

# Introduction

THIS ISSUE of the *Asian Studies Journal* deals with a condition—hybridity—which, although always a characteristic of society and culture, is now its major determinant. Even in times when people lived in isolated communities, social and cultural links always ensured an exchange of ideas and practices. Many of these were unconsciously adopted while others, although recognized as alien, were accepted. In addition, all societies and cultures experience change either through external forces or through internal ones such as the replacement of generations. Culture is not a solid body of traditions and norms but a way of living that adjusts to prevailing elements. It is always contestable and open to critique. Society, while exhibiting more stable features, is also open to change. Both culture and society should be seen as collective works in progress.

Societal and cultural change has been gathering momentum since the industrial revolution and promises to increase the pace of transformation even faster with the new communication technology. We have now, without doubt, entered the age of hybridity. The global condition is one of constant hybridization. Paradoxically, globality produces both similitude and difference. Being connected to others everywhere enables us both to expand who we are and to remain true to ourselves. These global connections make us appreciate similarities while confirming our own difference.

The new communication technology has enabled us to develop the capacity we have always had but never been able to fully accomplish. For the first time in human history we now have the capacity to remain in touch with anyone globally. This capacity will lead to significant transformations of society and culture whose full effects we can now only dimly predict. It has given us new forms of agency and, consequentially, new identities. These identities combine the old with the new in various manifestations of hybridity. Diaspora is now a common experience for Filipinos. International migration and overseas work generally require the maintenance of long-distance ties with their local communities. This easy access to the homeland generates a

condition of nonterritorial belonging. Filipinos overseas are now able to maintain ties both to their local communities and to their diasporic fellows. It gives them an absent presence. Those remaining at home partake of these new ties even if from another perspective.

This connectivity applies as much at the collective level as it does at the individual level. Globality expands individual as well as institutional networks. The nation-states' former autonomy is now being replaced by their ties to global institutions. These institutions, in turn, take an increasing interest in local issues. We now routinely recognize global trends as readily as local and regional ones. Often, global trends even take precedence over local ones. At other times the local is itself globalized. A new term such as glocality tries to capture this ambivalent and sometimes antinomian condition. Hybridity has now become a normal recognizable condition of culture and society. The essays in this collection illustrate how hybridity enters into and adapts itself in new cultural and social forms.

The article by Mizhelle D. Agcaoili on Filipino fansubbers aptly demonstrates the new hybridity. Steeped in their own local circumstances, fansubbers perform the task of cultural translators not only in terms of language but, as importantly, as local interpreters of foreign representations and practices. Their community consists both of online and offline interactions—each generating its own forms of hybrid practices. As Agcaoili convincingly shows, fansubbers operate mainly in cyberspace—a nonterritorial entity that encompasses global, local, and regional elements. They act both as consumers and producers of cultural products that, even as they consume and produce them, also reinterpret them. Hybridity here operates at different ontological levels: at the level of the Japanese text, their limited interpretation of these texts, and their translation into an acceptable Filipino English. Precisely because they are not professionally trained translators, their reinterpretations include both conscious and nonconscious elements. Fansubbers are a good example of how the global condition manifests itself locally. They are the new mediators of culture, occupying a position betwixt and between. Their liminal position facilitates their acceptance of hybridity.

Kanami Namiki discusses the way a national identity, created through the representations of dance, is based on elements patched together to produce a hybridized whole. The Bayanihan dance group is a well-known ambassador of Philippine national culture. It portrays the nation as a rich tapestry of local dance traditions. The result is a grand spectacle meant to awe its audience by displaying formal dancing skills and corresponding visual and colorful images. The nation is represented as a seamless whole whose parts unproblematically fit together. This national image is clearly a compilation of local and often heterogeneous elements unified under the banner of national culture. Hence the group's name: Bayanihan Philippine National Folk Dance Company. This hybrid entity is far removed from its folk origins and represents a Philippine national imaginary. In contrast, the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group chooses to represent local dance traditions without the elaborate and formal dance techniques of the Bayanihan. The national imaginary of the Obusan group is less concerned with elevating the local to the level of the national and in the process transforming it to fit national models. Instead, the Obusan group adheres more closely to folk styles, including an evocation of their milieu. Their dances are meant as much to inform the audience about local traditions as to entertain them. The national imaginary is still hybrid but one whose pieces retain their connection to locality. In this view the nation consists of discrete local traditions welded into a national society. While the first national imaginary is cultural, the second is societal. They are two different but related ways of imagining the nation. These two conceptions of the national imaginary are endorsed by the Cultural Center of the Philippines. The Bayanihan stresses cultural continuity and coherence, whereas the Obusan group emphasizes the local and its contribution to national society.

José S. Buenconsejo's article offers a detailed discussion of a particular cultural expression, the film *Ibong Adarna* (1941), and how the Buencaminos deliberately merged traditional and modern musical elements. The film deals with a well-known folk myth about a hero who goes on a quest to save his father and in the process finds his own beloved. The myth itself is a premodern example of hybridity, combining oral

tradition with more recent literary versions gleaned from Hispanic sources. The Buencaminos were competent musicians trained in the traditional musical genres but who quickly adapted themselves to fit the needs of an emerging cultural modernity. Apart from the Buencaminos, *Ibong Adarna* was made for a mainstream audience by a group of properly trained directors and cinematographers. *Ibong Adarna* is a combination of older genres translated into film by people competent in both traditional and contemporary culture.

The paper mostly discusses the music in the film and how different musical styles were both consciously and unconsciously employed. The Buencaminos employed earlier genres such as the *comedia*, *sarsuwela*, and *bodabil* as both musical styles and narrative structures. Imposed on these earlier genres was a contemporary Hollywoodish music to evoke appropriate moods. Some of these elements were employed unreflectively while others were used for ironic purposes, indicating a more conscious awareness of hybridity. Buenconsejo's discussion is quite detailed, and a more proper presentation would require visual as well as audio cues. His main point is to argue that while this film and other similar cultural products drew from established western sources, the final product reflected a Filipino aesthetic. This aesthetic, while hybrid, nevertheless constitutes its own field not reducible to its borrowed sources. Buenconsejo's paper is a complex discussion of musical hybridity and the role of irony at a time when Filipino culture was experiencing a moment of transformation from the traditional to the modern. Although the roles of the director and cinematographer are not explicitly discussed, what emerges is the artistic tension in a mainstream production fusing older with newer cultural forms.

Tomoko Onoe's article is a close ethnographic description of a Kalinga healing ritual: *gopas*. It consists of a complex set of offerings, chants, dance, music, and feasting performed over two days. Its main purpose is to obtain a spirit-guardian to protect one from illness. Like many other inhabitants of the Cordillera, the Kalinga, while having converted to Christianity a century ago, still retain many beliefs and practices linked to their precolonial past. Most of these are related to

environmental spirits whose activities impact most closely on everyday life such as sickness, accidents, or any unusual events. The Christian God, like Kabunian, remains rather distant, but one's immediate surroundings are the domain of several spirit beings. Some of these are good and protective, while others cause illness and even death. Their appeasement is necessary if one is to ensure good health and prevent misfortunes.

The gopas ritual is meant to entice a protective spirit to ensure a person's well-being. Onoe approaches her analysis by emphasizing the symbolic rather than the instrumental aspects of gopas. Toward the end of the ritual, a liminal condition, characterized by play, is seen as a key symbolic element. The formal behavior of the ritual is inverted through unscripted and comedic actions by the shaman and the spectators. Eventually, ritual action resumes and the procedure is soon terminated. Onoe's focus on the importance of play as an element in ritual is consistent with her culturalist stance. Gopas is seen as an attempt to restore cognitive order following the disruption of everyday life such as sickness. Play is an important element in the restoration of order. While this paper does not explicitly deal with hybridity, its context clearly indicates how Kalinga life and culture, under the aegis of globalization, consists of shreds and patches of tradition and modernity. While the gopas ritual is encased in tradition, its application and extension to foreigners indicates how it has adapted to conditions of globality.

I congratulate the contributors for their interesting and important insights on this topic. I particularly wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Michiyo Yoneno-Reyes for organizing the panel at a conference in Japan that served as the impetus for this collection. Professor Yoneno-Reyes not only encouraged our participation at the conference but also edited and put together this collection.

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