precisely due to its apparent evanescence, reappears like a spectre.

As a spectre goes, it is often shadowy, without depth. Whereas we are all too familiar with Asia being flattened and stereotyped, we are aware that some contributions in this special issue may be read as doing the same, but now reversed, as if Orientalism is in the current conjuncture overtaken by Occidentalism – a term that refers to the essentialistic rendering of ‘the West’. As Sun Ge writes, ‘Occidentalism had, at least in the modern history of East Asia, once played a key role in mediating the self-knowledge of the nations within the East with important questions being stirred up in the process’ (2007: 9–10). The past tense seems unqualified to us, as occidental discourses, like its orientalist counterpart, are still very much in place today. We do not wish simply to critique Europe as a self-aggrandising move, as Ang wrote, ‘a militant, self-righteous, hyper-oppositional stance serves only to deflate itself through the unproductive demonisation of a grandiose, abstract, Euro-Other’ (1998: 76). However, if Occidentalism does creep into our analyses, we believe that it is a productive one, as it summons every one of us to be more critical of our speaking positions, presumptions and our own spectres of the East and the West, in the end more willing to proceed with rethinking knowledge and cultural studies in a world that is so profoundly in flux.

The closing keynote of the 2012 Paris Crossroads conference by Walter D. Mignolo took precisely this theme. In his talk ‘Spirit Returns to the East: The Racial Distribution of Capital and Knowledge’, Mignolo discussed how recent geopolitical changes increasingly will marginalise knowledge production from the West in favour of the rest (a ‘rest’, we want to add, that may well be dominated by the BRIC countries, just as ‘Asia’ may well be dominated by East Asian localities) – a process, he argues, that in modern history can be traced back to the 1955 Bandung Conference. Whether such assertions are true is not the point here; what is important is what is going on in the production of knowledge in the current global geopolitical conjuncture, and how cultural studies deals with it. This is important because global power balances are shifting rapidly. In another essay published in the journal *Cultural Studies*, Mignolo reminds us:

Although silenced in mainstream media, multiple fractures are creating a larger spatial epistemic breaks (e.g. geopolitics of knowledge) in the overarching totality of Western global and universal history that from Hegel to Huntington was successful in negating subjectivities from non-Western, non-capitalist, non-Christian nations. (2007: 493)

Informed by our experience as ‘not quite a real European’, we take those multiple fractures not so much as matters of fact, but rather as matters of concern (Latour, 2005). While we hesitate to provoke with a return of the spirit to the East, we want to build on such multiple fractures and, to borrow Mignolo’s terminology, feed into this process and movement of ‘de-linking’ from the spectre of Europe.

Provincialising cultural studies?

Ackbar Abbas and John Erni state:

[A]lthough the dominance of cultural studies as a North Atlantic ideal or ideology or educational practice is evident, that ideal has become part of international consciousness, a lens through which to see the development of critical cultural studies movements elsewhere in the world, as well as a discourse capable of potent reflexivity and self-challenge. (2005: xxv)

Later in the same book, they claim that ‘whether it is about combating academic imperialism, performing critical comparisons, or rediscovering alternative traditions, cultural studies need to be inclusive of a wide array of diverse speaking positions’ (2005: 7). Eight years after this appeal, our academic experience informs us that much is yet to be done to de-link Europe from theory as well as from power.

Fortunately, recent years have seen a rise of publications that focus on the question of global knowledge production and cultural studies. In addition to Abbas and Erni’s *Internationalizing Cultural Studies* (2005), we want to specifically refer to and build on a by no means exhaustive or encompassing selection of scholarly projects explicitly connected to Asia. We are thinking of Laurie Sears’ edited volume, *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects* (2007), in particular Sears’ co-authored introduction with Carlo Bonura; Margaret Hillebrand’s edited special issue in *Postcolonial Studies* (2010) and her opening article ‘Communitarianism, or, How to Build East Asian theory’; Chen Kuan-hsing’s *Asia as Method* (2010); Emma Baulch and Julian Millie’s edited special issue on Indonesia in *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2013); and the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project.

The last mentioned on the list is particularly noteworthy, as it is one of the most productive forces that looks for, or aims at, a de-centred mode of knowledge production and cultural studies. It is framed clearly as an attempt to move beyond the spectre of Europe, as Chen and Chua state in the introduction of *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*:

The West has mediated and shaped the mode of knowledge production in the analyses of Asian societies, politics and cultures, and in self-understanding. The hegemony of ‘the West as method’ blocks the possibility of us looking toward relatively similar historical experiences shared in Asia, Latin America and Africa. [The movement aims to] open up the West-oriented singularity and to multiply frames of reference and sites of identification. (2007: 1)

To quote from its official website:

Since the late 1990s, the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project has worked towards the imagination and possibilities of diverse forms of intellectual integration in Asia. Besides publishing intellectual work produced out of Asia since 2000, the IACS has also organized various activities to contribute to the interaction of scholars working in and on Asia. (Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society, 2013)

Intertwined with this project is the highly influential *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (2010; first published as an essay in Chinese, later in book form in English) by Chen, one of the key figures in driving the project forward. Can we summarise its thrust by paraphrasing Chakrabarty, that is, to provincialise cultural studies? For Chen, deconstructing or provincialising is not enough. In his words: 'To provincialise Europe is a process that will loosen but not change the structure of the dialogue. A more active process needs to be initiated in order for a dialogue among sites outside Europe to take place' (2010: 219). However, a developing country nativism, which 'assumes that there is an indigenous consciousness and selfhood which has not been touched by colonial subjectivity' (2010: 221) remains locked in a model in which 'the West' serves as a singular 'Other that conditions the anxiety of the nativist' (2010: 222). For Chen, 'in a close reading of these postcolonial strategies of response, we cannot help but see that the West as the location of the Other is a perspective shared by all of the theorists discussed here' (2010: 222). How to move beyond the formula of the West and the rest (Hall, 1992)?

Situating his argument in the 'problematic of decolonisation, deimperialisation, and de-cold war' (2010: 212), Chen posits that Asia should become a method rather than remaining an object of study. According to Chen, 'using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt' (2010: 212). Europe then becomes just one out of many possible sources of reference: 'Once recognizing the West as fragments internal to the local, we no longer consider it as an opposing entity but rather as one cultural resource among many others' (2010: 223). Chen's plea for such a method of engagement is made in the context of Eurocentric experience that intellectuals in Asia are inclined, or simply persuaded by academic habits, to connect with the West rather than among themselves. (See Iwabuchi's article in this special issue on inter-Asian referencing; and Kwai-Cheung Lo's article on 'Asia as method'.)

Speaking from similar discontent with the persistence of Eurocentrism, Hillebrand observes that in East Asian Studies, 'it is the "old masters" of Western theory who continue to describe the broad contours and grand features of the intellectual landscape, and whose influence is writ large all over the canvas' (2010: 317). This subsequently inspires her to urge East Asianists to shed their reluctance and 'get on with the hard graft of turning the regions' thinkers, theorists, and philosophers into shining icons who can shed their light across our fields' (2010: 324), to build an 'East Asian theory'. Such trajectory may inspire, for example, translations of scholars who are not allowed entry into the charmed circle of cultural studies.

While this special issue allies itself with the above-mentioned attempts to unsettle Eurocentrism in the domain of knowledge production, it is not making any plea for regionally-rooted practices or theories per se. Chen acknowledges the current and historical power dynamics in the region, and questions the use of Asia 'as an emotional signifier to call for regional integration and solidarity' (2010: 219). However, when Chen writes that '[t]he task for Asia as method is to multiply frames of reference in our subjectivity and worldview, so that our anxiety over the West can be diluted, and productive critical work can move forward (2010: 223)', we cannot help but wonder: who is included in this 'our', and who is excluded, and based on what premises: locality, ethnicity, nationality, blood? Indeed, to insist on the multiplicity of either Europe or Asia runs the risk of ignoring the power structures that render some Asian (or European, or Western) voices more vocal than others. Hillebrand notes that the field of East Asian studies has 'now shrugged off its subaltern epistemological status, so much so that parts of it have developed colonizing ambitions themselves' (2010: 319). The current proliferation of China studies programmes and centres around the world provides a case in point, and hints at a political economy underpinning knowledge production. Indeed, some localities, languages, local knowledges and speaking positions are privileged above others, and it is part of the thrust of cultural studies to try to question and critique such emerging new colonialisms. Or, to put it in the words of Rey Chow:

If one of the major tasks of cultural studies is that of bringing the entire notion of 'culture' into crisis rather than simply that of assembling different cultures for their mutual admiration, then a localist and nationalist strategy as such, which returns culture to the status of some origin, property, or set of attributes – such as 'Chinese,' 'French,' 'American' – that everyone owns prior to language and discourse, would precisely put an end to the critical impetus of cultural studies. (1998: 9–10)

Indeed, 'the advocacy for a return to indigenous theory and culture usually masks, with the violence of "the West," the violence of the cultural politics that is *within* an indigenous culture' (Chow, 1998: 9; emphasis in original). They are precisely the problems of parochialism that dislocate an author such as Len Ang from the Inter-Asia cultural studies movement, as her plea for a truly transnational cultural studies movement is at odds with a specific regional project. Similarly, as we have just read, the work of Rey Chow steers away from any attempt to localise knowledge and parochialise knowledge production; instead, it aims relentlessly to interrogate any form of knowledge, warning against ethnicity as an index of authentic cultural knowledge and 'the fraught trajectory of coercive mimeticism' (2002: 124). Seeking to de-link from the 'Totality of Western epistemology', Mignolo cautions:

We are not, of course, looking to retrieve an authentic knowledge from Chinese, Arabic or Aymara; but, rather, we want to include the perspective and in the foundation of knowledge subjectivities that have been subjected in and by the colonial matrix of power. (2007: 493)

While the spectre of Europe keeps on haunting global knowledge production, as all contributions in this issue attest to, it seems likely that Mignolo is right to claim that centres

of knowledge production are shifting, and with them possibly also the parameters of what constitutes good knowledge, and what makes theory work or not. Western scholarship has long been blatantly ignorant and indifferent about both knowledge as well as cultural practices beyond its own boundaries; this ignorance and indifference is increasingly difficult to sustain under current geopolitical changes. However, as we have argued previously, we are highly sceptical of a retreat to local knowledge and indigenous theories, and their exclusionary tendencies. The biographies of both authors of this introduction inform such scepticism. As noted earlier, we are not quite the real European, neither are we quite the real Asian; if we are not comfortable with a Eurocentric mode of knowledge production, we are also wary of an Asiatic way of explaining the world. We are not sure to what extent we feel included in the 'our' of Chen. If, to cite Ang's critique of Eurocentrism, the 'European Subject cannot imagine that non-European others might have some pertinent role to play in the deconstruction and reconstruction of "Europe"' (1998: 89), we want to imagine differently in the current power shifts coded as the Asian century.

In that sense, our position is closer to what Bonura and Sears explicate in their introductory chapter to the book *Knowing Southern Asian Subjects* (2007), which explores 'how the changing hierarchical relationships between Southeast Asia and the Euro-American "West" have resulted in parallel changes in scholarship in Southeast Asia' (2007: 3). Their central concern is to rethink disciplinary and regional claims to represent South-East Asia, with the fundamental argument that 'all claims to disciplinary knowledge must recognize the limits on their ways of knowing' (2007: 4). The special issue shares this concern, with the tactical difference that it is not speaking primarily to area studies.

Rather, our preference in publishing this special issue in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* is to urge the inevitable encounter between cultural studies and area studies in the changing cartography of knowledge production. Introducing their special issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Baulch and Millie offer a compliment-cum-critique to cultural studies, that it requests rightly the 'area subject' to speak for itself, forgetting that it must speak 'in its own language and conceptual repertoire' (2013: 237–238). Zooming in on Indonesia, the focus of the special issue, they conclude: 'What is clear, however, is that the two disciplinary worlds are complementary, together creating a necessary and productive context for seeking understanding of media and their meanings in contemporary Indonesia' (2013: 238). Ariel Heryanto, one of the issue's contributors, probes the possibility of converging cultural and area studies with reference to South-East Asia. Like us, Heryanto cites the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project as an example, alluding to the internationalisation of cultural studies as one scenario of producing knowledge in the area, or in his words, 'a Southeast Asian-focused cultural studies' (2013: 304). As this special issue shows, when doing cultural studies in Indonesia, one is bound to engage with area studies. Indeed, the moment that cultural studies moves out of its Eurocentric comfort zone, one faces the uncanny proximity between cultural studies and area studies (see Chow, 1998). While area studies is burdened by a history of colonialism, Cold War rhetoric and imperialism (Chen, 2010), cultural studies is burdened by its Eurocentrism. When a turn to local or indigenous knowledge runs counter to the project of cultural studies itself – that tries to put the cultural adjective under

erasure – an uncritical globalisation of western knowledge is equally problematic. Both need each other, so it seems, but what is often lacking in disciplines located outside area studies is a sensibility to the importance of place, resulting in an implicit claim to universalism. It is our contention that area studies needs the theorisations of cultural studies, just as the latter needs area studies' sensibility to spatial and cultural context.

Here, we like to add one final note before we further elaborate the thematic structure of this special issue: namely, the notion of context. Our questioning of the 'our' in Chen's work can be coupled to a questioning of the stability of locality. Whereas context sounds more neutral than culture, in the end it may well serve the same ideological purposes of conveniently categorising and essentialising places, histories and people. According to Lawrence Grossberg:

[C]ontext is spatial, defining a bounded interiority, a stable island of ordered presence in the midst of an otherwise empty of chaotic space; second, context is relational, constituted always by sets and trajectories of social relations and relationalities that establish its exteriority to itself. (2010a: 30)

This inspires him to a plea for a radical contextualism, for which he borrows heavily from the thinking of Hall as well as Deleuze and Guattari, to move subsequently from context to conjuncture. For Grossberg,

conjuncturalism is a description of change, articulation, and contradiction; it describes a mobile multiplicity, the unity of which is always temporary and fractured ... Conjunctural analysis has to look at the non-necessary articulations of the socio-material, the lived-experiential, and the ontological realities of the conjuncture. (2010a: 41, 43)

We cannot help but feel estranged from this abstract and placeless language, one that is firmly grounded in the established canon of cultural studies which, as we have argued, privileges certain (Euro-Anglo-based) contexts above others, and one that in the end consistently arrives at a similar conclusion: that everything is complex and contradictory. The opening quote of this introduction from Michael Taussig shares this mistrust in contextualism, radical or not, and in our reading flags up a warning towards area studies as well as Grossberg's plea for a radical contextualism. Contexts have become like chambers of mirrors, endlessly reflecting and refracting. What is left in today's globalised world are, at most, glimpses of splintered Othernesses, power 'keeps ricocheting from West to Other, from mimesis to alterity, and back again in what can only be thought of as endless mobility one step ahead of interpretative discharge' (Taussig, 1993: 249). This kind of global moving and spinning contextualism and conjuncturalism makes the question of how to proceed in knowledge production in cultural studies in today's world as urgent as it is difficult. This special issue presents one modest attempt to tackle this difficulty.

Three themes

While the central theme of this special issue is knowledge production in the current historical conjuncture, in particular the role of cultural studies in what is often claimed to

have become the 'Asian Century', we propose to read the contributions along three interlocking axes: contemplation, elucidation and intervention.

Contemplation

Writing about the significance of cultural studies, Lawrence Grossberg claims that:

[T]he project of cultural studies is to tell better stories about what's going on, and to begin to enable imagining new possibilities for a future that can be reached from the present – one more humane and just than that promised by the trajectories we find ourselves on. (2010b: 241)

We want to add: who is in a better position to tell these better stories? All of our contributions, some more explicitly than the others, seek to contemplate this thorny issue of knowledge production, namely: who holds the power and the right to tell what is going on? Who is being silenced?

Rey Chow, in discussing the filmic works of Michelangelo Antonioni and Jia Zhangke, delves into the contestation of native informants and foreign observers in deciding and claiming what is real. As the opening piece for this issue, she reconfigures their contestation into a poignant question: 'like men and women, native informant and foreign observer are forever thrown together and must coexist, collaborate, and communicate *as though* there were a relation somewhere. How to proceed?' (p. 17). Kwai-Cheung Lo writes a genealogy of Takeuchi Yoshimi's idea of 'Asia as Method', and explains its contingency on Europe, drawing partly on the idea of Asia as method that has been recently pushed forward so prominently by Kuan-Hsing Chen. For Takeuchi, Lo argues, "'Asia as method" may mean Asia courageously embraces the negativity brought by Europe as the path to a higher stage of freedom and equality' (p. 31).

Koichi Iwabuchi engages with the question of what knowledge production in Asia is and can be. Moving towards a more regionalist approach, Iwabuchi reviews the rise of research on local, East Asian, media culture connections, and considers the significance of inter-Asian referencing and the next step to be taken, with the provocative conclusion: 'So much needs to be done. We are too busy to look after Europe' (p. 55).

Finally, in the closing piece of this issue, Giseline Kuipers turns our gaze back to Europe. Contemplating the question of the publics and ethics of academic virtues, she poses the central question for which we, cultural studies scholars, write while proposing the important virtue of doubt in knowledge production.

Elucidation

These contributions not only contemplate who is to tell what is going on; on a more empirical level, they also try to tell what is going on. Jeroen de Kloet investigates contemporary cultural practices, to explore how Europe haunts China and with what effect, and which possibilities of resistance or a reworking of 'Europe' are available. Intrigued by what he calls the 'hyper-European' style of new architectures that he has seen in Beijing, de Kloet engages with publicity materials of real estate developers and

an animation film by an overseas Chinese artist to analyse the translation of Europe to China when Europe is turned into a façade.

Chow connects a documentary by Antonioni with a film by Jia Zhangke, and probes into (Chinese) documentary realism in the age of digital synchronisation. According to Chow, 'What Jia's films make explicit, then, is much less documentary realism in the old-fashioned sense than the cultural politics of a new conceptual project. This is the project of imagining modern China, first and foremost, *as* medial information, a project that takes the *documentary-ing* of China as its key engagement. Moving from cultural practices to academic practices, Kuipers draws on her experiences in the European academy of our time. While teaching Bourdieu's (1984) quadrant of class and tastes, she asked students to describe the tastes of people working in different fields, and the cliché answers came readily. One year, she asked again: What would people working in social science departments at universities like? A Taiwanese student volunteered: 'Gucci bags'. Indeed, why would educated Europeans not buy Gucci bags? Her encounter with Asia in a European classroom guides her to 'new questions and debates, and to the sudden loss of relevance of old ones' (p. 77). Drawing similarly on academic practices, Lo and Iwabuchi explore the working of the Asian academic context, in which cultural studies is necessarily entangled with area studies and postcolonial studies.

Intervention

While the contributions can be read individually for their thoughts on knowledge production and elucidation of what is going on, they also should be understood as a collective effort to intervene in the Eurocentric mode of knowledge production. We are aware that critique of Eurocentrism has been going on for quite some time (Sohat and Stam, 1994). Ien Ang observes that 'as the end of twentieth century draws near, "world history" is no longer explainable from an exclusively Eurocentric point of view' (1998: 89). She understands Hans Enzensberger's proposition of 'reluctant Eurocentrism', as 'a "politically correct" version of a more general, unreflexive European chauvinism which is quite widespread throughout the continent' (1998: 89).

More than one decade further in the 21st century, we agree with Hillebrand's (2010) observation that critique of Eurocentrism may have become commonplace, or even unfashionable – and yet it still exists. In this case, we still need to intervene through rethinking knowledge production, and rethinking cultural studies that concern with knowledge production, both of which must wrestle with the legacy of European domination. Remembering Shu-mei Shih's caution that '[c]harges of repetition and yawns of familiarity then, may be hazards one must anticipate in insisting on continuous dissections of Eurocentrism' (Shih, cited in Hillebrand, 2010: 4), we hope that the contributions in this issue can serve as active interventions. It opens with Rey Chow's contribution, which sets out the basic parameters, and asks the central question: how to proceed. Then, de Kloet follows a more conventionally empirical track, after which Lo and Iwabuchi reflect on doing cultural studies in Asia. All of them demonstrate in their works attempts to proceed which, at the same time, should be taken as attempts to intervene in modes of knowledge production and possibilities of doing cultural studies. The special issue is closed by Giseline Kuipers' contribution, which, finally, brings the perspective back to

Europe and the role of cultural studies in Western academia, inserting one keyword into whoever is seeking to know: doubt.

This insistence on doubt, we believe, serves as an important reminder that in all our scholarly work there is the need to be unsure, to be puzzled and to be cautious, to be insistent on the specificity of our claims and their contingency upon time and place. These may read like trivial statements, but until today, ‘Western’ scholarship can still conveniently ignore these specificities (as signalled by universal pretensions implicit in book titles such as ‘Gender Trouble’), whereas scholars working on places outside the West carry time and again the geopolitical burden of representation. This anthropological and geopolitical deadlock haunts cultural studies and knowledge production in general. With the alleged rise of China, or the heralding of the Asian century, the need for new modes of knowledge production becomes more urgent than ever, so that we may develop tools to negotiate not only the spectre of Eurocentrism, but also the possible emergence of Asiacentrism. If only things indeed could fall more apart, if only the centre truly could not hold.

References

- Abbas A and Erni JN (2005) General introduction. In: Abbas A and Erni JN (eds) *Internationalizing Cultural Studies: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp.1–12.
- Ang I (1998) Eurocentric reluctance: Notes for a cultural studies of ‘the new Europe’. In: Chen KH (ed.) *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, pp.76–95.
- Baulch E and Millie J (2013) Introduction: Studying Indonesian media worlds at the intersections of area and cultural studies. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(3): 227–240.
- Bonura C and Sears LJ (2007) Introduction: Knowledges that travel in Southeast Asian area studies. In: Sears L (ed.) *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, pp.3–34.
- Bourdieu P (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chakrabarty D (2000) *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chatterjee P (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chen KH (2010) *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Chen KH and Chua CB (2007) Introduction: The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Movements Project. In: Chen KH and Chua BH (eds) *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, pp.1–6.
- Chow R (1998) *Ethic after Idealism: Theory–Culture–Ethnicity–Reading*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Chow R (2002) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- De Kloet J and Chow YF (forthcoming) *Pipan, sijue, yu (Yazhou) wenhua yanjiu* [Criticality, visibility, and (Asian) cultural studies]. In: Lo KC (ed.) *Yazhoude Kunjing yu Keneng: Fanxi Lishi, Guozu, Wenhua Rentong* [Asia’s Predicaments and Possibilities: Rethinking History, Nation, and Cultural Identification]. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Grossberg L (2010a) *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Grossberg L (2010b) On the political responsibilities of cultural studies. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11(2): 241–247.
- Hall S (1992) The West and the rest: Discourse and power. In: Hall S and Gieben B (eds) *Formations of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.275–332.
- Heryanto A (2013) The intimacies of cultural studies and area studies: The case of Southeast Asia. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(3): 303–316.
- Heryanto A (2007) Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies? In: Sears L (ed.) *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, pp.75–108.
- Hillebrand M (2010) Communitarism, or, how to build East Asian theory. *Postcolonial Studies* 13(4): 317–334.
- Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society (2013) About us. Available at: <http://culturalstudies.asia/about-us/> (accessed 6 August 2013).
- Latour B (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mignolo WD (2007) Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the grammar of de-coloniality. *Cultural Studies* 21(2–3): 449–514.
- Mignolo WD (2012) Spirit returns to the East: The racial distribution of capital and knowledge, keynote address to the Crossroads Conference, Paris, 2–6 July.
- Miyoshi M and Harootunian HD (2002) (eds) *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Sears LJ (ed.) (2007) *Knowing Southeast Asian Subjects*. Seattle, WA: Washington: University of Washington Press.
- Sohat E and Stam R (1994) *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. London: Routledge.
- Sun G (2007) How does Asia mean? In: Chen, K-H and Chua BH (eds) *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, pp.9–65.
- Taussig M (1993) *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. London: Routledge.

Biographical notes

Yiu Fai Chow is Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing, Hong Kong Baptist University. His publications concern Chinese diaspora, gender, popular culture and creative industries, and have appeared in *Cultural Studies*, *Signs*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* and *China Information*. In 2013, his book, co-authored with Jeroen de Kloet, titled *Sonic Multiplicities: Hong Kong Pop and the Global Circulation of Sound and Image*, was published by Intellect.

Jeroen de Kloet is Professor of Globalisation Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam, and Director of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies. He works on the cultural implications of globalisation in China. His monograph *China with a Cut: Globalisation, Urban Youth and Popular Music* was published by Amsterdam University Press in 2010.