

Cultural Effect, Illusive Text, and the “Popular”: Japanese Crime Fiction on (Post) Colonial Taiwan

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Antonio Negri makes a distinction between constituent power and constitutive (or constituted) power. Constitutive power entails centralized forces of command that come from above, that are imposed on a community, constituting established forms of social, political, and economic power. Constituent power, on the other hand, is immanent to a community, and is always present within and exercised by a community. Constitutive power cannot operate without constituent power, yet it can neither harness nor exhaust constituent power completely. It is this seemingly conflictual yet symbiotic relationship that opens up the possibility of examining a “third space” that is neither official nor private, a space (or sphere) defined and imagined that resists codification, homogenization, and standardization.

This paper situates itself in this space and explores the concept of the “popular” in the context of transnational movements within the Japanese Empire (1895-1945). Specifically, it seeks to consider the cultural exchanges between colonial Taiwan and the Japanese metropole, highlighting not the official colonial discourses but the distributed collective force of desire and pleasure of the masses that drove ontological emergence and social innovation in pre-war and postwar Taiwanese society. Unlike the official policies and institutionalized history that were documented, recorded, and codified, the unofficial nature of this subject matter means that there are scarce primary sources and sporadic secondary information. The “popular” culture was and is transitory and never meant to be permanently preserved nor studied. Its usefulness is strictly for the “present” “now” and constitutes an ephemeron (literally means “last for one day”) for us to get a glimpse of an undocumented past.

The paper will focus on two aspects of popular culture in the colonial period, popular literature and modern dance, tracing the route of dissemination, continuing circulation, consumption, and transformation. We will examine both native traditions and imported concepts, paying attention to the mode of transmission, noting variances between printed and somatic media. In the area of printed media, I will consider popular magazines such as *Bungei shunjū* 文芸春秋 and *Kingu* キング, noting its circulation, the class and gender of their readership, their reception in comparisons with popular native journals;

the number and type of genres included, and the temporal gap between Taiwan and the metropole. For somatic media, I will focus on the Taiwanese dancer Cai Ruiyue 蔡瑞月 and her mentor, Ishii Baku 石井漠, the founding father of modern dance in Japan. This intercultural transaction will be extended to a transnational study of how culture and art circulated within the Japanese Empire. In contrast to paradigms of the circulation of knowledge in oral and printed media, this somatic cultural transmission took its own route that was disengaged from the language hierarchy in the colonial period.

The ephemerality of the popular print media (which was not meant to be preserved and canonized) and performances (with each performance different and existing only in the “present”) means that they are difficult to recapture and represent. Since they were not imposed by the colonial authority, but rather enthusiastically embraced by the common folks, they can provide insight into the collective psyche of the people under colonial rule.

In the postcolonial popular cultural sphere of East Asia, interaction between the Japanese, Korean, and Sinophone worlds has created a vibrant, lively market of cultural exchange. This East Asian model of postmodern cosmopolitanism has its roots in modern East Asian coloniality. Current cultural theories remind us that the colonial popular is not a retrospective, formed, and completed system but rather an earlier manifestation of globalization and informatization. By examining the conditions of the “popular” in colonial Taiwan, the metropole, and other colonies, this paper hopes to shed light on a less known aspect of the colonial experience of Taiwan.