

*Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans: Self and Subject in Motion*. Edited by Kathryn Robinson. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 237 pp.

The rationalization of research funding under global university reforms over the last ten years has resulted in an ever-increasing number of edited collections of essays in the humanities and social sciences. Few proposals for conferences will be funded by grant disbursing authorities without the promise of subsequent publication as a key performance indicator. Resultant collections are often poorly focused, with contributions of widely disparate quality and focus: a reader always finds a couple of articles of interest, of course, but wonders why the sum of the collection seems less than its best parts might suggest.

An initial glance at Kathryn Robinson's collection *Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans* is likely to cause trepidation. The geographical focus is thus wider than the Pacific Rim, itself a term of dubious utility; and while the notion of cosmopolitanism is still the subject of useful intellectual discussion and debate, it is also now as popular as concepts such as hybridity and performativity were a decade ago, and thus risks an evacuation of specificity. The collection, indeed, draws together papers from a conference with an even looser title, "Cultures, Nations, Identities, and Migrations," held at the Australian National University in 2004. Richard Werbner's foreword makes a valiant effort at forging conceptual connections, specifically locating the "new cosmopolitanism" as a means of negotiating between universalism and communitarianism (p. x), arguing for a "fluid Asia Pacific" whose cultural imagination is marked by "the sea's horizon, not the island unto itself" (p. xi), and urging situated practices of cultural analysis and production. While a few of the papers respond to these issues, many go off in different directions. And yet the result is pleasing. The papers are often very different in approach, but they are of almost uniformly high quality, and several of them have close resonances with others. The result is a collection that, in total,

increases a reader's engagement with cosmopolitanism as it is refracted through artistic production and the disciplines of anthropology and human geography. All papers are of interest to non-specialists, and as a whole the collection is very much greater than the sum of its parts.

The papers in *Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitanisms* are divided into three sections. The first, "Representation, Self-recognition and Self-discovery," addresses questions of artistic production. Tony Day's essay is to some degree the odd one out. It is largely devoted to problematizing an account of the emergence of the autonomous individual and the individual's transformation into a subject that undergirds most studies of Western, and indeed global modernity. Through a reading of a variety of Southeast Asian literary texts, Day argues for a more complex narrative of selfhood, marked by both "public selfhood and interior states of subjectivity" (p. 24). Day's analysis is never uninteresting — particularly, for example, his careful distinction between the self produced in the nineteenth-century "Story of Njia Dasima" and the very different subjectivity manifest in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's reworking of the same story in the 1980s in *This Earth of Mankind* — but never quite produces a coherent counter-narrative. Clearly, selfhood and subjectivity do change radically, even if these changes do not follow a simple linear model: Day's planned book on notions of freedom in Southeast Asia may well provide a more detailed analysis. The remaining three essays are more closely linked. Kenneth M. George's account of the artistic career of the Indonesian artist Abdul Dajali Pirous explores how the artist's sojourn in New York resulted in a move from modernism to a consciously Islamic art, and then the development of an artistic practice that brings together religious, national, Achenese regional, and modernist influences into dialogue. Caroline Turner turns to another Indonesian artist, Dadang Christanto. Dadang's powerful instillations testifying to human suffering draw on particular historical events: the anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta and Solo of 1998; the devastation wrought by militias in Timor-Leste in 1999; and earlier violence in Indonesia that stretches back to the disappearance of his

father in the “killing times” of 1965–66 after the ascent of Suharto. Yet, as Turner shows, they have proved to be powerfully affecting to international audiences, drawing from those who have viewed them memories of other collective traumas. Turner’s conclusion that Dadang’s art has no “ideology” and is “independent of politics” (p. 95) is perhaps too rushed. It might, indeed, have been interesting to think how the concept of cosmopolitanism might lead to a reflection on Dadang’s art’s autonomy: how universalism, in this context, becomes a series of located practices. Turner’s and George’s accounts are strengthened, however, by the fact that both have been involved in the careers of the artists whose work they explore: George as friend, and author of descriptive writings about Pirous, Turner as a curator. Such reflexivity is magnified in the other essay in the section, Kirin Narayan’s “Moving Stories”, which investigates the boundaries between fiction and anthropology, and the possibilities that fiction holds for anthropological work. Narayan’s own subject position with reference to the place of her fieldwork, Kangra in Himachal Pradesh, is complex; she originally arrived there in 1975 with her mother. Her informants are thus long-standing family friends, who have participated in the writing of her fiction, and are also writing stories of their own, in which she is represented. The possibility of conversations being continued on the telephone, given the much greater availability of cell phones in India in the last few years, raises intriguing possibilities concerning subjectification, and indeed adds further complexity to the identification of individuals as cosmopolitans.

The second section of the book, “Religion, Cosmopolitanism and Subjectification” contains three essays that are much more conventionally anthropological in approach. Richard Eves and Alison Dundon both write of Papua New Guinea, Eves examining the influence of Pentecostalism in the Lelet plateau in New Ireland, and Dundon exploring the complex intersection of pre-Christian tradition and its modern reinvention and Christianity among the Gogodala, an ethnic group in PNG’s Western Province. For Eves, Pentecostalism, if it represents a global cultural flow, is a discontinuous one, a process of

“ebb and flow” in which some existing social practices it encounters are discarded, while others are preserved or revised (p. 119). The cultural revival among the Gogodala prompted by the intercession of an Australian art expert and then encouraged by the state, Dundon shows, came into conflict with Christian practices now firmly part of Gogodala identity. Yet such tensions are not absolute dichotomies, and may perhaps be best understood through the Gogodala’s own comprehension of the society’s development. In comparing Sufi cults in South Asia and Indonesia, Pnina Werbner takes a very different tack. A focus in research on how such cults are embedded within local cultural practices, Werbner argues, may in fact prevent us from seeing profound structural similarities which would make us aware of the manner in which religious experience and economic and social power are linked in our contemporary world.

The final section, “Identity and Displacement”, is perhaps the most diverse. Melani Budianta’s account, informed by personal experience and activism, shows the effects of the removal of proscriptions on the expression of Chinese ethnic identity in Indonesia after the fall of Suharto. Examining public ceremonies, intellectuals’ disagreements, and a variety of literary and filmic texts, Budianta illustrates the new debates and negotiations in Chinese Indonesian self-fashioning that this new freedom has provoked. Deidre McKay and Nicholas Tapp both look at transnational communities. McKay examines the position of Filipina migrants both with the familial spaces they are absent from in the Philippines, and in areas of the diaspora, here Canada, noting how foreign domestic workers, especially, perform, with little room to manoeuvre, a “culture of circulation” (p. 192) that moves between two contradictory identities: the normalized feminine role of Filipina and the returned expatriate identity of *balikbayan*. In the final essay of the volume, Nicholas Tapp plots a complex network of familial and cultural ties among Hmong in various locations: China, Laos, Thailand, Australia, the United States, and France.

What makes the essays particularly interesting are a series of intersections on a variety of levels. Within the sections, George’s and Turner’s explicitly address each other, as do Eves’ and Dundon’s

in section 2. Given that Christanto is ethnic Chinese, there are also connections between Budianta and Turner's papers. Yet there are also more subtle resonances that are less consciously foregrounded. Each contributor has made a conscious effort to address not simply an object or area of study, but also the conceptual questions such investigation raises. All may not use the same vocabulary, but there are enough points of intersection to provoke thought considering methodology, the combination of experiential and analytical knowledge, and for a reader to then re-apply and rework the questions raised in contexts beyond those foregrounded in the collection itself.

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