

ASIAN PERSPECTIVES

THE ASIAN STUDIES “CRISIS”: PUTTING CULTURAL STUDIES INTO ASIAN STUDIES AND ASIA INTO CULTURAL STUDIES

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This paper explores the link between globalization, as the source of contemporary crises in representation, and the academic crisis in Asian Studies. The situation of Japanese Studies in Australia is used as a case study to illustrate these links. I argue that traditional area studies, as a colonial structure rooted in the (Cold) War, has become anachronistic. It is suggested that one strategy through which conventional area studies may be reconfigured and revitalized is by more fully and warmly embracing those movements or networks such as cultural studies that can be seen as responses to global changes.

INTRODUCTION

The period of high, late, or post modernity often seems to be one of perpetual crisis. There was the crisis in literary studies (Newton 1997: xiii), the crisis in anthropology/ethnology (Moore 1999: 1–6), and the ongoing crisis in identity (Mercer 1990). Wallerstein’s (1998) apocalyptic argument that we are living in a crisis of the world-system hit a strong cord in a Japan plagued by social turmoil and unable to pull itself out of recession (Kawai 1998; Kishida 1998; Nakanishi 1998; Sakurai 1998). Indeed, the case of Japan has been deemed “extraordinarily symptomatic” (Said 1993) of such crisis, so much so that Kenzaburo Oe (2002) writes of the total decline and ruin of Japanese culture. The sense of crisis was only bolstered by the events of 11 September and subsequent paranoia over security, defence, and borders. Australia, where this paper is located, is a good example: the dominant image of a “fortress Australia” (Ang 2002) reveals a portrait of a nation riddled with deep-seated fears even before the World Trade Center towers were razed.

Harvey (1990: 306) sees all these pronouncements as representative of a general “crisis of representation”, a crisis that is not historically unique but rather an intermittent feature of modernity. For Harvey, the sense of crisis is a product of an incapacity to “grapple with

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank Robyn-Spence Brown, Peter Jackson, Brad Williams, Steven Kelleher, and all of the Cultural Flows group for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I would also like to thank the anonymous referee and the editors of IJAS for comments on later drafts.

the realities unfolding around us" triggered by a new phase of capitalism-driven time-space compression (globalization). Globalization is a – if not the – source of anxiety (Appadurai 2001: 1). This paper explores the link between the contemporary crisis in representation and the academic crisis in Asian Studies, with a particular focus on Japanese Studies and the Australian situation. It is argued that one strategy through which traditional area studies may be reconfigured and revitalized is by more fully and warmly embracing those movements or networks such as cultural studies that can be seen as responses to global changes.¹

A number of projects and networks have emerged in recent years that attempt to redefine and revitalize area studies in the context of changing global conditions. Three examples include: the Pacific Asian Cultural Studies Forum (PACSF) established in 1997 and based at Goldsmiths College, the University of London; the Project for Critical Asian Studies (Critas), set up in 1996 at the University of Washington; and the Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies initiative of the Ford Foundation (established 1997).² Critas has the specific brief of highlighting discussions about *crises* in progressive, Asia-oriented humanities projects internationally. These initiatives can be seen as responses to academic "crisis" generated by changing global conditions. The Australian situation offers a particularly useful context for understanding such projects.

THE AUSTRALIAN SITUATION

While having strong historical, cultural, and political ties to Europe, Australia is geographically and economically rooted in Asia. As a multi-cultural society with a small but growing Asian-born population, Australia appears uniquely placed to adapt to the forces of globalization. This is the argument of the recent Jeffrey Report (ASAA 2002), an Asian Studies Association of Australia commissioned report entitled "Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge: Repositioning and Renewal of a National Asset". The need for the report grew from "a sense of crisis felt throughout the Humanities and Social Sciences in Australian universities, especially among those whose work is related to Asia". The crisis is characterized by a loss of momentum in Asian Studies, a "stalling" (and possible decline) of the Asian knowledge base, and falling numbers of area specialists. The sense of crisis is reported to be particularly acute in the area of Asian language teaching, fuelled by speculation about declining enrolments (ASAA 2002: 31). The report essentially argues for the necessity of repositioning and renewing Asian Studies through the deepening, diffusion, and exchange of knowledge in and between government, business, media, NGO, education, and community circles.

From the 1950s Australia developed a strong international reputation for the quality of its scholarship on Asia (ASAA 2002: 1). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Japanese Studies in particular began to grow significantly. This growth spurt was surpassed by what some

1 Peter Jackson (personal communication) raised the converse argument that area studies might also be able to help save cultural studies from its own hegemonic tendencies, an idea which deserves a paper in its own right.

2 Pacsf: <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/pacific-asia-cultural-studies.html>; Critas: <http://depts.washington.edu/critas/>; Crossing Borders: <http://www.crossing-borders.net/index2.php>.

referred to as the “second tsunami” from 1988 to the mid-90s, a period which saw, at the tertiary level, enrolments double, Japanese-language departments almost double (from 19 in 1988 to 34 in 1993), and learners of Japanese become more numerous than for any other foreign language (Erben and Yumiko 1995; Marriot and Spence-Brown 1995). Although enrolments have levelled off in the last few years after the mid-1990s peak, the study of Japanese at the university level has remained popular. This is thanks, in part, to increasing numbers of overseas students (mainly from Asia) dominating the beginners’ streams (Spence-Brown 2001: 26).³ Chinese has seen a similar plateauing; however, Indonesian, one of the “big three” in Australia, saw enrolments fall during the late 1990s. Many other languages of “lower demand”, such as Thai, have been abandoned altogether (ASAA 2002: 35–43).

One of the consequences of the failure of resources to keep up with the early 1990s rise in demand may be a decline in competence (Morton 1994: 13). McCormack’s (1989) argument that a quantitative increase in students taking an Asian language does not necessarily translate into a qualitative increase may have been prescient. Again, Japanese Studies epitomizes developments in Asian Studies as a whole. As Sugimoto (1992) predicted, the mushrooming number of students studying Japanese during the “boom” periods did not translate into – and may even have undermined – a clear vision of the aims of and excellence in research in Asian/Japanese Studies. With the fading of the tsunami and falling numbers (in terms of both students and dollars), Japanese Studies in Australia has been left with no clear vision and a great number of language teachers who are not as qualified or experienced in research as their colleagues elsewhere in the university. Mainstreaming – the building of Japanese Studies into school and university structures “so that they will be entrenched in the infrastructure when the extraordinary funding and support are finished” (Rix, quoted in Low 1997) – did not occur as much as many would have liked.

The response to the developments outlined above has been repositioning and (attempted) renewal. The case of Monash University, as the largest university in the southern hemisphere with campuses in Malaysia and South Africa, is indicative. In the first place, job losses and amalgamation at Monash have occurred on a wide scale. In 2000, the independent Department of Japanese Studies was amalgamated with the existing Department of Asian Studies (Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, and, at that stage, Thai) to form the School of Asian Languages and Studies. Last year (2002) that School merged with European Languages and Linguistics to form an even larger body, the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics. In addition to these amalgamations, a number of projects emerged following the University Council’s approval at the end of 2001 of the “Global Development Framework and Global Development 2002–2006” and the subsequent establishment of the Monash Institute for the Study of Global Movements (The Global Institute) in early 2002. Although coming from disparate backgrounds, what was striking about these projects was the drive to build networks across disciplinary, faculty, and institutional lines via a shared vocabulary. Indeed, the goal of promoting new and vigorous cross-faculty and cross-disciplinary associations amongst researchers at Monash and beyond is the main

3 The expansion of Japanese at the school level means local students often skip beginner levels. The result is a majority of international and/or local Chinese-character background students at the introductory level (ASAA 2002: 25).

aim of the Global Institute, which is offering substantial grants for teams of researchers that fulfil this criteria.

Subsumption into larger and larger bodies undermines the sense of “belonging” that is a key component of identity. At Monash, just as those in Japanese Studies were beginning to build links with Chinese, Korean, and Indonesian colleagues and forge an Asian Studies identity, further amalgamation undermined any progress that had been made. The result is an identity crisis since it becomes increasingly difficult for such researchers to know where they are located or, indeed, whether their object of study can even be clearly defined any more. Such unease was merely confirmed in the recent (May 2002) declaration by the Minister for Education and Training that funding for the six-year-old National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools programme (NALSAS) was to cease. As Colin Mackerras,⁴ the first chair of the NALSAS Taskforce, has pointed out, gains made in the teaching of Asian languages in the schools since 1994 have yet to filter through to the tertiary sector. In attempting to address these issues of identity and positionality, in the latter part of 2001 a team at Monash, comprising mainly scholars of Japan and China, secured a Faculty of Arts Research Strength Grant for a project entitled “Cultural Flows”.⁵ The project can be seen as an attempt to address questions of identity and to re-affirm and revitalize a particular area of study that has been uprooted and detached from its traditional moorings. Cultural Flows was a response to changing global realities, an attempt to reconfigure and reinvent Asian Studies through the construction of inter-, multi- and even anti-disciplinary connections with researchers and frameworks in other areas. Many of the insights in this paper originate from my experience as a member of that project.

DEFINING (ASIAN) AREA STUDIES

Appadurai (2001: 3) defines area studies as “the largest institutional epistemology through which the academy in the United States has apprehended much of the world in the last fifty years”. Area studies can be said to be spatially located in two senses: its origin (America) and its focus (Asia/Africa/South America). It is understood as having emerged from a re-imagining of space during the middle of the twentieth century, resulting in a common spatial terminology – the Middle East, Southeast Asia – across the humanities (Morris-Suzuki 2000: 21). As the timing suggests, these spaces are or were, for the most part, (post-) *colonial* spaces. European area studies sounds strangely anomalous. Area studies itself has been called some sort of colonial structure (Harootunian and Sakai 1999: 596). Moreover, to say Asian Studies⁶ is spatially located refers not only to its object of study but also to its sources of funding: its dependency on the “governments and other organisations of Asian countries” (Harootunian and Sakai 1999: 595). Unlike other disciplines which are

4 On Radio National’s *Lingua Franca* programme, 5 November 2002. The transcript can be found at www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/ling/stories/s552983.htm (accessed same day).

5 The group held a conference, entitled “Cultural Flows With(in) a Globalizing Asia”, at Monash University from 29 November to 1 December 2002. A publication is scheduled to follow. More information can be found via the group’s web-page on www.arts.monash.edu.au/lcl/research/culturalflows.html.

6 I am using “Asian Studies” here to mean both content and language studies, though as argued in the next paragraph it typically refers more to the latter than the former.

temporally located – which are rooted in a canon that is tied to no particular site – Asian Studies is, by definition, tied to a specific physical place, whatever problems there may be in defining that place. And while it is possible to focus only on content, most students of Asia typically train in a language that is identified with a particular nation rather than the literature or culture of a particular region, as is more common in other modern language programmes (Spence-Brown 2001).

The “birth” of Asian Studies itself, as Harootunian and Sakai (1999: 596) point out, can be traced back to the needs of the American military during the last world war. In the years following the war, enthusiasm for area studies accelerated as the field became intimately connected with United States’ Cold War strategy (Wallerstein 1997). Whether during the war years or during the Cold War, the stress was on the need to “understand the enemy” by acquiring knowledge of where the enemy lived and, especially, the language(s) it spoke (Harootunian and Sakai 1999: 596). Indeed, post-war, language training was “the major justification for post-war U.S. government financing of area studies” (Wallerstein 1997: 200). Thus, “Asian Studies” typically refers to the study of Asian languages (Kamada 1994: 2), despite the fact that convincing pedagogical arguments have been made for a greater emphasis on content (Crawcour, quoted in Kamada 1994: 4). Although the importance of integrating socio-cultural elements with language teaching is increasingly recognized (Nagata 1998; Spence-Brown 2001), this frequently involves nothing more than “a predictable repertoire of cultural icons and stereotypical presentation” of the people concerned (Nagata 1995: 7). Moreover, the growth in immersion and content-based approaches has largely failed to match expectations. While not exactly what McCormack (1989) called “masses of people with a smattering of an Asian language and some half-baked cultural ideas”, in general, students do tend to emerge with rudimentary language abilities and a perfunctory grasp of the “culture” and then, hopefully, head to the “field” to hone their skills and knowledge. Asian Studies, in more than one sense, is a “field”, one in which there is, generally, no substitute for the process of immersion that is anthropological field work.

ASIAN STUDIES, IDENTITY CRISIS, AND GLOBALIZATION

At first glance, the connection between the sense of identity crisis some scholars of Asia are experiencing and the definition of Asian Studies as a field rooted in place, not time, is unclear. Harvey’s term for globalization – time-space compression – makes this link clearer. Globalization is not a new phenomenon. As outlined earlier, Harvey (1990) argues that capitalism drives “globalization”, that is periodic waves of time-space compression (the world getting faster and smaller) that result in disorientation and crises in representation. During the period 1870–1914, for example, the flow of both people and goods was far more open and numerous than they are today (Hirst and Thompson 1996). Kern (1983) gives an account of how the disorientation during this period affected political and social developments. Harvey (1990) argues that since the early seventies we have seen a new intense phase of time-space compression, a period variously referred to as late, high, or post modernity. Interestingly, Harvey’s dating corresponds remarkably well with the first ASAA report on Asian Studies in Australia. Set in train in 1978 and published in 1980, the report, like its successor, was “underpinned by a feeling of crisis among Asia specialists” (Kamada

1994: 5; Fitzgerald 1978). The Japanese Studies Association of Australia (JSAA) was also established in 1978.

In Australia, the sense of crisis temporarily abated during the tsunami years. But as the boom in Japanese language teaching and learning has plateaued, so the sense of crisis has re-surfaced more strongly than ever. The sense of crisis was clearly present at the recent (2 July 2002) JSAA AGM in which a number of strategic responses to revitalize the organization were tabled in the light of "dismal" membership figures and declining finances. But although the "crisis" is invariably seen as a financial crisis, as Harootunian and Sakai (1999: 595–96) point out, it is related more to the colonial structure of area/Asian/Japanese studies and the ways it has traditionally produced knowledge, ways that are increasingly out of sync with high, late, or post-modernity. "What they imply by crisis", conclude Harootunian and Sakai (1999: 596), "is that they are not sure they will be able to reproduce the same pattern of knowledge about Japan".

Traditional practices of knowledge production seem increasingly anomalous in the period of intense globalization the world is now experiencing. The question is why time-space compression should result in such dissonance, disorientation, and doubt. This is easier to grasp if time-space compression is first understood as the annihilation of space through time. "[I]f spatial and temporal experiences are primary vehicles for the coding and reproduction of social relations (as Bourdieu suggests)", argues Harvey (1990: 247), "then a change in the way the former get represented will almost certainly generate some kind of shift in the latter". The impact of globalization on identity, then, is related to the centrality of spatial and temporal dimensions for all systems of representation. "Identity is deeply implicated in representation", writes Hall (1992: 301), "[t]hus, the shaping and re-shaping of time-space relationships within the different systems of representation have profound effects on how identities are located and represented." Put simply, because identity is closely linked with place – with sites of social practice (Tuathail, Herod, and Roberts 1998: 20) – the way modernity "increasingly tears space away from place" (Giddens 1990: 18) inevitably undermines the sense of belonging. As Mercer (1990: 43) points out, the explosion of scholarly and non-scholarly work on identity is symptomatic of the doubt and uncertainty that follows from being uprooted and displaced from familiar spatial anchors.

The very spatial fixedness of Asian Studies that has long been its strength may now be its weakness. An analogy may be drawn with the decline of the nation-state. While the nineteenth-century phase of time-space compression certainly contributed to the establishment of the nation-state, the intense cycle we are now experiencing may ironically be weakening it. For example, Morris-Suzuki (1998: chapter 1) shows how the rise of the modern Japanese state saw the transfer of difference from place to time, minorities being assimilated so that they were no longer represented as foreign or exotic but instead as backward. The ongoing reinterpretation in terms of time rather than space that was a feature of the establishment of nation – a signifier that has become the dominant cultural identity of our time – now seems to be contributing to its fragmentation. This reinterpretation of space via time is characterized in practical terms by movement or flows (Appadurai 1996), flows of ideas/values, information, capital, technology, and, perhaps most significantly, people. These flows are interdependent. For example, the outflow of Japanese capital, particularly to Asia, from the seventies onwards, is inexorably linked to the unprecedented inflow of (mostly Asian) migrants into Japan now (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 175). In turn, this migration engenders flows of capital in the form of remittances in the opposite

direction. These remittances reaffirm home-country affiliations and create a market for home-country food delicacies and media (Nonini 2002: 7–8), supporting the phenomenon of “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998: chapter 3).

In Japan’s case, increasing global flows have resulted in a questioning – and increasingly desperate maintenance – of what it means to be Japanese: of (national) identity (Burgess 2003). In other words, such cultural flows and dissolving boundaries have seen, as Hall (1992: 302) puts it, a loosening of the central identification with nation and the strengthening of other – and the emergence of new – identities. Some of the announcements proclaiming the “end of the nation state” (Barber 1996; Ohmae 1995; Guehenno 1995) may be premature. The resurgence of popular nationalism and ethnocentrism are manifestations of the increasingly “violent maintenance” (Clifford 1997: 9) that modern nations require in the face of this identity slippage. Nevertheless, many analysts see globalization as a definite marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation-states (Ohmae 1990; Barber 1996; Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1996; Appadurai 2001: 4). Arguments that it is no longer citizenship but consumption (Turner 1994; Clammer 1997) and/or the media (Baudrillard 1988) that define identity are persuasive. Behind the apparent “choice” that transnational mediums such as advertising or the internet offer is the notion of free-floating homeless identities that have been detached or disembedded from the geography of (national) place.

A NEW ARCHITECTURE FOR AREA STUDIES

How are we to revitalize Asian Studies? How are we to reconfigure a new identity for the field and for scholars of the field in the light of these seemingly unstoppable global flows? The first thing to note is that globalization is not a unitary or one-way phenomenon. The same mediums and flows that tear space away from place are also increasingly being utilized to establish new spatial moorings at the local and regional level. As Tuathail (1998: 20) notes, the “entwining and essentializing of identity and place” occur through the logistics of globalization itself, with technologies of communication and the possibilities they open exploited in the promotion and delivery of *new* myths of identity and place. He sums this up, in a play on Barber’s (1996) best-selling work, by concluding that it is not only Jihad *versus* McWorld but also Jihad *via* McWorld. In practice, this means that the loosening of strong identifications with national culture is coterminous with a strengthening of other cultural ties and allegiances, above and below the level of the nation-state (Hall 1992: 302). Regionalism in particular has become an essential component of the contemporary world, globalization necessarily entailing new regionalist formations (Dirlik 1994; Ching 2001: 283–84). The “new regionalism” was given extra impetus following the collapse of the preceding regionalist divisions that characterized the Cold War (Ching 2001: 284–85).

Given such global reconfigurations, the underlying notion of the field as “a holistic, unified whole”, which was a feature of the colonial-structured area studies that emerged after the war (Harootunian and Sakai 1999: 601) appears anachronistic. Appadurai (2001: 7–9) argues for a “new architecture for area studies” which makes a decisive shift away from “trait” geographies (areas as relatively immobile aggregates of traits like language or culture) to “process geographies” (areas as spaces of action, interaction, and motion). Asian

Studies' rootedness in anthropological fieldwork at the local level coupled with its overall concern with geographical flows at the regional level may be an advantage in instigating such a shift. Thus, it is not so much that (Asian) area studies in itself "is an obstacle rather than a help in understanding the world we live in" (Morris-Suzuki 2000). Many of the skills traditionally demanded of area studies specialists remain relevant (Morris-Suzuki 2000: 22). Rather, the old, single framework version of area studies that focused on the static lines and boundaries between "peoples", "cultures", and "civilizations" has become outdated. What is needed is a new, alternative area studies that imposes a less narrow view of the world, one that is more in tune with contemporary global realities. Such an alternative would address the way that traditional area-studies has tended to isolate and marginalize the study of regions like Asia by "cutting it off from the major disciplines" (Ingleson and Nairn 1989: 260). Strategies to achieve this goal may include paying more attention to flows, connections, and relations between disparate locations, being more critical of the idea of "the West" as the source of theory, and promoting conversation and collaboration between scholars, students, activists, policy-makers, and other individuals in different societies (Morris-Suzuki 2000: 15; 18; 19; 22; Appadurai 2001: 20).

REVITALIZING ASIAN STUDIES THROUGH CULTURAL STUDIES

Cultural studies provides clues as to how the colonial-structured area studies of old may be reconfigured to reflect changing global realities. Cultural studies, as Jameson (1993: 46) has noted, has a "fundamental spatial dimension". Ang and Stratton (1996: 17) point out that cultural studies "must always be enunciated from, and engage with the political peculiarities of, a particular spatial/cultural context". This refers not only to the nation-state, which has long boasted a privileged status in cultural studies, but, more importantly, to emerging transnational perspectives in cultural studies. These transnational perspectives are increasingly seen (Ang and Stratton 1996; Chen 1996) as crucial in the development of a "local" decolonizing cultural studies that avoids simply reproducing dominant forms of (colonial) power. In sum, it is the spatial nature of cultural studies that may be usefully exploited if Asian Studies – itself spatially located – is to be reconfigured and revitalized.

In order to develop, it may be necessary, as I (2001) and others' have argued elsewhere, for Asian Studies to emerge from its perceived isolation in terms of (inter)disciplinary theorizing and more warmly embrace contemporary intellectual frameworks, such as postmodernism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies. The advantage of drawing on these "new" intellectual movements is not only the common spatial dimension but also the fact that they actually reflect a *response* to this latest phase of time-space compression which has affected the basic coordinates of all systems of representation (Hall 1992: 301; Harvey 1990: 392–93). Cultural studies, for example, as Hall (1990) points out, emerged *out of* the crisis of the humanities at the tertiary level. Similarly, McRobbie (1992: 719) notes how

7 Harootian and Sakai (1999: 593) argue convincingly that the conservatism of Asian studies, and especially Japan studies, has manifested itself in a rejection of and hostility to theory, particularly towards the "new" theoretical frameworks.

the collapse of many of the intellectual frames of reference has fuelled the development of cultural studies: “the word crisis”, she continues, “is one which appears with alarming regularity in the discourses of cultural studies”. The reason “crisis” and cultural studies are so often linked relates to the very nature of cultural studies as a project which cannot be carried out without challenging, problematizing, and making explicit the political/ideological production of knowledge. “Cultural studies can intervene with the practices of area studies”, argue Harootunian and Sakai (1999: 598/9), “[t]his is why there are so many who either reject cultural studies entirely or depoliticize it in the Japanese studies field.”

Cultural studies and associated intellectual frameworks are less movements with designated areas of study (as could be said of traditional disciplines) and more attitudes or even “structures of feeling” that reflect and are a product of late modernity. Compared with conventional area studies, which was a “top-down enterprise” fostered by government and other bodies, many of the new intellectual movements had “bottom-up origins” (Wallerstein 1997: 227). The common concern of contemporary movements with the everyday life of real people – Milner (1991: 108) suggests that there is little point arguing *against* postmodernism since it is “not so much a theory, more a way of life” – reflects the reassertion of individual, local, and regional identities in this period of late or post modernity. The slow but growing interest in the intersection of movements like post-modernism, postcolonialism, and cultural studies with Asian Studies suggests that not all in the profession consider such approaches a threat. Indeed, many are increasingly considering them necessary for the survival of the field. Unless such concerns are advanced and the epistemology of Asian Studies reconfigured, the globally inspired changes that continue to uproot and disturb familiar moorings will cause an ever increasing sense of dissonance, dislocation, and crisis among scholars of Asia.

Writing in 1994, Kamada (1994: 21) noted that it was not yet clear how cultural studies could be integrated into the study of Asia and even less clear how it may be presented in the classroom. Cultural studies has clearly developed and internationalized significantly since then. “One of the most profound influences on Japanese studies (as an academic discipline outside Japan) over the last decade”, writes Tokita (2000: 2), “has been the impact of cultural studies”. It may be too early to say, as Tokita does, that there has been a paradigm shift from Japanese (area) studies to (Japanese) cultural studies. In order to keep pace with the multi-, inter-, and anti-disciplinary turn in academia – a turn that is but one manifestation of the changes that are occurring globally – a revitalized Asian Studies clearly needs to develop further this relationship with the emerging intellectual movements or networks of which cultural studies is clearly one.

Some care needs to be taken in pronouncements concerning the “international” or “global” nature of cultural studies (Stratton and Ang 1996). Nevertheless, the type of intellectual work that emerged in its contemporary form in the early 1970s, and that is most commonly associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is now clearly being practised in many different parts of the world. This is well illustrated by the journal *Cultural Studies*, which over a relatively short period of time has had special issues on Latin American (13:2 April 1999), Irish (15:1 Jan. 2001), and Hong Kong (15:3–4 July 2001) cultural studies, as well as individual papers on transatlantic (Musner 1999) and Asian-Pacific (Wilson 2000) cultural studies. Admittedly, much of this work just sees

"British" cultural studies crossing national boundaries "in unreflexive national terms" (Stratton and Ang 1996: 362) and becoming, say, Spanish (Graham and Labanyi 1995) or Australian (Turner 1992) cultural studies. However, the most exciting developments have occurred when work has "gone beyond the international binary" and the boundaries themselves have been challenged. As Spivak (1993) puts it, a new breed of transnational cultural studies must displace the conventional "West-and-the-rest" opposition and put the transactions between countries in an international frame. "A transnational study of culture will not neutralize or disciplinarize the problem by defining it as 'comparative' work", she (Spivak 1993: 262–78) argues, ". . . the point is to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic."

The label "cultural studies" has and is being appropriated in various ways by various mediums. "Cultural studies is not one thing", writes Hall (1990: 11), "it has never been one thing." Nevertheless, it can be argued that so-called transnational cultural studies captures many of the underlying assumptions central to all cultural studies projects. While the study of popular culture is central to the project of cultural studies, its approach, as mentioned earlier, is one that specifically regards culture as political/ideological (Storey 1998: xi–xii). Just as Foucault is interested in power and its relation to knowledge and "truth", so cultural studies is interested in how knowledge is (re)constructed, (re)produced, adopted, and resisted. Clearly, the struggle over representation – which representations have authority and can secure hegemony and which cannot – is of central importance in cultural studies. In this way, poststructuralism – which identifies the problems of representation and the social (non-scientific, power ridden) nature of knowledge – underlies much of the cultural studies project, particularly the notion of asking how boundaries are configured and how they can be deconstructed. This may be the reason cultural studies resists codification (Johnson 1996: 75) and disciplinarization. Traits such as openness, theoretical versatility, self-reflection, and critique (Johnson 1996) form the strength of what has been called "a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional *rendez-vous*" (Bennet, quoted in Stratton and Ang 1996: 361).

As a post-disciplinary field of critical inquiry, cultural studies would appear more in tune with global developments. This is hardly surprising considering cultural studies has already been argued to be a *response* to the sense of crisis and rapid social change characteristic of this latest period of intense time-space compression. Cultural studies is less a movement with a designated area of study and more an attitude/"structure of feeling" precisely because it reflects a response to a new set of experiences of space and time. Social struggles and movements – social and cultural change – drive the cultural studies project forwards (Chen 1998: 41; Hall 1990: 12). The strength of the project, then, lies in the very fact that it is not a fixed monolith but "an unfolding discourse, responding to changing historical and political conditions and always marked by debate, disagreement, and intervention" (Storey 1998: xv). This is why some of the best work in cultural studies has not been on national "cultures", or even comparisons between societies, but work that has attempted to negotiate, challenge, and problematize taken-for-granted boundaries, borders, and binaries, just as they are being negotiated, challenged, and problematized by globalization. "[T]he nation state", write Ang and Stratton (1996: 71), "should not be the uninterrogated site for the development of a 'local' cultural studies."

FROM ASIAN (AREA) STUDIES TO (ASIAN) CULTURAL STUDIES

Asian Studies, in all its heterogeneity, can perhaps be said to have been slow in warming to what David Harvey (1990: viii) calls powerful configurations of new sentiments and thoughts. Recently, though, there have been developments which suggest a future path via which Asian Studies may reaffirm its own identity and revitalize itself. Not least is the emergence of a number of new journals which unambiguously attempt to put cultural studies into Asian Studies and Asia into cultural studies. In this respect, *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, a Duke University publication established in 1993, was ahead of its time. *Positions* was probably the first journal to focus specifically on incorporating insights from cultural studies and postcolonial studies into the study of Asia. Another trailblazer was *Traces*, a multilingual journal of cultural theory and translation edited by a group headed by Naoki Sakai at Cornell University. Published in four languages, *Traces* attempts to challenge prevailing notions of a hierarchical flow of theory and information from the “West” to the “rest of the world”, something which apparently saw it initially shunned by American publishing houses (www.news.cornell.edu/chronicles/11.15.01/Traces.html). *Traces* may be seen as part of the new breed of transnational cultural studies that attempts to displace the conventional “West-and-the-rest” opposition and put the transactions between countries in a global context. As Sakai (*ibid.*) points out, *Traces* is not a journal catering for a particular readership or area.

More recently, 2000 saw the first issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, a Routledge journal which specifically addresses the way cultural studies, in response to global cultural changes, has emerged internationally as an energetic field of scholarship. “*Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*”, goes the blurb (<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/routledge/14649373.html>), “gives a long overdue voice, throughout the global intellectual community to those concerned with inter-Asia processes . . . with the aim of enhancing the communication and exchange between inter-Asia and other regions of the cultural studies world”. Thus, the notion of giving voice to and forging links between individuals, the local and the global, and cultural studies’ practices and other new social and cultural movements is clearly stated. The purpose is to construct what the editors call a “critical inter-Asia subjectivity”, drawing on local critical intellectual traditions while making global links with other cultural studies networks. And while the use of inter (between or among) rather than intra (within) may at first appear rather counter-intuitive,⁸ the intention is clearly to highlight the existence of a plurality of “Asias”, to emphasize the links, and to problematize the lines that are drawn between the local, national, regional, and global.

The following year (2001) the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (Routledge) changed its name to *Critical Asian Studies* to reflect “the increasingly international and interdisciplinary field of Asian Studies”. The function of the name change was both to highlight “the continued commitment as activists and scholars to the search for critical perspectives on local, regional, and global change” and to signal “our self-critical assessments of the ways in which our efforts affect the world in which we live” (*Critical Asian Studies* 33:1 (March

8 The “Inter-Asia” label originated from the Trajectories project (discussed later) and was apparently inspired by the establishment of the Inter-American Cultural Studies Network to designate the linkage between North and Latin America (Chen 1998: 2).

2001) pp. 3–4). As with *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, the goal of the editors and directors is to foster communication and links with and between scholars and activists on the ground and to provide information on social movements and change in Asia.⁹ A final example of how Asian (cultural) studies is developing is the *International Journal of Asian Studies*, sponsored by the Institute of Oriental Culture at the University of Tokyo. This paper forms part of the inaugural issue of that journal. According to the editors (www.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/index-ENG.html), the journal “examines Asia on a regional basis, emphasizing patterns and tendencies that go beyond individual countries”. There is a particular interest in the workings of inter- and trans-Asian networks and the poorly understood role these have in the dynamic transformations that the region has witnessed and is witnessing, including transformations in identity. “Therefore the Journal is particularly interested in”, the editors conclude, “locating contemporary changes within a historical framework, especially using interdisciplinary approaches.”

The dates of the last three publications may well be indicative of the fact that the growing crisis in Asian Studies over identity and survival has reached a critical mass of sorts only very recently. The series of conferences fronted by Kuan-Hsing Chen at the National Tsing Hua University in Taiwan were the harbingers in this respect. Held in 1992 (“Trajectories: Towards A New Internationalist Cultural Studies”) and 1995 (“Trajectories II: A New Internationalist Cultural Studies Conference”) they were the first cultural studies conferences to take place outside the English-speaking world (Chen 1998: xv). In explaining the roots of the conferences, Chen (1998: xiv) talked of facing a “new reality and a new world” which brings with it “an urgent necessity to understand the world in different terms, more flexible, more dynamic, and more explanatory”. Hinting at the sense of crisis he (1998: xiv) notes how “[a]mbiguities, ambivalence, and uncertainty forced us to examine local and global situations. What do these transformations at various local, national, regional, international, and global levels mean?” Interestingly, in the aftermath of the conference the organizers were at first unable to find a publisher, something Chen, like Sakai earlier, links to the global knowledge production system. The shift in the global and intellectual climate in the ensuing years saw publishers suddenly keen to publish such material, as evidenced by the belated 1998 conference volume and the recent influx of related new journal titles. In 1998 a kind of Trajectories III (“Problematizing ‘Asia’: The First Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Conference”) took place at the same location, two years after the landmark “Dialogue with Cultural Studies” Conference held in Tokyo. Indications are that these are not isolated developments but rather a growing break with the existing structures and networks of intellectual production. To paraphrase Chen (1998: 3–4), both Asia and cultural studies are going through a critical phase of internationalization and transformation that is occurring “very much in response to” the changing dispositions and structure of global power relations.

In conclusion, it is clear that the sense of crisis that is increasingly felt in academia as in many areas of life stems from the new set of experiences of space and time that are

9 The growing importance of the link between scholarship and social activism is illustrated by the theme of the 5th International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference. The mandate of the conference is to connect “critical cultural analyses and progressive political action and social justice in age of violence and global uncertainty” (www.crossroads2004.org).

unfolding around us in this “new period of vast uncertainty” (Said 1993: 398). As Wallerstein (1997: 228) puts it, “the intellectual turmoil is real.” Australia’s unique historical and geographical position makes it a particularly useful site from which to draw lessons on how to respond to changing global experiences. The Jeffrey Report, cited earlier, provided some pointers in this respect. Another ASAA initiative, the Asian Studies in Asia Network, illustrates neatly how theoretical linkage may work in practice. The project, which held its first meeting in Thailand in 1998, seeks to support and complement the activities of Asian Studies scholars throughout Asia in developing networks for the exchange of ideas and information (<http://asianet.anu.edu/about.html>). As well as publishing a Directory of Asian Studies in Asia, it also conducts workshops and other activities to link scholars throughout the region and offers grants, particularly for younger scholars, wishing to participate in Asia-related conferences within the region.

In closing, a number of steps can be suggested that may help to (a) reaffirm our own identity as scholars of Asia and (b) revitalize Asian Studies. The central recommendation is the need to embrace more warmly the post-disciplinary fields of critical inquiry of which cultural studies is probably the best known. Because these movements or networks are *responses* to the sense of crisis and rapid social change characteristic of this latest period of intense time-space compression, they are useful in addressing the questions of identity and survival discussed here. More specifically, three suggestions can be made. First, wider networks of communities and dialogues may be established across faculties and institutions and between (academic and non-academic) individuals, networks that are more than an interchange between already existing (national) power structures. Second, (colonial) power relations that maintain boundaries and decide what is “true” and what is not can be more fearlessly scrutinized, interrogated, and challenged. Finally, the cultural practices of everyday life – what McRobbie (1992: 730) calls “identity ethnography” – may be given greater priority. The Cultural Flows project at Monash was merely one example out of a number of groups that have sprung up in response to these questions of identity and survival. It is my hope that this essay helps add a little coherence, direction, and perspective to the agendas of similar groups as they attempt to understand and engage with the emerging networks that are transnational or inter-Asian Studies.

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