

Introduction

The political life of academic intellectuals is a theme *positions* often returns to. Wen Tiejun's "Four Stories in One: Environmental Protection and Rural Reconstruction in China" is rooted in his academic work as an economist and dean of the School of Agriculture and Rural Development at Renmin University in Beijing. Wen draws on the academic convention of the cautionary tale to excoriate social policies in Mexico and China such as land commodification, neoliberal efforts to extract economic surplus from agriculture, incoherent urban planning, the ruin of healthy traditional farming, and the poisoning of food. On the strength of his surveys, Wen urges intellectuals to join the debate over land privatization in the People's Republic of China. Academic intellectuals have to seek truth through grassroots research, he argues, and in this case, the evidence suggests that agriculture

and food are best off when peasants organize themselves and the state re-institutionalizes organic farming as a national policy.

A pragmatics of truth is also at stake in Minoru Iwasaki and Steffi Richter's "The Topology of Post-1990s Historical Revisionism," which disputes the spurious project of Japanese right-wing war atrocity deniers. Iwasaki and Richter offer a critique of "historical revisionism" and reestablish the status of truth in historical narrative. Atrocity deniers seize on an alleged right of self-narration to devalue the patient, slow, factual work of actual history writing. In the name of narcissistic self-narration, the ultranationalists particularly target military sex slavery, school textbooks, and the International Women's War Crimes Tribunal in 2000–2001. These, and denial of the 1937 Nanjing atrocities and 1945 compulsory mass suicides in Okinawa, are right-wing strategies in the struggle to fill the political vacuum the Cold War's end left in Japanese civil society. Skilled historians must contest the claims of the radical rightist project and claim truth on the basis of evidence.

Focus on the pragmatics of truth among professional intellectuals brings Rebecca Karl's "Journalism, Social Value, and a Philosophy of the Everyday in 1920s China" to the related question of how it is possible to write history that is not a form of misrecognition. Karl's objective is to address "the relationship between journalism as a commodity form and the emergence of philosophical concepts of everyday life" that proliferated in polemics on social value in the Asia of Japanese imperialism. Focus on philosopher journalists in the 1920s clarifies how the problematic of social value gives rise to the category of the social problem. Using the example of sexual scandals, she shows how the love-triangle suicide in philosophically informed journalism transformed womanhood into a social problematic. The journalistic matrix these intellectuals laid out allowed the everyday to be understood as a philosophic problem and gave analysis a philosophical base for apprehending social facts. Addressing the present as much as the past, Karl's point encourages us to consider the implications and long-term effects of our own history-writing projects.

Fabio Lanza's "Politics of the Unbound: 'Students' and the Everyday of Beijing University" seeks to distinguish the sociological or state category of "the student" from the mobilized political category of "student activ-

ist” at elite Beijing University in the 1910s. Lanza shows that contemporary American models and statist, colonial policies were implemented and did produce athletic, Christian, bourgeois subjects. By contrast, amidst the organizational fevers and semianarchic cultural politics that swept informal Beida study societies, obdurate modernist intellectuals clustered as learners around the university. These informal students invented collective practices at a distance from the state; in fact, their momentary innovation meets the criteria of Badiou’s concept of the event. Student is a historical, or contingent, political configuration that remains categorically a still vital question facing academic intellectuals: how do we and our students surmount statist conventions restricting what students can know and what they are entitled to do right now?

Lanza and Karl invoke the problematic of everyday life. Helen J. S. Lee assumes this point in her “Writing Colonial Relations of Everyday Life in Senryu.” She opens, as Richter and Iwasaki advocate, a new historicity. Her subjects are those shock troops of the Japanese imperialist state project, the “unofficial, overwhelmingly working-class, and often impoverished Japanese settlers.” A comic poetic form called senryu, popular in metropole and colonies, allows Lee to distinguish ideologies of colonization from everyday expression of life in the colony. News media and colonial civic authorities organized contests and imported Japanese experts to judge the skill of local poets including Koreans. Lee’s point is that among the untidy mass of poets and readers, social experience rooted in the proximity of colonizer and colonized was expressed in a heteroglossic common language. She raises questions of Japanese-Korean relations at the level of race ideology and of lived experiences of colonial racism.

Dean Brink’s “Commercial and Heian Modes of Intertextuality in Tanka by Tawara Machi” is a shift in direction, but this essay also reads poetics in the moment. The poetics at stake are those of Tawara Machi, the first major poet to break the barrier separating poetic diction, the Heian tanka poem, and advertising language, to “enter the market as a responsive voice within, for, and ultimately by the market.” Tawara has insinuated into popular language a poetic device that restructures its Heian antecedents of deferred romantic gratification while conserving a technique complicit with consumer’s *jouissance*. Contemporary readers of Tawara’s poetry get

pleasure when they can referee among branded consumables, for they are compelled to choose between this brand and that, but never allowed release from the branded world of hyperconsumerism. The work of this “poet of the product” is banal. Her oeuvre marks only a “controlled release of *jouissance* within the frame of established desires.”

Hyon Joo Yoo Murphree’s “Transnational Cultural Production and the Politics of Moribund Masculinity” concerns epochal anxiety and masculine identity in the context of the 1997 finance crisis. His essay consolidates Iwasaki and Richter’s point that rightist demands for self-narration are a ruse to take over the post–Cold War social nullity. Turning to the cultural production of blockbuster films, Murphree’s project is to define what “moribund masculinity” is in Korean cinema and how this masculine code has come to mediate a now systemically impotent humanity in late-capitalist production relations. Moribund masculinity is a form of destitution in which the male subject has no economic point and masculinity becomes a nullity, a point of ruination. Murphree actually sees destitution as a radical possibility if it can be critically appreciated. When we see the link of moribundity to virtuality and the unavoidable fate of subject-object relations in capitalism, he argues, we see ideologies and fantasies in the process of being virtualized.

We include in this general issue two commentaries structured around the question of the political life of academic intellectuals. Allen Chun’s “The Postcolonial Alien in Us All: Identity in the Global Division of Intellectual Labor” raises a question about identifications, truthful intellectual work, and pragmatic academic intervention. This question requires him to ask how a subject for such an intellectual politics might be formed. In the end, Chun poses the question: “Why do we continue to assume that our ethnic identity is what determines our authorial subjectivity ipso facto, especially as intellectuals, all the while turning a blind eye to the equally (if not more) relevant forces that have shaped our epistemic subjectivities as Asian studies scholars, literary critics, social scientists, and so on?”

The second commentary takes the shape of a debate about the relation of intellectuals and citizenship. Simon Avenell’s “From the ‘People’ to the ‘Citizen’: Tsurumi Shunsuke and the Roots of Civil Mythology in Post-war Japan” is the occasion of learned commentary by Laura Hein, J. Vic-

tor Koschmann, and Wesley Sasaki-Uemura. Their discussion allows what Hein points out is the core responsibility of intellectuals: to insert political theory into a vacuous social movement milieu. Because Avenell's points are restated in these essays, I will not belabor them here except to say that the essay reassesses what Koschmann calls "postwar citizenship and protest in light of neoliberal ideology." And as Wesley Sasaki-Uemura argues, the points that Avenell and Tsurumi himself raise for debate are precisely what democratic practices will mean "for deeper discussion" of the nature of civil societies in various Asian countries and their "impact on the condition of democracy there." The strong implication arising out of this debate is that the conditions of democracy "here" might well benefit from being about mass mobilization for democratic ends in places like China and Korea.

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