

Asian Popular Culture

The global (dis)continuity

Edited by
Anthony Y.H. Fung



Media, Culture and Social Change in Asia Series

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ASIAN POPULAR CULTURE

This book examines different aspects of Asian popular culture, including films, TV, music, comedy, folklore, cultural icons, the Internet and theme parks. It raises important questions such as: What are the implications of popularity of Asian popular culture for globalization? Do regional forces impede the globalizing of cultures? Does the Asian popular culture flow act as a catalyst or conveying channel for cultural globalization? Does the globalization of culture pose a threat to local culture? It addresses two seemingly contradictory and yet parallel processes in the circulation of Asian popular culture: the interconnectedness between Asian popular culture and western culture in an era of cultural globalization that turns subjects such as Pokémon, hip-hop or cosmopolitan into truly global phenomena, and the local derivatives and versions of global culture that are necessarily disconnected from their origins in order to cater for the local market. It thereby presents a collective argument that, whilst local social formations, patterns of consumption and participation in Asia are still very much dependent on global cultural developments and the phenomena of modernity, such dependence is often concretized, reshaped and distorted by the local media to cater for the local market.

Anthony Y.H. Fung is Director and Professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is the co-author of the book *New Television Globalisation and the East Asian Cultural Imagination*, and author of *Global Capital, Local Culture: Localization of Transnational Media Corporations in China*.

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The global (dis)continuity

Edited by Anthony Y.H. Fung

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INTRODUCTION

Asian popular culture: the global (dis)continuity

Anthony Y.H. Fung

What is Asian popular culture? The chimera of Asian pop culture is perhaps perceived as something cute, something eerie, something fancy, and something exotic as opposed to the complex and well-established symbols and icons of western popular imaginaries such as Batman, Snoopy, E.T., the psychedelic pop music of the Beatles, and Hollywood. We as academics understand that this stereotypic understanding of Asian popular culture is not intellectually true, and therefore we tend to rebuff it and vilipend it *ad rem*. Yet, this attitude, at the same time, may compel us to easily brush off any debate on the core nature of Asian popular culture. In other words, despite imprecision and apocrypha, arguably we could use such characterizations, stereotypes, and even misrepresentations as a departure to help us understand the current phenomena and trajectories in Asian pop culture developments. In reality, it is evident that we do witness the lopsided flow of Hollywood cultures (such as Disney) to Asia. Very few made-in-Asia commercial imaginaries are sold and distributed in Europe or North America as they are believed to be unable to satisfy the appetites of those audiences, at least in the eyes of many distributors and producers. In this globalizing age in which transnational media industries predominantly control the flow of most pop culture imaginaries, the importation of pop culture from the “other global worlds” to Asia is the unpenetrable commercial strategy, while the reverse is always regarded as exceptional and something against the commercial, and perhaps cultural, norm. The formation of popular culture in Asia, therefore, has more or less been evolving in response to the globalizing culture that is imposed upon them (e.g. Allen and Sakamoto’s analysis of the Japanese pop culture, 2006). That active global continuity used to largely define what Asian pop culture is, but what is emphasized in this volume, is that this phenomenon is changing.

What we find in Asia today are numerous and diverse forms of popular culture; those mainly connected to global production, a few culturally indigenous forms

that consciously disconnect and distinguish themselves from the West and stand out in the global market, many hybrid forms that lie in between the continuum of global–local production and circulation networks, and even some elaborate cultural forms and products that can be converted to something global for certain situations. This book does not present a definition of Asian pop culture—which may practically be unfeasible owing to the diversity of Asian cultural products—but presents the readers cases of highly popular Asian pop imaginaries that can be connected to the discourse of globalization under the current theme of global (dis)continuity of the political economy.

In this volume, global (dis)continuity specifically refers to the degree of continuity of the modes and structures of operation of transnational cultural corporations, which conventionally dominate in the transplant of cultural products from the West to Asia in which local adaptations and modifications arise. In this changing political economic milieu, such political and social hierarchies, however, have experienced an about-face. We now see new forms and structures of operation that we have never seen before in processes of cultural globalization, including production, circulation, and consumption. What is occurring is not only changes in the cultural logic of globalization and localization of popular cultural forms, but also changes in concrete strategies, with large corporations now building up production capacity and distribution networks to generate a reserve global flow from Asia to the rest of the world. Some locales in Asia, including China and Japan, have become stable hubs or the nexus of global media, and are subsequently able to market culture to regional areas, as well as in their own market. It is by and through these global transnational corporations that Asia is being connected and reconnected to the rest of the world and within its own region.

With such a framework set, this anthology explicates the structure of the production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of Asian pop culture, and bases all the analyses from different Asian cities (including China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand) on real historical contexts with the common thread of theoretical inquiry on cultural and media globalization. Thus, many chapters begin with a macro semi-political economic analysis of the context in which these Asian popular cultures are grounded and, then, depending upon the disciplinary approaches of the authors, are followed with structural analysis, cultural studies of text, or studies on audiences and consumption. All these cases converge on the central theme of global (dis)continuity, thereby adding to and encouraging academic discussion on the subject matters concerned. There are case discussions that should be familiar to global consumers, ranging from the discussion of pop music (e.g. hip-hop and reggae), fashion magazines (e.g. *GQ*, *Esquire*, and *Cosmopolitan*), Hollywood movies (e.g. Harry Potter), to cultural brands such as Disneyland and its related commodities—the production, reproduction, or circulation of which have spanned across Asia and the other global worlds. They might or might not be Asian origins, but these culture imaginaries are disseminated and circulated from and to Asia. They not only have strong cultural implications to the local Asian societies they are disseminated in, but they are also vivid examples that characterize