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Transcultural media practices fostering cosmopolitan ethos in a digital age: engagements with East Asian media in Australia

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ABSTRACT The increasingly transnational reach of East Asian media suggests that East Asia has become an ever more de-territorialized media zone. But what has been relatively neglected in the extant scholarship is in-depth consideration of how East Asian media culture has been transnationalised beyond the geographic boundaries of Asia, especially in the context of accelerating online content distribution. In this article, we propose that Australia provides a useful case study to illuminate the cultural impacts of East Asian media beyond Asia. What is Australia's place in trans-Asia media circuits? Does the consumption of East Asian media by audiences in Australia enable them to develop increasingly reflexive understandings of cultural identity, in a turn toward everyday cosmopolitanism? Alternatively, might the new kind of mediasphere we witness emerging in Australia entail new forms of cultural encapsulation, or a proliferation of mutually disconnected ethno-specific media sphericules? Analysing in-depth qualitative interviews with 47 users of East Asian media in Australia, this article investigates how such media engagements open up and/or close down routes to reflexive transcultural practices for these media users; that is, it evaluates the potential of these media to cultivate cosmopolitan ethos in this context. We conclude that East Asian media in Australia may function for their users, paradoxically, as a cosmopolitan media niche within a national mediascape characterized more typically by cultural encapsulation.

KEYWORDS: East Asian media; Australia; transcultural media; cosmopolitanism; diasporic media

> Access has become better over time to other sources of media. Things like documentaries, music and stuff like that. Definitely it has widened. […] The Internet, Netflix, SBS on-demand. It's just a lot more. If you think about when we first came to Australia sixteen years ago, there's nowhere near what we have now. We hardly get any East Asian content sixteen years ago. Just anything to do with foreign is European foreign. I feel in the last 5, 6 years, the realization that we are actually part of Asia rather than Europe.
>
> — *Nila, 50, Tamil Malaysian Australian, in Australia 16 years*

> Otherness, difference, sameness are the differentiating and connecting categories that appear on our screens on a daily basis. Media are technologies which both connect and disconnect, but above all they act as bridges or doors, both open and closed, to the world.
>
> — Roger Silverstone (2007, 18)

The technological shift toward online delivery that Nila comments on in her remarks above marks the current moment as qualitatively distinct from the time in Australia's not-too-distant past when culturally diverse and non-Anglophone content was confined largely to community radio stations and newspapers, SBS — the designated "multicultural" TV channel — or video tapes and disks circulated within diasporic communities (Cunningham and Sinclair 2000; Cunningham 2001). This new transnational accessibility of regional media via online distribution occurs at a time when a trans-Asian mediasphere is already well established. While transnational East Asian media flows have a long history, there have been major and far-reaching developments since the early 1990s. Video-streaming Korean TV dramas, watching popular TV like China's dating show *If You Are The One*, and enjoying internationally co-produced East Asian films are now part of the taken-for-granted everyday experience across East Asia. Demonstrating this, many studies have been done on de-Westernised patterns of cultural production, circulation and consumption in East Asia (Curran and Park 2000; Erni and Chua 2005; Iwabuchi 2002; Iwabuchi, Tsai, and Berry 2017); the rise of Chinese media cultures and markets (Curtin 2007; Fung 2013; Zhao 2008); Korean Wave phenomena (Cho 2005; Chua and Iwabuchi 2008; Kim 2013); the cross-border popularity of Japanese media (Tobin 2004; Iwabuchi 2002, 2004); cultural adaptation and mobile formats (Moran and Keane 2004); and the consolidation of intra-regional media circuits (Berry, Liscutin, and Mackintosh 2009; Iwabuchi 2004; Kim 2008; Fung 2013). The increasingly transnational reach of East Asian media suggests that East Asia has become an ever more de-territorialized media zone (Chua 2012). But what has been relatively neglected is in-depth consideration of how East Asian media culture has been transnationalised beyond the boundaries of East Asia as a geographic territory.

We propose in this article that Australia provides a useful case study to investigate the cultural impacts of East Asian media in ways that help us rethink the regional relationships between "East Asia" and "Australia." What is Australia's place in trans-Asia media circuits? Does the consumption of East Asian media by audiences in Australia enable them to develop increasingly reflexive understandings of cultural identity, in a turn toward everyday cosmopolitanism (Ang 2001,150-59; Delanty 2006)? Alternatively, might the new kind of mediasphere we witness emerging in Australia entail new forms of cultural encapsulation (Christensen and Jansson 2013), or a proliferation of mutually disconnected ethno-specific media sphericules (Gitlin 1998; Cunningham 2001)? In sum, this article is interested in how East Asian media engagements by people in Australia open up and/or close down routes to reflexive transcultural practices; that is, in the potential of these media to cultivate cosmopolitan ethos.

Transcultural media engagements and the cultivation of cosmopolitan ethos

In asking whether the increased accessibility of East Asian media may foster an outward-looking, transcultural regional imagination among users in Australia, our project resonates with a body of scholarship that has emerged in recent years on mediated cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism itself is a concept with a lengthy history stretching back to ancient Greece; as a set of practices and attitudes based on openness to strangers, doubtless its history is even longer, and certainly less Eurocentric (Brown and Held 2010; Werbner 2008). In the present moment of accelerating global-scale mobility and interconnection, though, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been taken up in a range of new ways in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Hannerz 2015 [1990]; Delanty 2006; Werbner 2008). While that literature is too extensive to recap here,[1] it is useful for our purposes to draw from it a distinction between cosmopolitanism as a *normative-ethical value* and cosmopolitanism as a *descriptive-practical characterization*. Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider (2006, 386 (As the page extent of this entry in the References section is "381-403", please help clarify if the page number here is correct. Thank you.)) make just such a distinction "between normative-philosophical and empirical-analytical cosmopolitanism; or, to put it differently, between the cosmopolitan *condition* and the cosmopolitan *moment*." The former designates an abstract form of value: "a shared normative-philosophical commitment to the primacy of world citizenship over all national, religious, cultural, ethnic and other parochial affiliations," while the latter refers to an empirical "increase in inter-dependence among social actors across national borders," which may or may not foster the development of cosmopolitan ethos in individuals and groups (Beck and Sznaider 2006). Cosmopolitanism in this latter sense is not an ideal but a practical reality: what Bruce Robbins

(1998) refers to as "actually existing cosmopolitanism." In this article, what interest us are possible links between cosmopolitanism in these two senses; that is, the extent to which the *cosmopolitan mediated moment*, in which media content becomes ever more intensively mobile across national borders, may foster *cosmopolitan ethos* among media users (see below for further discussion on the latter).

Work on cosmopolitanism has proliferated within media and cultural studies in recent years (Robertson 2019), and can be divided into two broad areas that correspond loosely to the two senses of the term outlined above. On one hand, corresponding to the normative-ethical definition of cosmopolitanism are works that reflexively investigate the potential for scholars to develop cosmopolitan methods (e.g. Jansson 2013; Teer-Tomaselli and Dyll-Myklebust 2012). Like comparable approaches in other disciplines (e.g. Beck and Sznaider 2006; Beck and Grande 2010), these studies propose that media researchers ourselves have a moral responsibility to build in a cosmopolitan ethos as an integral part of our research methodology, for example by resisting methodological nationalism and foregrounding geo-cultural pluralism and reflexivity. On the other hand, more relevant to this paper, corresponding to the descriptive-practical sense of the term, other studies focus on actually existing cosmopolitan media practices "out there" in the research field. In this category we find a substantial subfields of studies on the transnationalism of migrant and multicultural media worlds (e.g. Cunningham and Sinclair 2000; Couldry and Dreher 2007; Dreher 2009; Nedelcu 2012; Christensen 2012), and on electronic news media's capacity to bring up-close the suffering of distant others, enabling empathic responses across cultural and geographic distance (e.g. Boltanski 1999; Rantanen 2005; Silverstone 2007; Chouliaraki 2006; Nash 2008; Kyriakidou 2009; Robertson 2013; Robertson 2019). Our topic in this article aligns us, up to a point, with the first of these subfields, insofar as many (29 of 47) of the people we interviewed had personal histories of migration from countries in East and Southeast Asia that might be seen to precodition their East Asian media habits in the present. But we also align ourselves with the second subfield in that we are interested in East Asian media's potentials for enabling forms of imaginative and affective attachment across distance and difference.

So what exactly do we mean when we say we are interested in how people's transcultural engagements with East Asian media in Australia might foster *cosmopolitan ethos*? Our main interest lies not in legislating what ought to count as cosmopolitanism in the abstract philosophical sense, but rather in attending to the varieties of actually existing cosmopolitanisms among media users. In order to do that, however, we need first to delineate some basic features that characterise cosmopolitan ethos in the (admittedly broad and necessarily imprecise) sense in which we intend it. First, at the most basic level, a cosmopolitan ethos entails *openness* toward the world and toward cultural difference. In Ulf Hannerz's words:

> A […] genuine cosmopolitanism is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity. (Hannerz 2015 [1990], 487)

Second, a cosmopolitan ethos is *reflexive*: it rests on the capacity not only to engage difference but to be changed by it. As Christensen and Jansson argue (2013, 159): "the cosmopolitan ethos prescribes a certain model of communication, one that opens up for self-reflexivity, mutual understanding and possibly self-transformation." The same authors also underline a third key feature of the cosmopolitan ethos: its *communicative* character: "The cosmopolitan ethos is an *ethos of communication*. It is an ethos of making connections and exchanging and sharing cultural meaning in the name of social and moral change" (Christensen and Jansson 2013). This is particularly germane to the study of media: "the concept of communication, literally meaning 'making something common,' provides us with a stepping stone for thinking about the relationship between media and cosmopolitanism" (Christensen and Jansson 2013, 8). Fourth, as a corollary and as already touched on above, cosmopolitan ethos relies on the capacity for *attachment across distance and difference* (Robbins 1998): "a sense of global belonging and commitment to distant others" that grows from the capacity to identify and connect affectively with strangers in spite of geographic separation and lack of direct personal contact (Kyriakidou 2009, 487). Fifth, cosmopolitan ethos centres cultural *pluralism*: "a stance toward diversity itself, toward the coexistence of cultures […] a search for contrasts rather than uniformity" (Hannerz 2015 [1990], 487), and a valuing of the multiplicity, incommensurability, and equality of cultures (Silverstone 2007, 15). Finally, a point that is less often made explicit in the extant scholarship on cosmopolitanism but is, we argue, implicit in and significant for the concept — and, as we will see, is also central to our interviewees' transcultural media engagements: that is, the cosmopolitan ethos that we have in mind rests on a capacity for *learning* (Delanty 2006, 44). For if this ethos entails openness to the world, to self-reflection and transformation, to cultural plurality, to communication and to attachment across difference, then the ability to realize such openness presupposes the ability to learn; that is, to take in and engage the new and the strange, and effect changes as a result of that engagement. We now turn to analysis of our interview data to explore whether and how all of this plays out in Australian audiences' engagements with East Asian media.

Method and demographics

This article draws on a collaborative research project the authors carried out in Melbourne, which sought to understand local media users' experiences of engaging East Asian media content. Between March 2016 and July 2017, we conducted 20 semi-structured group interviews with 47 participants. These included 16 household interviews that targeted multi-generational households including individuals with personal histories of migration, those of second- or third-generation migrant status, and those with no recent family history of migration. We also conducted 4 focus group discussions targeting young people, again across a mix of migrant and non-migrant groups and citizenship statuses (Australian citizens, Australian permanent residents, and people on various types of temporary visa).

Participants were recruited by means of an advertisement circulated on social media as well as through researchers' personal contacts and snowball sampling. The sole criterion for involvement was participants' self-reported regular engagement with East Asian media. Our focus was on participants' engagements with narrative, entertainment and informational media content, rather than their uses of media platforms for the purposes of interpersonal communication, which is a major topic meriting separate study (cf. Collins 2009; Madianou and Miller 2012; Lim, Pham and Cheong 2016) — although the distinction between these two types of usage is increasingly blurred.[2] Interviews were in-depth and lasted between 50 minutes and two hours, with an average length of around 70 minutes.

Our approach intentionally included *both* migrant *and* non-migrant media users in our sample, instead of focussing solely *either* on diasporic media users assumed to have some "natural" cultural attachment to the transnational media worlds they engage, *or* on non-migrant media users presumed to have no particular pre-existent feeling of connection with the distant others whose experiences transnational media depict. We took this approach in order, first, to avoid presuming a naturalized and exclusive connection between Asian media and Asian diasporas — since non-migrants and non-Asians also engage with these media, and the ways they do so may have implications for the development of a regionally connected consciousness among the broad Australian public. By the same token, we also sought to avoid the assumption that it is *only* non-migrant or non-Asian Australian residents who could embody transcultural engagement by connecting with East Asian media — since there is no reason why an orientation toward learning about a culture with which one has some past personal or family connection, but from which one is now temporally and geographically distanced, should not equally be understood as a kind of transcultural engagement.

Of those in our participant group who had moved to Australia from another country, most were born in countries and territories in Asia (including Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Laos and Thailand), but some had also migrated to Australia from elsewhere (the USA, Canada, the UK and Slovakia). Participants also claimed a range of ethnicities and ancestries. These included Chinese, Vietnamese, Hong Kong Chinese, German/Irish, Hungarian/Scottish, Korean, Indonesian, English/Scottish, Aboriginal/Anglo, Chinese/Thai, Spanish,

Slovakian, Malaysian Chinese, Canadian born Chinese, Japanese, Laotian, Tamil Malaysian, South Indian, and Indonesian Chinese. Reflecting these complex imbrications of migration histories, cultural heritage, ancestries and ethnicities, many participants described their cultural identity in hybrid terms (Ang and Brand 2002; Ang et al. 2006; Harris 2013):

> So I'm probably […] it's a mix of being […] I identify myself as Malaysian Chinese and Australian because I've been here for quite a long time now. […] I love living in Australia but I […] still always will identify myself as Malaysian. And, because my ancestors were from China, so I am very curious about that part of my identity, so I would love to explore that a little more. So that, that's probably why I like to consume a lot of Chinese — well the bulk of my East Asian media is Chinese. (Lien, 28, Malaysian Chinese Australian, in Australia 11 years)[3]

> I think it is a bit funny. I think I am a half-mixed CBC [Canadian-born Chinese]. […] I can't fully relate to Canadian-Canadian cultural society, and I can't fully relate to someone who was born and raised in Hong Kong. So I am very much in the mix and confusion of the two worlds. […] Watching the TV shows helps me to keep up with my language, and the language is a big part of my identity. So being able to watch, and watching the shows growing up, and talking to my grandparents and my parents in Cantonese, has formed a big part of my identity in being able to speak Cantonese and understand Cantonese. (Loretta, 23, Hong Kong Chinese Canadian, in Australia 7 months, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.))

We see in these accounts how for some participants, their East Asian media engagements link quite directly with cultural identification, opening up hybrid possibilities and complicating any straightforward equation of ethnicity with nationality and identity. For these and other participants, media are able either or both to open up and/or to close down routes to cultural identification and attachment. In the following section, we explore in detail how this happened in participants' engagements with East Asian media.

Orientations to East Asia media

Through interviews, we found that participants adopted, under different circumstances and at different times (and often mixing more than one together), four main orientations toward East Asian media; we

call these the *insider*, *memorial*, *outsider*, and *learner* orientations. In this section, we discuss each of these in turn with special attention to the last two, since the insider and memorial orientations somewhat echo the findings of an earlier study on transmigrant media by two authors of this paper (Seto and Martin 2018). In the final section of this article, we dwell on the learner orientation in detail, since it resonates particularly strongly with our central interest in media's potentials for transcultural media engagement facilitating the cultivation of cosmopolitan ethos.

The insider orientation refers to a naturalized homology between a media user's sense of their own cultural, ethnic, or national identity and the media engaged. We see this, for example, in Samuel's (34, Indonesian Chinese Australian, in Australia 10 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) explanation that he watched East Asian media because "it can resonate because it is your background, your culture. You got similar physique, you can relate more." Similarly, Manjuan (27, Taiwanese Chinese, in Australia 3 years, _____(Same as above.)) described a sense of identification with certain media because "if it is [set] in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, China, their faces are like me"; and Ning (25, Thai Chinese, in Australia 8 years, _____(Same as above.)) felt that "Japanese or Chinese show, culturally it is more similar to what I like, so it is more relatable. […] Eastern Asian ones just feel more real to me." Leni (24, Chinese Australian, in Australia 23 years, _____(Same as above.)) elaborated in greater detail, with a reflexive interpretation of the kinds of culturally specific values that felt familiar to her as a result of her sense of cultural identity:

> I get a sense of familiarity watching some East Asian media things […]. And I think […] that […] makes me feel a little special when I watch something like a Hong Kong drama and go, "oh I've been to that place and I know exactly what they're talking about," and that's not only just a part of my childhood but […] it's still […] a big part of my identity […]. A lot of my friends who maybe didn't have a similar experience growing up, they don't have that kind of relationship. Like, if you're watching *If You Are The One*, a lot of them don't understand what the appeal is. […] It's because you don't understand Chinese people [laughs], […] their values are so different and […] the idea of a family unit is so different in Asia compared to what it is here. […] Especially in the action kung fu movies, we'll do this for pride and everyone's like "that's so weird, why are you dying for your country?"

Often closely related to this insider orientation is what we call the memorial orientation, which, as Seto and Martin (2018) discuss in detail, emphasises an affective response based on one's sense-memory of having engaged particular media in childhood. Along these lines, several participants explained their liking for older East Asian media as "a nostalgia thing" based on

childhood memories, especially time spent with family, as Matthew (26, Malaysian/Hong Kong Chinese Australian, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) underlined:

> Since I was a kid, all of the Jackie Chan and Jet Li movies I always watch, I'd always watch with Dad, so when I tap into those older movies it just brings back that sort of tension of like oh, back in the day, because […] it's one of those things we have in common. So it's […] a two-pronged thing, keeping in contact with your roots but then […] there's also a family dimension to it as well, which is […] why I […] still I watch it I suppose.

Similarly, Leni (introduced above) remarked that Hong Kong dramas had "a special soft spot in my heart because I grew up watching them with my grandma." Lizzie (45, Malaysian Chinese Australian, in Australia 37 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) enjoyed Chinese fantasy and comedy movies, and watching Miyazaki's animations with her daughter. When asked about what differentiated these from Australian, American or British media for her, she responded with a strong insider discourse that underlined her memory-based affective sense of closeness with East Asian media:

> with the British and the American [media], it's just their sense of humor, very different [from] the Chinese, [and] especially [from] the Miyazaki. Look with the western society, even language wise, you can't really translate it to some degree because it is a feeling. When you watch it, you feel a certain way. It just can't be translated because we are brought up in that culture. It is not something that could be taught or [be] expressed […]. Because I came from an Asian country and lived part of my life there, you can relate to those certain movies.

Like Matthew's discussion of a kind of emotional "tension" surrounding particular media and Leni's evocation of a "special soft spot in [her] heart," Lizzie's emphasis on the non- or even anti-linguistic quality of her attachment to Chinese and Japanese media — her sense that the connection is based on an untranslatable, unteachable, ineffable *feeling* resulting from deep memory — encapsulates the affective dimension of the memorial orientation.

In sharp distinction to these first two orientations, some participants described a kind of pleasure they derived from engaging East Asian media *as a result* of a cultural or aesthetic gulf they experienced between themselves and the media. We call this exoticizing stance, which emphasises the media's strangeness and difference, the outsider orientation. Representative examples include Binh's

(26, Vietnamese Australian, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) discussion of her former obsession with K-pop:

> the reason I got into K-pop music was just because I found it really bizarre that […] it just felt really manufactured […] and I was like whoa, this is really extreme, everyone's dressing the same and everyone's doing the exact same dance — the TV shows, all of the TV stations in Korea are very similar to each other so it's like, I can't tell the difference, so I got into it for a year.

Matthew (introduced above) made related remarks about the Japanese gameshows he liked to watch on SBS, as he put it: "just […] for the pure comedic […] element […]. It's like, seriously that's what they're going to be doing?"

The example that cropped up most often in this light was the Chinese dating show *If You Are The One* (*Fei cheng wu rao*) which had been broadcast with English subtitles on free-to-air TV channel SBS 2 for three years at the time we conducted our interviews, and proven a surprise ratings hit with Australian viewers (Sun 2016). Again and again, *If You Are The One* was cited as an example of an East Asian media product that was so bizarre it became compulsive viewing.[4] Rebecca (27, Hong Kong Chinese Australian, _____(Same as above.)) offered an energetic discussion along these lines:

> [Our family is] obsessed with *If You Are The One*. […] Mostly just to see the things that people come up with, like, how do you think of that? You know, you have one question left, if this is the one: "Am I tall enough?" […] What, you're going to judge […] someone that you're really going to spend the rest of [your life with]? And just the views and the ideas that they have about what makes a functional relationship. Like "oh, how do you feel about living with my parents?" You've never even met the guy yet and you're asking *that*? […] All the values that they have, like, "I value the fact that you're successful now," and […] the mediators will be like, "no but he's just talking about right now he doesn't have a house but in the future [he will]" and she's like "no I need a house" — you know? […] [It's] interesting to see that's what people value, that's what they think of, off the bat. […] It's scary, the first thing he comes on and then she turns her light off and it's like "why did you turn your light off?" "Oh, he's too skinny." Literally the first thing, you know like, "can't do it."

Ken (42, Hong Kong Chinese Australian, in Australia 38 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) had a comparable response to the program, though linked the entertaining unfamiliarity of contestants' attitudes to generation as well as culture:

> I just find it incredibly funny. Where every applicant is either an entrepreneur, likes to recite Shakespeare, studies philosophy, owns a condo, aspires to own a multi-national business. It just typifies the perception of Asian culture. And the ones that come on and say that I am a struggling artist, they never get chosen. It is amusing just to see […] how young people, particularly Asian young people, see the world. And what they think are desirable attributes. It is amusing. It is an eye-opener I suppose.

Resonating with our own argument on multiple viewer orientations, Lucille (27, Chinese Australian, _____(Same as above.)) offered a perceptive reflection on the situational polysemy of a media text like *If You Are The One*:

> You can watch the same show […] and see very different things. […] For example if we're watching *If You Are The One*, there's certain people who watch that because that's kind of like a show that they […] find interesting as a snapshot for […] their identity. But then there's also […] a group of people who watch that because they really enjoy the ridiculous costumes and the bad translations, right? They're kind of watching two different versions of the same show.

While Lucille's "identity snapshot" view is what we referred to above as the insider orientation, her second view — where a media product becomes perversely enjoyable by virtue of ridiculous costumes, bad translations, alien attitudes and peculiar aesthetics — corresponds neatly with our outsider orientation.

Transcultural learning

The final orientation to which we turn is at once the most complex and heterogeneous, and the one that brings us most directly back to our central research question about East Asian media's cosmopolitan potential. That one of the chief pleasures of engaging East Asian media was the opportunity to learn

something was a persistently recurring theme in our interviewees' responses. Participants discussed learning a range of things from them, from concrete life skills (cooking, language, relationship management), to general knowledge about regional history and societies, through to abstract attitudes and values. In this section, we work through five of the major themes within the learner orientation.

Several participants emphasized the value of East Asian media as a tool for *historical self-education*, especially in the context of personal or family connections with regional histories. For example, Bob (Rebecca's father, 72, Hong Kong Chinese Australian, in Australia 55 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) discussed the value of newly available Chinese media for deepening his understanding of modern Chinese history:

> Sometimes the movies they go back earlier. […]: I'm like that, yeah my family [was] like that, and so you relate [to] it and you want to find out more, and it sort of brings you back to that era [to] see […] how people live, how they behave, their dress, costume, setting, the family, and how they behave and what they're selling in the street. […] I see them you know, yeah I can remember that, so it's related back in those […] early days in my own life. […] But then […] they change, keep changing, especially in China for the last […] 50 years, you know […] after Qing dynasty, the warlord, and then you got World War II, the Japanese, and then Communists […]. And now you got […] the second biggest economy in the world, you know? So, it's a big change from that past 60 years, you can see that. So that affect[s] me. […] You keep on being a Chinese, the China is not the China I used to know. […] And then you want to find out how they change. The only way you can find out is from the media, from the drama you can see these things stage by stage. […] It's sort of very educational, to me.

From our broader discussion, was clear that developing knowledge of modern Chinese history and society through media was an important project for Bob on a personal level, and one in which he had invested significant energies over the five and a half decades since he left Hong Kong.

Sal (52, Aboriginal Australian, _____(Same as above.)) engaged East Asian media for a historical learning project with a different kind of personal investment. A Marxist political activist and PhD student, Sal joked that her fannish obsession with K-pop made a contrast with her otherwise "serious" political and academic image in the eyes of her housemates and friends. She had first become interested in K-pop after a stay in Seoul with a friend she had met while doing volunteer work in Palestine. She now listened to K-pop every day, watched Korean dramas about twice a week, and had been led, through these interests, to seek out Korean historical novels in translation. "Didn't see it

coming and now I'm just totally obsessed," Sal joked. She related her Korean pop-cultural obsession back to her intellectual and political interests in world history:

> I find Korean novels, and I'm trying to read more Korean histories and things like that, so this [interest in K-pop] has helped me to start to learn more about Korean history, Japanese history, and Chinese history I hope to get into as well. Because […] politically I hadn't really had an interest in the Asian region, I'd been mainly interested in the Middle East, Latin America, and so getting into the Korean cultural side of it has actually really sparked my interest in Korean politics and Asian […] politics, so not just Korean but Japanese and Chinese as well, and trying to understand that region much more […]. Because my current PhD is in settler colonial histories, so I've really been toying with the idea of maybe doing something, once I'm post-PhD, looking at […] comparative histories of Australia and South Korea, because of the Japanese occupation, things like that. Because I'm interested particularly in resistance histories under settler-colonial states.

As a member of a colonized indigenous people in the Australian settler-colonial state, Sal's interest in histories of resistance against settler-colonial regimes may have a certain personal edge. As with Bob above, although in more unpredictable ways, Sal's engagements with East Asian media enable her to find self-educational opportunities connected with a deep personal investment in regional histories.

Couple Manjuan (introduced above) and Dae (31, Korean, in Australia 6 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) related a different engagement with mediated representations of Japan's colonization of Korea:

> Dae: These days when I watch drama with Manjuan, it makes more topics to talk to each other [about].
>
> Manjuan: But I know a story about him. […] He was watching a Korean show. The story is talking about many years ago before World War II, Japanese soldiers in Korea. The show is talking about history. But it kind of blamed Japan for what they have done at that time. At that time when he watched that show, he was really angry. And did you cry?
>
> Dae: No. […] I think just that I showed her because I am very interested in history things. When I was in high school and university, I studied history even by myself. […] So if I watch a show or drama about history, I think I focus more.

Here, a Korean historical drama provides a platform for Manjuan's education about the Japanese occupation of Korea, Dae's deep affective engagement with that same history (according to Manjuan's recollection of the event), and a strengthening of the connection between the two on the basis of this mediated historical education.

Closely connected to the use of media for these kinds of historical self-education are other participants' projects of *reflexive roots-seeking*. This type of engagement sits somewhere between an insider and a learner orientation. It is based on a certain felt personal connection to the culture or society in question — the location of one's "roots" — but it is also predicated on a distancing from that place that propels a desire to learn about current conditions. This orientation was usually espoused by people who either had migrated as very young children or were second-generation migrants, hence felt a need to *seek* roots, rather than feeling the kind of strong, self-evident homeland identification that Bob (above) felt based on deep personal memory. Consider the following responses:

> A lot of my friends are […] Canadian born Chinese or Australian born Chinese. […] They just watch English type shows, whereas I would spend my time watching both Chinese and English. So when they see me watching Chinese ones and I tell them about it, [they say] "oh you are so Asian." [I say] "Oh OK, just keeping in touch with my roots." […] It's kind of nice to watch something that is close to your roots I guess. […] For me it's half-half because I grew up in Canada, and a lot of things I did was very westernized. […] A lot of my Asian knowledge and culture has come from these dramas. So when I do go to Hong Kong, when I talk to other people of Hong Kong descent, they would like "how do you know that?" [and I say] "oh it's because I watch [Hong Kong channel] TVB." […] By watching Hong Kong television, it really gives me a sense of what life is like in Hong Kong, what they do. (Loretta, introduced above)

> I think the Eastern media resonates with me a lot even though I am overseas. Every time there is the Chinese spring multicultural festival on TV, I would always watch it. Some of it makes no sense to me, like Beijing opera. It made no sense to me, it just looks very weird and sounded very weird. But I think trying to understand it from my father's and grandfather's perspectives, it sort of makes sense that this was how things should sound […]. Even though it doesn't quite make sense to me, I try to have an appreciation for it. (Hao, 28, Chinese New Zealander/Australian, in Australia 10 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.))

Both of these accounts underline the duality of the roots-seeking attitude. On the one hand, Loretta and Hao are drawn to "homeland" media because they associate it with their cultural "roots," and as such feel a certain affective attachment to it. On the other hand, however, they both also emphasise the distantness and otherness of the "root" cultures with which they seek to connect through media, and the conscious efforts required to connect effectively. It is the self-conscious intentionality of the effort to use media to connect with one's cultural heritage across divides of geographic distance and cultural difference that marks the reflexivity of the roots-seeking project.

An attitude removed one degree further from a sense of personal identification with the culture being studied is what we call the *social documentary* attitude, which can be seen as a mix of outsider and learner orientations. This attitude underlines the otherness of the society into which media are assumed to provide a window, but unlike the outsider orientation discussed above, here media users expressed interest in learning about the underlying cultural logics of that society, rather than stopping at finding it bizarre or amusing. *If You Are The One* again featured heavily in this type of response, of which the following accounts are typical:

> Wherever we travel, I like to see how people live. If you see a movie where it depicts how they live, to me that is very fascinating. It could be like they are living in Shanghai in an apartment block and dealing with people in other apartments. To me it is very fascinating. It is almost like a sociological study of people. (Nila, introduced above)

> I think [*If You Are The One* is] […] is a real […] good […] mirror of Chinese society as it stands now in terms of what they expect or what they're looking for — not in the […] dating sense but just as a society what we expect of […] the male people, […] of the guys to be doing and […] the girls […]. So that's like the serious sort of element which I find […] quite interesting. (Matthew, introduced above)

> [*If You Are The One* has] got a different flavour to it, they have a different way of […] assessing the men and looking at the men and different ways of [assessing] potential husband material. […] It's just that whole cultural thing, the difference in what they look for in men. […] [It's] definitely a different style, a different approach, different humour sometimes, no I can't pinpoint it […] but I do, I definitely get something different from it — and it's enjoyable, otherwise I wouldn't watch it really. […] I definitely think it makes me feel closer. […] To me Australia is […] everybody, it's all the different cultures all live together and this […] for me, […] I think it brings it a little bit closer […] or I feel a bit closer because I'm

watching it. (Suzi, 52, English/Scottish Australian, in Australia 20+ years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.))

Each of these responses interprets East Asian media, documentary-style, as a "window" onto a society strange and different from the viewer's own. For Nila, a Chinese movie could be comparable to a personal trip to observe life and social relations in a Chinese city; for Matthew, *If You Are The One* is an interesting "mirror" on gender relations in contemporary China; for Suzi, the same programme is both a window onto the ineffable but enjoyable difference of Chinese attitudes toward marriage, and a means to connect personally with a multiculturalist ethos.

Another type of learner attitude is what we call the *connoisseur* attitude: this refers to the deep, detail-oriented learning projects of fans and aficionados with a specialist interest in very particular domains of media and culture. The connoisseur attitude involves investing time amassing particularist and sometimes obscure knowledge, trading to some degree on the cultural capital generated through the efforts involved, nurturing a significant personal and affective attachment to the objects of connoisseurship, and developing a sense of community with like-minded connoisseurs (Fiske 1992; Jenson 1992).[5] Three members of our participant group could be classified as connoisseurs, all of them Japanophiles. John (Nila's husband, introduced above) was an avid fan of Japanese movies and TV series, and said that about thirty percent of his overall media consumption was East Asian, largely Japanese. This interest connected with his fascination with Japanese men's clothing and textiles: he spoke at length about how he sought out information on Japanese traditional dyes and dying techniques, fabric mills, artisanal textile production practices, and textiles histories via Instagram, documentary films, books, and the online accounts of other enthusiasts. His interest in and connection with Japan deepened even further as he gained a following on Instagram and was featured on websites for stylish menswear. John also exchanged information about Japanese media and culture in a circle of three other Japanophile friends in Melbourne who met regularly to exchange links to Japanese content online; some within the group also travelled regularly to Japan and they all enjoyed Japanese food. John felt that through all these media and culture related activities, he had developed "a great affinity for Japan," to the extent that when he and Nila finally visited, "it felt like I was being at home. […] When we came back from Japan to Australia, it just felt like I was leaving one home for another."

Enrique (23, Spanish Australian) and Nadeja (22, Slovakian Australian, in Australia 17 years, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.)) were a couple who shared a fannish interest in Japanese anime which had begun for both of them when they studied Japanese language in high school. Nadeja was also involved in the world of Cosplay, making her own costumes based on anime characters and attending conventions. She related:

> Japanese animation is the one I go back to in general because of a lot of variety. […] You have got so many dramas, you have fantasy, sci-fi and horror. So I am into the psychological horror style. […] When I went to Japan last July, it coincided with this really popular series. So there was a theme park that was themed around that animation. And there was all this merchandise into it everywhere. […] When you go to Japan, especially when something is really popular, you feel like a part of something. You like the same stuff that all these people like. […] Most of the genres that are popular are not the ones that I like. So I get really excited when I see something really popular that I like because it is rare.

Nadeja clearly revels in the variety, richness, complexity and abundance of Japanese anime culture; she also underscores the fannish pleasures of specialization and rarity value, as well as a transcultural sense of connection with Japanese fans and the transnational fan world. Furthermore, Nadeja's fan interests motivated her to pursue an opportunity to work in Japan, where she is residing at the time of writing. This illustrates how Nadeja's fandom encouraged not just connoisseur interests but also the development of openness and post-media action to pursue work and the chance to live in the culture of her fandom.

Nadeja's partner Enrique (_____(Same as above.)) shared similar interests, but his account expanded out from anime to broader Japanese media culture:

> The media I enjoy the most would be same as Nadeja: Japanese animation. The sheer variety and quantity of it. No matter how much you watch, there's always a constant stream of new content and new series. As well as the comics that go with it, the games that go with it. […] As well as Japanese TV, I think Japanese variety shows are quite entertaining. […] Especially when you can't understand bits and pieces of it, to understand certain jokes and references that might not be that well-known, it certainly keeps you invested. "Oh like I might as well look this up and see what it means." […] It is interesting to kind of try them all out and see which ones you enjoy. So when you do enjoy something, it is like — not that you "earned" it — but you got that kind of appreciation behind it. Because a lot of the stuff is available on free-to-watch TV, a lot of Japanese people do know. […] They are more than happy to talk and discuss about it with you.

Enrique emphasises the activity of learning itself: looking up obscure words and phrases, and investing time exploring different series so that one almost "earns" one's appreciation of a favourite.

Like Nadeja, too, Enrique underscores how media connoisseurship as a learning project can extend into transcultural human connections.

Nadeja's and Enrique's mediated practices resonate with a key question underlying our attempts to understand whether and how East Asian media engagements, as a form of transcultural communication, may foster cosmopolitan ethos for media users in Australia by affording opportunities to practice cultural openness, reflexivity, and pluralism. While some of these have already been demonstrated in the examples above, below, we focus on participants' explicit reflections on the more abstract question of the kinds of attitudes, values, and self-transformations they associated with their engagements with East Asian media. Consider the following responses:

> [Japanese cinema, J-pop and K-pop] really is a curiosity for me. […] There's some […] slightly problematic implications there, and I know I'll […] always be a tourist or whatever because I don't speak any of the languages, I speak English, and it's not my culture. But by the same token I think it's also important that Australians also […] have a sense of their place in the region, we are an Asia-Pacific country and so I think […] checking out East Asian media is a good way to […] broaden your knowledge of that, to the extent that you can. (Aidan, 26, Irish/German Australian, _____(Please provide the interview date if possible.))

> Because I'm exposed to a lot of Japanese, Korean, Chinese shows, so I understand more of that culture, and […] because I'm exposed to more, I feel like I'm more open-minded. […] I'm absorbing that culture as well. (Ratana, 28, Chinese/Thai Australian, in Australia 15 years, _____(Same as above.))

> [East Asian media] is just something you don't see on the regular in Melbourne very much, […] so becoming part of it and kind of having that other side of media exposure, […] it definitely does make me feel a little bit more connected internationally rather than just Australia and Melbourne, which is a very small place. (Steven, 24, Hong Kong Chinese Australian, _____(Same as above.))

> I think [Japanese manga and anime and K-drama] is fascinating, especially because learning about other cultures makes you think about your own culture as well, and how we're different to others. (Bridget, 21, Scottish/ Hungarian Australian, _____(Same as above.))

> I definitely think that [Japanese anime and East Asian dramas] make me question how we do things in Australia, just little things like […] the showers in different countries — it just kind of opens your mind to different cultures, so by seeing all these shows that do different things you're kind of like "oh, we don't do that here," and think about that […] and also different ways people interact with people. So how people [are] very polite and if they bow and things like that and […] by watching that I kind of subconsciously think "oh I would bow here like that," yeah. […] It kind of makes me want to go explore, there's a sense […] that I'm not just happy just living in Melbourne, I want to go travel. Because when I was younger I was like "I don't want to travel, there's no point in it, […] life is perfectly fine here, I'll just stay here." But now that I know more about the world I really want to go to Japan because I think their culture and their architecture is amazing. So I really want to go travel and I really want to experience other cultures. (Charlotte, 16, English/Scottish Australian, _____(Same as above.))

Such responses represent the effective opposite of the "outsider" orientation discussed above. Rather than occasioning the exoticisation and reification of cultural and aesthetic differences as bizarre or ridiculous, East Asian media are felt to support the development of outward-looking orientations beyond geographical and cultural constraints of Australia. They are experienced as broadening knowledge, making a step toward regional connection, opening the mind, transcending the parochial narrowness of locality, fostering awareness of the plurality of cultures and the reflexive relativisation of one's own, providing impetus for a turn toward the world in future travels, and producing varying levels of cross-cultural identification. In other words, these media, as a form of communication in Christensen and Jansson's sense of "making something common" across geographies and cultures, appear in these instances to allow media users to learn exactly the kinds of cultural openness, reflexivity, and pluralism that we argue characterise cosmopolitan ethos.

Cosmopolitan niches in a polarized media world

Returning to our central research question, then: does the new availability of East Asian media in Australia facilitate mediated cosmopolitanization? The answer at which we have arrived is both "yes" and "not quite." Our research clearly shows that such media *can* be experienced as reinforcing attitudes of openness, reflexivity, pluralism and learning. Yet, in many cases it is an open question whether, in practice, such transcultural media engagements do foster cosmopolitan ethos as

"attachment at a distance" (Robins 1998, 3) or communicative subjects' "continuous attempts to understand one another" (Christensen and Jansson 2013, 8). For transcultural communication is not the sole or necessary capacity of such media: as we have seen, they can also reinforce a naturalized and more or less exclusive sense of cultural identity as insider or outsider. Unsurprisingly, what our study uncovers is not any single, consistent East Asian media effect; instead, participants engaged with East Asian media through a diverse range of identificatory (and dis-identificatory) options.

The multiple possible orientations toward such media depend at least in part on the personal history and identification of the individual, and we have seen this in many of the examples above. This is evident, for instance, when personal histories of migration and the affective pull of memory shape responses to transnational media in the present, and conversely when an absence of felt personal connection reinforces an outsider orientation. While we have done our best within the constraints of space to give basic contextual background for each individual quoted, further study might well uncover deeper systemic distinctions between the ways differently positioned groups respond to these media. It is worth noting, too, that the consequences of particular orientations are in fact unpredictable — as for instance when a strong outsider orientation, despite its superficial lack of promise for cosmopolitan engagement, sparks interest that subsequently leads to deeper exploration and cross-cultural connection (for example when Binh travelled to spend time in Korea as a result of her fascination with "bizarre" K-pop).

As for the question of whether a fragmented and internally heterogeneous mediasphere equates to new forms of cultural encapsulation (Christensen and Jansson 2013), or disconnected media sphericules (Gitlin 1998; Cunningham 2001) in a digital age: we suggest that the idea of media as ethno-specific sphericules is in fact challenged by the actions of these boundary-crossing users of East Asian media, which notably disrupt predictable lines of affiliation based on homologies of culture, heritage, and ethnicity. Challenging the presumptive "naturalness" of Asian diasporic communities' engagements with Asian media, a closer look at the *ways* they engage leads us to recognise theirs as a form of cosmopolitan media practice that may indeed be the forefront of media cosmopolitanism in the Australian context. This is so because regardless of ethnicity or migration history, it is the process of reaching out from one's immediate cultural world through media to learn, connect, reflect, and self-transform that we should understand as the opportunity of fostering cosmopolitan ethos. Established transnational media flows and connections have for some time engendered cross-border dialogues with the capacity to cultivate cosmopolitan disposition (Iwabuchi 2017), but the more recent development of digital communication technologies and the amplification of media platforms have made such opportunities far more ubiquitous and mundane. While cultural encapsulation can be one consequence of a fragmented digitised media world, and doubtless some individuals and groups — primary among them large swathes of the white, local-born national public — choose to consume media that reflects back their own ethnic and cultural image, not all media niches entail cultural

encapsulation. Recall John, the Indian Malaysian Australian hunting down Japanese documentaries about traditional textiles; Sal, the Aboriginal Australian making mediated connections with the history of Japan's colonization of Korea; or Ratana, the Chinese-Thai Australian with the mixed diet of Japanese, Korean and Chinese media. All of these stories are about people reaching out through East Asian media to form new trans-national, trans-cultural attachments. While the East Asian media worlds our participants inhabit are niches in the Australian mediascape, then those niches are not — or not only — encapsulating, but also outward-looking: they are bridges more than they are closed doors (Silverstone 2007, 18).

The paradoxically cosmopolitan character of this East Asian media niche is exacerbated by its wider context within the dominant media landscape in Australia. In the broader conversations we had with participants in the course of interviews, the general consensus was that despite the increasingly Asian character of everyday life in large Australian cities as a result of migration and transforming food cultures, and regardless of the increasing availability of Asian media through digital distribution, which had effectively banalized its everyday local presence for some, nonetheless the national "mainstream" media world was still very Anglo-dominated and Eurocentric. Participants underlined the alienating effect of what they saw as mainstream Australian media culture, especially broadcast television's failure to represent the ethnic diversity that they understood as characteristic of actually existing Australian society. The lily-white casts and alien life-worlds of soap operas including *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* were mentioned several times: "it is like watching a foreign film for me," said Nila (see also Seto and Martin 2018). Furthermore, as Tim Soutphommasane, Australia's outgoing Race Discrimination Commissioner, observed in his final address in that role, today "sections of a fracturing media industry, under the strain of technological disruption, seem to be using racism as part of their business model." With the amplification of formal and informal media distribution platforms in the post-broadcast digital age, "some media outlets are using racial controversies to grab attention — as a means of clinging on to their audiences." (Soutphommasane 2018)

Juxtaposed against Nila's comment quoted in this article's first epigraph, these two remarks seem to tell opposite stories: Soutphommasane's, about an Australian media world closing its doors and becoming xenophobic and inward-looking; Nila's, about East Asian media in Australia opening up bridges to the region to enable a cosmopolitan re-imagining of the nation. In fact, despite their distinct effects, the phenomena described arise from the same structural situation of fragmentation of media audiences in a post-broadcast era dominated by online delivery via various digital platforms. While in Soutphommasane's account, legacy media leverage racism in an attempt to win back dwindling audiences, media users like Nila are able to leapfrog out of the national media market altogether by turning to Asia-regional content delivered online. Overall, for our interviewees, East Asian media remained a specialist niche, and even popular Asian-Australian celebrities like Korean-

Australian singer Dami Im and Vietnamese-Australian TV chef Luke Nguyen were perceived by some to be more exoticised novelties than truly embraced by the mainstream. Thus, enjoying Cantonese films, Korean dramas, and J-pop offers a kind of creative cosmopolitan escape for some media users – – including those without Asian heritage — from a national media world of racist tabloid news, xenophobic talkback radio, and blindingly white TV soaps. For them, it is not East Asian media but rather the dominant media landscape of Australia that exemplifies the closed door of cultural encapsulation. There are, of course, exceptions to such media parochialism. The efforts made over decades by multicultural broadcaster SBS provide one obvious example; another is government broadcaster ABC's new TV drama series, *The Heights* (Matchbox Pictures and For Pete's Sake Productions, 2019), which follows the lives of a multi-ethnic cast of characters living in and around a high-rise housing estate. Such a development speaks, perhaps, to the power of media users like those interviewed for this project, with their thirst for deeper and more nuanced representations of the actually existing cultural diversity of Australian urban life. However, both the restrictive power of the dominant national media landscape and people's agential, creative and open-minded capacity to access the alternative visions provided by transnationally circulating East Asian media remain co-existing facets of Australian society. Neither should be overstressed or underestimated. It is within such a seemingly polarized national media context in the digital age that transcultural media's progressive potentials to foster cosmopolitan ethos are engendered, intersecting complexly with local multicultural engagements and paving the way, we might hope, for future transformations in the national media mainstream.

Notes

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[1] For a critical overview from the perspective of media and cultural studies, see Ong (2009); see also Brown and Held (2010).

[2] As part of the same broader research project, we also analysed interviews conducted by Seto with Southeast Asian transmigrants in Melbourne in 2013; that analysis is published in Seto and Martin (2018). The present article forms a "pair" with that one. But whereas that article focuses on Southeast Asian transmigrants' engagements with East Asian (and other) media in Australia, this one focuses largely on permanent migrants and other Australian residents' engagements with East Asian media. Seto and Martin (2018) "follows the person" to consider participants' full media worlds in rich context, whereas this one "follows the media" by targeting people who engaged with East Asian media specifically, and focussing questions on their experiences of those media.

[3] For each participant quoted, we list pseudonym, age at time of interview, self-described ethnicity followed by "Australian" when the participant has Australian citizenship or permanent residency, followed by length of time in Australia if the participant migrated from another country.

[4] This appears to run somewhat counter to China's state-level attempts to win hearts and minds through the "soft power" of media exports (Peng and Keane 2019).

[5] The cosmopolitan potentials of transcultural fandoms have been considered in more detail by scholars within fan studies, e.g., Jenkins (2006); Jung (2011); Han (2017).

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