Introduction: Contested Globalization and the Belt and Road Initiative

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This celebratory issue of our journal appears at a moment when globalization is under serious threat after thirty years of almost unrestrained expansion. The explosive challenges of increasing income inequality and environmental degradation combined with the widespread perception of China's aggressive challenge to US world leadership and the global rise of populism have engendered a trend toward regionalization and defensiveness about national self-interest. The COVID-19 crisis, which has lasted for almost a half year at the time of writing, seems to only strengthen this trend. Transnational mobility may become much more restrained in the future and fundamentally change the academic debate on transnational Chinese mobility.

This is a good time, therefore, to reconsider the mission of our journal. The focus of our field of enquiry will remain on Chinese mobility within and without (pen)insular East Asia, but the old and the new impediments to the continuous increase of global border-crossing may gain more of our attention. In particular China's quickly changing role in the world begs for attention. We are happy to publish two articles that, each from a very different angle, advocate the maintenance of a measure of cosmopolitanism when considering Chinese mobility. These are by Wu Xiao An, Professor of History at Peking University and Director of the Peking University's Center for the Study of Chinese Overseas, and by Hsin-Chin Hsieh, Assistant Professor in the Graduate Institute of Taiwanese Culture at National Taipei University of Education, Taiwan. In addition, the need we felt for a reconsideration of our journal's mission motivated us to convene two panels for the 11th International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS11) in Leiden, the Netherlands, July 15–19, 2019; these panels addressed the consequences for our field of study of the Belt and Road Initiative, initiated

by President Xi Jinping in 2013.¹ We publish two contributions from the panels in this issue, both on Chinese mobility directed at Indonesia. These articles are by Ping Lin, Associate Professor at National Chung Cheng University, Chia Yi, Taiwan, and Qianqian Luli, researcher at the Indonesia Studies Center, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China. The other papers, for various reasons, cannot be published in this issue but will be summarized below in order to highlight their contribution to the discussion about our journals' mission. Lastly, we publish the research report by Yi Ying, Research Coordinator in the Chinese Department at Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, which is about Indonesia as well.

Wu Xiao An, by our invitation, shares his efforts to come to grips with what he calls the pathbreaking developments that are quickly changing the field of Chinese diaspora studies; his article, "Shifting Paradigms of Chinese Diaspora Studies and the Changing Dynamics of Transnational Chinese Communities: A Holistic Review," is a wide-ranging position statement which is meant to stimulate academic debate. He notices that China's rise and its ongoing integration in the world, and the concomitantly changing international position of Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan launched a wave of Chinese elite students studying abroad and of nouveau riche emigrating to the West, and of returning Chinese new emigrants; this dynamic brought to life a new discourse on Chineseness and the Sinophone world that reshaped the meaning of how the ancestral home country and the host countries connect, and of the imagery and meaning of being Chinese, including being Chinese Overseas.

Wu finds it ironic that the new discourse, despite its acknowledged sophistication and global and multi-disciplinary orientation, is primarily produced by North American, non-Chinese, and a few expatriate Chinese scholars. He challenges mainland Chinese scholars to not leave Chinese diaspora in the periphery of their concerns but to better acknowledge its importance for China's modernization, and to study it without prejudice: for many decades, political and ideological considerations worldwide have motivated the scholarship on Chinese diaspora, both by Chinese and by non-Chinese scholars. Wu proposes the development of a holistic approach that transcends political ideology and frames Chinese diaspora and the connection between the ancestral home country and the host countries as an integral part of world history. In his proposal he considers only the period after the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, but otherwise he poses no limits to space and time in the framing of his approach.

1 For a full description of the panels, see the ICAS11 Program Book: https://eu.eventscloud.com/file_uploads/9975450ba354e8668120b10778d17841_ICAS_11_Programme_prior_start.pdf, sessions 293 and 333.

Hsin-chin Hsieh, in her article “Re-positioning Taiwan: Historical Representation and Transformative Identity in Taiwanese American Literature”, investigates, how “Taiwanese American writers represent Taiwan history in literary works with a focus on a female perspective as a way of re-constructing identities and re-positioning Taiwan on a global scale.”² In doing so she adjoins Wu’s approach of using world history to better acknowledge and understand what is commonly considered to be peripheral—in this case Taiwan. Her case studies of the first-generation Taiwanese American writer Joyce Huang’s *Yangmei Trilogy* (2001–2005) and the multiethnic second-generation writer Shawna Yang Ryan’s *Green Island* (2016) employ Shu-mei Shih’s “relational comparison” as a theoretical approach. Both novels treat Taiwan history from the viewpoint of the Taiwanese diaspora in the US. This enables Hsieh to argue that, in her words, the novels “embody the transnational connection between the homeland and the host state...” and, because they situate Taiwan “in the related national, transnational and world histories...[they] connect and compare Taiwan with other parts of the world.”³ One may conclude that both Wu and Hsieh, by historicizing global connectivity, seek to achieve a proper balance between the usually more visibly represented national interests and the interests of those whose professions, companies, career prospects, or search for a livelihood make them move across national borders.

The other three articles in this issue highlight the impact of the BRI on local ethnic relationships and student mobility, and consider the difficulties involved in the ongoing educational and cultural exchanges going on among the countries in the region.

Ping Lin, in his article “Discovering the Xinyimin in Jakarta: New Chinese Migrants from the PRC,” notices, that one effect of the BRI is the considerable number of PRC nationals with different regional and social backgrounds moving to Indonesia and working in a large variety of occupations. By doing so, most gain opportunities for upward social mobility that were unavailable to them in China. Considerable differences exist among these migrants to Indonesia, however, not only in their occupations but also in the decisions they make about settling down in Indonesia, and in how they think about their host country. Lin’s study suggests that the fewer the resources available to them, the more they tend to settle in Indonesia and the more responsive they are to Indonesian society; whereas those who work as managers of large firms are more likely to align themselves with the PRC discourse on the BRI.

² See the abstract of her article in this issue.

³ Ibid.

Qianqian (Anna) Luli, in her article “Chinese Students in Indonesia and the Belt and Road Initiative,” reports on her research on the motivations of Chinese students to study in Indonesia since the BRI took off. This study is part of the ongoing research by the Indonesian Studies Center of Fujian Normal University, and is meant to explore current trends and conditions of student exchanges between Indonesia and China. The BRI played into students’ motivation to obtain a better quality of education and an international degree, but it was found that the number of Chinese students studying in Indonesia has not increased sufficiently since the BRI took off. The factors that are hindering the successful implementation of official student exchange programs may be directly related to the place of origin of the students, the majors they have chosen, or the level of degree that they have obtained.

Yi Ying and her students Fiona Garcia and Zefanya Novianti report on their explorative research in their article “The Views of Younger and Older Generation Chinese descendants in Indonesia Regarding the Selection of Auspicious Dates”; this is a first effort at understanding the differences among Chinese descendants of different generations in Glodok Chinatown in Jakarta, Indonesia, concerning their views on the Chinese tradition of selecting an auspicious date. The dominant factor for the older generation appeared to be their life’s experience with this tradition, whereas for the younger generation the existence of a concerned family tradition was dominant. Religious beliefs and the availability of knowledge about the tradition were important determining factors as well. It is surmised that the efforts by Mandarin teachers to spread knowledge on Chinese traditions may be all too easily sidelined by the predominance of Islamic teachers in their schools.

Finally we turn to our panels at ICAS11 and look summarily at how the papers that could not be published in this issue may contribute to the academic debate on the future of our field of study and on our journal’s mission.⁴ The panels were intended to take a critical stance toward the prevalent optimism in Beijing about the BRI’s results but also to look at how the BRI may just as well stimulate new forms of collaboration and give shape to new patterns of integration and new lifestyles. In doing this they were expected to bring the relationship between China and the countries in (pen)insular East Asia into sharper focus and serve to develop the themes on which our journal focuses. Three major themes were addressed.

4 These papers, with a few exceptions noted in footnotes, are not included simply because their authors did not have time available to work them into articles.

First, just like Ping Lin's article introduced above, they looked at how the Belt and Road Initiative affects existing ethnic relationships in Southeast Asia. This of course is a central concern for our journal as well as for the field of Overseas Chinese studies as a whole. Wan-Ping Tai went against a negative appraisal of the BRI in his paper "Overseas Chinese Enterprises' Responses to the One Belt and One Road Initiative in Southeast Asia: a Case Study of Thai Chinese Enterprises (2015–2018)."⁵ His research on the Sino-Thai CP Group found that projects involved in high-speed rail construction, the automotive industry, e-commerce, and telecommunications meet the needs of Thai society and are therefore widely accepted by local people. He warned, however, that when Chinese resources are blindly put into a project, major local industries are not involved and competition with local enterprises and residents is created, these types of projects are prone to failure and can even have a negative influence. Ming-Feng Liu, in his paper "Ethnic Relations and the Attitude of Overseas Chinese toward China's Belt and Road in Southeast Asia: the Case of Singapore and Malaysia,"⁶ argued that differences in sensitivity to local ethnic relations may explain why Singapore's policy is relatively stable where BRI is concerned, while Malaysia's is more conflict-generating.

Studies such as these generate indispensable data for a proper understanding of how ethnic relationships develop at the present time. Such studies make it clear, however, that in order to reach such an understanding, research on how China's position in the world has changed and continues to change is needed. This was the second theme discussed at the ICAS11 panels. Ho-Fung Hung, in his paper "China, OBOR, and the Question of Empire,"⁷ contested the commonly held assumption that the BRI, by its involvement with China's Asian neighbors and other developing regions, at the present time poses a challenge for American domination: "(H)aving been a free rider in the US-centered global order for decades, mastering the skill of flexing its political and military muscles on the global stage effectively is going to be a long process for China."⁸ In arguing like this, Hung followed an international-relations

5 Wan-Ping Tai is Professor in the Department of International Business at Cheng Shiu University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. His paper will be reframed and published in the next issue of TCEA.

6 Ming-Feng Liu is TCEA's Chief Editor; he is Associate Professor at the Graduate Institute of Culture and History of Fukien of National Quemoy University, Quemoy, Taiwan.

7 Ho-Fung Hung is Elizabeth P. Wiesenfeld Professor in Political Economy at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland, USA; his presentation has been published as: Ho-Fung Hung, "China and the Global South," in *Fateful Decisions: Choices That Will Shape China's Future*, eds. Thomas Fingar and Jean Oi. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

8 See the ICAS11 website: <https://www.eventscribe.com/2019/ICAS11/agenda.asp?pf=FullSchedule>, accessed May 26, 2020.

approach. One may or may not agree with his argument, but it is difficult to see how one can dispense with the discipline of international relations when taking position amidst the multiple dilemmas involved in the evaluation of China's role in the world, or for a journal such as ours to not pay sufficient attention to that discipline.

The third theme discussed in our panels was the circulation of knowledge and, in particular, how the BRI may help globalize student mobility and the knowledge and cultural industries. Among the questions considered was what students' impact may be on the transformation of the societies in which they land, and what potential they have to create a dynamic and productive transnational sphere of intellectual and cultural interaction.

Ann Heylen, in her paper "Popular Culture Research and Student Mobility between Taiwan and Southeast Asia,"⁹ noticed that the dominant presence of ethnic Chinese among students moving to Taiwan is reflecting the existing asymmetrical relation between Taiwan and Southeast-Asian nations. She suggested that popular-culture materials can be used as a valuable medium to both facilitate a reciprocal understanding—in spite of an increased pressure by China's soft power in the region, not only with regard to Taiwan as the most sensitive case for political reasons—and to thwart the branding of popular-culture commodities by nations like South Korea and Japan. Together with the research reports by Qianqian Luli and Yi Ying published in this issue, a lively picture emerges of the difficulties involved in the circulation of knowledge among the countries of East and Southeast Asia. A productive addition to this was Victoria Ten's paper "The Circle of Knowledge: Contemporary East Asian Alchemical Practices Returning to the West."¹⁰ By focusing on GiCheon (氣天 *kich'ŏn*), a contemporary Korean practice of internal alchemy, her paper examined "the routes by which Eastern internal alchemy finds its way within western or modern society, as one example of old East Asian knowledge returning to the west in a new guise."¹¹ In this way, the nuts and bolts of cultural assimilation across the Eurasian continent come closely into focus and enable the exploration of alternatives to Chinese cultural expansion.

Most of the papers presented in the panels reflected empirical research on how the BRI is transforming the connectivity between the countries in East and Southeast Asia. Their authors were cautious concerning any prediction

9 Ann Heylen is Professor in the Department of Taiwan Culture, Languages and Literature of National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan.

10 Victoria Ten is an Affiliated Researcher at Leiden University, the Netherlands.

11 See the ICAS11 website: <https://www.eventscribe.com/2019/ICAS11/agenda.asp?pf=FullSchedule>, accessed May 26, 2020.

about the BRI's long-term impact, but naturally this inquiry underlies their research and also greatly concerns the broader public. For a meaningful reflection on the BRI's potential in the future it may help to develop a *longue durée* approach and a broader regional scope, as is proposed by Wu Xiao An and Hsin-Chin Hsieh. For example, the panels' papers suggest, that making the BRI work in Thailand and Singapore is easier than doing so in Malaysia and Indonesia because of differences in the incidence of ethnic sensitivities. But centuries-long historical precedents exist for this, which are closely connected to the policies implemented by the former colonial powers and which may stretch into the future, or at least provide a baseline for a well-informed discussion about future developments.

It seems clear, that our journal is in a favorable position to contribute, from its specific angle, to the ongoing academic debate in Overseas Chinese studies. It is hoped, that this issue at this festive occasion will provoke abundant responses from our audience and enhance our journal's role in that debate.