Asian Crisis?

Since the last *fin de siècle*, the East and Southeast Asian region has undergone turbulent events and developments: regime changes, economic crises, natural disasters, terrorism attacks. Some of these experiences have directly affected peoples’ notion of the nation-state – such as Hong Kong’s “transfer,” to use but one of the many euphemisms employed to describe that rainy Tuesday on 1 July 1997, from British back to Chinese hands; but also the 1998 fall of Suharto and subsequent calls for Reformasi, decentralization and regional autonomy in Indonesia. Although groups in society have expressed their disappointment or anger about their governments, this has not always – surprisingly perhaps – reduced their “patriotism,” or love for their country. The Asian financial crisis at the end of the 1990s was paralleled by an increase, rather than a decrease, of different tropes of patriotism.

Perceptions have changed not only due to developments or events within the boundaries of the nation-state, such as tendencies towards regional autonomy (strengthening a love for the region rather than the nation), but also because of altered international configurations. For instance, under the influence of the highly increased globalization of trade, media and education, different groups in different Asian societies have become real or virtual travelers, engaging in multiple cultural experiences. The “cosmopolitanism” of these groups may and does feed into their patriotic belongings, and vice versa. This book will analyze mediated articulations of what we have coined “cosmopatriotism” in popular cultures and arts of East and Southeast Asia. But why, one may ask, did we opt for this neologism?
Cosmopatriotism in the age of intense globalization

With the perceived rise of global terrorism, which may well be interpreted as one of the symptoms of our risk society (Beck), or as a quite sinister manifestation of a profoundly networked world (Castells), the academic and social quest for ethical alternatives or answers has rapidly increased. Religious fundamentalism, vibrant nationalism and global terrorism are intricately embedded in processes of intense globalization. Over the past years, a more cosmopolitan take on our globalized world has been proposed as one possible answer to the crises we are facing today (Appiah; Beck; Nussbaum; Turner). In the words of Beck: “after communism and neoliberalism, the next big idea is needed – and this could be cosmopolitanism” (20–21). It is a term that can be traced back to the Cynics of the fourth century BC, where it signalled “a rejection of the conventional view that every civilized person belonged to a community among communities” (Appiah xiv). More than 200 years ago, Immanuel Kant, who, ironically, never left Königsberg himself, referred to cosmopolitanism as being a citizen of two worlds – cosmos and polis (Beck 18).

With Kant, the term became intrinsically associated with the Enlightenment, probably also adding to its potential imperialistic undertone, as the terms of condition for world citizenship seem to be set by the West. Consequently, as Van der Veer states, it is a trope of colonial and secular modernity: “Cosmopolitanism is the Western engagement with the rest of the world and that engagement is a colonial one, which simultaneously transcends the national boundaries and is tied to them” (10). Indeed, also today, the term evokes the image of the affluent world citizen, who in his (rather than her) Italian hand-made suit flies elegantly across the globe, attending business meetings or conferences, equally at home in Jakarta as in New York. In this view, the cosmopolitans are those who hold passports, have jobs and are fervent collectors of air miles. These are, indeed, mostly white men.

But, in our view, the term can and ought to be rescued from its elitist connotations. In his book “Cosmopolitanism – Ethics in a World of Strangers,” Appiah forcefully argues for the ethical need, if not obligation, to feel responsible to strangers, one that necessitates us to operate from a logic of “universalism plus difference” (151). In his lucid story, in which he points at the risks of cultural preservation and its underlying belief in purity and essence, a position that he shares with Sen, Appiah presents a deeply global, interconnected perspective on our contemporary world. It is relevant that Appiah writes of ethics, rather than idealism. The colonial and secular trope of cosmopolitanism may well be called an ideal, referring to an idealism, “in the sense of idealization, of valorization; but also in the sense of turning-into-an-idea” (Chow xxi). Yet, as Chow aptly remarks, history shows that idealism is always anchored in violence (xxii). The move from cosmopolitanism as an ideal towards an ethics of cosmopolitanism implies a move away from an authoritative moral discourse.