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Meaghan Morris in Cultural Studies in Asia

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Meaghan has been part of the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project from the very beginning—she was at the founding conferences, organised by Chen Kuan-Hsing, in National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan, between 1992 and 1995. The two conferences bore the title of ‘Trajectories: Towards a New Internationalist Cultural Studies’ and ‘Trajectories II: A New Internationalist Cultural Studies’, respectively. According to Kuan-Hsing, he was motivated by historical changes in Asia, from postwar decolonisation to post-Cold War in late 1980s, marked locally in Taiwan with the lifting of martial law in 1987. This was also the period of the rise of Asia within global capitalism, beginning with Japan, followed by the so-called ‘Tiger’ or ‘Dragon’ economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore via the export-oriented industrialisation. The industrialisation model was subsequently picked up by China and the other Southeast Asian countries. The conferences certainly lived up to their promise of being international, with presenters from first and third world locations, and the core concerns were very much grounded in the historical conjuncture of Asia at the end of the twentieth century. One evening during the second conference, while the edited volume for selected papers were being prepared for publication, Rebecca Barton, the editor for the book project at Routledge, brought up the idea of an Asian cultural studies journal. In a hotel room in Taiwan, with Meaghan, the late Jeannie Martin, Kuan-Hsing and myself from the conference and Rebecca, the plan for *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* was hatched. It was decided that Kuan-hsing and I would be the co-executive editors, supported by a relatively large editorial collective drawn across Asia and Australia.

The title *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* was to first appear in 1998 as the subtitle of the volume of selected conference essays, titled *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, edited by Kuan-Hsing. Two to three years of intensive preparation followed, with the very first Inter-Asia Cultural Studies conference taking place in Taiwan in 1998, with the theme of ‘Problematizing Asia’. This was followed by a series of small group meetings among potential editorial collective members in different Asian cities and another conference in Fukuoka, Japan;

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activities generously funded by the Japan Foundation. The first issue of the journal appeared in April 2000. Meaghan was on the advisory board.

In the same year, Meaghan took up the inaugural chair professorship in the Department of Cultural Studies in Lingnan University, the small liberal arts college in Hong Kong. This relocation from Sydney to Hong Kong placed her in the very developmental trajectory of cultural studies in Asia. Lingnan is not among the top choices of Hong Kong students. Most of the students came from the lower end of the academic achievement ladder and also from lower income family background. Additionally, English was a foreign language for these students as Hong Kong is proudly Cantonese speaking. Meaghan is a complex thinker. It would therefore not have been easy initially for her to teach these students. Rising to the challenge, she became a respected and much loved teacher among the students. In return, they taught her much about lives in Hong Kong. She came to increasingly identify with Hong Kong citizens' struggles to deal with the invasive presence of China.

Hong Kong, the land of Bruce Lee, kung-fu and wuxia films, was a good place for Meaghan's abiding interest in martial arts cinema. She found ready collaborations with colleagues at Lingnan to continue her film studies, which constitute part of what some would now call 'Hong Kong Studies'. Taking the Department of Cultural Studies as a developmental project, Meaghan worked hard to fly the flag of the department and Lingnan University beyond Hong Kong. A major reputation-building moment was the hosting of the Crossroad Conference of the Association of Cultural Studies at Lingnan in 2010, on the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Department of Cultural Studies. I suspect that Meaghan did not expect that she would be associated with Lingnan for twelve years, from 2000 to 2006 as a full time employee and 2006 to 2012 employed half-time. During the latter half of this academic position, she also served as the Chair of the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society, whose function is to extend the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project beyond the journal to include organising the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies International Conference and the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Summer School for postgraduate students and early career academics, on alternate summers. After her stay at Lingnan University, Meaghan took up a short fellowship in the Cultural Studies in Asia Research Cluster at the Asia Research Institute and a William S.W. Lim Professorial Teaching Fellowship in the PhD Program in Cultural Studies in Asia, both at the National University of Singapore.

Throughout all these years, the fellowship that Meaghan has forged with cultural studies scholars in Asia has been facilitated by a shared belief that it is necessary for cultural studies scholars to have intensive knowledge of, and to theorise from, the local. All who are familiar with her work will notice how Meaghan's analysis generally begins with a seemingly casual and anecdotal observation of a very local Australian or Hong Kong phenomenon, from which a complex analysis is progressively built up. The emphasis on starting with knowing the local has been foundational to the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project from the start. As the curriculum, pedagogy and methodology for Inter-Asia Cultural Studies becomes increasingly self-aware and formalised, Meaghan's footprint can be found, and will continue to be found, in the unfolding journey.

About the author

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