

EDITORIAL

Editorial Foreword

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The six articles that make up this issue provide critical insights into the problematic ways that history reflects ideology, spanning a broad range of topics including colonialism, legal compensation, folklore, urban planning, and literature. Each author shows how critiques of essentialized history reveal fractures in the logic of classification that demarcate and delineate boundaries of class, ethnicity, national identity, and law. With reference to these fractures, the articles collected here problematize paired conceptual categories such as privacy and sexuality, individual rights and public policy, immortality and rebirth, revolution and transcendent sovereignty, value and price, and stereotypes and typologies of cultural distinctiveness.

The first two articles are concerned with the legacies of war and imperialism in South Korea. Na Sil Heo provides a detailed analysis showing how the planning, design, and construction of housing in postwar South Korea should be understood as a project concerning the problematic modernity of the family and the dynamics of gender roles, individuality, sexuality, and privacy within the home. Heo points out that a close examination of the history of architecture and interior design reveals that problems of privacy within the home reflect the cultural politics of Cold War contestation. In this sense, the importance of privacy and the configuration of children's rooms—set apart from but in relation to the space of reproductive conjugal sex in the “master bedroom”—are potent signs of liberal, democratic modernity set against a backdrop of collectivized, communal housing in North Korea. Through an analysis of public debate in both popular and policy-oriented media, Heo illuminates the contrast between anonymous uniformity and privacy in the spatialized ideology of democratic freedom, and in the space of freedom's alterity as imagined in restrictive communist conformity.

Marie Seong-Hak Kim examines the legal history of compensation from Japan and Japanese companies for Korean victims of forced labor and sexual servitude, making a critical distinction between the immorality of the exploitation of colonialism and the problem of legal culpability. By parsing the problem of legality, Kim makes an important point for understanding how the history of the law is different from both nationalist histories of oppression and public memory that takes shape as national history. She notes that understanding the problem of compensation in relation to the history of liability can provide a framework for international relations that goes beyond an overdetermination of the past in the present. Kim makes a strong case for distinguishing between the social history of the law in context and cultural histories of colonialism. As she succinctly points out, her goal is to explain how “judicial dissonance in South Korea is a reflection of a much bigger discord over the interpretation of Korea's history” (p. 477).

The second two articles invite readers to consider ways in which literary forms open critical perspectives on Chinese cultural history in two dynamically innovative and creative moments in time: the late premodern seventeenth century and the early “postmodernity” of the twenty-first century.

Tina Lu offers an incisive reading of a collection of “lifestyle guide” essays written by the playwright, cultural theorist, and Qing-era entrepreneur Li Yu. She makes an argument for how we can understand this collection of commentaries, which cover a broad and seemingly disparate range of topics, not simply as reflections on the integrity of class hierarchy. She interprets them as a kind of political philosophy of social distinction based on a delineation of the use value of commodities, on the one hand, and, on the other, their symbolic value as refined and relatively expensive commodities within a consumerist framework that anticipated more contemporary brand-value distinctions. Throughout the analysis, Lu reminds us that Yu was as precisely attuned to the politics of social capital, and as attentive

to the fine points of price differentiation and market segmentation, as he was to the symbolic significance of affected protocol and rituals of conspicuous consumption in the performativity of public life.

Focusing on the powerful significance of Chairman Mao's embalmed body, Hang Tu explores the fascinating and fantastical ways Chinese writers have engaged with multiple levels of tension in the materialization of immortality, the dystopian sacralization of ideology, and the performative monumentality of mythologized revolutionary history in the context of postrevolutionary Chinese capitalism. Following an analysis of embalming as an act of fictionalized science that blurs the secular and the sacred, merging the mystification and demystification of immortalized biotechnical sovereignty, Tu uses literature to understand the contradictions and paradoxes of mumification. He turns first to Liu Cixian's novel *China 2185*, in which Mao's mind—his thought, if you will—is digitally resurrected to lead an endless revolution that lives on in the timelessness of cyberspace, and then to Yan Lianke and Chan Koonchung's satirical fiction, in which Mao's body is further immortalized as kitsch “symbolizing not the ghostly return of revolution but the eternal life of capital” (p. 520).

The last two articles examine how communities in southern Asia imagine themselves, and their distinctive cultural boundedness, through the juxtaposition of self and other in contexts shaped by power, authority, privilege, and prejudice.

Alexander McKinley engages with the problem of stereotyping and the essentialization of the figure of the Muslim in Sinhala literature. His intervention has broad significance, highlighting the ways that ethno-religious stereotypes change through time. McKinley shows how the logic of stereotyping is not based on a trajectory of linear development or manifest discursive continuity based on the provenance of impressions and misperceptions. Essentialized cultural attributes take on a life of their own as they are resurrected and rearticulated by authors whose appropriation of tropes, within and across genres, gives new and often problematic meaning to older references, both derogatory and commendatory. Through careful narrative analysis and philological interpretation extending from precolonial to postcolonial literature, McKinley reminds us that while stereotypes express the violence of essentialization, the terminology used in stereotyping betrays the profound complexity and the subtle, insidious power of language to articulate shared meaning in terms of bounded distinctions.

Aparna Kapadia's interpretation of Jhaverchand Meghani's travel writing focuses on an important and problematic consequence of the national appropriation of culture to define regional identities in terms of essentialized and bracketed notions of ethnic, religious, and linguistic heritage. Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of “unity in diversity” reflected a vision of inclusiveness for independent India, but reified diversity at the level of subregional cultural identity. These identities were ultimately subsumed within the federated states that made up the republic after 1947 but were being debated in the nationalist discourses that characterized the late colonial public sphere. Kapadia brings this general problem into critical focus through a detailed examination of the case of Saurashtra and Meghani's claims for the distinctiveness of folklore and oral traditions within the essentialized boundaries of what was becoming the modern state of Gujarat. Meghani's conflicted engagement with the problem of reification—which entails the illusive search for authentic alternatives and “pure” local traditions—serves as a valuable reminder of the perilous logic of relativism that extends beyond methodology to conclusive generalization about history and culture, and cultural history.