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Introduction to "Naming Modernity: Rebranding and Neologisms during China's Interwar Global Moment in Eastern Asia"

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In a 2011 video installation, Hanoi art collective the Propeller Group set out to "rebrand" Communism in the visual language of TV commercials, mocking contemporary global "progressive" discourses. The Propeller Group used this kind of postmillennial rebranding to mock both capitalist advertising and Communist propaganda in Vietnam. Such rebranding, however, is neither new nor limited to challenging public art. Political and cultural rebranding, which involves new labels and discourses and aims to develop a new identity, was not a term used to describe Mao's recasting of Soviet Marxism for Chinese use in the 1930s (he called it "the Sinification of Marxism"). However, the current Chinese government has embarked on a campaign to effectively rebrand Marxism and socialism with Chinese characteristics that any Madison Avenue advertising agency could understand, with campaigns to revive the "Red classics" that appeal to the nostalgia of those who lived through the pre-reform era (1949–1978). This rebranded Marxism remains the space in which revolutionary nationalism has driven China to become a central international power. Similarly, a rebranding of China's indigenous ideology, Confucianism, has provided credentials for China to participate in the global capitalist project (Liu 2010; Mao 2014). Rebranding involves creating new words and repurposing common words to achieve new goals. While "rebranding" is a term we associate with capitalist advertising, the comprehensive application of adaptation and diversion to new purposes is just what we see in the vibrant intellectual world of the interwar years.

The six articles in this special issue of *Cross-Currents* present case studies in which the national has been "rebranded" as international, and international ideas and institutions have been recast as local in China, Japan, and Korea during the interwar global internationalist moment (1919–1937). Of course, such rebranding was not the conscious goal of the Japanese Communist Party's (JCP's) focus on the Chinese Revolution, of the

modernization of Chinese popular religious traditions such as Tiandijiao, of Korean students' appropriation of Asianism for the needs of the Korean independence movement, of Chinese Communists posing Sun Yat-sen's principle of an alliance of the oppressed as a form of Comintern internationalism, or of the reinvention by the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD) of the idea of a China-centered Asian alliance based on borrowing the organizational imagination of the League of Nations and the Comintern. Yet behind all of these examples lies a process of organizational borrowing and blending in key areas such as religion, nationalism, and external conduct. These efforts, in turn, rebranded the resulting identities, institutions, and ideas as "modern." Moreover, ideas and images that had emerged between the wars were then adopted in the same mode after the war in Southeast Asia. Mao's Sinified Marxism, the best-known adaptation of the interwar period, became the inspiration for further adaptation in Pol Pot's postwar Cambodia.

These efforts at "rebranding" by various actors in Korea and Japan were shaped by the same structural factors of the global moment as in China. These factors included the expansion of networks, the changed geopolitical situation (Cheek and Yeh 2016), and governance needs. In all of the case studies presented in this special issue, actors in China, Korea, and Japan sought to cope with local challenges in a time of crisis, responses that were materially shaped by the circulation of ideas and the challenges of the day. The interwar ideological moment was shaped by violence, national crisis, Japanese aggression, and the impact of World War I, as Professors Timothy Cheek and Wen-hsin Yeh (2016) noted in the keynote address for the workshop that inspired this volume.[1] Given the extraordinary global synchronicity of the time (Zachmann 2017), the Versailles Treaty (1919), the Great Depression, and Japanese aggression amplified crises in colonial Korea and in Japan itself (Ward 2014). The historical context and ideological moment of the interwar global world as it refracted in Eastern Asia is the focus of this special issue.

The concept of rebranding, while certainly anachronistic for the interwar actors, can nonetheless help us make sense of what Cheek and Yeh have called the distinctiveness of interactions in East Asia in "the simultaneity of the transformation in these three dimensions [systems of thought, cultural institutions, and social identities] and the rapidity of their change" (Cheek and Yeh 2016). The collapse of "ideas, institutions, and identities… tightly intertwined under the traditional state" combined with the encounter with modernity to spur crises in Japan, China, and Korea. Cheek and Yeh argue, "This approach views modernity as both an intellectual venture and a lived experience" (Cheek and Yeh 2016). However,

imperial traditions and legacies nonetheless continued to inform new ideas and institutions and, I argue, acted as the basis for rebranding each polity via "modern" internationalism. At the same time, "Modern systems of thought gave life to social institutions and generated new social roles and identities in China's tumultuous transition during the first half of the twentieth century" (Culp, U, and Yeh 2016, quoted in Cheek and Yeh 2016). A comparable mechanism integrating endogenous and exogenous resources is visible in the reinvention and adaptation in our case studies in Korea, Japan, and Cambodia. This special issue seeks to reframe the interwar experience of modernity, nationalism, and internationalism by juxtaposing detailed examples from across Eastern Asia. If Chinese modernity was formed by such a dynamic interaction among ideas, institutions, and identities as Culp, U, and Yeh suggest, how did this dynamic operate in other Eastern Asian polities? What can these cases add to our overall picture of the interwar world?

Historiography

Continuity and adaptation as conditions for the adoption of the new in place of the old have been key in the transformation of institutions, ideas, and identities in China, Japan, and Korea (Schwartz 1964; Westney 1987; Davidann 1998; Moon 2013). The adoption of a new concept takes place at crucial moments when the challenges of new realities are not answered with old conceptual apparatuses, as was the case with the Hakka's adoption of Christianity amid their land conflict with locals during the Taiping War (Kuhn 1977). The borrowing of ideas perceived as international and modern produced organizational and ideological hybridity in Buddhism across East Asia (Pittman 2001; Kim 2013) and in Chinese Communism (Perry 2012; Yeh 1996).

Rebranding in this regard draws on several earlier studies of the transformation of institutions, identities, and ideas in interwar Eastern Asia. One is Wen-hsin Yeh's view of May Fourth cultural iconoclasm, which led to the spread of Marxism in Zhejiang Province as "more than a sweeping attack against the past on behalf of the future," as "a quest for a new self-understanding by the generation poised at a transformative juncture in the province's life" (Yeh 1996, 5). Another is historian of Chinese religion Rebecca Nedostup's examination of how national surveys introduced new "modern" international categories and neologisms that produced new realities in China's religious life and were employed for nation building by the GMD (2009). In a broader Asian context, scholars have addressed how local forms have been rebranded as international with regard to definitions of national strength—for example,

through the adoption and adaptation of the international and the rebranding of the indigenous as modern with regard to physical cultivation (Singleton 2007; Antolihao 2015). Historian of Chinese Buddhism Brooks Jessup (2016) shows the reinvention of Buddhist animal protection ideas and the formation of civic institutions via the borrowing of organizational techniques from British organizations. Cultural and business historians Sin Yee Theng and Nicolai Volland (2015) have productively used the term "rebranding" to describe the trend of Southeast Asian Chinese business owners rebranding themselves as patriots, which allowed them to boost their businesses.

Because scholarship on China, as well as on Korea and Japan, is largely compartmentalized by theme, the topics covered in this volume—Chinese and Japanese Communism Buddhist redemptive societies, China's geopolitical vision, the Korean independence movement—have not been addressed as part of the same research interest in organizational and ideological hybridity. Likewise, how the adoption of new ideas relates to organizational innovation has not been addressed equally across these fields. Collectively, the articles in this special issue help us make sense of the mechanism of adopting "the modern" in the interwar global moment by reinventing the national "old" as the international "new" in the Chinese context and by examining how this adoption was related to China—outside its spatial borders and outside the temporal scope of the interwar moment—through the contemporary concept of rebranding.

Although internationalism is perceived as the opposite of nationalism, in interwar Eastern Asia, these concepts were intertwined. Historian of the United States Erez Manela (2007) has shown how Wilsonian internationalism was the trigger for nationalism worldwide, and scholars have emphasized the continuity rather than the rupture of nationalism and internationalism in the May Fourth movement (Müller 2017; Xu 2010) and the common origins of both in the Versailles conference and in post-Versailles Japan (Stegewerns 2003; Doak 2017; Weber 2017). Nationalism and internationalism are laced together in the institutions, identities, and ideas discussed in the case studies presented here. Previous studies have missed or minimized these connections, and it is the rupture between the two that is usually the focus of studies of interwar transformation pertaining to these themes. All of these cases—despite different modalities of rebranding, reinventing, and adapting neologisms and foreign ideas—show that what we commonly consider to have been ruptures between traditional and modern were, in fact, continuities based on "legacies of the imperial state and its sponsored traditions" (Cheek and Yeh 2016). These continuities bridged the seemingly

incompatible dichotomies of the modern and the traditional and served rather as "translations" of those concepts, as Wen-hsin Yeh noted in the keynote address at the "Beyond the Sinosphere" conference at which the idea for this special issue arose.

What Do We Contribute?

The case studies in this volume raise seldom-addressed questions regarding the East Asian historiography of the interwar period. They examine the rebranding of ideas, such as the White Lotus as Tiandijiao; Sun Yat-sen's internationalist nationalism as Comintern internationalism; and the Asianist vision as the Chinese Revolution, Korean independence, and China's policy in Southeast Asia. Institutions were also rebranded, including the Japanese Communist Party, Chinese Communist organizations, and the regional Asian alliance under the Chinese Nationalist Party, the GMD, leadership (which was rebranded as the International of Nations). Finally, there was the rebranding of identities, such as Pol Pot's Cambodia as Maoist and the Japanese Communist Party, Korean student movement, and GMD policies as internationalist. Transnational networks were conduits for the circulation of ideas and peoples and shaped adaptations, neologisms, geopolitical visions, and organizational forms, which channeled the rebranding that bridged the traditional and the modern.

David Ownby, whose notion of "rebranding" inspired the theme of this special issue, examines the modernization of the White Lotus tradition through the categories and neologisms of science, which shaped the organization and ideas of the redemptive society Tiandijiao. While insisting on the relevance of Chinese tradition and in this way representing a countercurrent to the iconoclastic New Culture movement, Li Yujie, the founder of the society, still borrowed new terms from modern science, such as from quantum physics. As Ownby notes, in this synthesis, Li transcended the dichotomies of traditional and modern, superstition and religion. At the same time, his embrace of Chinese tradition and Christianity had relevance to the "cultural nationalism" of the Guomindang government elite. With the cosmopolitanism of his teachings—which included elements of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism—and his spiritual practice, Li sought to contribute to the anti-Japanese war effort.

Craig A. Smith demonstrates how the discourse surrounding China's sphere of interest in Asia and Sun Yat-sen's proposal of an alliance with the weak and oppressed nations, which originated in his Asianist ideas, was rebranded by borrowing the League of Nations and Comintern global imagery for the concept of the International of Nations. Sun's Asianism was later appropriated in turn and rebranded by the Japanese as an Asianist justification for

imperialism. The GMD's policy of countering Japan in Southeast Asia was seen as a revival of the tributary system (Shin 2009), but it has never been explored as designed, which was in counterbalance with and borrowing from the Comintern and the League of Nations, using institutional borrowing and the neologism of the International of Nations, the *minzu guoji*.

My own contribution to this special issue further shows that, as Chinese Communists overseas dealt with discrimination, they regarded themselves as contributing to the modernization of China. They translated and rebranded Sun Yatsen's ideas of an alliance with the oppressed nations for the purpose of China's revival as Comintern internationalism and borrowed geopolitical visions from the Comintern to liberate Southeast Asia and the Americas from imperialism. The result of this translation in the transnational networks of Chinese Communists was institutional borrowing from Comintern international organizations.

Tatiana Linkhoeva shows how Japanese Communists, following the Comintern policy of promoting international support of the Chinese Revolution, rebranded the Chinese Revolution as central to Japanese and Asian emancipation. It was a method of self-redemption —and organizational rebranding—within the Japanese Communist Party in an atmosphere of growing nationalism and political oppression in Japan. It is uncertain to what extent this rebranding also harked back to the Asianist ideas of Sun Yat-sen's associate Miyazaki Toten, or to the ideas of Russian intellectuals like Sun Yat-sen's penmate Nikolai Sudzilovsky-Russel regarding the importance of the Chinese Revolution for the liberation of Asia and Russia (Szpilman 2011; Tikhonov 2016). Yet Asianist ideas permeated a wide range of intellectual and political currents in Asia after the China Pan-Asian conferences in opposition to the League of Nations of 1926–1927 failed due to Japanese aggression in China (Weber 2017). We see this trend in my own article as well as in the articles by Smith, Linkhoeva, and Neuhaus.

Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus argues that it is precisely because of the legacy of Japanese imperialism that the theme of pan-Asian ideas in the Korean independence movement, triggered by disappointment in the Versailles Treaty, has not previously been acknowledged. Korean students in Japan recast Asianist ideas drawing on and rebranding "traditional" values of Asian civilization as a modern Asianist ideology for the liberation of Korea from both Western and Japanese domination through engagement with transnational networks of Taiwanese and Chinese students. The GMD's Asianist policy, the Chinese Communist geopolitical vision, "traditional" internationalism based on ancient ideas of Datong and Tianxia, and the attention Korean students and Japanese Communists paid to the liberation of

Asia and China reflect the negotiation of China's historical role as a benevolent leader in Asia in the twentieth century.

Finally, Matthew Galway examines how China's role—as echoed in Pol Pot's postwar rebranding of Cambodia through Mao's interwar writings on the Sinification of Marxism, also drawing on Buddhism—shows the postwar life of interwar adaptations and how such adaptations happened via comparable rebranding modes. Mao's Sinification of Marxism itself was a product of the interwar global moment, and its alleged universality was precisely the reason why it became the label and the modality of the rebranded indigenous Kampuchean anti-Vietnamese Marxism of Pol Pot.

To sum up, reinvention, adoption, and adaptation, which we call "rebranding," involved new words—neologisms—as labels for modernity. These neologisms included the International of Nations, the e-tropons of Li Yujie, and Pol Pot's Kampucheanized Marxism. There was also the rebranding of "traditional" ideas and identities as "modern" in the cases of Sun Yat-sen's ideas, Buddhism, and Asian "civilization." New words were adopted because of the imperative for social actors to justify their views vis-à-vis their opponents using the frame of reference of an external justification (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). The "modern" international has served as such a frame of reference in all of these case studies.

Rebranding: A New Agenda?

Collectively, these essays show how the ideas of Asian and world unity and internationalism and science leading to modernity contributed to the path of national survival for Korea, Japan, China, and postwar Cambodia, though the price paid was violence and human tragedy in almost all of these cases. During the 1930s, as Mao Zedong was rebranding Marxism for China's conditions, he recognized that ideology as one that would be capable of mobilizing China, according to China specialists Apter and Saich, "as a form of power requires symbolic capital," so Mao's goal was to invent a discourse community that could generate symbolic capital (1994, 113, 136). The cases of rebranding in this special issue did just that. The JCP, Chinese Communists, the GMD with its International of Nations, Li Yujie, Korean students, and Pol Pot all drew on existing traditional systems of thought to generate new ideas, institutions, and identities.

The contributions of these articles lie at the intersection of the distinct discourse communities of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian, and global histories and raise new questions. It is clear that local developments cannot be understood without a basic

understanding of these translocal and global interactions. We hope this special issue sheds some light on how local contexts, contingent events, and transnational networks shape adaptations of the categories of governance, geopolitical visions, and organizational forms during the interwar global moment in Eastern Asia, as well as on the role of China in this Sinosphere (Fogel 2009), which, based on this rebranding, also includes postwar Cambodia, as well as Chinese communities outside of China.

What can we learn from the historical precedents of ideological rebranding during the interwar period? Today, as economic globalization conceptualized as physical cross-border circulations of goods is seemingly under question (Ghemawat 2017), China presents itself as its proponent, shouldering the responsibility of world leadership and promoting adaptation to the conditions of globalization (Xi 2017). The similar binary language of globalization and protectionism invokes comparisons with the interwar time, a peculiar era during which the rise of economic protectionism amid the Great Depression led scholars to announce the end of the globalization that had started in the nineteenth century (Boyce 2009). At the same time, as this special issue shows, during the interwar period there was an unprecedented transnational circulation of ideas and people whose aspirations transcended nations and were truly global. While concerns regarding national survival were real in many contexts, national discourses often became vehicles for larger concerns and regional imaginations. Many of these manifested through the processes of rebranding and the adoption of neologisms, as the quest for modernity required at the time. Both highlighted global connections and imaginations. How can the neologisms, rebranding, and institutional innovations from the interwar time illuminate those happening now in China—the rebranding of Maoism and Marxism being one example, or the very rebranding of China's place in the world?

"Beyond the Sinosphere" Workshop

The articles in this special issue were gathered from twenty-one papers first presented at the conference "Beyond the Sinosphere—Modalities of Interwar Globalization: Internationalism and Indigenization among East Asian Marxists, Christians, and Buddhists, 1919–1945," hosted in July 2016 by Freie Universität Berlin's Graduate School of East Asian Studies in Hanover, Germany.[2] This conference set out to formulate a framework through which scholars could explain the similar mixture of ideologies and organizational structures among interwar Communist, Christian, and Buddhist movements.

During the 1920s and 1930s, ideologies and organizations overlapped and cross-pollinated, producing what we now see as hybrid ideologies, which propagated utopian visions of global modernity. Urban environments that enabled border crossing for individuals with few resources and the print media brought people together. The three movements were Braudelian worlds and networks with long-standing exchanges of ideas and people. Parallels and connections among the movements' discourses and organizations, as well as their overlapping social networks, are a window into the world of alternative historical imaginations of the interwar ideological global moment. These imaginations were obscured by narratives of hostility and incompatibility created on both sides of the Iron Curtain during the highest tensions of the Cold War in the period after 1945, which was marked by the defeat of Germany and Japan. The conference papers captured the contexts, conjunctures, and connections of the ideological and organizational hybridity of the "roads not taken."

The conference sought to reframe the narrative of the interwar period in China and East Asia. One such narrative is that of the foundation of revolutionary China, which grew out of the May Fourth movement of 1919. Reframing this account requires a methodology that does not judge historical materials by the values of the contemporary world but rather practices rigorous contextualization. Such an approach allows researchers to pay attention to spatiality and take the challenges of juxtaposition and comparison from global history, critically examining translations between local and global contexts. The following themes are important for understanding the context of the interwar time: the points of connectivity and interaction between the three movements; the response to crisis; the conjuncture and competition between the three movements and redemptive societies through print culture and shared institutional techniques; the commercial world of print in which all religious and political activism came together; and what the world looked like for actors of the time.

We aim to reflect a world seen from an East Asian perspective, one that recognizes the centrality of Japan as well as the differences between China and Japan, though the two were mutually interlocked and interactive. The Sino–Japanese conflict must be assessed in the larger context of the rise of the United States as a Pacific power, of the Soviet Union from 1917 onward, and of the Cold War contestation between the two. The conference discussions raised new questions in this regard, some of which are reflected in this special issue, and we hope these will spark further conversations.

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Notes

1   The workshop—"Beyond the Sinosphere: Modalities of Interwar Globalization: Internationalism and Indigenization among East Asian Marxists, Christians, and Buddhists, 1919–1945"—was hosted by the Graduate School of East Asian Studies at Freie Universität Berlin on July 13, 2016.
2   The following paragraphs are based on the conference proceedings and the input of two keynote speakers, Tim Cheek and Wen-hsin Yeh.

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