

BOOK REVIEW

Sinoglossia

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Sinoglossia is a collection of essays that seek to rethink and push further the concept of the Sinophone and its studies. As Andrea Bachner argues, Shu-mei Shih's concept of the Sinophone is still the topos of this volume (pp. 229–236). Yet, by replacing the suffix *phone* with *glossia* (from *glotta*, which means language or tongue), this new term puts an emphasis on the diversity and multiplicity of *tongues* (Sinitic, non-Sinitic and those that are between these categories), bodies and media, which writers, artists and other media actants use to negotiate the *Sino*. Hence, instead of decentering China, a Sinoglossiac act mediates the differences between the constructive process of China/Chineseness and the corresponding process of its deconstruction (pp. 2–4).

This book does not aim to present a prescriptive definition of Sinoglossia or a unified theoretical framework. Rather, its chapters offer a variety of views that enable the reader to appreciate their *differences* as sites of production. As Ien Ang argues, what these individual interventions reveal is often the contradiction inherent in the term itself (pp. 212–219). Methodologically, most contributors offer in-depth examinations of local or even individual acts of cultural production that either challenge preconceived notions of China/Chineseness or trespass the boundaries between languages, ethnicities and regions.

This book is divided into four sections: corporeality, media, translation and theoretical interventions. The first section opens with Jia-Chen Fu's "Inspecting bodies, crafting subjects," which studies the way the Kuomintang (Nationalist) government (1925–1948) in China used the physical examination as an educational tool to construct and normalize a modern Chinese body. Fu's discussion is juxtaposed with Howard Chiang's analysis of the work of the Taiwanese artist Hou Chun-Ming's, *Body Image* (chapter two). The production of the artwork involves Hou's interview with his subjects in the nude, a therapeutic massage he performs on them and, eventually, pairs of paintings of the subjects' bodies done by Hou and by the subjects themselves. In this process, both Hou and the subjects rediscover, rethink and redefine queer Chinese/Taiwanese bodies. Finally, Chun-yen Wang studies the experimental theatre of the 1980s group *Lanling jufang* in Taiwan and demonstrates how Cold-War US values were instrumental in redefining the *free* Chinese body (chapter three).

In other sections, Paola Iovene (chapter four) offers a thought-provoking discussion of the 1980 film by Huang Zumo, *Lushan lian* (*Romance on Lushan Mountain*). For her, the film demonstrates how early post-Mao cinema transfers the spectators' affection from socialism to the nation via the body, linguistic skills and modernity of a woman from the diaspora. Iovene's re-examination of the meaning of the diaspora and the role it plays in the Chinese national construct addresses Shih's criticism that the concept of the diaspora itself reinforces the idea of China as the imagined centre of the Sinophone ("Against diaspora: the Sinophone as places of cultural production," in *Visibility and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, University of California Press, 2007).

In fact, the complexity of the diasporic experience is well-demonstrated by E. K. Tan's "Sinopop" (chapter five). Through his analysis of Wee Meng Chee's songs, Tan illustrates the pressures experienced by the Malaysian Chinese within the context of a Malay-centric notion of cultural diversity. Within this context, China is certainly not the imagined centre in the diaspora. A similar challenge is presented by Ien Ang in her analysis of the histories of Chinatowns, which reveal how the diasporic experience is irreducible to the centre-margin dynamic (chapter 12).

Meanwhile, such a centre-margin model also overlooks the culturo-linguistic diversity within a community like Taiwan. For Yu-lin Lee, for example, Syaman Rapongan, a writer of the Austronesian Tao ethnicity, finds himself needing to write in Chinese. Syaman Rapongan's case reveals that the Sinophone itself is made up of differences that still pivot upon a Sinocentric imagination (chapter nine). A similar observation is also made by Tzu-hui Celina Hung in her examination of the politics of translation in the Taiwan Literature Award (chapter ten).

Diasporic literary productions, meanwhile, mediate their own contradictions. In his analysis of Ted Chiang's *Heptapod B*, Carlos Rojas identifies the Asian American writer's deconstruction of the myth about the Chinese script in his work and his perpetuation of such a myth in his personal life (chapter six). Meanwhile, Ping-hui Liao reevaluates the late work of Eileen Chang by rethinking how her writing renews her understanding of modernity at the intersection of the Sinophone and Anglophone (chapter eight). In another intervention (pp. 225–228), Rojas ruminates on the term 拆那/*chai-na* (demolition/China), a composite word that challenges our preconceived notion of the Chinese language as a predominantly script-base signifying system and a linguistic production that puts into question its Sinitic boundary.

David Der-wei Wang is apt to point out that the starting point of Sinoglossia is perhaps our acknowledgement that the Sinophone is a state of exception and an "intervention with China" (pp. 201–212). Wang's observation (inadvertently) resonates with and adds depth to my proposal to rethink the Sinophone in terms of extraterritoriality ("Revisiting Sinophone," *Monde Chinois Nouvelle Asie* 57 [2019], 13–24). It also converses with Lydia Liu's work on how boundaries between China/foreignness have been further processed through colonial discourses (*The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*, Harvard University Press, 2004).

Sinoglossia is a thought-provoking volume. It requires its readers to build their own understandings of the term itself and what it means to their research by assembling and rearranging these various voices and pieces. The term itself invites the contributors and *us* to rethink and reconfigure both Sinophone and Chinese studies in a rapidly changing global political milieu. Its individual chapters are also excellent teaching materials for students and specialists of their respective topics.