

## Editor's Introduction: Structures of Feeling

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This issue of *positions* opens with the unrecognized legacies of far-right movements in something as mundane as archival collections and closes with a searing critique of nationalist ideologies through the documentary medium. This way of bookending this collection seemed especially apt for the 2024 summer issue, given that it is scheduled to publish just before the US presidential elections. Though the outcome is unknown at the time of writing, it has become clear that we ignore the fringe at our own peril. I have therefore opted to reference Raymond Williams's phrase to title this introduction to insist that hegemony is never total and "structures of feeling" signal alternative formations of affects and modes of thought, struggling to emerge in the gap between convention and their unpredictable reception, especially evident in the cultural sphere.

Framed by the two articles are nine additional ones that chronicle various cultural movements and examples of works that directly responded to (and in some cases found creativity through) their constraints. The first set tracks developments in the twentieth century in rough chronological order from the rise of Korean proletarian melodrama amid Japanese colonial censorship in the 1920s–30s to the commercial growth of Japanese literature in English translation in the 1950s United States, the reversal of Chinese feminist iconography from the 1960s–70s Cultural Revolution to the 1980s, and the attendant production of the “neoliberal labor heroine” in the 1990s. The second set then provides detailed examples of contemporary cultural practices from poetry, short fiction, and web novels to films and documentaries that gesture toward alternatives to the discontented present.

Jeff Eden begins by examining the Jarring Collection, the largest assemblage of Xinjiang Muslim manuscripts outside China gathered by Gunnar Jarring (1907–2002), a Swedish diplomat-cum-Orientalist. Eden situates Jarring’s youth within the period of Sweden’s history when far-right ideas drew on the Nazi movement that ultimately influenced the way someone like Jarring would come to amass his collection. Based on Aryanist “race science” prevalent at the time and its search for “pure” racial groups, Eden’s article shows how Jarring ignored the predominantly cosmopolitan cultures of Central Asia found in local book culture, reading habits, and popular literary tastes in favor of essentialist and isolationist understandings of folk culture as *Volk* that resulted in a narrowly curated collection focused on mysticism and Islamic saints. Redacted from his celebrated diplomatic career that ironically included a stint as United Nations special envoy to the Middle East to negotiate peace after the Six-Day War, his fascist past was not just a blip, since Jarring was part and parcel of the Orientalist academy that had long roots in the search for the “pure Aryan” in South and Central Asia.

Against such fascist ideology, proletarian writers appropriated melodrama as a narrative form to circumvent colonial censorship during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Sangmi Bae examines Ch’ae Mansik’s 1933 novel *After the Doll’s House* as a paradigmatic example of how members of the Korea Artista Proleta Federacio used melodrama, widely serialized in popular newspapers, to surreptitiously convey revolutionary ideas to the masses. Rather than Orientalist ideas about discreet cultures, melodrama

served as a cosmopolitan mode of expression that drew on the commercial demands of the publication market to propagate proletarian literature in the face of oppressive political conditions. While melodrama has often been denigrated as lowbrow, catered to mass consumption, Bae shows how its popularity addressed the everyday experiences of marginalized groups such as women to critique their precarity resulting from class and sex inequities. Plot devices such as love triangles and sexual violence that on the surface seem sensationalist enabled readers to draw parallels between unequal gender and class relations, so that social revolution becomes the antidote for both women's and workers' liberation.

Market life also dictated the oeuvre of Japanese literature in English translation. Carefully combing through the archives of US trade publisher Alfred A. Knopf Inc.'s Japanese literature translation program, Brian Hurley shows the nexus of Cold War geopolitics, commercial interests, and aesthetic judgments that shaped the availability of Japanese literature for an English-reading audience. The translation program was initiated in the 1950s by Knopf editor-in-chief Harold Strauss (1907–75), who had served in the US military during World War II and engaged in intelligence work for the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers during the US occupation of Japan. Strauss's archive stretches in minutia from the routine to the philosophical regarding the translatability and commercial viability of Japanese works, the literary value of erotic novels, and the connections (rather than juxtaposition) between aesthetics and economics, between the transcendental and the transactional. Just as censors could paradoxically become part of the creative process in colonial Korea, the publisher's commercial calculations could become "an unpublished body of literary criticism." Rather than belie the commodification of the arts, Hurley marshals the "speculative language of finance and the creation of secondary derivatives markets" to argue that "a translation is both a derivative product and productive derivative."

On this point, Yu Zhang's article about the popular reception of finance-themed novels in early 1990s China finds resonance. Hong Kong entrepreneur-turned-writer Leung Fung Yee (b. 1949) and her celebrity led to "Leung fever" as a way for ordinary Chinese people to translate the new significance attached to finance and economics during market reforms. Likening the emotional highs and lows of markets and financial speculation to

sexual escapades and love affairs, Zhang argues that an “erotic-speculative sensation” found in Leung’s novels helped financially uneducated readers navigate and survive the new financial age. Popular literature that used to be structured around feelings of constancy, certainty, and predictability with ethical lessons was now centered on pragmatic solutions to everyday problems that were increasingly ephemeral, uncertain, and unpredictable. Moreover, positive appraisals of Leung’s work by mainland critics not only legitimized new market activities but also interpreted Leung’s prolific output through former categories of socialist productivity, what Zhang calls the frame of “the neoliberal labor heroine,” who like her socialist counterpart creatively maximizes time to produce at breakneck speed.

Although the labor heroine may thus have found new life in the post-Mao era, the iconography of female political power took a dramatic reversal, as Laura Pozzi and Damian Mandzunowski show through the example of Jiang Qing (1914–91). Rising to the top of political leadership during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Jiang embodied women’s political power and gender equality in socialist China. Her sartorial choice to wear the Mao suit rather than the *qipao* visually symbolized this equality, which was also reproduced through her cultural productions of revolutionary operas featuring strong androgynous women. With her downfall in 1976, however, she became the “iconic anti-icon,” or a negative icon, of a liberated woman in China. Political caricatures systematically reversed her powerful image into the antithesis of the ideal socialist woman she had so carefully curated. Taking Jiang seriously as a historical figure, Pozzi and Mandzunowski demonstrate how such caricatures that coded female power as manipulative, selfish, and vain represent latent misogyny’s returning with a vengeance in the post-Mao era. As so often is the case, she (along with the revolutionary model of liberated women) took the fall, since Mao could not be held responsible for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution.

In the aftermath of such reversals and the flattening of history, the next set of five articles grapples with the ramifications. Critical of the return of “tradition” in the guise of *guoxue* 国学 (literally, “national studies”), Dian Li uses critical nostalgic lyricism to examine the work of poet-turned-novelist Alai (b. 1959), who displaces essentialized notions of Chinese identity by constructing a symbolic Tibetan ethnicity that is “between history and

phantasmagoria.” Although set in a historical imaginary of Eastern Tibet replete with the grandeur of times gone by, Alai’s work is less interested in recreating the past than exploring the “tension between what has been and what could have been.” This, Li argues, is precisely the aim of critical nostalgic lyricism to articulate alternatives against the teleology of linear progress in deterministic historicism (whether nationalist or Marxist) that places minoritized subjects under threat of erasure. While nostalgia, like melodrama, has often been dismissed as conservative or reactionary, Li attributes nostalgia’s “fecundity” to the postmodern crisis of historicity.

On the flip side, nostalgia can easily devolve to support nationalist ideologies. Examining the writings and curatorial and artistic practices of Qiu Zhijie (b. 1969), Chang Tan shows how the artist’s shifting use of Buddhism in the guise of non-elitist “folk” art appealed to authenticity and nativism, resulting in cultural imperialism. Although the artist’s use of Buddhist symbols took on an apolitical facade, his works in fact projected a Sinocentric worldview, in which “peripheries” such as Taiwan and Tibet could be drawn into the orbit of China and its civilizational discourse of cultural homogeneity. By discussing Qiu’s work in this context, Tan traces the contradictions within global avant-gardism, which seeks to elevate the “margins” through self-Orientalism and exoticism. Like the Japanese literature in translation discussed by Hurley, Qiu’s Buddhist-themed art lies at the nexus of aesthetic and commercial considerations, and, like the translation program initiated by Strauss, was aligned with geopolitics, in this case those of China rather than the US to project its own form of cultural hegemony.

The postmodern flattening of history can become a metaphor for reading Chinese web novels in Renren Yang’s article. Yang argues that the popularity of amateurish cover designs that render them two-dimensional, or “flat,” is a symptom of China’s transition to a post-Fordist cultural economy in which globalization increasingly homogenizes and thereby renders even the most custom-made appear eerily similar in the digital sphere. Examining the acclaimed web novel *Zhuixu (Matrilocal Son-in-Law)* by Fennu de Xiangjiao (Angry Banana) serialized since 2011, Yang demonstrates how flatness describes the post-Fordist era in multiple ways, including the displacement of bureaucratic, hierarchical organization of production and its attendant standardization and working-class solidarity by flexible, “flatter”

organization of production, giving rise to differentiation and individualism. In the face of post-Fordist precarity in which cultural producers are subject to digital algorithms for maximization of profit, they become flexible producers writing “at any time in any place,” focusing on surface appearances and actions rather than the protagonist’s internal workings. Read in conjunction with Yu Zhang’s article, our capacity to resist the “any time, any place” in satiating our desires that feed into the imperative for flexible production seems especially urgent.

Tian Li offers a potential opening, what she calls “a virtual space before the door of the law.” By examining the *Togani* effect in reference to the impact of the 2011 South Korean feature film *Silenced (Togani)* based on a true story of sexual violence against disabled children, Li shows how social justice films can take on transnational afterlives to critique the judicial system beyond national borders. Despite the potential for transnational solidarity, Li demonstrates its limits by contrasting the impact of *Silenced* with the 2017 release of *Angels Wear White* in China. Although the film was released just a month after the launch of the #MeToo movement, the capacity of the screen (whether mass media or closed circuit) to advance social justice is much more tentative in the Chinese context, and understandably so, given the ambivalence of the camera that also serves the interests of state surveillance.

Complementing Tian Li’s foray into the role of filmmaking in (re)making social reality, Danzhou Li explores socially engaged art in rural China. Li contrasts previous forms of activist art based on formal experiments of new media in urban settings as “social writing” (*shehui xiezu*) with “personal writing” (*geren xiezu*) to describe a type of site-specific artistic practice that is a hybrid of avant-garde art and rural community-based video works. Li argues that such a form of socially engaged art powerfully critiques “problems of inequality in spatial rights and living injustice in the wake of rapid urbanization.” Attuned to the “rural problem” under postsocialism and the “lingering rural” as an integral part of the Chinese revolutionary heritage, Li examines Mao Chenyu (b. 1976), an artist with multiple identities as a writer, director, architect, and farmer. Focusing on Mao’s Paddy Film project begun in 2003 as an example of personal writing, Li demonstrates how the project blurs the boundaries between autobiography and ethnography.

By combining visual documentary and archival practice to promote “place making” through filmmaking, the Paddy Film project, Li argues, reclaims the disappearing pro-peasant world and offers a rural Chinese future.

The final bookend to this issue is provided by Harrod J. Suarez, who also explores the possibilities for radical critique in the documentary form through “stateless cinema.” Placing in stark relief the paradox of documenting the undocumented, Suarez analyzes the 2019 documentary film *No Data Plan* by Miko Revereza (b. 1988) that tracks the filmmaker’s undocumented status in the United States through a disjointed framing of his train journey across the country. Like the erratic, makeshift, found character of the Paddy Film project that makes rural life visible in China, *No Data Plan* rejects conventional cinematic form to represent a kind of DIY style in the face of limited resources, rejecting any stable subject position. Attuned to the film’s use of captions through which the filmmaker’s mother’s story is narrated, Suarez argues that the captions hovering in proximity to the filmic diegesis represent the undocumented presence. By “speaking nearby” without seeking presence, she represents the “archipelagic universal,” Suarez’s analytic framework in reference to the Philippines, a postcolonial nation of islands whose name derives from the imperial project to homogenize and incorporate a heterogenous archipelago. Upending nationalist epistemologies through the open-ended signifier, he eschews the totalizing force of empire to propose a differentiated universalism toward an “elsewhere,” since “difference is not binary but plural, infinite, and finally universal.”

In short, this issue of *positions* offers varied structures of feeling that intimate multiple elsewheres. While their pathways and trajectories may not be fully articulated, this is as it should be, since neither critique nor results can be predetermined.