Introduction

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Recent work in history, anthropology, and related disciplines has opened up new ways of thinking about inter-Asian connections. The contributors to this book aim to ground these themes in a concerted focus on particular spaces or sites. We suggest that sites can, in themselves, be constitutive of particular modes of Asian interactions. Much recent literature on Asian transnationalism has focused on Asian elites and on textual modes of interaction, notably focusing on the writings of pre-eminent Asian intellectuals and literary figures. In thinking about spaces of interaction, we aim to broaden the focus of discussion to include non-elite Asians and their interactions with each other. By focusing on spaces—real and virtual—these articles begin to conceive new ways of capturing changing geographical imaginations and the fluidity of borders and boundaries across Asia.

Border towns; university dormitories; *madrasas*; places of transit; refugee camps; places of work, from rubber plantations to oil fields; the meetings of Asian non-governmental and activist organisations; the sites of major inter-Asian conferences of statesmen, which sometimes assume symbolic significance; virtual sites of Asian interaction, found in the hyperlinked websites of Asian insurgent groups—these are among the sites we hope that the articles here, and the theoretical perspectives they provide, might open up for discussion and further research. Taken together, these articles might be seen as a contribution to the study of what Engseng Ho has called 'local cosmopolitanism', and also to its limitations and tensions.[1]

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[1] Engseng Ho, The Graves of *Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

This collection of articles is the culmination of an intensive workshop, held in Dubai in 2008 as part of a larger conference on inter-Asian connections. It is also, we hope, a starting point for a fruitful and collaborative research agenda.[2]

The chapters also engage with research in the fields of urban studies and urban history. They develop the already rich historical literature on port cities across Asia—the quintessential sites of Asian cosmopolitanism—as well as more recent work on the 'moving metropolises' and 'mobile cities' of contemporary Asia. We seek to go further, however, in restoring to our analysis of older global cities, such as the urban centres of Central Asia.

Finally, a focus on sites of Asian interaction enables this collection to shed new light on the growing field of diaspora studies. Research on Asia's many diasporas has enriched the older literature on migration to illuminate the links of kinship, trade, and information that connect locations across Asia, and beyond. Many recent works on particular diasporas have tended to look inwards—at how distinctive diasporic cultures maintained a sense of 'home' while abroad—whereas our focus has been on how different diasporas have come into contact with each other in particular places, often for the first time.

Pursuing the theme of sites of interaction in an Asian setting allows us to interrogate assumptions about the boundaries of regions and sub-regions. Thinking broadly about spaces of interaction will allow us to go beyond the oceanic perspectives that have dominated recent discussions of inter-Asian connections. For example, the study of Central Asia has in some ways been eclipsed by the work on the Indian Ocean; focusing on sites of Asian interaction will not only bring Central Asian and Indian Ocean studies into dialogue, but might also uncover connections that cut across these regions. Thinking in terms of particular spaces allows us to refine what we mean by 'inter-Asian connections': by focusing on the agency of particular sites in producing different modes of interaction, the articles in this book are alert to the limits as well as the extent of inter-Asian connections.

Sites

Do certain sites and spaces produce particular kinds of interaction? Do port cities, or highland bazaar towns, produce distinctive modes of cultural

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[2]   The authors coordinate a new research programme on 'Sites of Asian Interaction', based at the Centre for History and Economics, Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, which seeks to develop some of the ideas proposed in this special issue. The project website can be found at: http://www.histecon.magd.cam. ac.uk/sai/index.html, [accessed 13 January 2012].

and economic exchange? Do the unwritten rules and codes of international organisations and activist networks shape the kinds of inter-Asian connections that they mediate? How does the location of places of religious power and pilgrimage influence inter-Asian encounters? These are among the questions that emerge from the diversity of sites considered by the chapters here.

In her chapter on Mahendra Pratap's travels through Asia, Carolien Stolte examines the way in which the individual journeys of an anticolonial activist wove together diverse sites of political exile. Using political prosopography to connect disparate sites of exile and activism, she focuses in particular on the centrality of Japan as a site for the interaction of radical political projects from across Asia. Yet, concrete interactions in sites of political exile—and in the pages of publications like *World Federation*—gave rise to an imagined site of the future: an ill-defined but powerful idea of a pan-Asian entity: the province of Buddha.

Evelyn Hu-DeHart's chapter makes clear that sites of Asian interaction need not be located in Asia. Focusing on two very different sites of Asian interaction in North America—the enclosed enclaves of Chinatowns and the more open frontier spaces of the borderlands—she explores in great depth how different kinds of sites lend themselves to different kinds of Asian interaction. Like the plantations of the nineteenth century, Hu-DeHart shows that garment factories in the Chinatowns of New York and Los Angeles are the sites not of interaction but of constraint and segregation: 'co-ethnic exploitation', in her terms, is as central to the history of Asian migration as are cultural exchange and diaspora formation. The northern and southern borderlands of the United States, on the other hand, were more open spaces of interaction for Asian migrants of diverse origins in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She writes compellingly of the history of Asian diasporas 'finding each other, colliding, converging, interacting, while maintaining their distinct identities'.

Writing of the Uzbek *tekkes* (Sufi lodges) of Istanbul, Lâle Can highlights the multi-dimensional nature of the interactions that they enabled. Can shows that *tekkes* were sites of social support; centres for the exchange of political and economic ideas; way stations on many individual journeys in search of scholarship and spiritual sustenance; and very concrete sites for the transmission of job opportunities, contacts, accommodation, and travel assistance. Bridging the artificial divide between religious history and the social history of mobility, Can's finely textured study might open the way for a compelling comparative exercise on the boarding houses and dormitories of Asia's migrant corridors as spaces of cultural interaction.

The physicality of her chosen site looms large in Jacqueline Fewkes' account of Ladakh, a mountainous region sitting at the heart of a region that scholarship has separated unhelpfully into the study of 'South' and 'Central' Asia.[3] Within this broader historical and geographical context, Fewkes hones in on the bazaars of Leh as a site of interaction, where long-distance trade gave rise to the exchange of ideas about value, where each interaction embodied complex translations between currencies, calendars, and ideas of worth.

Sumit Mandal's contribution takes as a site of interaction the *keramat* of the Malay world: the 'venerated graves of notable figures', which have long been 'sites of multi-ethnic and hybrid cultural practices', from Mindanao to Cape Town. He shows that the study of *keramat* provides us with a way of understanding the modes of inter-cultural contact and the generation of inter-cultural understandings that the mobility of peoples entailed. Crucially, he argues that *keramat* are at once deeply localised—and in that sense, immobile—sites, embedded in their littoral locales, and a site for the convergence of translocal networks, above all the Indian Ocean networks of the Hadrami diaspora.

With the opening of Kirsty Walker's chapter, we move to the most intimate of sites of interaction: the family home. Walker writes of Eurasian families who embodied in their own genealogies a range of Asian interactions. Walker shows that an 'Asian' identity was deeply contested within Eurasian communities, leading to the obliteration or deliberate forgetting of certain kinds of inter-Asian connections and a corresponding emphasis on European connections. Moving from the private into the public sphere, Walker shows that publications like the *Eurasian Review* were crucial sites where the community's elite shaped Eurasian identities.

Also focusing on the public sphere of the Straits Settlements is Chua Ai Lin's contribution on the Anglophone public sphere of Singapore. Examining the press as a site of interaction, Chua argues that the English language allowed for intellectual and social exchange across the borders of ethnicity in Southeast Asia's 'plural societies'.

In her chapter on 'citing as a site', Ronit Ricci brings a fresh temporal dimension to the discussion: she focuses on literature and translation as sites

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[3] For further discussion of this point, see Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia', in Paul H. Kratoska, Remco Raben and Henk Schulte Nordholt (eds.), *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space* (Singapore: Ohio University Press/NUS Press, 2005); and James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

that spanned centuries. The practice of citation, she argues, created 'sites of shared memories, history, and narrative traditions'. Examining particular texts as sites of interaction—specifically, the *Book of One Thousand Questions*, an Arabic text which spawned translations in Javanese, Tamil, and Malay— Ricci shows that the practice of citing created, within the texts themselves, a dense web of connections between the Arab world and South and Southeast Asia.

Finally, Teresa Tadem's chapter draws our attention to the contemporary anti-globalisation movement as a site of Asian interaction. It treats the Annual Governor's Meeting of the Asian Development Bank as a site of interaction, focusing on the encounters (and the tensions) between Asian development activists and NGOs as they shared strategies and experiences. Tadem focuses on the conditions of possibility for such sites of interaction: the wave of democratisation in Southeast Asia in the 1990s was crucial in opening up a space for activists to meet. However, the fragility of that democratisation pointed, too, to the fragility of some of the alliances and mobilisations that Tadem discusses.

Networks

Most historical narratives see Asian societies, especially by the colonial period, as ethnically 'plural' in the sense of being 'segmented'.[4] But the focus of many of the articles here on trans-ethnic connections uncovers a very different picture. Cities, for example, were fluid environments with wide international connections. The Asian 'village city'—as it is often termed— was host to sojourners of all kinds. For single women it was a place to find anonymity and waged work. It was a place where people could lose some of their ethnic definition: a world of pseudonym, subterfuge, and fleeting encounters. Communities were pushed closer together, producing new kinds of speech and new popular cultures.

Early anthropological readings on urban social networks capture a sense of neighbourhoods that shade into one another; interactions that bring certain obligations, identities even, but stop short of being a collective, with a corporate existence of its own. These kinds of networks could, of course, be linked to ethnicity. But in another sense, particularly within the informal economy of the port cities and their hinterlands, they went beyond ethnicity, to encompass a wide variety of situations in pioneering societies where people

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[4]   J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

were meeting for the first time, negotiating space, developing services, forging a degree of trust. We see this in Can's discussion of the Uzbek *tekkes*, and in Hu-DeHart's work on borderlands.

These links, in turn, became regional, and a multiplicity of ideas emerged from this: ideas about commerce, politics, modernity, civility, the role of the intellectual, and the place of religion. Fewkes shows that some very old networks—the networks of the Silk Road—continued to have meaning, and reach, in the colonial era. Many of these articles focus on the ways in which people lived—and live—transnational lives while remaining culturally and linguistically distinct.

The chapters here give location and tangible form to networks that scholars often discuss as though they were free-floating: the authors focus as much on the brittleness of networks as on their reach. Walker, for instance, warns against using the metaphor of networks too loosely, emphasising the need to focus on what holds networks together, and what makes them break. In her chapter she emphasises the importance of emotion, of family ties and tensions, in the process. Networks, according to this view, are built upon fractures and secrets, rather than seamless connections. Hu-DeHart shows us that the networks of diaspora were not enclosed or self-contained, but that they could—at times—erect firmer boundaries around themselves in pursuit of profit. Tadem focuses, for her part, on moments, particularly on moments of crisis—during which networks coalesce: the Asian financial crisis of 1997 provided one such window of opportunity.

The Archive of Mobility

Our third theme is the nature of the archive itself: where are the archives of mobility in Asia? What is the archive of cultural and intellectual exchange? The articles here look for the fragments through which we can illuminate the circulation of ideas, particularly those that go beyond conventional textual sources. These may include the ephemera generated by the apparatus of colonial intelligence services; 'tin trunk' researches in family papers; oral history; the archives of architecture, itself an eloquent testimony to the transfer of ideas and symbols.

Many of the traces of interaction are found in legal records of one kind or another. These records in Asia are often poorly preserved or even in danger of extinction. They have rarely been fully exploited by historians. But court records can illuminate networks and conflicts in extraordinary

ways. In many cases they are the only point at which individual lives find written record. Consular courts and arbitration, registers of companies and their shareholders allow research into commercial agreements, contractual disputes, and the same sources can help unlock the intimate: naturalisation and visa applications; registration of marriages, divorce, and inheritance; and child custody disputes.

The articles in this volume imagine the archive in new ways. Walker pieces together, from fragments, the intimate histories of Eurasian families—using oral history, press reports, and the poignant archives of Malaya's public trustee. Fewkes, too, uses the private records of families, in her case the thousand or more pages of papers kept by a family of traders in Leh, the survival of which was down to chance: they were 'boxed, reboxed, and...threatened for consignment to the rubbish fire'. Can uses the Ottoman archives to unearth the history of the Uzbek *tekkes*: the petitions and letters she cites illuminate the lives and the itineraries of humble pilgrims and travellers; they also provide an oblique but illuminating look at the history of political ideas. The petitions Can examines are suffused with the language of rights or of justice, with competing languages of political legitimacy. They allow her to write a new kind of social history of political ideas in the Ottoman empire—thus far dominated by the study of the reformist press—giving us some sense of how sites like the *tekkes* facilitated the exchange of ideas about 'politics, colonialism, religion, [and] resistance'.

Finally, Mandal and Fewkes both look to the archive of material culture: the *keramat* that dot the littoral landscapes of Southeast Asia, the material remains of the Aziz Bhat Serai in Leh. As Mandal shows, the *keramat* give expression to histories of mobility that are very much alive. They remain sites of worship and reverence.

Here, historians may aim to capture what Claude Levi-Strauss called 'a history of the fleeting moment, the only kind of history that can be captured immediately'.[5] A single gesture, an attitude of prayer, the juxtaposition of shrines and the mixture of peoples can convey, in a 'fleeting moment', a whole history of travel and migration, circulation and appropriation. Other sites may live only in memory expressed in oral tradition, the original 'sites' having been erased by acts of violence or appropriation, or demolished by the forward march of development.

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[5]   Claude Levi-Strauss, 'History and Anthropology', in Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology, Volume I*, trans. Clair Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Shoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

Cosmopolitanism and its Limits

Cosmopolitanism is a central theme of the chapters here. They are all, in some sense, cosmopolitan histories—or histories of Asian cosmopolitanism. But, crucially, they are also histories of the limits of cosmopolitanism, of cosmopolitanism both as a tool of historical analysis and as a form of social and political practice.

Walker's chapter warns that it is 'dangerously naive' to assume that the cultural encounters that gave rise to Southeast Asia's Eurasian families produced a smooth cultural cosmopolitanism. She focuses, instead, on the friction—and even the pain—of cultural contact, on the problems of translation and mistranslation. Even with a qualifying term—'working class' or 'vernacular' cosmopolitanism—she argues that discussions of creolisation or cosmopolitanism might easily fall prey to a kind of nostalgia. Fewkes emphasises the ways in which cosmopolitanism can fade: across Asia, regions that were once deeply cosmopolitan have been marginalised (and, one might argue, 'provincialised') by post-colonial politics and the drawing of borders: Ladakh's history of marginalisation in post-colonial India is a prime example of such a process at work. And yet, Fewkes argues, the old trading cosmopolitanism has left many residues and traces in contemporary Ladakh.

If the process of translation often stands at the heart of discussions of cosmopolitanism, Ricci argues that the opposite can also be true. Leaving certain Arabic terms untranslated in Malay, Tamil or Javanese 'contributed to the creation of a transregional, standardised Islamic vocabulary across South and Southeast Asian Muslim societies' and thus cemented a sense of 'Arabic-centred cosmopolitanism'.

To the extent that they do constitute histories of cosmpolitanism, the papers here point to a cosmopolitanism that was messy, inconsistent, lived rather than theorised. As Joel Kahn has argued in *Other Malays*, in places like Singapore and Malaysia 'there are... no cultural beliefs and practices that are not hybrid'. A 'certain cosmopolitanism,' he argues, 'governs the practices of localised individuals and institutions, everyday social interaction between individuals and groups, popular cultural activities and forms of religious worship [and] patterns of economic interaction'. Kahn concludes, and many of the contributors here concur, that 'it would be a mistake to assume that only the elite is capable of cosmopolitan practice'.[6]

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[6]   Joel Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006), pp. 167–168.

Taken together, the articles in this volume shed new light on the history of political and religious globalisation in modern Asia, transcending both national and imperial boundaries, while expanding the range of methodologies and sources brought to bear on studying Asia's modernity. The articles illuminate how ideas travelled across Asia, and how they changed in the process. They transcend the national or imperial frameworks that have contained the study of the history of ideas in Asia, focusing instead on networks of people, texts, objects, and symbols that circulated throughout Asia in the age of global empires. They examine the history of ideas as they are embodied in social and cultural practices, rather than focusing only upon the work of intellectuals or seeking Asian 'great texts' to stand alongside the European canon. This allows the contributors to examine also the history of ideas that remained unwritten, but which can be traced through the study of social and individual memory or the architecture of sacred landscapes; the 'everyday' history of ideas that found expression in the popular press or are filtered through the reports of colonial courts and police.

Notes

1 Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground*

Tim Harper

Introduction

On Monday 15 February 1915, the Chinese New Year holiday, the Indian 5th Light Infantry mutinied at Alexandra Barracks in Singapore. The regiment, made up entirely of Muslim troops, was the mainstay of the garrison on the island. At around 3pm, shots were fired; soldiers broke open the magazine and cut the military phone lines. The regiment's British officers were off-duty, resting at home or on the beach, and news of the uprising was slow to spread. No one, it seems, thought to tell the police. One party of rebels headed towards Singapore's Chinatown, killing Britons they met on the way. Others headed to a nearby battery, manned by locally recruited Sikhs of the Malay States Guides: they killed the British officer and foisted guns on the Guides, but most of them fled into the nearby jungle. The largest and most resolute band of rebels headed west to Tanglin Camp, where 307 German internees and prisoners of war were held, and offered them guns and liberty. But colonial hierarchies held: in the reported words of a naval lieutenant, 'a German officer does not fight without his uniform or in the ranks of

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* An early version of this paper was written for a workshop on 'Asia Inside Out: Period' at the University of Hong Kong, December 2010. I am very grateful to the organizers, Helen Siu and Eric Tagliacozzo, for inviting me. I owe a particular debt to Sunil Amrith and all our co-participants at the 'Sites of Asian Interaction' project at the Centre for History and Economics, Cambridge.