

# Sinoglossia

Edited by

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# Introduction

Andrea Bachner, Howard Chiang, and Yu-lin Lee

This volume proposes the concept of Sinoglossia as a lens for a more capacious, more heterogeneous approach to objects that are precariously described by labels such as “Chinese” or “Sinophone.” At stake here is the acknowledgement of, and thereby an intention to overcome, three distinct limitations in existing theorizations of Chinese culture: their focus on ethnicity or language at the exclusion of thinking in terms of embodiments or styles; their limited attention to mediation and mediality; and their continual deferral of translational issues, challenges, and problems. Sinoglossia functions as a supplement to the paradigm of Sinophone studies. It introduces an alternative but complementary theory that is defined by cultural formations not overdetermined by Sinitic linguistic ties in the way that the Sinophone has been typically framed around the social life of language systems (whether by linguistic governance or political resistance). The concept of Sinoglossia thus combines a heteroglossic (Bakhtin) and a heterotopian (Foucault) approach to the critical study of mediated discourses of China and Chineseness. This enables a more flexible conceptualization of Chinese culture as an array of polyphonic, multi-discursive, and multilingual articulations, as well as one whose place or topos is composed of different flexible, at times frictional, positionalities. Since both Sinoglossia and Sinophone contain the prefix “Sino-,” one of the recurring motifs that suture both theoretical frameworks is their consistent bind to, as well as resistance against, the symbolic seduction of “Chineseness.” This friction brings to light the productive power of Sinoglossia as a platform for transmedial possibilities, such as for translating and reading different types of embodiment across languages and regimes of cultural production. In the spirit of the concept we propose in this volume, we have opted not to transform our distinct perspectives and conceptual contributions into a univocal text. Instead of a conventional introduction, a multi-vocal dialogue, then:

## 1. Why Sinoglossia?

**AB:** Do we really need another neologism with and about “Sino-,” in the moment in which Sinophone has barely become established? While drawing on Sinophone, Sinoglossia and Sinophone are not the same. I see Sinoglossia as an intervention, an irritation, an interruption, an opening of ground. There will be no new discipline called Sinoglossic studies, nor should there be. The term maintains its allegiance to things “Sino-,” while pairing it with “glossia.” The multiple meanings of “glossia” invoke language (from “glotta,” “language”), but also corporeality (“glotta” also means “tongue”), thus wedding signification and materiality and drawing attention to a question of media and mediation. The term resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin’s term “heteroglossia,” thus borrowing a whiff of multiplicity and heterogeneity by means of this echo. Its second part also marks the term “Sinoglossia” as a method—a way of glossing or conceptualizing. The term’s unfamiliar combination invites us to reflect anew on our practices of naming, categorizing, theorizing with and beyond naturalized and conventional boundaries but also marks the possibility of thinking anew precisely by revisiting other formations. For me, the term does not come out of a gesture of rupture for rupture’s sake, or newness for newness’s sake. Rather, it sets itself up to serve as target of critique, a caveat also against traditional ways of marking disciplinary interventions, claiming theoretical newness, or marking a conceptual turn.

**YL:** I would like to emphasize the multiplicity and heterogeneity that the term “Sinoglossia” connotes. Sinoglossia, first of all, highlights the linguistic aspect of the Sinophone practice. Echoing the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, Sinoglossia underscores the multilingualism in the Sinitic language “family” and further specifies a minor/minority discourse that opposes the major/majority one, similar to the conception of Sinophone. In this regard, Sinoglossia brings the awareness that the Sinophone can be regarded as a broad category that refers to all literature written in Sinitic languages on the one hand, for example, those produced by the linguistic and ethnic minority groups in the Sinophone world. On the other hand, Sinoglossia connotes minor/minority literatures against the backdrop of major/majority literature, for example, Malaysian Sinophone literature vs. Malaysian literature, and Sinophone Chinese-American literature vs. American literature. Moreover, when Sinoglossia is considered as a method, that is, a way of glossing, Sinoglossia highlights a transformation of a language and a society, as befits the paradigm of “minor literature” set by Deleuze and Guattari, where minorities produce their “minor” literatures by using major languages, thereby invoking a transformation of their societies. In the process, the means of translation becomes essential and deserves further investigation.

HC: Within the formulation of Sinoglossia lies an intrinsic contradiction, and I would like to suggest that this inherent contradictory nature represents the most theoretically powerful and promising aspect of Sinoglossic inquiries. If the prefix “Sino-,” for all intents and purposes, continues to raise the specter of homogeneity (whether in relation to a “Chinese” family or aiming to represent all things related to “Chinese” broadly construed), the “glossia” part of the word draws attention to the possibility of difference and resistance to coherence. Language, after all, is a form of communication, but communicative ideals—especially after the Habermasian model—are premised on the rhetorical necessity of synthesizing difference in matters of opinion and concern. As such, Sinoglossia provides a framing rubric to unify forms of analysis or types of cultural texts that are not normally considered together. Like Andrea and Yu-lin, I share the view that Sinoglossia denotes a mode of intervention that privileges the epistemic status of heterogeneity and multiplicity. It therefore extends certain agendas of Sinophone studies to reconceptualize minor-to-major relationality and the historical and conceptual foundations of global identities in the twenty-first century. It also departs from it, though, by broadening out to consider the normative and subversive regimes of mediality, translation, and corporeality. In a debate on the public sphere, sociologist Richard Madsen predicted that it is precisely at the periphery of what Tu Wei-ming calls “cultural China,” where the most exciting new stories about civil society may be told. Sinoglossia exemplifies such a topos of re-narration.<sup>1</sup>

**2. What does/do your specific discipline(s) and theoretical background(s) contribute to the study of Sinoglossic articulations? What do different institutional contexts and cultural positionalities contribute to Sinoglossia?**

HC: While we might agree that making a distinction between Chinese and Sinophone studies is important, we often overlook the fact that judicious historical studies weigh differently in these two fields. With this statement I am referring to several phenomena. First, Chinese history is an established and respected scholarly discipline, but there is no comparable field called Sinophone history. This is crucial, because if Chinese literary and cultural studies continue to be informed by historical scholarship (for example, we need the history of wartime China to contextualize the writings of Eileen Chang), what kind of history does Sinophone studies draw on? Up to this point, most Sinophone scholars have not

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1. Richard Madsen, “The Public Sphere, Civil Society, and Moral Community: A Research Agenda for Contemporary China Studies,” *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 183–198; Wei-ming Tu, “Cultural China: The Periphery at the Center,” *Daedalus* 120, no. 2 (1991): 1–32.

been trained in history, but they often shoulder the burden of explaining the history of how Sinophone communities and cultures have matured over time. Shu-mei Shih, for instance, has pointed to Qing continental colonialism, Han settler colonialism, and migration as three of the most important historical vectors in Sinophone history. Second, as a postcolonial intervention, Sinophone studies differs from Anglophone and Francophone studies most tellingly with respect to the centrality of historiography to the latter two field formations. Whether we are reading Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Frantz Fanon, or Edouard Glissant, history matters because the work of these authors *already rewrites* history. But there is no Sinophone historiography to speak of; consequently, the growing body of scholarship in Sinophone studies does not rethink history as much as merely relying on history (whose history?) for ethical and political purposes. In this volume, we draw on the cultural history of the body, mediality, and translation as points of entry to enrich the prospect of placing Sinophone and Sinoglossic studies on a par with other postcolonial inquiries. That is, by launching the rubric of Sinoglossia, this book argues that the relation between new field formations and established areas of scholarly inquiry must always already critically attend to historical analysis and thereby devise new, creative ways of relating the past to the present. Sinoglossia rewrites history by displacing the hegemonic status of “China” and by creolizing methods that address the questions of mediation, multilingualism, and polyphonic corporeal practices.

**YL:** It is worth noting the etymological meaning of the term “gloss,” interpretation, as Sinoglossia is considered a way of glossing. It is in the same vein that translation can be brought into the study of Sinoglossic articulations. It is true that Sinophone literatures are often accomplished through translation. Further, it is equally important to note that translation means not only transporting a word and its meanings from one language and culture to another but is also an act of repetition in interpretation. There are a great number of bilingual and multilingual authors in the Sinophone world whose writing undertakes an inevitable process of translation. From this perspective, Sinoglossia can also be seen as an act of redefining the so-called Chineseness that constitutes a process of aesthetic creation by traversing the linguistic thresholds within the language.

**AB:** To link “Sino” and “glossia” represents a call for a more flexible, interdisciplinary engagement with things to which we can append the label “Sino-.” The different disciplinary backgrounds of our contributors and of us editors are a first attempt at imagining an even more radical inter-, and indeed, transdisciplinary stage for this kind of work. This also means to work productively with and beyond the limitations of our own fields. My own formation in (Western)

critical theory and comparative literature in a European and American academic context is a case in point. To think conceptually and comparatively has allowed me to inhabit as well as to escape the boundaries of Chinese literary and cultural studies. My work is always about how a certain, culturally specific case helps us conceive of a whole set of phenomena and concepts differently; it always strives toward such conclusions by appreciating specificities and shared traits through a comparative perspective. My work with “Sino-” material and the concomitant problem of paying attention to cultural specificity while not falling prey to essentializing and while stepping carefully with and around the politics involved has sharpened my comparative and conceptual perspectives. It has also made me more sensitive to the theoretical blinders imposed by disciplinary limits and institutional contexts. After all, terms such as “Sino-” and their disciplinary valence change radically depending on where we stand as we label and analyze them. Consequently, to achieve a Sinoglossic perspective means to be open to other disciplines and other positionalities, to enrich and help shape such dialogic interactions instead of rigidly policing their boundaries.

**3. Sinoglossia still marks itself as “Chinese” (Sino-) and as pertaining to things related to language (glossia, via “glotta”). Is this a limitation? (How) Can Sinoglossia reach beyond what it designates as a term and speak to other cultural/linguistic contexts and objects?**

**AB:** The component “Sino-” is only a limitation if we abide by the logic imposed on area studies by Western-centrism or if we conjugate it only according to Sinocentric definitions. The latter pitfall, i.e., an overly limited understanding of “Sino-” has been mainly disarmed by Sinophone studies, since “Sino-” can no longer be used as a synonym of “Han” without contestation. The former pitfall, that of thinking of “Sino-” objects only as part of their own bounded territory is still alive and kicking in spite of multiple critiques. This forces us to spend more time and energy on clarifying the conceptual valence of what we understand as “Sino-” objects. Only within a mindset in which phenomena from a non-Western culture are merely examples but cannot generate their own theoretical impulses does a label such as “Sino-” become an obstacle. Once we contest the privilege of things European and North American to claim the status of theory, while phenomena from the rest are either representative of or exceptions to such theories forged at the center, work with culturally and linguistically specific material from elsewhere also sheds its fake conceptual boundaries. Of course, we cannot (and do not want to) be oblivious to the complex processes of translation, dialogue, contestation, and change that happen when conceptual thought travels. But since our understanding of what makes certain phenomena

“Sino-” is already temporary, flexible, and relational, instead of fixed or based on essentialist categories, a movement of adaptation, friction, or even complete rupture is already in place in a Sinoglossic approach. The component “glossia” is a slightly different matter. If we read it as merely descriptive of our objects of study, i.e., those related to language, the term would indeed curtail critical engagement—even in spite of the multiple significations of the term. However, I take glossia to describe a method rather than merely a trait of the examples with which such a method concerns itself. And such work, while attentive to objects far beyond the reach of language and textuality, functions with textual and linguistic media to communicate its findings. Since Sinoglossia does not designate a fixed and delimited disciplinary field but takes into account that culturally and linguistically specific phenomena are in flux, it can communicate its insights beyond its scope (which is always situational and temporary to begin with). As such, it happily shares its work with other methods and recognizes that its objects mingle with phenomena from other cultural and linguistic contexts.

HC: It may be useful to return temporarily to the field of Sinophone studies, for it has had to deal with the specter of language, as the “phone” part of the word lends itself easily to critiques of linguistic, scriptic, or textual centrism. Does the substitution of glossia resolve such tensions? I would argue that, through its connection to materiality and the body, glossia highlights the stakes of taking the physical markers of Chineseness and their mediation seriously. At the very least, what is being generated here is a theory of decentering any assumed equivalence between “China” and forms of Sino-representation. This is not a plea to abandon language altogether; as we will see in the third part of the volume, a more systematic interrogation of the technology of translation contributes to this decentering of assumed equivalence. This book, then, expands Sinophone studies to relate the transgression of linguistic boundaries to other material and conceptual forms of border crossing. In this way I consider Sinoglossia an analytical force of contradiction, and in so doing, the “Sino-” and “glossia” parts of the word promise to denaturalize one another continuously.

YL: Sinoglossia emphasizes the linguistic variation and the social transformation that follows, which offers an alternative way of viewing the Sinophone community as a linguistic and cultural unit. Deleuze and Guattari have argued that minor literature is political and often takes on a collective value.<sup>2</sup> In a similar fashion, Sinophone writers likely induce a transformation of the Sinophone community through their literary practice. In addition, with reference to Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, Sinoglossia marks a centrifugal tension existing within language

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2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor literature*, trans. Dona Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 17.

and its multiple dimensions in society. In this regard, Sinoglossia describes the transformation of the Sinophone community informed by linguistic hybridity. As the Sinophone community continues to change, it confronts the other from either the inside or the outside. There are many linguistic, cultural, and ethnic minorities within the Sinophone world; the Sinophone also encounters such communities as the Anglophone and the Francophone. Therefore, Sinoglossia describes a process of linguistic transformation in a global world. As a result, Sinoglossia does not close in on itself but rather it opens itself up to the world. That is to say, the minor, or the other, constitutes its subjectivity and invents a new society by inaugurating a transformation through language. In addition, this linguistic practice as an aesthetic creation does not necessarily base itself on the logic of center-periphery antagonism; rather, it opens itself toward the future by denouncing the authenticity of language and the loyalty to an idea of authentic language.

#### **4. Does Sinoglossia describe a set of objects, a methodology, or both? What is the relationship it establishes between examples and methods?**

**YL:** A Sinoglossic approach seeks neither a true definition of Chineseness nor any specific minority discourse against China-centrism. I would argue that the proposal of Sinoglossia aims to point out a new ethical-aesthetic mode and a new politics concerning the relationship between the local and the global. This effect can be evidenced by minority groups within the Sinophone world and by diasporic authors who have attempted to voice their unique linguistic and cultural heritage despite its close relationship with the Chinese.

**AB:** Sinoglossia is a work in progress. In flux, its definition remains open, subject to different perspectives. Hence a volume that dialogues with Sinoglossia from different vantage points, hence a “theory” section that showcases a multi-planar engagement rather than synchronicity, hence an introduction that underlines the specific voices of us co-editors rather than constructing a coherent version of Sinoglossia that we all subscribe to. It invests in tension, friction, overlap, and supplemental energy rather than setting up a doctrine. Sinoglossia can designate a set of objects as well as a method. In fact, I would argue (but other voices here and elsewhere might see this differently, of course) that we cannot (and should not) dissociate both. In consonance with Sinophone, Sinoglossia designates a set of objects that, while claiming the label “Sino-” in fact constantly push the boundaries of this very label. At the same time, it insists that groups of objects do not stand still and that the categories that form the basis for our work are also constantly in need of scrutiny and open to being redefined. Sinoglossia as a method has to remain flexibly open to evolve and question itself precisely because



its objects are in flux. It sets out to trouble established categories rather than cementing them or imposing new disciplinary boundaries. In fact, Sinoglossia is a way of drawing attention to the complex feedback loops between objects and methods to begin with. To maintain critical openness, we cannot tie methods and objects into tautological loops, where each just confirms the other in its stability. However, methods and examples cannot be completely disconnected either. There is no method independent from its object, nor objects without a (however basic) methodological or conceptual framework. Sinoglossia reminds us also that we have to continue to link methods and objects anew, hearkening to the new impulses that come from the frictions between them.

HC: This book proposes three objects *as* methods in turning Sinoglossia into a new theoretical and interdisciplinary venture: body, medium, and translation. Although each of these objects of study may seem abstract at first, the various chapters give them concrete depth and cohesion by unveiling their signification of a contested and embedded claim to Chinese culture. In this sense, whether we are addressing the epistemological foundation of corporeality, engaging with the polyphonic ruminations of genre, or following the ways in which ideas and words cross the boundaries of time and space, our approach to defamiliarizing the Chineseness of a given case study simultaneously infuses it with a dose of Sinophonic aura and color. This constant ambiguation, always intentional, connects examples to methods and objects to methodology via a self-reflexive procedure in which synthesis and plurality collide. I would argue that rather than presenting one particular approach, this volume should be more appropriately taken as a flexible toolkit, with a common thread of acknowledging how the construction and refraction of Chineseness always contains its own seeds of undoing.

## Part I. Corporeality

This part considers the body as the ground for comprehending the uneven normative claims laid by cultural forms to the signifier China. Traditionally, race and ethnicity have been closely scrutinized for phenotyping the biological expressions of Chineseness. Our aim, however, is to expand those inquiries by incorporating other modes of embodiment that overlap with race/ethnicity but are not confined by its conceptual criteria. For instance, the expressivity of the body in the performing arts oftentimes refigures at once the biopolitics and the geopolitics of Chinese culture, routed through distinct frames of localized universality. The recent work on the global history of acupuncture and “Chinese” medicine outside China, for instance, attests to the immense flexibility of the body for packaging alterity and tradition as new global commodities in the

neoliberal age. Such practices tend to proceed across vastly different language systems and punctuate dispersed historical genealogies that provincialize the centripetal gravitation of China and Chineseness. Similarly, photographic and filmic productions of diseased embodiment over time perpetuate the global circulation of the ideological portrayals of certain polities (civilization, empire, nation, state, etc.) as intrinsically dead, pathological, or liminal.

Although there is a growing measure of scholarly thought and analysis on the materiality of literature and its social networks and conditions, this part of the project calls attention to a different type of materiality—the materiality that envelops and defines the soma as a corporeal assemblage through which language translates, media interact, experience is reconfigured, and meanings become transformed. For all the attention we pay to scripts and texts, it is particular body parts that execute their production and comprehension; for all our appeal to sound and image, it is bodily labor that conditions their realization and from which their value emanates. In this sense, corporeal practice itself captures the collision of the different geopolitical arrangements (and governance) of space, place, territory, region, and area. Moreover, somatic utterances often rely on the support of material objects—where they appear, how they are positioned, and why they exist in the first place. The matrix of materiality surrounding the body thus highlights the unpredictable ways in which moral economies mutate across time and space. Sinoglossia's take on corporeality focuses on bodily gestures, body modification practices, and processes of embodiment as the natal site of world making and social transformation.

Jia-Chen Fu's chapter, "Inspecting Bodies, Crafting Subjects: The Physical Examination in Republican China," brings us back to the variegated efforts to standardize the physical construction of the modern Chinese body in the early Republican period. Specifically, Fu explores how the practice of physical examination (*tige jiancha* 體格檢查) came to constitute a central focus of modernizing elites to build a strong and abled nation. Though seemingly placing an emphasis on the materiality of the body, the standardization of physical examination nested a larger aim of inculcating a fit and healthy mind—a modern and robust Chinese subjectivity—especially at a time when the Nanjing-based Nationalist government increasingly felt the entwined pressure from the Communist Party and the Japanese in the 1930s. This form of subjectivity helped to cultivate a refracted sense of self and other, thus always producing individual consciousness through the making of corporeal form and revealing the possible ways whereby one integrates into the larger social order/body. In this sense, Fu's chapter provides an important origin story in the history and epistemological foundations of Sinoglossia: how the technologies of generating normative bodily metrics contributed to the flexibility and biological expressions of Chineseness.

Howard Chiang's chapter, "Therapeutic Humanism in Hou Chun-Ming's Art: Queer Mimesis, Subaltern Souls, and the Body as Vessel in Sinoglossiac Taiwan," continues our investigation of Sinoglossic corporeality by turning to avant-garde art in contemporary Taiwan. In 2014, the highly acclaimed Chiayi-born artist Hou Chun-Ming 侯俊明 began his *Body Image* project, which involves interviewing people from all walks of life about their personal life. Aiming to uncover the deepest desires of the interviewees, these sessions normally last two days and begin with Hou and the interviewee stripping off their clothes. On the first day, the interviewee shares memorable autobiographical moments and the most intimate stories about past sexual experiences. On the second day, following a *tuina* massage by Hou, the naked protagonist paints an image of the body deemed most representative of his or her true self. After a period of reflection on the session, Hou responds by painting a separate drawing while naked. Chiang's chapter discusses a portion of these paired paintings that form the "Male Hole" subcollection of *Body Image*. Each of these pairs represents a unique subject position in the Taiwanese gay male community. Chiang argues that Hou's art, centering on the dialectic mechanisms of concealment and revelation, constitutes a form of queer psychotherapy in which the dynamic scripts of transference and counter-transference reciprocate between the interviewed subject and the work of art, between the body corporeal and the body visualized, and, above all, between the secrets and the fulfillment of the soul. From a Sinoglossic viewpoint, with its explicit utilization of queer bodily affects, Hou's art leverages an alternative genealogy of psychoanalytic governance in Sinophone Taiwan.

Chun-yen Wang's chapter, "What Does an Open Body Say? The Body and the Cold War in the Early 1980s Theater of Taiwan," historicizes the 1980s as a significant turning point in the history of modern theater in Taiwan. Rather than focusing on the reinvention of Chinese theatrical traditions, Wang's chapter looks into the connotations and denotations of the West in Taiwan's "theatrical renaissance." In the late Cold War context, an "open body" (開放的身體) on stage was highly praised and sought after among theater practitioners during this period. By historicizing the West in tandem with the notion of the open body, this chapter calls attention to the socio-historical and the geopolitical aspects of the Cold War in Taiwan's "theatrical renaissance." An important architect of the "open body" form was Wu Jing-ji 吳靜吉, who led a series of workshops and training courses in "Lan-Ling Theater Workshop" (蘭陵劇坊). Leading Taiwanese actors and actresses whose career came of age in this period, such as Lee Kuo-hsiu 李國修, Liu Jing-min 劉靜敏, Liu Rou-yu 劉若瑀, Jing Shi-chieh 金士傑, and Lee Tien-ju 李天柱, were all trained and influenced by the new "open body" performing method. The magnificent production of the play *Hezhu xinpei* (荷珠新配, Hezhu's New Match) in 1980 was a landmark exemplar that followed the method of "open body" in performing. Following the spirit of

this volume to examine Sinoglossic cultural formations from the vintage point of corporeal politics, Wang's chapter explains the ways in which the modern "open" Taiwanese body is simultaneously imbricated in relation to geopolitics, area studies, progress, and modernity that the United States invents, leads, and develops throughout the Western bloc in the Cold War era and beyond.

## Part II. Media

The term "Sinoglossia" puts particular pressure on questions of mediality, as it probes the connection between Chineseness ("Sino-") and mediation ("glotta," tongue or language). While the term "Sinophone" implies and implicates the question of mediality, it also limits—both in cultural and medial terms—what falls under its purview, i.e., what forms part of the Sinophone field. After all, Sinophone studies uses one aspect or medium of language—speech and sound—as the basis for a redefinition of its object of study. Meanwhile, much of Chinese media studies, a vibrant subfield of Chinese studies, similarly builds on preexisting assumptions of the links between media and Chineseness. In contrast and as a supplementary turn, the Sinoglossic approach we map and model here does not tie a specific medium to a definition (or redefinition) of Chineseness. Instead, it investigates how different media and mediascapes end up being defined as Chinese and indeed how Chineseness itself is being constructed. In other words, by paying attention to the mediation of Chineseness, Chineseness is no longer understood as an essence (being Chinese) or as a property (having Chineseness), nor as a linguistic category (speaking or writing in Chinese) or a context of production (made in Chinese places, by ethnic Chinese or speakers of Chinese). Instead, Chineseness can be understood as the outcome of acts of performance, representation, and mediation, as the product of repetitions of cultural scripts that create the impression of a stable category but also lend themselves to different reactivations that can trouble and redefine the limits of Chineseness.

To espouse such a theory of Chinese mediality, one that pays attention to how Chineseness is imagined and performed, implies a multi-perspectival approach from two different, yet complementary, vantage points. On the one hand, it involves thinking about medium specificity, the differences but also interactions between different media. Scrutinizing specific "Chinese" media allows for a comparative understanding of how "Chinese" mediascapes are scripted, introducing subtle medium-specific styles and aesthetics as particular ways of expressing and constructing cultural and national identities. On the other hand, such an approach will not only scrutinize Chinese media articulations and analyze their claim of Chineseness but also take into consideration how Chineseness is imagined and mediated from the outside or the margins of Chinese cultural spheres. Such a perspective on Chinese media, and indeed, the mediation of what counts

as or is imagined as Chinese, thus allows for the theorization of Chineseness as a multiply contested ground that constantly renegotiates national nostalgias, orientalist dreams, regional and transregional interests, global networks, and cultural politics.

Paola Iovene's chapter, "Landscape of Words: *Romance of Lushan Mountain* (1980) and Sinoglossia as Delimitation," presents one example of how Chineseness is being renegotiated through an analysis of Huang Zumo's film *Romance of Lushan Mountain*. In the film, the landscape of the Lushan Mountain, a natural site multiply marked by different moments in Chinese culture, becomes the context for a romance that taught viewers how to fall in love with love, with the Chinese landscape, with tourism, with family, and ultimately with cinema itself. Iovene's attention to the filmic medium as is iconizes Chineseness-as-landscape as well as to the double inscription—the filmic recording of inscriptions at Lushan—allows for a reflection on the links between medium and Chineseness. As Iovene argues, multiplicity, diversity, and change themselves can be the defining characteristic of Chineseness and as such will be subjected to a fixing that limits the sliding movement of "glossia" and contains the scope of the "Sino-."

E. K. Tan's chapter, "Sinopop: The Case of Namewee/Wee Meng Chee," analyzes the multimedia work of Sinophone Malaysian artist Namewee (Wee Meng Chee) as a basis for a reflection on the possibilities and limits of Sinophone critique. For Tan, the term "Sinopop" designates popular music from marginal Sinophone communities that describes and represents localized expressions. Namewee's controversial work scrutinizes ethnic power constellations in Malaysia by underlining Malaysia's multilingual and multicultural wealth. As an example of Sinopop, Namewee's work showcases the productive intersections between different cultural and linguist traditions while also allowing for a critical perspective vis-à-vis the circulation of work from peripheral Sinophone communities within the Sinosphere.

In "Chinese Writing, Heptapod B, and Martian Script: The Ethnocentric Bases of Language," Carlos Rojas reframes the question of ethnocentrism and Chinese writing through an analysis of Ted Chiang's 1998 short story "Story of Your Life" and its screen adaptation as Denis Villeneuve's 2016 film *Arrival*. This analysis starts with a scrutiny of ethnocentric uses of the Chinese script but widens the conceptual questions involved by reflecting on the inescapable link between ethnocentrism and language. Quine and Derrida are brought into dialogue for an unusual critique of Derrida's use of Chinese characters: rather than faulting Derrida for his own ethnocentrism, Rojas reflects anew on the inescapability, and indeed, necessity, of what some call "ethnocentrism." The Chinese script enters this chapter peripherally, and thus, ultimately, centrally: as a question that leads us to critique conventional notions of writing and language

themselves and thus also as a caveat against universal, non-ethnocentric definitions of language.

This part concludes with Junting Huang's chapter, "The Techne of Listening: Toward a Theory of 'Chinese' Sound." Rather than contenting himself with the idea of a Sinophonicity that limits the "phone" under scrutiny to language (the Chinese language family), Huang asks what it would mean to theorize "Chinese" sound by way of a Chinese techne of listening. This does not mean to essentialize some kind of sound or way of listening as Chinese. By looking at Sinophone sound artists such as Hsia Yu, Yan Jun, and Qiu Zhijie, Huang analyzes the dialogue between Chinese reflections on listening, for instance, Wang Jing's concept of "affective listening," and Western concepts, such as Pierre Schaeffer's notion of "reduced listening." For Huang, these examples allow us to think toward a Sinophone critique that situates language in the greater context of cultural practices and to investigate its technical operations and media infrastructure. How we understand sound as a medium, regardless of its particular shape, is also how we mediate the diverse traditions of a given culture. Theorizing "Chinese" sound must be seen as part of such a process.

### Part III. Translation

This section treats the recent development of Sinophone studies from the perspective of translation. Ping-hui Liao's chapter, "Eileen Chang at the Intersection of the Sinophone and the Anglophone," explores the borderline where Sinophone and Anglophone articulations meet. After her sojourn in Hong Kong, Eileen Chang went to the US and published her well-known novels, including *Rice-Sprout Song*, *Naked Earth*, and *The Rouge of the North*. The three English novels brought her great fame in the Sinophone world despite the fact that they were not well received in the US. Not surprisingly, Chang's English novels are often considered a "translation" project, which embodies a process of negotiation between the past and her residence in the new world. In addition to these English novels, Liao examines further this "translation" project by looking at Chang's other works written during her stay in the US. Liao discovers in these works a "late style," developed through rewriting or retranslation of her early novels and characterized by her diasporic experience in relation to Hong Kong and Shanghai. With a focus on the Hollywood traces in Chang's *Father Takes a Bride* (*xiao ernu*), Liao argues that Chang's late work should not simply be considered a nostalgia for her homeland but rather constitutes an effort made by a Sinophone writer to accommodate the Anglophone. That is to say, Chang's experiment with a new genre and media, in particular Hollywood comedy and musicals, is in fact a "multilingual and polyphonic project" aiming to connect to the new world while reinventing a new image of "home," albeit a conflicting and dissonant one.

In a similar fashion, Yu-lin Lee's chapter, "The Frontier of Sinophone Literature in Syaman Rapongan's Translational Writing" examines the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries of the Sinophone. If the Sinophone always points to an irreducible tension that exists between linguistic, cultural, and ethnic articulations, the Taiwanese indigenous writer Syaman Rapongan's writing no doubt demonstrates that tension and pushes it to its extreme. Just as Syaman's Tao culture is a part of Austronesian culture, the Tao language belongs to the family of the Austronesian languages and has little to do with Sinitic languages. However, as a minority writer, Syaman is forced to use Chinese as his medium, and consequently, his writing undertakes an inevitable process of translation. Using Syaman's translational writing as an example, Lee's chapter addresses some key controversial issues central to Sinophone studies. Lee argues that Syaman's writing embodies a minor Sinophone articulation that inaugurates a linguistic transformation, characterized by orality as an uncharted field that is intersected by both articulation and signification. Lee further labels this uncharted field as the "frontier" of Sinophone literature and argues that, by discovering this linguistic uncharted field, Syaman is able to envision a possible territory of existence for himself and his entire culture as well.

Tzu-hui Celina Hung's chapter, "The Promise and Peril of Translation in the Taiwan Literature Award for Migrants," attests to the translingual practice of the Sinophone in the context of Taiwan by looking at the development of the emerging genre of migrant literature in Taiwan, in particular that of Southeast Asian marital and labor migrants—a literature that is written in Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, Filipino, and Burmese languages but translated for Sinitic-language readers. Language use is of course a crucial issue in this kind of literary expression. However, Hung does not limit her investigation to linguistic translation as a necessary vehicle for literary expression but extends her focus to the troubled politics of cultural translation. Accordingly, Hung examines not simply the migrant writings' storytelling patterns but looks into the award's grassroots history and organization, its selection process, and its implication for community formation. Drawing on translation studies, Hung explores a new frontier of Sinophone literature to rethink the frameworks, standards, and uses of literary criticism.

#### **Part IV. Conclusions: Theoretical Interventions**

In lieu of a conclusion, *Sinoglossia* closes with a series of short essays: David Der-wei Wang's "Sinophone States of Exception," Ien Ang's "The Inherent Contradiction of Sinoglossia," Colleen Lye's "Kingston beyond Orientalism," Carlos Rojas's "Demolishing Script: China and 拆那 (*Chai-na*)," and Andrea Bachner's "Sinotopias." Shuttling back and forth between different disciplinary

and conceptual perspectives, these pieces reinforce the experimental character of this volume in the form of theoretical and methodological reflections. They approach the problems raised in this volume from different disciplinary vantage points, using different vocabularies and methodologies. Rather than establishing Sinoglossia as a univocal, fixed concept, we want to allow the frictions and consonances among these shorter essays to highlight the fluidity and flexibility inherent in our proposal to think through a Sinoglossic lens.



## Therapeutic Humanism in Hou Chun-Ming's Art

### *Queer Mimesis, Subaltern Souls, and the Body as Vessel in Sinoglossiac Taiwan*

Howard Chiang

Can Chinese therapeutic massage work alongside anthropology and psychoanalysis? In what ways do art, text, and therapeutic governance collide or conjoin? How does the body conceal, mimic, or stage the secrets of the soul? What forms of medium, cultural and historical resources, and strategies of simulation enable the subaltern agent to be heard? Can avant-garde art produced for the sake of expressiveness be at once about artistic creation, curative science, queer resistance, postcolonial healing, social survival, political refraction, regimes of selfhood, scriptive aesthetics, and the authorization of futurity? This chapter shows the converging possibility of these otherwise disparate injunctions in the art of 侯俊明 Hou Chun-Ming (b. 1963).

My choice of this Chiayi-born artist is perhaps not surprising. When his 搜神記 *Soushenji* (*Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals*, 1993) was sold for HK\$2.64 million at Christie's in Hong Kong in 2008, Hou rose to international acclaim after many years of relative obscurity.<sup>1</sup> Apart from his fame, though, I have chosen to focus on Hou's art because it speaks to the most pressing concern of this volume: the way that the Mandarin Chinese writing system interacts with—and even morphs into/from—other genres of cultural expression and, ultimately, styles of social critique.<sup>2</sup> Hou's work captures the highly transmedial nature of Sinoglossiac cultural production in three distinct ways: first, the visuality of his art assigns textual and scriptural elements to a preeminent role so that

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1. Chun-Ming Hou 侯俊明, *Soushenji* 搜神記 [Anecdotes about spirits and immortals] (Taipei: China Times, 1994).
  2. On the role of textual inscription in Hou's art, see Chi-Lin Hsu 許綺玲, "Chutan Hou Chun-Ming yishu zuopin zhong de wenben shengcheng lichen" 初探侯俊明藝術作品中的文本生成歷程 [A preliminary genetic observation of texts in the art works of Hou Chun-Ming], *Sun Yat-sen Journal of Humanities*, no. 37 (2014): 133–160.

Hou has decidedly liberated his work from the superficial bind of “need” (需要) and “demand” (需求) and gravitated toward the accumulated attention on the fluid nature of “desire” (慾望). What has surfaced as a result is an “incarnated subject” (復生的受訪者)—a metonymy of self-desire summoned by Hou.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, the psychoanalytic turn of his work also ventured in two distinctively new directions. First, inspired by a fractured relationship with his own father, Hou became obsessed with cataloging and visualizing the variety of configurations assumed by a father-son relationship across different Asian societies. This ethnographic impulse resulted in the 亞洲人的父親 *Yazhouren de fuqin* (*Asian Fathers*, 2008–present) project, for which Hou has interviewed men from Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Hong Kong about their impression and understanding of their father.<sup>4</sup> Each “case” resulted in a drawing, adding up to what one critic has labeled a “visual archival documentary” (視覺檔案的紀錄).<sup>5</sup> This empirical archive embodies the growing appeal to Oedipal and reparative dynamic explorations in Hou’s art. Second, the psychoanalytic turn of his work is undergirded by Hou’s personification of what Carl Jung has called a “wounded healer.”<sup>6</sup> Hou often renders the curative function of his work as the art of healing precisely from the viewpoint of a therapist who has been impaired.<sup>7</sup> As Hou divulges about the conditional source of his inspiration, “the majority of my creative output is related to the kind of illness and pain my body has experienced.”<sup>8</sup>

3. Pin-Wen Ke 柯品文, “Shentitu de zhaohuan yu jiushu: Lun Hou Chun-Ming Nandong shenti yuwang de keneng zhishe” 「身體圖」的招換與救贖：論侯俊明《男洞》身體慾望的可能指涉 [The summon and redemption of “Body Images”: Possible references to bodily desire in Hou Chun-Ming’s *Male Hole*], *Taiwan Fine Arts* 112 (2018): 72.
4. Chun-Ming Hou 侯俊明, *Yazhouren de fuqin: Hengbin 亞洲人的父親：橫濱* [Asian fathers: Yokohama] (Taipei: L’Orangerie International Arts Consultant Co., 2008); Chun-Ming Hou 侯俊明, *Yazhouren de fuqin: Taiwan 亞洲人的父親：臺灣* [Asian fathers: Taiwan] (Taipei: L’Orangerie International Arts Consultant Co., 2009).
5. Kai Sheng 盛鑑, “Hou Chun-Ming Yazhouren de fuqing Zhong de dang’an yishu yu duihua meixue” 侯俊明《亞洲人的父親》中的檔案藝術與對話美學 [Visual archive and dialogical aesthetics in Chun-Ming Hou’s *The Asian Fathers Interview Project*], *Journal of Art Studies* 14 (2014): 102.
6. Carl G. Jung, “The Psychology of the Transference,” in *Practice of Psychotherapy*, 2nd ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), 163–320.
7. Viewing medicine as a form of art, I borrow from anthropologist Judith Farquhar’s insight that non-biomedical styles of healing culture afford us the opportunity to experience the “presence of the vastness of an unfamiliar world.” Judith Farquhar, *A Way of Life: Thing, Thought, Action in Chinese Medicine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 111. It is in this sense that I maintain a close affinity between the study of medical pluralism and the interest in alterity in queer theory. On the relation of the foreignness of alternative healing systems to the scientific understanding of the mind, see Howard Chiang, “Contested Minds Across Time: Perspectives from Chinese History and Culture,” *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 56, no. 2 (2022): 420–425.
8. Chun-Ming Hou 侯俊明, *Shentitu fangtan chuangzuo: 2014–2017 身體圖訪談創作：2014–2017* [Male hole: 2014–2017] (unpublished pamphlet in Mandarin Chinese), 44.



Figure 2.3: The *Male Hole* exhibition at the 2016 Taiwan Art Biennale (台灣美術雙年展). Courtesy of Hou Chun-Ming.

By treating the non-normative agent, its imagery, and its corporeal history as an intertwined vessel, the *Male Hole* project thus offers a window into the emotions and experiences of queer life in a region that has been depicted as an “orphan of Asia.”<sup>10</sup>

I argue that Hou’s art, centering on the dialectic mechanisms of concealment and revelation, constitutes a form of queer psychotherapy in which the dynamic scripts of transference and counter-transference reciprocate between the interviewed subject and the work of art, between the body corporeal and the body visualized, and, above all, between the secrets and fulfillment of the soul. *Male Hole* pinpoints the nuance of therapeutic humanism that has come to underpin Hou’s “psychoanalytic turn,” which posits a new homeostatic-defense mechanism of the psyche: mimesis. The tensions that emerge out of the contrast among each pair of the *Male Hole* installments bestow the central message that what we see in others is ultimately our own projection and imitation. In mirroring and resolving unconscious conflicts as such, Hou’s art encapsulates a series of “mimesis of the self”—from the self of the queer analysand to that of the *tuina* psychotherapist—to leverage an alternative genealogy of psychoanalytic governance in Sinophone Taiwan.

10. See Chien-hsin Tsai, *A Passage to China: Literature, Loyalty, and Colonial Taiwan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 251–280.

## The Frontier of Sinophone Literature in Syaman Rapongan's Translational Writing

Yu-lin Lee

### Introduction

Using the Taiwanese indigenous writer 夏曼藍波安 Syaman Rapongan's translational writing as an example, this chapter describes a frontier that exists within Sinophone literature. First, it notes the encounter between sound and script in Syaman's writing. If Sinophone writing, as Jing Tsu has pointed out, always draws attention to the permanent and irreducible tension that exists between sound and script, it follows then that Syaman's writing no doubt intensifies that tension and pushes it even further to the extreme. Furthermore, as Syaman's writing demonstrates, the tension between sound and script exists not only within the domain of Sinophone articulation but also extends outside its specific territory.

The term "Sinophone literature" is commonly used to indicate a body of writing that uses the Sinitic languages of the Chinese ethnic people and is circulated within the Chinese community both inside and outside China. Therefore, the term "Sinophone" bears not simply a linguistic indication, but it also contains geopolitical, ethnic, and cultural connotations. Syaman's writing, however, further complicates the case. Just as the Tao people are an Austronesian ethnic group that is definitely not of Chinese ethnicity, so the Tao language belongs to the family of the Austronesian languages and has little to do with Sinitic languages. However, as a minority writer, Syaman is forced to use Chinese as his writing vehicle for many reasons, and consequently, his writing experiences an inevitable process of translation and thus produces a special form of Sinophone literature wherein the Tao oral tradition plays a vital role.

Accordingly, this aforementioned encounter between sound and script in Syaman's translational writing becomes one that uses both Tao articulation and Chinese transcription. More precisely, Syaman has channeled Tao sounds

into the Chinese writing system, resulting in a linguistic transformation that is inaugurated by the incorporation of foreign sounds into Chinese scripts. Thus, a continuous line of linguistic variation induced by the Tao language, mostly its sounds, cuts through Syaman's Chinese writing with a unique speed and rhythm.

Being part of an ethnic minority on the island of Taiwan and using other languages than his native tongue to write has become an inescapable fate for Syaman. Hsinya Huang has pointed out that "[t]he first and foremost problem facing indigenous writers is the writing system."<sup>1</sup> As translation became a necessary means for Syaman to write at all, the problems connected with translation become indispensable in order to examine Syaman's Sinophone literature precisely. It is well known that trans-lingual and transcultural practice has become a trademark in Syaman's writing. It should also be emphasized that such trans-lingual and transcultural practice is in fact an actual act of translation, both linguistically and culturally. However, translation is never a transparent process of simply transporting a linguistic and cultural system from one language into another; it is rather a deliberate manipulation of the two languages that involves both aesthetic valuation and the complex politics of cultural identity.

With these intertwined questions in mind, this chapter first addresses the issues related to Syaman's translational writing with respect to Sinophone studies while also introducing the supplementary concept of Sinoglossia to the paradigm of the Sinophone. Referencing the Bakhtinian idea of heteroglossia, Sinoglossia underscores multilingualism and multiculturalism in the Sinophone practice. Since Syaman's Chinese writing offers an unusual mode of translational writing, the problematics of translation thus are one of the primary inquiries of this chapter. This chapter argues that Syaman's translational writing embodies a minor articulation that inaugurates a linguistic transformation that is immanent within Sinophone articulation. More importantly, it contends that Syaman actually discovers or invents an "orality" that is prior to his written scripts and can be considered an uncharted field that is intersected by both articulation and signification. This uncharted field is what we term the "frontier" of Sinophone literature, as it actually exists within and inside Sinophone articulation rather than outside it. More significantly, with the discovery of this uncharged frontier, Syaman is able to envision a possible territory of existence for himself as well as the entire tribe.

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1. Hsinya Huang, "Sinophone Indigenous Literature of Taiwan," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 252.

## Moving from Sinophone to Sinoglossia

Can Syaman's writing be regarded as Sinophone literature and thus be included in Sinophone studies? The term "Sinophone literature," particularly as Shu-mei Shih applies it, designates a body of literature produced "on the margins of China and Chineseness within the geopolitical boundary of China as well as without, in various locations across the world."<sup>2</sup> Further, for Shih, the term "Sinophone" embodies the historical process of various colonial formations, the migrations of Chinese people (*Huajen*), and more importantly, the dissemination of Sinitic languages by will or by force.<sup>3</sup>

In this regard, it seems natural to consider Syaman's writing as an example of Sinophone literature, not simply because Syaman uses Chinese as his writing vehicle but also because he voices a marginal culture that deviates from the very authority and authenticity of so-called Chineseness, not to mention that the culture's geopolitical location is outside China. Clearly, the term "Sinophone" as used here is mainly understood as a broad category of literary and cultural production that relies mostly on Sinitic languages. Its emphasis on marginality and locality, the term "Sinophone" also proposes a discursive and critical framework that promotes "multidirectional critiques" by underscoring its "place-based" cultural production to debunk the idea of Chinese-centrism.<sup>4</sup>

Intriguingly enough, it is also in this same vein that Syaman's writing as an illustration of Sinophone literature challenges the very concept of the Sinophone as a broad literary category and an expression of a minor or minority culture, relative to its Chinese counterpart. If, according to Shih Shu-mei, the discourse of the Sinophone implies a resistance to Chinese authority as well as a deviation from the authenticity of Chineseness, then these tendencies apparently require some modification in Syaman's case. Syaman has written extensively against colonialism and modernity; for him, both colonialism and modernity are evil powers that have damaged the Tao tribal civilization and harmed its society. However, colonialism and modernity are not exclusively Western or Chinese; ironically, the Taiwanese government should be the one blamed for this kind of "invasion" regardless of whether the administrations belonged to the Chinese Nationalist Party or the "nativist" Democratic Progressive Party.

Having connected the practice of the Sinophone to the discourse on colonialism, Shih has provided, in particular, a framework of "settler

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2. Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 8.

3. Shih, "Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?," 8.

4. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 190.

colonialism”—instead of Chinese diaspora—in order to expose “the dark historical underside of the so-called diaspora of imperial subjects.”<sup>5</sup> This “triangular” power structure of settler colonialism between colonizers, settler colonizers, and the colonized may seem helpful in order to understand the complicated relationship between Han Chinese settlers (Taiwanese) and the aboriginal inhabitants on the island of Taiwan. However, their intertwined relationship appears to be more complicated and cannot be simply reduced to a colonizers-colonized one, particularly when considering this against the backdrop of China. For example, the Taiwanese nativist movement that continues to fight against China constantly seeks alliances with the aborigines despite the fact that the aborigines view the Han settlers on that island as being not much different from the Chinese on the Mainland. It becomes even more complicated and confusing when both the Taiwanese Han people and the aborigines attempt to establish subjectivities of their own as a means to markedly distinguish themselves from the Chinese on the mainland.

This confusion between Chinese and non-Chinese people potentially derives from the assumption that the term “Sino” embraces a single ethnicity and a unified cultural heritage. Despite the fact that the Sinophone discourse constantly denies such a misconception and emphasizes its own multilingual and multiethnic features, the term “Sino” persistently implies a unified ethnicity and a cultural identity albeit invented and imaginary ones. In this regard, Syaman’s literature precisely discloses the pitfalls of such an integrated ethnicity and imaginary unified community. The fact that the Tao tribe belongs to the vast Austronesian ethnic and linguistic group evidences the falseness of this assumption. Clearly, the Tao cultural heritage has little to do with Chinese civilization, and therefore it is incongruous to consider the Taiwanese aboriginal civilization from the Sinophone perspective.

If Sinophone constantly signifies China and Chineseness, it follows logically that Syaman’s writing should be excluded from Sinophone studies, especially by ethnicity and cultural heritage. Hence, this chapter proposes the different concept of “Sinoglossia” as a supplement to the paradigm of Sinophone studies, to overcome these apparent limitations in its theorization. With its connotations of Bakhtinian heteroglossia and Foucauldian heterotopia, the concept of Sinoglossia focuses more on the language issue that occupies the central concern of Sinophone studies. Nevertheless, the prefix “Sino-,” like that in the term “Sinophone,” maintains a consistent binding to as well as resistance against the imaginary unity of Chineseness. Therefore, it becomes more productive to regard Sinoglossia as a site for transmedial possibilities and investigation of the various linguistic embodiments of Sinophone articulation and cultural positionalities

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5. Shih, “Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?” 3.

worldwide. In other words, the term “Sinoglossia” offers an alternative critical approach to use for reconsidering the shifting of linguistic boundaries through translation, thereby positioning so-called Chineseness in its own cultural production.

This aspect, as informed by the new concept of Sinoglossia, is fruitful for examining Syaman’s writing, which actually embodies a special form of Sinophone literature. As mentioned, Jing Tsu cautioned regarding the irreducible tension between sound and script in the Sinophone practice, and Syaman’s translation writing no doubt intensifies that tension as well as further complicates its cultural significance. The mixture of Tao and Sinitic languages inevitably remaps the linguistic territory of the Sinophone and transforms the conventional function of Chinese characters. Further still, Syaman’s trans-lingual and transcultural practice also expresses the urgent search for the survival of an indigenous people and its civilization.

### The Aporia in Syaman’s Translational Writing

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have described the predicament of Franz Kafka as a minor writer as “the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, and the impossibility of writing otherwise.”<sup>6</sup> Being a Jewish descendant living in Prague and writing in German in the early twentieth century, Kafka faced the problem of having to choose German as his writing vehicle. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka’s predicament involved the problems related to national consciousness, the survival of a small literature, the writer’s psychological distance from his chosen writing vehicle, the relationship between languages and the living community, etc. As a result, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka’s German writing, that is, writing in Prague German, can be recognized as a “deterritorialized language,” a strange and minor use of German that can be compared to the use of African American or Black English in the American context.<sup>7</sup>

A similar predicament can be found for the indigenous writer Syaman and his Chinese writing in contemporary Taiwan. Syaman has felt obligated to write and has been eager to preserve the Tao language and culture through the art of writing and storytelling. It seems impossible to write in Tao, not because of the lack of a Tao writing system or because of the insurmountable gap between the oral tradition and literary expression, but rather because of the scarce readership for the Tao language. More importantly, similar to Kafka’s predicament, it

6. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.

7. Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16–17.



## Sinophone States of Exception

David Der-wei Wang

This chapter seeks to engage with the concept of Sinoglossia by stressing the dynamics of history and changeability in Sino-spheres. The current paradigm of Sinophone studies is largely based on theories from postcolonialism to empire critique, with an emphasis on the politics of voice. Implied in the paradigm is a dualistic mapping of geopolitics such as assimilation versus diaspora, resistance versus hegemony, and Sinophobia versus Sinophilia. Resonating with the provocation of Sinoglossia which stresses embodied mediation, circulation of sound and script, and transculturation within and without Sino-spheres, this chapter offers three conceptual interventions: the “xenophone” (*yi* 夷) or the foreign as that which is always already embedded in the invocation of China (*hua* 華) since ancient times; “postloyalism” as the phantasmal factor that haunts the platform of Sinophone postcolonialism; and the “state of exception” as a tactic through which Sinophone subjectivity continuously refashions itself.

### Sinophone and Xenophone Changeabilities

“Sinophone” is arguably the most provocative keyword of Chinese literary studies since the turn of the new millennium. Although the term has been used since the 1990s in select contexts, it was not made popular until 2007, when Shu-mei Shih published *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*.<sup>1</sup> In her book, Shih invokes the “Sinophone” as a language-based critical perspective from which to engage the linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and political dynamics in China, as well as Chinese-speaking communities worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In opposition

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1. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2007.
  2. Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 709–718; Shu-mei Shih, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” *PMLA* 119, no. 1 (2004): 16–30; Shu-mei Shih, “Theory, Asia and the Sinophone,” *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 4 (2010): 465–484.

to conventional references to “China” as a homogenized entity, she argues that the dispersal of the Chinese people across the world needs to be reconceptualized in relation to vibrant or vanishing communities of Sinitic-language cultures rather than of ethnicity and nationality. Sinophone literature seeks to reconsider Chinese literature by projecting a sphere where multiple Chinese language literatures are being produced, circulated, and contested. Shih derives her definition of the “Sinophone” from the Sinitic language family, an immense network comprising more than 400 topolects, dialects, and ethnic languages.<sup>3</sup> While recognizing the dominant position of the Han Chinese, Shih stresses that the “Chinese” language is a multitude of Han and non-Han, regional and ethnic utterances of the Sinitic language family. To this we should also add the multitude of utterances in various social, gender, and class communities. Thus, when studied from a Sinophone perspective, Chinese literature appears to be a kaleidoscopic constellation of soundings, spaces, and identities, as opposed to the enclosed, homogenized corpus upheld by the national apparatus.

Such a Sinophone vision opens up new terrain for studying Chinese literature. At its most dynamic, “Sinophone” amounts to nothing less than a realm of Bakhtinian “heteroglossia,” in which the centripetal and centrifugal sources and forces of languages interact with each other.

But beyond this shared recognition of plural soundings of the Chinese language, critics of Sinophone studies are taking different approaches to the questions raised above. For instance, Shih emphasizes the oppositional potential of the Sinophone vis-à-vis the imperialist hegemony of China, thus echoing the tenor of postcolonialism and empire studies. Jing Tsu contends that “Sinophone governance” is a nebulous process of negotiation through which Chinese-speaking regions and cultures form a communicative network. Between these positions, one observes a spectrum of proposals addressing the affective, cultural, semiotic and political terms of Sinophone articulations. These stances compel us to understand modern Chinese literature not as a fixed field but as a flux of practices and imaginaries.

Both Shih and Tsu have made enormous contributions to Sinophone studies, in particular their discovery of the manifold individual voices, regional soundings, dialectical accents, local expressions—alternative “native tongues”—that are in constant negotiation with the standardized, official national language. Meanwhile, their approaches also point to areas where additional critical efforts are desired. I would suggest that, despite their interventional efforts, neither Shih nor Tsu goes far enough to confront the most polemical dimension of Sinophone

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3. Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” 709–718. See also Victor Mair, “What Is a Chinese ‘Dialect/Topolect’? Reflections on Some Key Sino-English Linguistic Terms,” *Sino-Plantonic Papers* 29 (1991): 2–52.

studies. In my view, for a Sinophone project to exert its critical potential, one must not engage merely with the domain of conventional overseas Chinese literature plus ethnic literature on the mainland. Rather, one should test its power *within* the nation-state of China. In light of the translanguing dynamics on a global scale, we need to reimagine the cartography of the Chinese center versus the peripheries so as to enact a new linguistic and literary arena of contestations. As a matter of fact, to truly subvert the foundations of Chinese national literature, we should no longer consider it apart from the Sinophone literary system.

My proposal may sound self-contradictory because, as defined by Shih and Tsu, the Sinophone is invoked in the first place to deal with the literary and cultural production outside China proper. Nevertheless, I argue that while a Sinophone scholar can divert his or her attention from Chinese national literature for various reasons in praxis, he or she must reject the temptation of a dichotomized logic of the Chinese versus the Sinophone. If “Chinese” is not a homogenized entity but a constellation of Sinitic utterances amid a flux of historical changes, a Sinophone scholar can conclude that even the official Han language, however standardized by the state, comprises complex soundings and transformations and is therefore subject to a rhizomatic tapestry or Sinoglossia. Chinese national literature, just like overseas Chinese literature, consists of a *processual flux* of expressions and experimentations in both script and sound. Thus, Sinophone studies cannot eschew the figure of China as both a political entity and a cultural heritage. Particularly at a time when “China is rising” and Chinese literature is commanding more and more attention worldwide, the invocation of the Sinophone should serve as not merely a critique but also a form of agency, helping triangulate the literary paradigm of the Chinese nation and the world.

This would not constitute a new Sinophone “obsession with China” akin to that which C. T. Hsia (1921–2013) diagnosed in 1971 in order to describe the ambivalent attitude of modern Chinese literati toward the challenges of Chinese modernity: a masochistic mentality among Chinese intellectuals to see any given social or political malaise as a sickness unique to China, and thus grapple with Chinese modernity only negatively, by denouncing it.<sup>4</sup> Instead of a new national parochialism, such a redefinition of the Sinophone, as a “Sinophone intervention with China,” follows in Hsia’s footsteps—though without his fixation on Euro-American culture—to propose a world-literary view of Sinophone literature. By countering both an “obsession with China” and what has surfaced in some strains of Sinophone critique, an “obsession against China,” such a Sinophone intervention provides a critical interface through which to rethink the configuration of (Chinese) national literature and Sinophone literature vis-à-vis world literature.

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4. C. T. Hsia, “Obsession with China: The Moral Burden of Modern Chinese Literature,” appendix 1 in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1971), 533–554.

In my view, for a Sinophone project to exert its critical potential, one must not engage merely with the domain of conventional overseas Chinese cultures plus ethnic minorities on the mainland. In light of the transcultural dynamics on the global scale as well as the intricate ethnic histories of premodern China, one needs to reimagine the cartography of the Chinese center versus the periphery so as to enact a new linguistic and literary arena of contestations. In an effort to understand China as not merely a modern polity but also a historical flux of multiple Sinophone civilizations, I call for a critical—and creative—inquiry into the genealogical implications of Sinophone discourse.<sup>5</sup> I have tackled elsewhere the premodern discourse of *hua-yi zhibian* 華夷之辨 (Sino-barbarian distinction) and translated it with respect to “Sinophone/xenophone distinction.”<sup>6</sup>

Historians have observed that the valence of the “distinction between *hua* and *yi*” fluctuated in relation to the vicissitudes of Han and non-Han powers throughout medieval China. Whereas the Six Dynasties saw the first major migration of Han Chinese to the south as the north was occupied by the barbarians, the Tang dynasty thrived on its multicultural vitality and ethnic hybridity. It was in the Song dynasty that the “distinction between *hua* and *yi*” gained an increased political thrust partially because of the barbarian threat from the north, which prompted an ethnic and territorial awareness suggestive of the incipient mode of nationhood,<sup>7</sup> and partially because of the holistic view of Confucian orthodoxy. The fall of the Northern Song to the Jurchens and the fall of the Southern Song to the Mongols gave rise to a discourse of loyalty, martyrdom, and consequently loyalism (*yimin* 遺民) on behalf of authentic Han Chinese civilization.<sup>8</sup>

If the conventional discourse of *hua* vs. *yi* stresses distinction or *bian* 辨, which is oriented more to a spatial verification of inside, center, and orthodoxy in opposition to outside, margin, and heterogeneity, the late Ming–early Qing cases suggest the possibility of *bian* 變, which foregrounds the change and changeability of *hua* versus *yi* over time. This happened when the Japanese commercial translators-cum-Confucian scholars Hayashi Gahō 林春勝 (1618–1680) and

5. For a detailed description of postloyalism, see my book in Chinese *Houyimin xiezuo: shijian yu jiyi de zhengzhixue* 後遺民寫作：時間與記憶的政治學 [Postloyalist writing: The politics of time and memory] (Taipei: Ryefield Publications, 2007), particularly the first chapter, 23–70.

6. David Der-wei Wang 王德威, “Huayi zhibian: huayu yuxianjiu de xinshijie” 華夷之變：華語語系研究的新視界 [Sinophone/xenophone changeability], *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue* 中國現代文學 [Modern Chinese literature] 34 (December 2018): 13.

7. Zhaoguang Ge 葛兆光, *Zhaizi Zhongguo: Chongjian youguan Zhongguo de lishi lunshu* 宅茲中國：重建有關中國的歷史論述 [Here resides China: Reconstructing discourses about China] (Taipei: Linking, 2011).

8. Hence, “being loyal to the emperor not only concerned one’s external behaviors determined and regulated by a hierarchical order; being loyal to the emperor had become a moral principle of self-regulation that the intellectuals self-consciously enforced.” Xuan Li 李瑄, *Ming yimin qunti xintai yu wenxue sixiang yanjiu* 明遺民群體心態與文學思想研究 [Research on the collective mentality and thought of Ming loyalism] (Chengdu: Bashu chubanshe, 2009), 37.

Hayashi Hōkō 林信篤 (1644–1732) came up with *The Altered State of China and the Barbarian* (*Kai hentai* 華夷變態), a compilation of records that describe the changes of Han-Chinese culture in China in the aftermath of the Manchu conquest. All has been turned upside down, as the Japanese observers noted—hence the “altered state of *hua* and *yi*.” The Japanese scholars conclude by stating that Japan, not China, turned out to be the civilization that carries on the Chinese legacy at its most authentic. In a similar logic, the eighteenth-century Korean envoy Kim Chonghu 金鐘厚 (1721–1780) famously stated, “There is no China after the fall of the Ming” (mingchaohou wuzhongguo 明朝後無中國).<sup>9</sup> Korea, the *yi*, is entitled to replace *hua*.

I argue that the “changeability of *hua* versus *yi*” emerged in late imperial China to signal the epistemological shakeup of the relationships between China and the world in multiple terms. If the “distinction between *hua* and *yi*” helps define the world of China as a self-contained polity which oversees the taxonomy of Han Chinese versus barbarians, the “changeability between *hua* versus *yi*” informs a China entering the world with expanding horizons, ethnically and otherwise, beyond the purview of the old civilization. It may not be a coincidence that *yi* takes on bifurcated connotations at this juncture. Whereas the *yi* within the conventional geopolitical mapping of China undertook the new designation in relation to “ethnicity,” to be contained, assimilated, and eventually naturalized into the Chinese nation, the *yi* from the world outside of China represents the agents of modernity, ever ready to be emulated or contested. The national narratives of the Republic of China and the People’s Republic of China, from “there is only one China” to “the homogeneous body of multiple ethnicities,”<sup>10</sup> testify to the continued entanglement with modern ramifications of *hua* and *yi*.

The rise of Sinophone discourse, accordingly, may be understood as a most recent impulse to renegotiate the definition of China vis à vis the changing world. However resistant they may be to China’s impact in post-Cold War dynamics, critics in the vein of Shih may actually gain rather than lose critical force if they took a few historical lessons about China in relation to ethnicities and regional cultures in premodern times. It also prods us to rethink the linguistic model of extant Sinophone studies. As Shih indicates, language in regional, dialectical, and spoken terms serves as the last common denominator of Sinophone communities. Such a “Sinophone articulation” is also said to be a barometer by which a Sinophone subject gauges the degree of her Chinese identity, and Sinophone articulation after all is destined to dissipate in a xenophone community as time

9. Li, *Ming yimin qunti xintai yu wenxue sixiang yanjiu*, 37.

10. “There is only one China” is a statement by the historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) on the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War; China as a “homogeneous body of multiple ethnicities” was a phrase coined by the sociologist Fei Xiaotong 費孝通 (1910–2005) in the late 1980s. See my discussion in “Huayi zhibian.”

## Sinotopias

Andrea Bachner

The rise of Sinophone studies has been accompanied by a flood of neologisms. Is this phenomenon just a fad? Just proof of an exaggerated bid for newness or some theoretical sheen that allows us to brush up the image and standing of our discipline in the field of the humanities at large? Perhaps, not all of these terms are doing equally interesting work. But there is, after all, a power to naming. And there is also, I would claim, a power in the proliferation of names. In fact, the sheer multiplicity of terms could be interpreted as the sign of a certain unease with the boundaries, definitions, and terminologies of the discipline that I will still call—for now—Chinese studies. The recent flock of terms would thus mark a creative line of flight from the disciplinary status quo, an invitation to rethink the ways in which our discipline works and indeed to renegotiate our definition of the field.

But if we take these terminological interventions seriously, they lead us to conceptual questions in and beyond the field of Chinese and Sinophone studies. No matter whether these new terms follow and elaborate upon the term “Sinophone,” such as “Sinophonics” or “Sinophonia” or switch from “phone” to “graph,” such as “Sinographies” or “Sinographia,” “Sino-” remains their signature component. Even in coinages that pun through homophony, such as Rey Chow’s “xenophone” or my own “si(g)nology,” nothing can rid us of the redounding echo of “Sino-” even as we discover its avatars in new graphic shapes and endow them with new meanings. The term around which critical approaches to the paradigm of the “Sinophone” rally in this volume, “Sinoglossia”—originally Chien-hsin Tsai’s felicitous invention—is no exception. Its second component, “glossia,” gives body to the matter of language (from “glotta,” “language” but also “tongue”) as well as pointing to a critical meta-level, a way of reflecting on and constructing, or indeed, glossing, its companion, “Sino-”. Meanwhile, the term’s purported claim to openness, flexibility, or hybridity in and beyond the confines of that which pertains to “China” (of the Sino-proper or as Sino-property) is staked

almost entirely on its resonance with Mikhail Bakhtin's term "heteroglossia." But it remains unclear whether the terminological assonance at play infuses "Sino-" with critical energy or reterritorializes "hetero-" by repositioning it in a specific cultural and linguistic context. In spite of all our critical efforts, maybe "Sino-" still marks a stubborn remainder of territorial boundaries and ethnic identity politics. Maybe it is still a reminder also of fantasies of the other—"Sino-" in its Latinate form (from Latin "Sinae," Greek "Sinai," possibly Arabic "Sin") is, after all, derived from terms coined by non-Chinese cultures even though it might have originated from "Qin." More simply put, what is the valence of "Sino-"? And what are the conceptual, political, and disciplinary stakes of remaining attached to "Sino-" even as we attempt to contest the violence of concepts based on national, ethnic, and cultural identity?

Shu-mei Shi's notion of the "Sinophone" (while she did not invent the term, she gave it its current critical thrust) is meant to evade the ethnocentric construction of Chineseness in two interrelated moves. Firstly, the term "Sinophone" updates Chinese studies by contesting its Han-centric perspective. In other words, its "Sino-" component marks a difference between an ethnic denominator with its rigidly policed identity politics and a hybrid constellation of cultural and linguistic Chineseness. Secondly, Shih uses the term as an intervention in diaspora studies. To contest models that imagine Chinese culture as circles of weakening cultural authenticity arranged around a center or origin, Shih insists on an expiration date of diasporic cultures.<sup>1</sup> If we combine these two movements, "Sino-" (in its combination with "phone") has the power to destabilize ethnocentric and nationalistic models of Chineseness precisely because it includes, in some cases even warrants, its own disappearance. As Sino-articulations circulate globally, they might lose the very label of "Sino-."

In fact, many "Sinophone" articulations fit the category "Sino-" only precariously. Some of them might not feature Chinese language material (either orally or graphically) at all; and to call them "Chinese" or "Sinophone" merely highlights the problematic practice of determining the cultural belonging of an aesthetic object by the creator's ethnic look or passport or else by its context or place of production—"made in China" or in spaces read as Chinese. "Sino-" there becomes a topos, a common place. But Shih's emphasis on the temporal boundedness of "Sino-" (and "Sinophone") marks an escape route also from insistently lingering Sino-topoi like authorial ethnic profiling or the tendency to equate place (of production) with cultural identity. Instead, because they sport remnants of Sino-identity politics, in the form of conventional attachments or labels, her examples show the precariousness of just such practices of naming and

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1. An example of such an approach to the Chinese diaspora is Tu Weiming, ed. *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

defining. Their Chineseness exists under erasure—in evidence precisely because it has been consigned to negation and disappearance.<sup>2</sup> “Sino-” there exists in the twilight zone of what will have been lost, or rather, sloughed off—after all, this is not a loss to be mourned but a horizon of new possible attachments and alliances gained. Nevertheless, even as a category under erasure, “Sino-” persists. This paradox is common to conceptual movements that destabilize naturalized categories: in every deconstruction of “Sino-” there lurks a tiny reaffirmation of “Sino-”—albeit only in the form of a construction, by marking “Sino-” as a strategically constructed category that is subject to being constructed differently. As long as we do not cease to reactivate “Sino-” in this critical way, we can keep its essentializing thrust at bay. And yet, we can never entirely rely on the resistant power of terms that sport the component “Sino-.” Instead, we have to work constantly at imbuing them with the energy to disrupt identity politics and conceptual violence. Thus, we will neither fall prey to turning Sinophone, or indeed, Sinoglossic, approaches into Sino-topoi (naturalized commonplaces of Chineseness) nor indulging in Sino-topia (the tendency to infuse terms such as “Sinophone” or “Sinoglossia” with utopian desires).

The productive, spectral glimmering that Shih’s work proposes, however, is not the only avatar of “Sino-” in Sinophone studies. As a discipline,

Sinophone studies disrupts the chain of equivalence established, since the rise of nation-states, among language, culture, ethnicity, and nationality and explores the protean, kaleidoscopic, creative, and overlapping margins of China and Chineseness, America and Americanness, Malaysia and Malaysianness, Taiwan and Taiwanness, and so on, by a consideration of specific, local Sinophone texts, cultures, and practices produced in and from these margins.<sup>3</sup>

But this conceptual intervention, this disruption of essentializing concatenations comes from a specific place or *topos*. The political and cultural resistance embodied in the term “Sinophone” remains tied to the flexibility, even instability, of its very definition, or, more radically, to the possibility of its own expiration date. As such, it is based on its links to specific temporal and spatial contexts. And these need an overarching category, even if only in the form of a label under which we group a diverse array of individual scenarios. As an approach that insists on “difficulty, difference, and heterogeneity” and “frustrates easy suturing,” Sinophone

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2. Here, I use the Derridean notion of “under erasure” (“sous rature,” originally Heidegger’s term “Durchkreuzung”) to think through critical uses of the category “Sino-.” Inspired by Heidegger, Derrida uses the notion to destabilize “being.” See Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972); Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
  3. Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 127, no. 3 (May 2011): 709–718, quotation at 710–711.



studies cannot divest itself of the component “Sino-.”<sup>4</sup> To destabilize the calcified identity politics of Han- and Sinocentrism means to revisit their commonplaces (topoi) but also to inhabit their space and place (topos), albeit differently.

The assertion that Sinophone studies is a Sino-topos, in that it is tied to particular linguistic and cultural categories, is itself a commonplace. One that warrants further analysis like so many other commonplaces, since they tend to naturalize connections and occlude the fact that they are wired in a certain way for a reason. Sinophone studies is a field of inquiry defined by a specific set of objects. But unlike area studies, Sinophone studies claims to be a method, a specific type of inquiry. What is the relationship between content and method? Is this method circumscribed by its content in that it can only apply to a certain set of objects but not to others? Or have specific objects forged a methodology that can be translated to other objects? Can Sinophone studies apply there where only part of the material is Sinophone, or, even more radically, in cases in which no Sinophone material is under analysis? The question of a Sinophone methodology pertains to a second-order problem with “Sino-.” This is no longer a problem concerning the definition of “Sino-,” of the potentially problematic inclusionary politics and essentializing force of this label. Rather, it is one of the conceptual limitations attached to an approach that situates itself in a specific cultural context (in this case via its objects of study).

But is this a problem with “Sino-” (and Sinophone) per se, or a problem with academic practices and assumptions instead? Certainly the latter. After all, the politics of exemplarity differ widely depending on cultural situatedness. Whereas Euro-American case studies often make for universal exemplars—examples that are proffered with a view to generalization—non-Euro-American examples only illustrate the discreteness of their own cultural context. This difference is so deeply ingrained that a direct critique seems of little or no avail. In fact, it seems to persist stubbornly in academic practice even though intellectual thought has repeatedly censured it. The current proliferation of approaches of the type “x as method” or “x (作)為方法” is a symptom of this problem as well as an attempt at circumventing the Euro-American monopoly of methodology. Usually, the “x” in “x as method” is something outside of Europe or the US, for instance, Asia, China, or Hong Kong, or in slightly different formulations, Taiwan or the Sinophone.<sup>5</sup> These approaches are reactions against Western-centrism,

4. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 20017), 5.

5. See Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), inspired by Yuzo Mizoguchi’s 溝口雄三 *China as Method* (方法としての中国). For “Hong Kong as method,” see the description of a conference at the University of Hong Kong in 2014, <https://www.smlc.hku.hk/news/detail.php?id=571>. For an approach close to “Taiwan as method,” see Shu-mei Shih and Ping-hui Liao, eds., *Comparatizing Taiwan* (London: Routledge,

especially of a US-style area studies for which the West provides theories and methodologies for the study of the rest—which means, of course, that the rest is being relegated to the realm of mere objects. The “x-as-method” paradigm usually attempts to counter such unequal distributions of theories and objects by taking what was formerly described as mere objects and turning them into the basis for a methodology. This means, however, to tie theoretical thought to a specific set of phenomena, to assign it a particular place. The challenge here is to reformulate the link between the particular and the universal; as Pheng Cheah states, “neither to denigrate the universal nor to claim an alternative and usually antagonistic modularity, but for Asian studies [or Chinese or Sinophone studies] to claim that their subject is a part of the universal, not just a check to a preformulated universal, but as something that actively shares in and partakes of the universal in a specific way.”<sup>6</sup>

Different challenges come to the fore here. The problem lies not with the link between the specific and the general per se, nor with the presupposition that located particulars can become the ground for a more generally valid theoretical thought. In fact, this is precisely the case with all methodologies or theories, that they spring from specific phenomena and emerge in specific contexts and from specific positionalities. And yet, in most cases, this very link is being forgotten or strategically erased, mostly on the basis of the assumption that singularities of one type of culture—Western culture—are representatives of the norm rather than contingent and culturally specific expressions only. When we claim the status of method or of grounds for a method for non-Western phenomena, however, we cannot put the “x” of method under erasure in the same way. By contrast, nobody needs to posit something like “the West as method,” since it is always already presupposed that the unnamed “x” in method is the West to begin with. This twisted logic lies at the heart of our challenge.

Let us bracket for a moment the very crucial differences in the various recent “x-as-method” constructions—the problems of power differentials (for example, China versus Taiwan), of perspective (China as method from a Japanese vantage point versus Hong Kong as method from a Hong Kong perspective) or definition (Asia as method involves the ideological baggage of a Western definition of Asia).<sup>7</sup> Let us assume that we are looking at something like “Sinophone as method.” What is the “as” or, not completely equivalent, “(作) 為” in this

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2015). “Sinophone as method” is implied in most of Shih’s writings on the Sinophone. For a reflection on this paradigm, see also Carlos Rojas, “Method as Method,” *Prism* 16, no. 2 (2019): 211–220.

6. Pheng Cheah, “Universal Areas: Asian Studies in a World in Motion,” in *Postcolonial and the Global*, ed. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 54–68, quotation at 62.
7. For a critique of the Western construction of “Asia,” see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 208–214.

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