Introduction

East Asian Perspectives on Psychoanalysis—
Theoretical and Political

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In a recent issue of Concentric entitled “Asia and the Other,” editors Jung Su and Frank Stevenson rightly point out that “Asia” can no longer be regarded as the “Orient” was imagined in the 19th century. The images that continue to capture international attention in popular films today—for instance Kazuo Ishiguro’s film The White Countess (2005), Steven Spielberg’s Empire of the Sun (1987) and Ang Lee’s Lust, Caution (2007)—are thoroughly immersed in a nostalgic and romanticized “Oriental” atmosphere, for all these films are quite self-consciously located in a time and cultural horizon that is irrecoverably past, and whose passing is in fact witnessed by them.

It is therefore no surprise that these three films focus on Shanghai—the most extreme and conspicuous example of China’s new and fully globalized power, as the nostalgic and romanticizing gaze of these films only makes more evident. In fact, this famously cosmopolitan portal to the “East” was always far more complex than the ideology of Orientalism allowed, and the mysterious and exotic Shanghai of the 1930s and 1940s that is projected in these films, despite their concern for a certain degree of historical accuracy, actually conceals such historical complexity, and serves as a reminder of the continuing power of the Orientalizing worldview. It might well be said that the films play with this nostalgia quite deliberately, and that they create this idealized retrospective vision of Shanghai precisely because our contemporary context—the one in which they were made and received—is a world in which that Shanghai is gone forever. It is thus as if we were being invited to revisit our own historical imagination from a new position, and at a moment when its former hold upon us is no longer so strong, so that the luxurious fictionalizing atmosphere of this imaginary past could appear as precisely that. Curiously, then,
the “East Asian perspective” that emerges in these films might be said to function not only as nostalgia, but also as repetition and displacement.

“Asia” and the “West” no longer form a binary opposition in contemporary thought, and as Su and Stevenson point out, the model that romanticized Asia as the “Other,” and simultaneously allowed the “West” to imagine itself as more uniformly modern, democratic and rationally scientific than it actually was, no longer serves as a functional model, and cannot clarify the geo-political and cultural realities of either half of this polarity. East Asia, which has had its own counterparts to the West’s Orientalism, likewise no longer relies on such paradigms, and the essays in this volume, if they indeed present something like a set of “East Asian perspectives” in their plurality, explicitly detach themselves from any such binary logic.

There are, however, some pitfalls that remain operative in contemporary discourse. In attempting to reconfigure this binary opposition, some scholars have pointed to the rapid expansion of economic power in the East, its rapid modernization, and its increasingly global influence, of which Shanghai is certainly an example, along with cities like Hong Kong and Singapore. Such an approach, as Stevenson points out, has recently given rise to “what has been called, after Said, an ‘Occidentalist’ perspective on the part of Asia,” in which the dissolution of the East/West dictotomy is narrated as the story of the East’s emergence into the world of global capital—and thus as the narrative of a certain Westernization, as if capital made all cultural difference disappear, but only under the horizon of western hegemony and homogenization. As Stevenson puts it, attributing such Occidentalism to the East “implies that the old West/East binary still holds.”¹ Economic power and the logic of global capital may in fact lend themselves all too readily to the maintenance of this binary opposition, which contemporary discourses of “development” also support.

The question is therefore how to reconfigure the imaginary and real boundaries that constitute our contemporary experience, without relying on the nostalgic and fictionalized oppositions of Orientalism, but also without neglecting the power of cultural difference, or forgetting all such differences under the intoxicating influence of globalizing narratives of capital and technology. For there are still many profound differences that cut across our cultural space, differences that are not only located between East and West, but more and more within these regions, along lines and strata that no longer correspond to national and linguistic boundaries. Economic development and capital, so conspicuous in Shanghai, and

¹ Frank Stevenson, “Asia and the Other,” Concentric 34.2 (Sept. 2008), 7.
the diffusion of communication technology that is so evident everywhere, are by no means enough to displace long traditions, values, habits of thought, political realities and modes of social life which—even when they change in the context of what we so quickly call “global” culture—do not necessarily produce homogeneity, as if “globalized” culture were not in fact a network of differences. These differences exist, but they run along new fault lines, and they are often obscure or multi-layered; indeed, they often remain barely visible today, which does not mean that they no longer exist, but rather that they do not conform to the familiar categories of nation and religion, or to the old stereotypes that Edward Said analyzed in *Orientalism* in 1978 (stereotypes that, despite the title of Said’s book, focused not on East Asia but mainly on the Islamic world, with significant consequences for post-colonial theory).  

2 What perspectives on these broader debates might emerge, and with what realignments or differences, when we consider the deployment and articulation of psychoanalysis in East Asia today?

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The present issue of *Concentric* took its impetus from a conference on “Lacan in East Asia” organized at National Taiwan University in the spring of 2008. Our intention in organizing this event was simple: we wished to bring together a group of scholars from across East Asia who shared an interest in Lacanian theory and contemporary French philosophy, with the aim of cultivating a larger international community for further work together. The conference was designed to explore the different perspectives that East Asian scholars were bringing to the study of psychoanalysis, and to strengthen the network of scholarly collaboration and exchange across this region. Japanese and Korean scholars had expressed an interest in more sustained work across their national borders, as well as in working with scholars from Taiwan. These national borders, of course, are marked by complex and often painful historical experiences, whose residual effects remain very much alive, as several of these essays suggest. While the scholarly community might be expanded to include an “East Asian” perspective on psychoanalysis, no unity could be presupposed: on the contrary, the historical, linguistic, religious, and political borders that remain between these countries testify to the formation of cultural and psychic distinctions within East Asia that psychoanalysis might well address. A symptom of these differences might be found in the fact that, when Korean and Japanese psychoanalytic societies had previously met, they used

English as their common language—a fact that already points to the broader geopolitical horizon of what we too easily call “East Asian” culture. Likewise, when Korean and Japanese scholars, together with our colleagues from Hong Kong, came to Taiwan, where yet another set of native languages is spoken, English was again our common language. These brief indications already suffice to problematize the very idea of an “East Asian” perspective (in the singular), by marking both the internal differences and the intersections with the West that are in play here, and that suggest why we elected to pluralize “perspectives” in our title.

As our plans for the conference developed and interest in the event increased, we included a number of scholars from France, England, Australia and the United States as well, and in this broader context we renewed our question as to whether the scholars in East Asia might not have certain “perspectives” on psychoanalysis that differed from their Western counterparts, even—or perhaps especially—when their academic training was squarely in French philosophy and their degrees were obtained in France or the United States, which was largely the case.

At first glance, it seemed obvious that the cultural differences separating East Asia from Freud’s Vienna were conspicuous, and might well dominate the conversation. Freud’s work developed in the context of monotheism, and recent violence in the Middle East has led to a dominant strand of work in psychoanalysis, among Western scholars, dealing with the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The recent surge of interest in Saint Paul is only one of the more conspicuous examples of this insularity among Western scholars. And so, we were led to ask a number of all-too-obvious questions. What happens when psychoanalysis is transplanted into a Buddhist or Taoist context, where the “Big Other” does not have the same status, and the “name of the father” cannot function in the same way, or operate under a single name, much less a single gender? How does psychoanalysis, and its reliance on structures like the Oedipal Complex, function in East Asia, where kinship structures, and the basic vocabulary of familial relations, are quite different? How does the Oedipus complex function, and how do the psychoanalytic dynamics of rivalry and identification operate in the context of Confucianism, where obligations, relationships, and hierarchies of dependence and responsibility are quite differently configured, so that the concept of a single universal “moral law” does not does not have the same status, and “identity” itself is always situated, rather than being lodged in a single “subjective personality”?

The differences that arise among various ethical traditions likewise merited attention. The ethics of psychoanalysis developed by Lacan was clearly situated in a philosophical tradition that is quite distinct from that of Asian philosophy (in his
Ethics of Psychoanalysis, Lacan’s major guideposts are Aristotle, Christianity, Kant and Bentham), and Freud himself explicitly acknowledged that the concept of the superego was descended from the Kantian moral imperative. How might the ethical traditions of East Asia reconfigure or challenge the presuppositions of Freudian and Lacanian theory, and the frameworks that govern the “relation to the other” for thinkers like Hegel and Levinas? What challenges or displacements might arise with respect to the “ethics of psychoanalysis,” in the context of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism? Following a certain tradition of philosophical anthropology, powerful work has been done in recent years on the historical formation of ethical practices, and scholars of antiquity like Bernard Williams, Steven Gill, and Jean-Pierre Vernant have shown convincingly that the world of Homer and Greek tragedy simply cannot be understood if one superimposes a Kantian framework on the ethical world of the ancient Greeks. The differences in our contemporary world merit equal consideration.

Along with ethical traditions, the very concept of the “subject” in Lacan, decentered as it might be, was nevertheless developed in conversation with the tradition of concepts formed by Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, including the legal and political correlates of the “subject,” which one sees in notions such as “autonomy,” “self-determination,” “freedom,” “rights,” the “will,” “responsibility” and “guilt.” Could all these notions, even in their psychoanalytic reformulation, be transported directly into the context of East Asia without difficulty, or might they be displaced or counterbalanced by the multiple philosophical and political traditions of East Asia, and the very different conceptual foundations that underwrite its various understandings of “personhood” or “identity”?

Likewise, if one considers the traditions of Western medicine, and its evolving conceptions of the body, sexuality, and disease, not to mention the techniques of treatment and cure, one cannot avoid the question of the tensions or differences that distinguish the traditions of East Asian thought, including both its formal medical traditions and its more everyday conceptions of lived embodiment, and the practices that surround it. These cannot be treated as equivalent to the framework that is presupposed in the West. And even if psychoanalysis (taken as a “science”) proceeds as if every subject could be treated by its methods, bringing into the clinical situation whatever cultural or personal material that subject may carry, as just so much “personal debris” to be analyzed, these cultural differences cannot

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simply be ignored, and cannot be reduced to symbolic material that might be “treated,” but must also be recognized as decisive for the functioning and the formation (or deformation or transformation) of psychoanalysis as a discipline in the context of East Asia.

Finally, and not least, the problem of language could hardly be circumvented, since the alphabetic system of writing that Freud discussed in the Interpretation of Dreams, like the “signifier” that Lacan took from the tradition of Saussure, could not simply be equated with the characters operative in East Asian languages, which mix ideogrammatic and phonetic forms, and which function quite differently in Chinese, Japanese and Korean (not to mention Taiwanese, Hakka, Cantonese, and the many other languages that are often simultaneously in use in Taiwan, Malaysia and elsewhere, some without a written form). The influence that these languages have on one another, moreover, and the strange mixture or buried history that links some of them to one another—Japanese kanji being perhaps the best-known example—point beyond linguistics toward the complex political and colonial history that underlies differences between Korean, Japanese, Mandarin and Taiwanese, for example, all of which makes for an extremely complex situation when it comes to the “symbolic order” and the linguistic dimension of the subject who speaks, both in these geographical regions and in their diasporic extensions across East Asia and the West. These linguistic differences thus point not only to a very conspicuous and substantial difference between “Eastern” and “Western” languages, but also to the internal differences that separate the countries of East Asia from one another. The linguistic horizon of East Asian languages therefore confronts us with differences internal to East Asia that simultaneously reveal a complex political and historical experience of overlapping, influence, and hybridization (for example in Japanese), deliberate mutual exclusion (for example in the case of Korean), leading us from the linguistic domain into the long political history of the region, which likewise bears on the formation of subjectivity in “East Asia” in a way that we can hardly ignore. Even writing practices, such as calligraphy, give rise to a relation to language that has no precise counterpart in the West.

The long and complex experiences of colonialization and war that link and separate these countries, together with the various contemporary transformations of political life (ranging from Hong Kong’s experience of the British and their contemporary return to mainland China, to the multiple colonizations of Taiwan and its complex current relations with China, Japan, and the West, the removal of Taiwan from the United Nations, the increasingly tense but simultaneously
promising relations that appear possible on the Korean peninsula, and the passage of China through the Cultural Revolution into its currently emerging form that is, for all its modernization, still heavily marked by pre-revolutionary forms of sociality, perhaps even more evident now than they were during the Revolution)—all this has produced arrangements of political and psychic identity that have no immediate or obvious counterpart in the West. The broader political history of East Asia, its forms of “citizenship” and “governmentality,” have produced a variety of philosophical, institutional and subjective arrangements that cannot attach themselves neutrally to standard Western notions of the “person” or “individual,” much less to the Freudian conception of the “ego,” any more than the linguistic forms in which subjectivity is constituted in East Asia can be immediately and transparently rendered in Western equivalents. Anthropologists have often noted the substantial differences that underlie various conceptions of emotions, such as shame, guilt, love, and anger, in different cultural and linguistic contexts, and current efforts by evolutionary psychology to pretend that these differences have no bearing on our essentially “innate” and “biological” emotions cannot blind us to the deep differences that culture can produce, even at the level of “immediate lived response.” Thus, even if we have long abandoned the stereotyping oppositions that once separated “shame culture” and “guilt culture,” as we have abandoned the early racial categories of nineteenth-century anthropology, nevertheless these political, linguistic, medical, ethical, religious and philosophical formations of the “person” are significant, and do not simply disappear because the internet has been globalized. It should come as no surprise that psychic and political life should be implicated in these differences, whatever the evolutionary psychologists may say about universal or “hard-wired” emotions.

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In consideration of these questions, our conference invited participants to reflect on the issues of difference as a general problematic for the theme of “Lacan in East Asia,” and to explore the transformation or deformation that psychoanalysis might undergo in this very different cultural, political, philosophical, medical and religious environment. But the conference theme in no way demanded any explicit treatment of East Asian topics. In fact, many of the participating scholars had received their degrees from the United States and France, in philosophy or literature, and did not themselves identify their work as necessarily related to East Asian culture, and from an institutional point of view, we were more interested in
exploring what East Asian scholars of psychoanalysis were actually thinking and writing, and in building a foundation for future work together, than we were in producing anything like an “East Asian identity” for such research, which would have run against the intellectual grain of all our participants. As a result, “Lacan in East Asia” acquired a double, perhaps somewhat contradictory signification, and came to designate a kind of “split subject” for the conference as a whole: on the one hand, this title invited papers in psychoanalysis that engaged directly with the context of East Asia; but on the other hand, it aimed to explore work in psychoanalysis being done in the scholarly community of East Asia without necessarily bearing on East Asia in any way. “Lacan in East Asia” thus came to designate an exploration of this very duplicity.

In thinking about the organization of this volume, then, the editors initially considered some familiar structural divisions, the most obvious being the division between “theory” and “practice,” which is simultaneously a division based on content, with the “site-specific” papers focused on East Asian material forming a quasi-natural group. Such a division would separate papers dealing explicitly with East Asia from the theoretical papers dealing with contemporary French thought. And indeed, this issue could be read with such a framework in mind, with some essays dealing directly with East Asian material, and others being situated in the field of French philosophy and Lacanian theory.

On this first approach, the articles dealing with East Asian material might be said to form a group. Thus Joyce Liu, in “Force of Psyche,” deals with the historical background of the late Qing dynasty, and the importation of Western (especially American) models of psychic health, grounded in the science of electricity, into the context of Chinese debates about modernization and political reform at the end of the nineteenth century. Likewise, Mirana Szeto explores the more recent political struggles over the Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea, and the peculiar way in which these small fragments of rock have been invested with the fervor of Chinese nationalism, in a manner that extends beyond Diaoyutai, from Hong Kong and China to Japan, Taiwan and expatriot communities in the United States. Hung-chiu Li’s work belongs with this group of papers in that his work addresses the recent and highly emotional street protests that took place in Taiwan on the occasion of the last presidential election. Similarly, Chaoyang Liao’s comparative study of Sophocles’ heroine in Antigone and the figure of Minzhi in Zhang Yimou’s Not One Less seems naturally to belong in the group of papers explicitly devoted to exploring cultural difference, and developing the perspective of East Asia.
A second set of papers, by contrast, initially appeared to be “purely theoretical,” dealing mainly with issues internal to Lacanian theory, or with the relations between Lacan and the philosophical tradition. Thus, one might imagine Kazuyuki Hara’s paper on Lacan and Derrida, or Sang-Hwan Kim’s paper on Hegel, Heidegger and Lacan, as examples of purely theoretical work—work that would not provide any particular “perspective” on the question of “East Asian perspectives.” Likewise Chien-Heng Wu’s paper on Lacan and Derrida, concerned as it is with correcting Slavoj Žižek’s somewhat polemical (Wu calls it “unfavorable” and “disparaging”) criticism of Derrida’s later work, might well be regarded as a “theoretical” contribution that has no particular bearing on the question of “East Asian perspectives.” Tsung-Huei Huang’s paper on shame and animal rights, focusing as it does on the function of photography, the politics of affect, and some details of Lacanian theory, might also appear to belong to this “theoretical” group. The division of labor between theory and practice seemed to provide a natural principle of classification, grounded in explicit content (and thus isolating the papers dealing with East Asian material).

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On further consideration, however, this division of intellectual labor appeared too hasty. In fact, it soon proved profoundly misleading: based on a fiction of binary difference, it obscured the true character of the work we were presenting, and closed down the question we were seeking to pose, regarding what might constitute an “East Asian perspective” in contemporary scholarly life. For on closer consideration, it became clear that the “purely theoretical” papers intervene in standard debates among Western scholars, disrupting received opinion about Lacan, and functioning like a “thought from outside” (to borrow Foucault’s formulation on Blanchot), not only displacing the established formulae that govern current debates in the West, but simultaneously providing a subterranean “perspective” on psychoanalysis that, without expressing any “East Asian identity,” may direct us toward a clearer sense of the fault lines and differences that distinguish “psychoanalysis in East Asia,” and allow it to disrupt the platitudes and paradigms that are so sedimented in the “West” today. If this is so, however—if the “purely theoretical” essays in this collection may be said to represent, in an unexpected and subterranean way, something like an East Asian perspective—this means that the

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reference “East Asian” no longer functions in binary opposition with respect to “Western” thought. If, in fact, an East Asian perspective might emerge on the “Western” side of our editorial division, in the “purely theoretical” group of papers, then East and West no longer function as a binary opposition, based only on explicit content or geography. This does not mean that difference has disappeared, but that it has begun to function along new fault lines, in a fashion that we will call *incalculable*. To pretend that only those papers dealing explicitly with East Asian material could count as articulating an “East Asian perspective” (if this is still the right terminology) was to blind ourselves to the way that knowledge was actually operating in the essays. As a result, our initial editorial categorization had to be displaced.

In order to clarify the displacement that we have just so briefly sketched, let us press this point a little further, taking some of these papers as examples (we will return to the term “example”). We have suggested that the “theoretical” papers dealing “only” with French philosophy might be seen as opening a space, a set of discursive possibilities, that contribute to our theme of “East Asian perspectives.” Thus Kazuyuki Hara, for example, provides a meticulous account of Lacan’s work on the “neighbor” in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, and Lacan’s reworking of Freud’s treatment of the “neighbor” (in its two rather different formulations, *das Nebenmensch* and *der Nächste*). Hara then compares that account, in which the very emergence of the subject entails an unexpected proximity and internalization of the “other,” to Derrida’s treatment of “the friend” in *The Politics of Friendship*, which reveals an unexpected instability in the boundary of the “self” and “identity.” Hara’s aim is not to choose one figure over the other, or indeed to show that their positions are the same, but to explore what he calls a certain homology that brings these two thinkers much closer than the critical reception of either has generally recognized, and he does this while insisting that the concept of “love” that both thinkers explore, as a concept that subverts our normal understanding of the border between the friend and enemy, self and other, or love and hate, is a discovery they both share and articulate with considerable intimacy or proximity of thought, yet without becoming mirror images of each other.

Likewise Sang-Hwan Kim revives the question of the “end of metaphysics,” a question that seems to have been relegated to the past in most recent cultural criticism in the West, as if the obsession with “grand narratives” that held center stage for so long a decade ago had now been dealt with and surpassed by more localized forms of “cultural critique.” The turn from “high theory” in the 1970s and 1980s to more expressly political or historical work, however, while certainly
productive in itself, has nevertheless allowed certain important philosophical questions to recede, as if the “crisis of meaning” explored by Derrida and others could be left behind, and familiar forms of (historical and positivistic) discourse could return “after theory.” If one turns to the leading journals in contemporary cultural theory in the United States today, the strong critique of foundationalism that appeared in Heidegger, Derrida and others, in which the very operation of reason was forced to encounter its own blindesses and instabilities—a critique that also led, in Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault and others to some highly productive, experimental and quasi-poetical forms of discourse in philosophy—now seems to belong to the past, having been superseded by the recent turn to more historical and empirical work, conducted in a sober and earnest tone.

It is this comfortable and familiar arrangement that Sang-hwan Kim disrupts, making a striking and very useful intervention in at least two ways. First, he puts psychoanalysis back into conversation with the longer philosophical tradition in which Lacan himself so often situated it, and he traces the motif of “night” as a figure for the end of metaphysics, a figure that Hegel already used and that Derrida explored at some length, but that Kim resituates in relation to psychoanalysis, which might well be regarded as the “science of the night,” turning as it does to the dream, the unconscious, and the nocturnal world of the subject. What place does psychoanalysis occupy in the history of metaphysics, and how should we really understand the philosophical importance of Lacan’s work in the broader trajectory defined by Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida? Obvious as this question may seem, it is quite surprising that, in Western journals, most recent philosophical discussions of the Heideggerian trajectory simply by-pass psychoanalysis, as if it were too obscure, or too mired in clinical material, too concerned with the “personal” or the “sexual,” or indeed “insufficiently philosophical,” when in fact Lacan’s work was clearly intended to situate Freud in the broader history of metaphysics, where he believed the most radical claims of psychoanalysis could acquire their greatest weight. But if philosophy has tended to neglect psychoanalysis (apart from the important exception of feminist theory), on the “other side,” the most visible Lacanian theorists have repeatedly denounced the attempt to situate Lacan in the philosophical tradition, insisting that Lacan’s exclusive and privileged radicality was somehow “purely psychoanalytic,” or (even more narrowly) exclusively “Lacanian,” with the unfortunate result that Lacan has been isolated in a community of cultish “followers,” and has largely been read “against” Foucault, “against” Derrida and Heidegger, and indeed “against” philosophy as such (philosophy being condemned as simply another “master discourse,” which psychoanalysis obviously
rejects)—as if philosophy were simply an exercise of pure reason, and as if philosophy had not undergone the massive upheavals that Lacan himself so clearly recognized.

As we have seen, Hara’s careful engagement breaks with these imaginary rivalries that have polarized readers of Derrida and Lacan in most American and European scholarship, and made “friendship” between them impossible. And in a similar way, Kim likewise returns Lacan to the broader intellectual context where he belongs, and from that horizon explores the particular “subversion of the subject” that psychoanalysis entails. Secondly—and here again we touch on the theme of “East Asian perspectives”—Kim writes in a precise but also evocative manner, with stylistic gestures and flourishes that reach towards a larger, less reductively propositional kind of thought. From the standpoint of psychoanalysis, he asks, could the end of metaphysics not perhaps be interpreted as a weakening of the name-of-the-father? And if so, rather than lamenting this demise of paternal authority, and construing it as a sign of cultural corruption (as a growing number of European Lacanians are currently doing), should we not enter into this historical space, to explore it and even celebrate it for the new possibilities it affords? Does Lacan’s analysis of this weakening of the paternal function, along with his increasing attention to the tenuous, vulnerable, always-compromised consistency of the imaginary, symbolic and real, their subjection to the unbinding work of the death drive, not likewise serve as a way of exploring the end of metaphysics? And if this is so, might we not also consider that the increasingly porous and unstable boundary between “Orient” and “Occident” today, the contemporary disappearance of any simple boundary or difference, is likewise implicated in what philosophers have called the end of metaphysics, when the sun no longer passes from East to West, heliocentrism having been permanently marked by the night of the unconscious? Kim suggests, moreover, that the disappearance or erosion of the border between East and West might also be attributed to the global reign of capital and technology, which now function as a type of “universal reason,” replacing the differences that used to be organized under the name “culture.” But if this is so, if we are indeed faced with a globalized universal techno-economic language machine that recognizes no borders and allows instant communication and normalization across languages—and this thesis has often been proposed in recent years—then might we not have to consider, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that capital and technology now function as contemporary names-of-the-father, which means that these dominant global forms may be more of a symptôme than a foundational truth for symbolic exchange, and that these new modes of organization provide only a
kind of prosthetic and artificial synthesis, concealing the end of metaphysics under the illusion of a new foundation, and producing a new *synth-homme* or “synthesized man,” the subject of this artificial synthesis, a subject that has no deeper ontological foundation, which also means a subject that is awaiting what Kim calls a “new historical sunrise”?

From our perspective, then, it seems that the “purely theoretical” papers actually articulate a position that intervenes in the established pieties of Western theory, and that may therefore be considered as contributions from an “East Asian perspective.” And the appropriateness of such a hypothesis would be all the more confirmed if one considers that these “theoretical” papers in no way express an obvious “East Asian perspective,” at least not in the way that would confirm the traditional expectations of Orientalism. Like Hará and Kim, Wu invites us to consider a much more intimate relation between Lacan and Derrida, and if his paper serves as a critique not only of Žižek’s reading of Derrida, but also of the general tendency to set these two thinkers into a tedious opposition, such that readers of one are automatically obliged to denounce the other, then we may well ask ourselves whether this new perspective on French thought deserves to be considered as an “East Asian perspective.” But the difference that such a perspective might offer cannot be localized in a region or ideology, in a religious belief or a national identity, along the familiar oppositional lines that previously separated “East” and “West” in a simple opposition. These papers thus offer something like an example of an “East Asian perspective” that is truer to the way these cultural differences actually operate today, in all their enigmatic intertwining which hardly leaves all difference behind.

If the theoretical papers could lay claim to articulating a certain “East Asian perspective,” so too the “practical” papers, dealing explicitly with East Asian content, could not be situated so easily on the “Oriental” side of this division. For in fact all these papers stand squarely within the familiar paradigms of Western knowledge, not only operating within the boundaries of an archive familiar to Western scholars (Lacan, post-colonial theory, Foucault, psychoanalysis), but even contributing to that field as much as our more exclusively theoretical papers. To categorize these essays by confining them in advance to the “regional” domain of “East Asian studies” would be to misrepresent their actual arguments, procedures, and contributions.

Consider for example Joyce Liu’s paper tracing debates on psychic health and political identity in the late Qing dynasty, which draws heavily on the work of Foucault and other theorists of governmentality, as well as on Lacan and Badiou.
This paper traces the peculiar path by which the nineteenth-century American “New Thought Movement,” a curious mixture of modern science (chemistry and electricity), Christianity, and spiritual healing, was imported into late Qing China by the missionary John Fryer (1839-1928), who lived in China for 35 years and translated over 130 books into Chinese, among them a book by the American Henry Wood entitled *Ideal Suggestion Through Mental Photography*, a book with surprising echoes in Emerson and Thoreau. In China, of course, these theories were transplanted, mixed with Buddhist and Confucian thought, threaded into different imaginary and symbolic networks, inserted into local debates about political modernization and population management following the defeat of the Chinese in the First Sino-Japanese War (1895), and deployed as part of an effort to purge the Chinese body politic of its decadent, opium-smoking, foot-binding, superstitious and backwards culture. The discourse that emerged out of this American transplant to fashion a new, modernized, hygienic, psychically healthy and manageable population, promoted by late Qing reformers, would remain very much alive through the period of Mao Zedong, and would appear in Chiang Kai-Shek’s *Law of the Heart for Revolution* (1934). Given its meticulous detail and embeddedness in the late Qing dynasty, one might wish to confine this work to the area of “East Asian Studies,” but here again its theoretical contribution is equally significant, its procedures are fully inscribed in contemporary French philosophy and cultural theory, and more than this, Western readers may be especially struck to find in Liu’s analysis an image of nineteenth-century American spiritualism that runs quite counter to the canonical images of Transcendentalism. If there is an “East Asian perspective” here, as there obviously is at several levels, one cannot grasp that perspective by appealing to traditional dichotomies of East and West, which are thoroughly exploded by this paper.

Or again, to take another example, consider Szeto’s paper, which traces the dynamics of nationalism and the intractable dimension of *jouissance* in the political field. Precise and detailed in its elaboration of a particular geo-political site of conflict, this paper nevertheless traces that conflict in its reverberations far beyond Diaoyutai, across East Asia from Hong Kong and China to Japan and Taiwan, and beyond to the British colonial regime and the diasporic Chinese community in the United States. And in the process, Szeto deploys Lacanian theory to distinguish democracy from nationalism, in a way that belongs squarely within the political discourses that characterize contemporary Western theory. It would be misleading to pretend that these two papers represent an “East Asian perspective” in any obvious way, even if they offer a perspective on East Asia, which is a very different
manner. In fact, it might well be argued that these two papers belong in the “theoretical” group, since the contribution they make belongs to that domain as much as to the “practical” or “geo-historical” domain.

Another point is worthy of mention in this context, for these two papers, mapping as they do the surprising and highly overdetermined layers of mutual influence that bind the “East” and “West” to one another, deploy psychoanalytic theory in a fashion that is immediately and seamlessly integrated with contemporary post-colonial theory. The easy fluency that these essays establish between psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory appears so natural and self-evident that readers may not be struck with the shock that they should experience here: for in the United States, apart from a few notable exceptions, psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory have been opposed to one another for many years, rivals in the academic world. In East Asia, this is simply not the case. Anyone familiar with scholarly production in East Asia will know that these two fields have a remarkable and productive influence on one another. In this sense, one could say that the papers of Liu and Szeto make a contribution at the theoretical level as much as they do in the domain of “East Asian” studies. Here again, the convenient binary opposition between East and West simply fails to register what these papers accomplish, or to capture the force of scholarly knowledge in its actual practice and fecundity. Likewise, Li Hung-Chiung’s paper on the recent Taiwan election is fully immersed in its local context, which concerns the heated local debates around Taiwan’s democracy—its difficult and currently shifting relation with mainland China, its fraught colonial experience, first with Japan and then with the generation of 1949ers who occupied Taiwan when Chiang Kai-Shek brought the Chinese government-in-exile there during the period of Mao’s rise to power and the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 (a second colonization brokered by the United States at the end of WWII, when Japan was removed from the island), and finally, the larger geopolitical horizon, which included recognition of Taiwan as one of the founding members of the United Nations, followed by the removal of Taiwan from this same body in 1971, when the People’s Republic was recognized as the legitimate government of China following Nixon’s trip to China). But here again, in spite of this “local” immersion in East Asia, this paper is a precise and rather technical analysis of details in Lacanian theory, particularly in regard to the “four discourses” elaborated in the recently published *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Does this paper provide an “East Asian perspective”? Our conclusion is that it does, but not at the level one might expect. For it is not on account of its treatment of Taiwan’s politics, but rather at the theoretical level, that
this perspective is genuinely registered, in the way Li’s analysis advances the possibilities for psychoanalytic theory in the domain of geopolitical analysis, without reactivating the sterile and stagnating polemics that are so common in Western debates about psychoanalysis, and that separate Lacan from post-colonial theory in such provincial and unnecessary ways.

The papers that seemed at first sight to be “purely theoretical,” and appear to have no relation to East Asia, thus intervene in current arrangements of scholarly discourse, challenging the established positions of the West in a fashion that may indicate a certain “East Asian perspective,” even as they operate in a “purely theoretical” mode. And the essays dealing more directly with East Asia, while taking that region as their focus or content, do not necessarily provide any obviously “East Asian perspective” on psychoanalysis, but function as forms of analysis that are entirely consonant with those one finds in contemporary Western journals. Unless one wishes to say that the topic of East Asia automatically generates an “East Asian perspective,” which is not a position we hold, this second group of papers cannot be said to represent such a perspective any more than the “purely theoretical” group that is concerned with Lacan’s relation to philosophy.

As a result, our editorial division of labor collapsed. And this collapse raised our initial question to a new level. If the “obvious” division between “Western” papers (so-called because they are purely theoretical, or because they focused on French philosophy) and “Eastern” papers (so-called because of their content) was insufficient, this is because the very conception of the border between East and West that it presupposed was poorly articulated. Not only was this editorial division (based on first appearances) too hasty, but in grasping “difference” too quickly, and with too-familiar concepts, it actually concealed the very issue that we were seeking to address. For in fact, just as the clear binary division between “East” and “West” no longer serves to clarify the geo-political reality of cultural difference in our contemporary situation, so also the “obvious” editorial divisions we first considered began to seem misleading: indeed, these tempting editorial divisions actually concealed what an “East Asian perspective” might mean for contemporary thought.

If there is an “East Asian perspective,” or a plurality of such perspectives, in the essays that follow (which are not divided or classified at all), that perspective would have to be grasped without appealing to the binary logic of Orientalism, but rather by following the multiple, unexpected, intersecting and subterranean paths of thought that actually characterize contemporary thought in its unstable and destabilizing reality. Thus, these essays, taken as a whole, may be read as “examples,” in the plural, of East Asian perspectives, and we intend “example” in
the Kantian sense: not as norms to be followed, or models to imitate, or classes that can be unified by a common procedure, but rather as singularities that reveal a community in formation. In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant observes that the peculiarity of artistic production is that it cannot follow any rule or norm, but must disrupt all precedent, yet in a way that allows some continuity, some recognizable community, to emerge, and to allow the reflective judgment of the audience to receive it as an “example.” For this reason, the act of reception must also exercise its freedom, not in the ethical sense of a freedom that determines itself freely under the moral law, but a freedom that is closer to the “free play of imagination,” and that cannot be understood with reference to any model or norm. Thus, these essays invite the reader to take them as examples of what “East Asian perspectives on psychoanalysis” might mean today. If they do articulate such a perspective, or set of open possibilities for difference at perhaps a particular historical moment, this perspective will appear in unexpected ways, in the manner of the incalculable, which the reader is invited to encounter.

**About the Author**

Charles Shepherdson works at the intersections of literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis. He is the author of *Vital Signs: Nature, Culture, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge), *Lacan and the Limits of Language* (Fordham), and *The Epoch of the Body* (Stanford, forthcoming), as well as collections of essays translated into Serbo-Croatian and Korean. He has received support from the Henry A. Luce Foundation, the Andrew Mellon Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. He has held fellowships at the Claremont Graduate School, the University of Virginia, the Pembroke Center at Brown University, and the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He was appointed to the Senior Specialist Roster in American Studies with the Fulbright Program for 2006-11, and he taught in Taiwan from 2006-08 as a National Science Council Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University and National Taiwan University.

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