INTERCULTURAL MASQUERADES: NEW ORIENTALISM, NEW OCCIDENTALISM, OLD EXOTICISM EDITED BY REGIS MACHART, FRED DERVIN, MINGHUI GAO

Intercultural Masquerades: New Orientalism, New Occidentalism, Old Exoticism, Regis Machart, Fred Dervin, Minghui Gao (eds.). Springer-Verlag: Berlin Heidelberg, 2016. £80.00. ISBN 9783662470558.

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It is now a truism that although Said's critique of Orientalism is flawed, generalising, and does not consider in any depth the cultures lying beyond the middle-East and North-Africa, it brought due attention to problems in the colonialist discourse and stereotypical representation of the 'Other' which Western cultures have constructed. This edited volume argues that these problems of ideological construction of the Other are still ongoing, and considers them in the context of the Asian cultures ignored by Said – mainly, East-Asian and Southeast-Asian cultures such as China, Japan, and Singapore. The thematic concerns of the book also propose that new forms of Orientalism as well as Occidentalism have emerged, especially in sites where intercultural encounters are located. These sites of interculturality – whether it is the case of mainland Chinese students studying in Singaporean universities, or representations of the Japanese diaspora in Brazil boosting Japanese nationalist sentiment back 'home' in Japan – can be both concrete and abstract. But more often than not, they reveal or even intensify cultural conflicts rather than construct communicative dialogues. This is a worrying concern that the authors of the book attempt to voice, proposing that although the categories of East and West cannot be simply done away with, critical thinking should move 'beyond [...] "intercultural masquerades"', and beyond the dichotomist division of East and West that essentialises 'populations and [gives] very little voice to individuals' (xi). In extension, we should also be critical towards both 'Orientophilia' and 'Westophobia' (xi), which are reactions to the perpetuation of Eurocentrism that have gone awry.

The aims and views the book so far sound reasonable, though the criticism of Said's critique of Orientalism and the East-West dichotomy is not new. The introduction also leaves the reader wondering what precisely are the new forms of Orientalism and Occidentalism that the book purports to treat, and how they differ substantially from the 'old' forms of stereotypical cultural representation of the non-white, non-Western Other. We do find some more clarification in the case-studies that the book chapters present, though unfortunately, the first impression the essays give is that they are somewhat of a mixed-bag of disparate topics loosely linked by the broad theme of representations of the Other. Nevertheless, upon close reading, we may generally divide the essays into two categories. Firstly, sociological and anthropological studies of cultural stereotypes and the construction of the Asian Other in Higher Education, focusing on the experience of international students from East-Asia (especially China) in westernised higher educational institutions abroad. For example, Song and McCarthy's 'Reconceptualising the "Other" in Australian Universities' and Yang's 'The PRC "Foreign Talent" Scholars and their Singaporean "Other"' fall into this category. Secondly, cultural representations of the imagined Other in music, film, and literature, e.g. Aaltonen's essay on exoticism in world music vinyl collections, and Guillerez's 'Writing Ambivalence: Visions of the West in Republican and Post-Maoist Chinese Literature'. The disadvantage of grouping these two types of essays together is that the interdisciplinarity of this collection seems superficial and does not cohere in a deeper, interactive way. For instance, one obvious question is what the essays on cultural imaginings of the Other in literature and media have to say on those that examine the living experience of being an

Other, and vice versa? Despite this drawback in the organisation of the volume, the essays raise two important concerns that can be summarised as below.

Firstly, the problem of Occidentalism. As the editors state in the introduction, Occidentalism is the 'exact opposite trap [of Orientalism]' that some scholars and Asian peoples fall into, resulting in 'systematically blam[ing] "the West" to re-empower "the East"' (xi). This has led to a 'Westophobia', particularly manifested in the rise of radical Islam and discourses against modernisation and globalisation in Asian countries (especially China). The West is demonised and held accountable for moral decay, loss of tradition, and many other ills in contemporary society. This has partly contributed to the reinforcement of nationalism and religious radicalism in some Asian countries. For instance, some Chinese students come back to China with increased nationalist sentiments due to their negative experiences abroad in Westernised/Western cultures and institutions, as Jackson's essay demonstrates; or, in Kawai's study of the Japanese TV series *Haru to Natsu* (2005), where Japanese Brazilians are contrasted with the Japanese in Japan, the former are shown as more 'authentically' Japanese than the latter because the Japanese diaspora cling to their tradition whereas the Japanese back 'home' are increasingly Westernised and lose their identity. Through this kind of Orientalisation, or Othering of the Japanese diaspora in Brazil, an Occidentalism that expresses nostalgia for a Japan before modernisation and contact with the West emerges, and is used for nationalist propoganda. This way in which the Oriental Other gazes back at the West is in fact 'auto-Orientalising' (111), because it is often used manipulatively by Asian peoples themselves to justify power relations and political ideologies by re-affirming stereotypes of Asians as obedient to their parents, faithful to their native traditions, more collective-minded than individualist. Occidentalism is not, therefore, a critical resistance to Orientalism but a continuation of it that often deepens the chasm of understanding between 'East' and 'West'.

Secondly, interculturality is used to problematise the notion of culture. One argument in the book is that taking an intercultural perspective means accepting an understanding of culture as highly liquid, i.e. culture being always in the process of change, re-formation, and hybridity. This is in direct contrast to the static view of culture, which argues that 'in order to make sense of the world', there is a need 'to maintain some kind of comfortable stability rather than to face a challenging ongoing fluidity' (67). Intercultural sites where different identities and cultures mingle and clash – e.g. universities with many international students, diasporic communities, or the global circulation of local music and literature – are therefore highlighted as the foci of the criticism of neo-Orientalism and rigid cultural categories. For instance, the tension between perceptions of 'East' and 'West' also exists between cultures that share one ethnic group, such as the mainland Chinese and Singaporeans. Commonly-shared ethnicity and aspects of cultural tradition are not guarantors of any shared cultural experience or sense of identity, as Yang's study of the failed interaction between Chinese students and local Singaporean students in Singapore shows. The process of Othering is more often than not accentuated rather than diminished between cultures and peoples who are very similar and geographically close, because, according to Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste,* 'difference is asserted against what is closest' (1984: 479). These issues remind us that Asian peoples occidentalise and orientalise each other: the 'non-Western Other' cannot fit them into one category. There is still a vast amount of work to do on examining and comparing the discourses of power between different Asian cultures.

In sum, despite raising some interesting questions as mentioned above, the drawbacks of this volume are: 1) lacking focus and connection in the organisation of essays; 2) disappointingly offering less than what it purports to do, namely, to make a substantially new critique of Orientalism and demonstrate new modes of exoticism. Overall, the book also leaves the reader wishing for a stronger theorisation and definition of its key notions such as

interculturality, new Orientalism, and masquerade. For one, the book title begs the question of what intercultural masquerade is. What is being masqueraded as what? Are the editors and authors suggesting that cultural representations of the Other – both the non-Western Other and the non-Eastern Other – are masqueraded to hide the real ideologies and power struggles at play? Or that cultural stereotypes are masqueraded as cultural authenticity? If these questions were addressed more explicitly and considered in more detail, the arguments about interculturality and post-Saidean Orientalism could be much stronger. On the other hand, to end on a positive note, the concerns in this book about conflicts in intercultural experience, the rise of Occidentalist discourse, and the need for inter-Asian comparisons to challenge the East-West dichotomy raise the bigger and extremely important question of whether the critique of Orientalism that focuses on resisting Eurocentrism is still pertinent. If we understand the nature of Orientalism as a discourse of power that flows from the more powerful to the less powerful, that stereotypes the Other to keep it under control and makes claims about (Western) cultural superiority, then in a world where the balance of global power has radically shifted and countries like China and India are already more powerful than many Western cultures, is not the assumption that Orientalist discourse is an appropriation by the more powerful West of the less powerful non-Western Other a Eurocentric delusion itself? Is Eurocentrism itself really a global problem, or a self-critical exercise of (mostly) European and North American scholars reflecting on their own identity and the atrocities of Western imperialism? How to go beyond the Eurocentric criticism of Eurocentrism and Orientalism is perhaps the more urgent task of post-colonial criticism today.