

## **Mobilities, Communication, and Asia**

### ***Introduction***

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Asia is, and has been, a site of multiple mobilities—of media, peoples, and ideas. These various mobilities in and across Asia that this Special Section addresses are significantly imbricated in relations of communication and power. Yet they have not received adequate attention in media and communication studies or in the expansive scholarship on mobilities, which has largely remained focused on the North Atlantic West. This introduction makes a case for the importance of addressing relations of mobilities in Asia and understanding how relations of communication and power inform, and are informed by, such mobilities.

*Keywords: mobility, Asia, postcolonial, migration, media, modernity*

Why a special section on mobilities, Asia, and communication? One obvious reason is that, with a few exceptions (e.g., Aguiar, 2011; Edwards, Ho, & Choi, 2017; Steele, 2016; Sun, 2014; Wallis, 2013), most of the available literature on mobilities has focused on the West, especially the North Atlantic West. Although some of this work has acknowledged the importance of global mobilities, for the most part an exhaustive discussion of mobility outside the North Atlantic context is lacking. But just because research on a topic is lacking is not necessarily a reason to focus on it. Why that absence of scholarship needs to be made present is at issue and addressed here.

This article first discusses how we understand the concept of mobility. Then we turn to the importance of examining Asia in the context of mobilities and address how focusing on mobilities in Asia might unsettle some underlying assumptions of the “mobility paradigm” (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007)

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that prevails in the social sciences. Finally, we discuss the importance of communication—as theoretical analytic and social phenomena—for advancing our understanding of mobilities in, across, and of Asia.

### What Do We Mean by Mobility?

Mobility here refers not simply to movement, but rather movements that are situated in relations of geopolitical, cultural, economic, and historical power—all of which typically work together (Cresswell, 2006; Massey, 2004). Mobility is, as Tim Cresswell (2006) has argued, a movement between locations where the movement is socially produced by, and situated in, larger relations of power and becomes imbued with meanings. Cresswell posits: “Movement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the *burden of meaning*” (p. 6, emphasis added).

Further, while mobility is imbedded in representational logics, it is also an *embodied practice*, as some scholars have rightly asserted (Cresswell, 2006; Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Sheller, 2011). How mobile bodies are given meaning, how they acquire and forge meaning, and how they resist dominant meaning structures as they cross scales are central points of interest for us.

It is worth mentioning that, although we use the term *mobility* to frame this Special Section, we do not oppose it to *immobility* (Cresswell, 2006; Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Sheller, 2011; Urry, 2007). Recognizing that mobility is situated in relations of immobility or stasis, we argue that the conceptual analytic of mobility should involve a recognition of various immobilities underpinning mobilities. When we discuss or use the term *mobility* in this essay, we assume its connection to some relation and instance of immobility. John Urry (2003) has famously called this the “mobilities and moorings” dialectic (see also Hannam et al., 2006; Urry, 2007). In other words, “moorings” (that is, anchorings, stasis, fixity) always inform mobilities. Any mobility emerges from a mooring—however temporary—that enables that mobility; and that mobility also becomes anchored in particular places and sites. Mobilities and immobilities are relational (Adey, 2006), and invoking one of them always implies (and should imply) the other.

### Why Asia?

Since European (and in some cases, Asian) colonial and even precolonial times, Asia has been a hub of numerous mobilities that have played an important role in producing the various histories and geopolitics of Asia.<sup>2</sup> Examples of such mobilities in Asia during precolonial times include:

- the old Silk Road (whose memories and histories are being rearticulated as China builds a “new Silk Road” today) along which products moved between China and Central Asia;
- the vast migrations of poets, painters, sculptors, and others around the 16th century from what was then Persia (today Iran) to India to serve the Mogul empire and in the process remake the history of India through a logic of multiculturalism and multireligiosity;

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<sup>2</sup> What we call *Asia* did not exist in precolonial times—that is, prior to European colonialism. The term is an invention of the European colonial imagination (Hui, 2011; Sakai, 2000; Spivak, 2007).

- the post-1947 migrations of Hindus from what is now Bangladesh to India, and Muslims from India to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and (West) Pakistan; and
- the vast movements (or better, defection) of millions of people from North to South Korea in the period after Korea gained liberation from Japan in 1945 and was then divided at the 38th Parallel during the Cold War (the Korean migration is estimated to be about 900,000, or roughly 10% of North Korea's population during this period (Tanaka, 2008).

The Korean situation also reminds us of the importance and influence of the Japanese empire on transnational mobilities in that part of Asia in the first part of the 20th century. In the 1920s and 1930s, technicians, engineers, and politicians in Japan were building highways, communication networks, aviation systems, and electricity with the aim of creating new levels of transnational mobility in Asia that might constitute a self-sufficient human bloc to counter Western imperialism in Asia and at the same time shore up Japan's dominance in Asia.

The politics of mobility in Asia is also revealed in the situation of exiles, refugees, and asylum seekers. One example is the "boat people" of Vietnam arriving on Malaysian shores and then being betrayed and denied "home" by the Malaysian government in the late 1980s. Some of these people also arrived on Australian shores from the late 1970s to early 1990s and were given asylum. However, asylum policies for Vietnamese people in Australia are far more stringent now than they were 40 years ago. The Australia situation is interesting because it represents an anomaly that speaks to the position of Australia in relations of mobilities in Asia. Because of its strategic position in the trans-Pacific zone as well as its proximity to Asia, Australia has always been impacted by Asia (especially East and Southeast Asia), and discussions in public culture have debated whether Australia is in fact part of Asia (many argue that it is). Clearly, Asia needs to be thought of not simply territorially but geopolitically, economically, and historically—as a site of interlinked relations.

More recent cases of mobilities in Asia are those of Rohingya refugees fleeing to Malaysia, Bangladesh, and India to avoid persecution in Myanmar. Malaysia and India have denied them asylum and sent them away. And Tibetan refugees in India have attempted to escape China's violence toward and (what many consider an illegal) occupation of Tibet. These examples point to a history of despair and statelessness that informs many types of mobilities within and across Asia.

The rapid and unequal globalization of the economy since the late 20th century has further expanded mobilities across Asia. Skilled and unskilled workers, such as finance professionals and domestic workers, migrate from places such as India, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka to financial and developing hubs in the Middle East and South and Southeast Asia (Singapore, Seoul, and Hong Kong primarily). As a result, their lives become situated in, and are remade by, mobile regimes of capital and culture, giving rise to questions such as: Where does India end (or begin)? Is India in Hong Kong? In the Middle East?

Recent mobilities of students to places such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and even Australia occur as many turn away from the United States and the United Kingdom as scholarly destinations—because of financial reasons, long distances from home, and post-9/11 geopolitics that has produced an unwelcoming immigrant climate in these Western nations. In addition, there are mobilities of care and intimacies when families are

forced to split up because the husband may be employed in Dubai while the wife might be informally employed as a domestic worker in another part of the world or in another part of Asia. Many social processes of intimacy that in the past might have been "bound" or located in one site in Asia are today caught in a politics of mobility.<sup>3</sup> Although there is nothing particularly Asian about this type of mobility, we highlight this example because existing scholarly work on mobile intimacies and care generally tends to focus on an East-West flow of such care and caregivers.

Asia today has also become a global hub of telecommunications and entertainment. The world's biggest cinema industry—Bollywood—is situated in Mumbai, India. Software and hardware development that makes today's digital world possible takes place in Asia. Telecommunications companies and business processing outsourcing centers are based in parts of Asia such as the Philippines and India (Mankekar, 2015; Shome 2006). These firms facilitate all kinds of teleconnectivities in our current global moment. Some of the world's largest music industries are in Asia: consider the trans-Asian mobility of K-pop—popularly dubbed the "Korean wave" (see Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008).

These few examples point to a rich and complex history and the geopolitics of precolonial (that is, pre-European colonial and, in some cases, Asian colonial) mobilities, and postcolonial trans-Asian mobilities of populations, media, consumption objects, and ideas. These mobilities remind us that Asia is not, and never has been, a fixed, exotic, timeless, and traditional location—as the West would have it. It is, and always has been, an unsettled site made up of movements and re-movements. As well, Asia is a site of multiple temporalities, given its long and diverse histories of various modernities (Shome, 2016) that often collide (and collude) with one another in shaping the shifting contours of Asia.

For instance, Hong Kong until 1997 was a British colony. Today, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), while having been handed over to China, nonetheless falls under the administrative dictum of "one country, two systems." The temporality of Hong Kong (seen as more modern by most) and the temporality of Mainland China (seen as less modern and less sophisticated than Hong Kong) is an example of such colliding temporalities (and yet also colluding temporalities, as China and Hong Kong must work together). Such multiple temporalities that are symptoms of Asia's diverse histories and the diverse colonial formations that have been historically established in Asia inform our understanding of mobilities across Asia. They form the contexts in which those mobilities must be comprehended. A *historical sensibility* must inform mobility studies, including those in Asia. It is the various complex processes of mobilities—some of which we have referenced above—that make up the many told and untold histories of Asia that need to be made visible. In doing so, the scholarly goal should be to break away from, or unsettle, the normative and unmarked temporality (that is, the temporality of the North Atlantic West) that thus far has been an unmarked logic in the dominant literature on mobility. This has been the case even when scholars have acknowledged "differential" or "multiple mobilities" (Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller, 2011; Sheller & Urry, 2006; also Creswell, 2006, Massey, 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> We make this point with caution because we are aware that during periods of European colonialism in Asia, many native domestic workers were forced to constantly move with the colonial families they served. We recognize, however, that today this process has multiplied manifold under neoliberal capitalism, and the geographical scales of such mobility have widened.

Eminent Asian intellectual Wang Hui (2005) has argued that a new idea of Asia needs to emerge: "A new idea of Asia—which is neither the beginning of a *linear world history* nor its end, neither self-sufficient subject nor subordinating object—provides an opportunity to reconstruct world history" (p. 5), emphasis added). At one level, this is what we are attempting to do: to understand Asia on its own terms and through a postcolonial sensibility that refuses an understanding of Asia as a fixed, timeless, changeless site of rooted traditions and desires that is now somehow becoming charged up (as one hears in Western anxiety-ridden rhetorics about the "Asian century" or in self-orientalizing discourses of "Asia rising" and "Asian turn"). And our entry point into this understanding are the relations and the logics of mobilities that have made and continue to make Asia.

Several questions emerge in thinking about mobilities in the context of Asia: What kinds of relations of mobility are evident in Asia today? How are they linked to earlier historical migrations and violences in Asia? What (new) political and cultural subjectivities are emerging or violently being erased due to particular mobilities; (think of Hong Kong, Tibetan refugees in India, Palestinians, and Kashmiris)? What type of Asia, and what types of borders as well as connections in and across Asia are being produced by these various regimes and relations of mobilities? Might mapping some of the mobile processes in Asia provide new contexts for rethinking mobilities and thus inviting new reconsiderations of mobility (and immobility) in mobility scholarship?

Mobility, as noted earlier, is a relational category (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2006). We can further describe it as an intersectional category—by which we mean that the politics and relations of mobility in a particular context are thoroughly imbedded in, and intersect with, not just issues of class, race, gender, sexuality, and so on but also very centrally with the questions of state and state power. The horrific mobility of Rohingyas today is not merely about the mobility of a persecuted group but centrally about the state of Myanmar and about the states that refuse them long-term abode (such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand) or that "accommodate" them only on certain terms (such as Bangladesh). In other words, mapping mobilities in Asia is also about (at least implicitly) mapping logics of state operations in particular Asian contexts, revealing how that might call attention to the relation between state/nation and mobility in Asian contexts, and help us understand the state beyond liberal Western theories of state power.

For instance, Partha Chatterjee (2011) advanced the influential notion of "political society" to understand state power beyond liberal Western state models in which the civil/state binary often informs our understanding of the state's relations with its population. Beyond civil society, however, in many postcolonial contexts, there exists a political society comprised of populations (such as squatters, homeless, or extreme poor) who are not considered members of civil society (an elite sphere in many postcolonial contexts) and whose daily operations of living and surviving might be illegal. For example, squatters might move from one location to another and set up shift residences and habitats in places where they are not supposed to. Yet the state often ignores such violations and informally recognizes the power of their communities. In fact, politicians might seek the patronage of this population. That is, the state might ignore these "violations" or movements "not because they [the squatters] have a right to them but because [state] authorities make a political calculation of costs" (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 14) that they may incur on a moral front if they enrage or alienate such profoundly disempowered groups.

This recognition of the state's negotiation with a political society affords a different understanding of the state (that exceeds Western liberal models of the state, where the state's relation with its population is often understood through the binary of state versus civil society). The essays showcased in this Special Section do not necessarily exemplify such ways of thinking about the state, but we make this point to highlight how the topic of mobility invites us to focus on a state's relation with various population groups and their mobilities (or lack thereof) and how those relations might help us theorize various models of state power beyond Western liberal models.

To study mobilities in Asia, then, is to also study the *logics of modernities* through which states in Asia manage their populations, economies, and cultures. Thus, this Special Section also hopes to contribute to ongoing conversations about Asian modernities (Barlow, 1997; Chatterjee, 2004; Clark, 2011; Dutta, 2017a; Rofel, 1999; Shome, 2012). When we focus on various mobilities in, across, and of Asia, understanding which logics of the modern become visible and how they invite us to recognize modernity itself as a contested category are important theoretical issues. Mobility is often associated with the notion of modernity. Focusing on mobilities across Asia enables us to better understand the current dreams and desires of modernity in many Asian nations—for instance, the transnationalization of their media and markets or the expansion of transportation systems to enable cross-border commodity movements. This is evident in China, which builds ambitious bridges and transportation pathways to ease connections between economies in East Asia. At the time of writing this essay, China is set to soon open a vast bridge that will connect Hong Kong, Macau, and Zhuhai.

Focusing on mobilities in Asia enables us simultaneously to challenge and expose the dark undersides of the modern desires of contemporary Asian nation-states. Again, the treatment of migrant domestic labor is a case in point, where the host nation may turn a blind eye to the various abuses to which migrant labor is subject while the state's economy benefits from such migrant labor (Dutta, 2017b). Many nations in Asia do not subscribe to the liberal Western ethos of human rights and often disregard this logic as being a "Western imperial logic." A recent report by Human Rights Watch (2016) notes the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf states have not ratified the International Labour Organization's Domestic Workers Convention even though they have voted for it. Domestic migrant workers are not protected by labor laws in the UAE (as far as we know), although it is possible this may change in the future. Underneath the glitz and glamour of Dubai's towering buildings are the blood-stained bodies of migrants. Here is the dark side of the UAE's modern dreams. Thus, the reason for focusing on mobilities in Asia is not to privilege these mobilities (in contrast to mobilities in the West) but to reveal the desires and despairs, hopes and horrors—and the zones in between—within which these mobilities are situated and produced and yet remain unknown.

In focusing on mobilities and Asia, we do not want to be misunderstood as advocating regionalism in scholarship. We are aware of a growing interest in regionalism as an analytic in some current critical scholarship that can sometimes seem like a rearticulation of area studies in a new mode (see Chiang & Wong, 2016). We also recognize the growing power of regional blocs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that attempt to redress geopolitical power imbalances. Although that in itself is not problematic, too often such regionalisms in practice can end up simply as a competitive other to the West. We do not focus on Asia to advocate a continental or regional approach to critical scholarship. If we focus on Asia, we do so in a manner that is resonant with Gayatri Spivak's (2007) recognition of a (pluralized) Asia as a position:

So you see how Asia is not just a problematic, but it's a problem, and so for us to really understand how it is a whole collection of positions without identity and going back and forth, *we have to step out of regionalisms.* (p. 243, emphasis added)

To focus on Asia (and mobilities) is not only to resist any essentializing but also to make visible the numerous conjunctures, positions, and articulations through which Asia is constantly being made and remade; through which Asia links up to what is not seen as Asia; and through which to make visible unknown Asias so as to resist exceptionalist narratives about the "Asian century" or "Asia rising" that dominate global imaginations today. At the beginning, as at the end, our project and goals are first and foremost political; they are not about reacting to the West. At a broader level, our intellectual impulse is resonant with Kuan Hsing Chen's (2010) imperative to develop "Asia as method" a title he reworked from Takeuchi Yoshimi (1960/2000)—although, again, we resist any essentializing of something called an "Asian method." "Asia as method" is not a "slogan" (Chen 2010, p. 255) but an intellectual practice that seeks to understand Asia in some of the ways highlighted above; at the same time, this practice we argue needs to be connected with analyses of global formations of power.

### **How Does Focusing on Asia Unsettle Elements in the Mobility Paradigm?**

As indicated at the outset, in current Western social science scholarship there is a turn toward what is being called the "mobility paradigm," or the "new mobility paradigm" and "mobile methodologies." These concepts were initially advanced in works of influential scholars such as John Urry and Mimi Sheller. While we, too, are influenced by the rich insights of these influential scholars, we take pause and ask: For whom is this mobility paradigm a "new" paradigm? Is it so new when we consider a context such as Asia? The mobility paradigm in current Western scholarship, as initiated by Urry and Sheller, has rightly admonished social sciences for a kind of "sedentarism" in its modes of inquiry (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 208). Sheller and Urry argue that "sedentarism treats as normal stability, meaning, and place, and treats as abnormal distance, change, and placelessness" (p. 208). They emphasize the importance of "mobile methodologies" (as opposed to sedentary modes of inquiry) in which processes of knowing, and the objects of our knowledge, are not to be seen as static but considered as outcomes of, and responsive to, the constant shifting mobilities of our environments within which we produce knowledge.

All this indeed makes a tremendous contribution to social science research frameworks. Yet without diminishing the importance of these perspectives, we argue that in postcolonial contexts (whether Asia, Africa, or Latin America), sedentarism in scholarship, ideas, and public intellectual work has never been a luxury that one could afford. For example, when the South Asia Subaltern Studies Group was attempting to rewrite and challenge "elitist" official histories of Indian nationalism from the perspective of the "missing" subaltern in such official histories, their research (and the questions informing them) had to be "mobile" as they studied, analyzed, and documented moving peasant uprisings and resistances in so many parts of colonial India.

Returning to the Korean situation, no sedentarism is possible. To understand Korea (including its present) is to have an intellectual imagination that is mobile and that constantly moves between what is now South Korea and North Korea as well as considers their relations with Japan and the Cold War. Similarly, how does one engage in a social science investigation of Palestinian culture and society without centralizing mobility

and foregrounding a research imagination that moves between and across the numerous scales of violence—and the ever-increasing Israeli settlements and ever-shifting landscapes of mobility for Palestinians—that constitute the nation that we call Palestine? To put all this succinctly, European colonialism in Asia (and its postcolonial aftermaths) has meant that any serious intellectual work in, and about, Asia cannot think of place and method as bound and static. So when West-situated scholars attempt to enrich social sciences by advocating a mobility paradigm and initiating a perspective of mobile methodologies, we, as postcolonial scholars, find it important to “provincialize” such impulses (Chakraborty, 2000) for we recognize that underlying these initiatives is again the normative unmarked imaginary (of time and space) of the North Atlantic West. Our imaginations in postcolonial contexts always had to be mobile; it was not a choice or matter of reflection. It was and is our postcolonial condition.

### **Communicative Interplays of Mobilities**

Mobilities are constituted by and constitutive of communication (Cass, Shove, & Urry, 2005). Movements of bodies, technologies, labor, and capital are rendered (im)possible through communication, and at the same time serve as the foundations for the reproduction of discourses, communicative processes, and communicative frameworks that create the conditions of immobility (Dutta, 2017b). Some ideas are communicated and move through communicative networks because they are tied to and embedded in networks of local-national-global power (Dutta, 2011; Springer, 2016). These hegemonic ideas of global capital underlie the material inequalities in distributions for opportunities for mobilities. The mobility, for instance, of neoliberal discourses of trickle-down economics across Asia is tied to the discursive power of global capital, narrated through Asian sites of discourse making (Dutta, 2017a). The global movement of capital, commodities, and labor is constituted amid political and economic structures that render salient certain meanings of mobility while erasing other possibilities for interpreting mobility. Further, the global movement of capital, while enabling and encouraging mobility for some (upper-class, upper-caste Asian consumers, students, executives, and academics with access to the global free market), also renders many others immobile—disconnected and erased from the possibilities of movement (Dutta, 2017b). While celebratory discourses of Asian cosmopolitan mobilities depict a specific class politics of privilege and movement capital, these discourses also obfuscate the erasures and displacements that are written into the mobility of global capital (Szerszynski & Urry, 2006). In this sense, mobility and immobility are not binaries but are interrelated in a system that expresses and captures the numerous desires and violences of globalization (Springer, 2016).

The anchorings of globalization processes in and across Asia, intertwined with transformations in other regions (such as Australia or Zambia through Indian and Chinese extractive industries framed as development), depict the power inequalities, social injustices, oppressions, and exploitations that are produced by global flows of capital, narrated in Asian logics. Asian capitalisms and extractive industries reproduce overarching ideologies of capitalist colonialism marked in Asian narratives (Dutta, 2017a). The mobilities of various neoliberal capitalisms across Asia (re)produce patterns of inequalities that reify the neoliberal order, playing out center-periphery relationships within and across Asian spaces (MacLeavy, 2014). Relationships of global movements from/within/between Asia(s) are embedded within overarching differentials in power and control, tied to who participates in decision making and resource extraction and, simultaneously, who is displaced from material and discursive spaces in order to contribute to capitalist profiteering (Dutta, 2011). Displaced from spaces of livelihood, the figure of the migrant and the various processes of migration make these relations visible and



often invisible, particularly erasing the alienation and displacement produced by the mobility of global capital (Dutta, 2017b). Linked to this process are mediated and communication practices—such as technology, films, music, social media, and remittances—that shape and inform various types of migratory movements. For example, the migration of large numbers of middle-class and lower-middle-class workers from Bangladesh into precarious jobs in Singapore is tied to the circulation of images through mobile media that project the neoliberal story of mobility (see Dutta, 2017b; Duta & Kaur, this Special Section). Additionally, the transnational migration of communication practices themselves constitutes new forms of mobilities and immobilities, agency, and identity formations. For instance, the movements of writing poetry in Bengali among migrant construction workers in Singapore express agentic opportunities for negotiating and resisting structures of migration.

Communication is central to these processes. For example, technology firms are constantly developing new communication language through software that requires a constant flow of transnational expert workers who are often treated in problematic ways (in terms of cultural recognition and wages) in host nations. Similarly, finance capital globally circulates through communicative values and processes (including migrant remittances to their nation of origin—a process itself underwritten by non-Western values of domesticity and familiarity). Transnational movements of celebrities and popular culture (for instance, in Asia) serve diasporic populations in many parts of Asia that have implications for their migrant experience as well as the production of a transnational Asian identity. Disempowered and often stateless migrants connect to or engage their music in their diasporic situations to produce some sense of cultural security in an otherwise coercive exploitative condition (lacking decent food, shelter, and wages). These meanings of security also emerge as anchors for resistance in oppressive working conditions. Relations of gender, sexuality, class, and nationality are central considerations in these phenomena because the migration itself is often wrought with gender violences, discrimination and exploitation of poor laborers, and the devaluing of peoples of particular nations in global migratory practices; for instance, White Europeans, Americans, and upper-class Asians are usually seen as *expatriates*, while the word *migration* is reserved for mobilities of non-Western lower classes, even within non-Western host nations. The mobilities of stigmatization and discrimination are constituted amid intersecting relationships of class, race, and gender. A communication perspective attends to the constitutive role of communicative technologies, communicative resources, and discourses in the (re)production of mobility. Moreover, a communication perspective attends to the effects of movements on forms, processes, and experiences of communication.

### **Anchoring and Disrupting Asias**

Whereas Asian anchors offer conceptual categories for theorizing communication and mobility from and within Asia, these anchors also offer the bases for disrupting the articulation of a homogeneous and monolithic Asian category as the foundation for theorizing communication and mobility (Dirlik, 1998). Asia is a site of both centering and decentering. Mobility as a trope forms the foundation for this movement back and forth between interrogating the assumptions that make up Asia in hegemonic imaginaries and simultaneously working with Asia's margins to co-create ontological categories grounded in social justice. The articulation of social justice is interrogated, constituted in relationship to transformative opportunities for resisting neoliberal structures.

The concept of Asia and the mobility of the hegemonic Asian category (as Confucianism, collectivism, harmony) are disrupted through the locally situated, contextually embedded accounts of movements, stasis, displacements, and disruptions. The hegemonic articulation of Confucianism as Asian values is disrupted, for instance, through narrative accounts of resistance, argumentation, and challenge. Categories such as collectivism, communitarianism, and familiarity that are often deployed to mark the Asian "other" as the basis of Asian values, often through the deployment of self-orientalizing elite discourses that serve the Asian elite, are rendered impure through the everyday accounts of movements of Asia's underclasses and the challenges offered by these underclasses to capital. For instance, the overarching logic of Asian face-saving is disrupted by the accounts of everyday resistance performed by workers in precarious working conditions. The symbolic articulations of Asia, grounded in materialities of flow, are disrupted as well as mobilized across spaces through the everyday accounts of mobilities. The anchors to Asian representations of mobilities in elite Asian and Euro- and U.S.-centric discourses are situated in relationship to the inequalities in distributions of material resources. Especially critical are the inequalities in the distribution of communicative resources of expression, participation, and voice across Asia and the ways in which these resources are mobilized in the realm of power and control.

We critically interrogate the production of knowledge within Asian academe as a site for reproducing inequalities and difference, reproducing hierarchies of caste, class, gender, and race in Asian societies. Often paradoxically these inequalities are reproduced through the very production of the self-orientalizing Asian "other" embedded in Asian values, utilizing the trope of Asian values to write over, obfuscate, and erase differences in and across Asia. The "Singapore model," for instance, celebrates Singapore's multicultural management as a site for reproducing difference while obfuscating the racist structures that continue to reproduce "Chinese privilege" (Thanapal, 2015, 2017). Thanapal discusses the symbolic and material resources that are continually deployed in Singapore to maintain the hegemony of Chinese norms as universal, from everyday interpersonal structures to structures of education and employment to structures of national policy making. Knowledge productions about the experiences of Asians in Western contexts often are entirely oblivious to the racism and violence carried out by Asian elites within Asia or by dominant Asian races within their sociocultural fabrics. The location of privilege from which categories of Asian experiences of racism are produced in the literature erases the violences of racial reproductions in and across Asia, which are legitimized through Asian authoritarianisms.

Beyond the West-Asia dichotomy, then, we suggest the role of racism as a strategy for reproducing power and erasing voice. Although studies depicting the racialized experiences of a wide array of Asian communities in White societies offer insights into the flow of racism, the interplays of racist, classist, and casteist practices across Asia mostly remain undertheorized. The ways in which difference is constituted and reproduced in Asian societies need urgent attention in the backdrop of the violences experienced by migrating minority communities within Asia. With much of the postcolonial echelons of the cosmopolitan academe being made up of upper-caste, upper-class Asians, often trained in and by colonial tropes, the omission of the overarching questions of race, caste, and class within Asia speak to the formations of power through which knowledge about Asias is produced. As such, the emerging concepts from Asia's margins in the many conversations in this Special Section resist the dominant self-orientalizing ontologies that are manufactured at Asian sites of knowledge production, often as tools for reproducing bourgeois hegemony and keeping intact elite power and control (Dirlik, 1998).

### **Technologies, Neoliberal Seductions, and Mobilities**

Mobilities are often positioned in the communication literature in the context of information communication technologies (Dutta, 2017a). Asia emerges in these accounts of mobilities through the artifact of the mobile device, often framed in the hegemonic discourse as an instrument of empowerment and movement out of poverty and into spaces of cosmopolitan possibilities. Accounts of mobile telephony across Asia offer visual representations of mobile phone penetrations and uses. For instance, the technosolutions of microfinance under the Grameen Bank model are tied to the technosolutions of the mobile phone, generating new market opportunities for mobile phones through mobile development interventions. The framing of the mobile as the solution to development is tied to the creation of new market opportunities for transnational capital. The mobility of the mobile device is tied to the logics of global capital, creating new spaces for penetration by mobile communication technologies, working hand in hand with the nongovernmental organization sector. The co-branding with Grameen and the positioning of health solutions pushes new markets for mobile communication technologies.

Asian imaginaries of technologies (Dutta, 2015, 2017b) of mediation on one hand disrupt Eurocentric linear explanations of mobilities that conceptualize mobilities as linear movement; on the other hand, these imaginaries, grounded in everyday accounts of negotiations, disrupt homogenizing tendencies of self-orientalizing Asian categories that serve the agendas of the Asian elite. Whereas mobilities are interrupted with disjunctures and differences, Asian mobilities are intertwined with global processes of neoliberal governance, tied to narrow logics of market promotion, individualization, and reworking of the state to serve the agendas of private capital (Dutta, 2011). Whereas the global deployment of neoliberal logics serves as the fulcrum of global movements of capital, bodies, products, services, technologies, and finances, these neoliberal logics take root in various articulations in the interstices of Asia (Dutta & Basu, 2018). For instance, Chinese neoliberal reforms are carried out under the broader language of socialism, articulating the market as the basis for the transformation to socialism (Dutta, 2011).

The framework of information communication technology for development (ICT4D), positioned as the solution to challenges of global development through access to opportunities for information and participation, is constituted within the individualizing and market-driven logics of neoliberalism (Dutta & Basu, 2018). ICT4D suggests market-based technologies as tools for delivering development; at the same time, it builds in new markets for technology corporations, framed in the narrative of development. Education, health care, employment, entrepreneurial opportunities, new market access, empowerment, voice, and democracy are all enabled by new technologies for development. The notion that new communication technologies such as the Internet will leapfrog development, ushering in new opportunities for liberty and economic growth, replicates the imperialist impulse of the dominant development paradigm, and "derives from the 19th century's idea that technological progress will ultimately free people from all natural and social constraints" (Alzouma, 2005, p. 351). Devoid of the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that constitute the challenges of development, the leapfrogging narrative paradoxically replicates Eurocentric ontological domination even as it frames the technology in culturalist language (Alzouma, 2005). Also, the technology-driven discourses of development often reflect the agendas of the professionalized, managerial domestic elites who stand to profit the most through technology-driven

interventions funded by international development actors and who control the rewards attached to computer and Internet use (Dutta & Basu, 2018).

When Google announces the launch of Google Balloon to connect disenfranchised and disconnected parts of the global South to the Internet, it is worth critically interrogating the neoliberal and surveillance agendas of Google (Katikala, 2014). The trope of connectivity, unchallenged and circulated uncritically, postures Google as the savior, all set with its multicultural ethos and Asian leadership. The celebratory tropes of Asian leaders in Silicon Valley ushering in progress through new communication technologies need to be questioned in the realms of control, surveillance, and promotion of the market (Dutta, 2017a). Similarly, the introduction of the Aadhaar card in India as a marker of mobility through identification obfuscates the immobilities that are integral to the very technoseduction of Aadhaar (Taylor & Broeders, 2015). That India does not have equitable access to the technologies for making the cards, that different social classes have differential access to the technologies, and that different bodies present different challenges to being counted remain obfuscated from the discursive space (Dutta, 2017a). Accompanied by authoritarian policy transformations that tie access to welfare services to Aadhaar, the card becomes an instrument for rendering the already immobile lives of the margins even more immobile. The mobility of the Aadhaar model across Asia, then, must be inverted, attending to the materiality of embodied experiences. Similarly, the tropes of e-governance in China circulate notions of democracy and participation as they co-opt subjects into structures of authoritarian control (Noesselt, 2014).

### **Difference and Power**

Mobilities offer critical frameworks for theoretically examining the communicative constructions of concepts, the ways in which these concepts move across spaces, and the strategic deployment of these concepts toward serving the agendas of power and control (van Dijk, 2008). The metadiscourses—that is, discourses about discourses—of mobility are both mobile and immobile, with some of these concepts moving through spaces of knowledge production in and on Asia, while others are interrupted, and sometimes interrupted vigorously, within structures of power. What moves and what does not move in the constitutive spaces of communication are tied to the materiality of spatial organizing of Asian logics. What Asias make into the spaces of knowledge production are tied to the politics of class, caste, gender, and race that play out within Asian contexts, especially amid discursive celebrations of the “Asian turn.”

For instance, the mobility of Singapore’s model of multiculturalism is constituted amid societal and institutional forms of racism that are experienced by Malays and Indians in Singapore (Chew, 2018). The everyday experiences of stigma and discrimination are communicatively constituted, reinforced through racist discourses that mark the body of the minority (Velayutham, 2009, 2017). The discursive silencing of racism in the mainstream, constituted in the state-driven model of multicultural management, precisely creates the condition for everyday racisms to perpetuate (Velayutham, 2017). In other words, the mobility of Singapore’s multiculturalism is constituted on the immobility of the articulations of racism amid authoritarian strategies of multicultural control deployed by the Chinese majority Singapore state.

The absence of racism from the discursive space through state-managed strategies also translates into the systematic absence of questions of racism from the academic literature. Consider the experiences

of India's Muslim minorities amid the rise of Hindutva authoritarianism that has been globally sold as a neoliberal model for pushing growth (Baber, 2004). Similarly, consider the experiences of minority communities in China, with the narratives of marginalization mostly being erased from the discursive space through various state-directed totalitarian strategies of power and control (Gladney, 2004). The complexities of power formations across Asia are rooted in a diverse array of contexts. Juxtapose, for instance, the experiences of minority Hindus in Malaysia experiencing everyday racisms against the backdrop of the experiences of Muslim minorities in India facing lynchings at the hands of Hindutva forces. The mobility of racist violence across Asian contexts is layered and situated amid inequalities in social structures.

Moreover, space is rooted in economic inequalities, with differentials in power constituting the inequalities in discursive spaces, discursive articulations, and discursive processes (Tickamyer, 2000). The attention to the movability of concepts across spaces offers insights into the terrains of power differentials within and across Asia, and the ways in which these power differentials are discursively constituted. Mobility of meanings constitutes the materiality of spatial inequalities, with hegemonic meanings forming the bases for material inequalities in the distribution of resources (McFarlane, 2009). The core-periphery relationship in spatial organization is upheld through discourses that legitimize imperial-capitalist interventions as pathways to development and modernization (Dutta, 2015). For instance, the discursive constructions of the Silk Road are intertwined with the material interventions and displacements that are being produced along the nodes of the Silk Road project (Neef & Singer, 2015). The neoliberalization of peripheral resources is integral to the perpetuation of ecological imperialism, upheld through discourses of development and growth (Frame, 2016). The discursive constructions of the smart city as the nodal anchor of development is intertwined with the displacements that are being produced as necessities for a technologically futuristic imagination of the city as the epicenter of the national imaginary.

### **The Articles in This Special Section**

In "Tracing the Discourse of Migrant Labor in China: Mobility, Fixity, and Displacement in the Workshop of the World," Ban Zhuo explores the ways in which migrant labor is discursively constituted and materially structured, narrating experiences of disenfranchisement and marginalization. The interplays of displacement, emplacement, fixity, and mobility serve as the anchors for theorizing the interpenetrating flows of capital, relationships between the urban and the rural, and the reworked intimacies generated by these flows. In "Logics of Mobility: Social Movements and Their Networked Other," Shiv Ganesh attends to the sites of networking and disconnection in indigenous organizing around access to land, constituted in relationship with national-level organizing in India. Salient in the article is the place of the networked other of the movement, constituted in a continually negotiated relationship with the mainstream structures of national-level organizing.

The article by Earvin Charles B. Cabalquinto, "'I Have Always Thought of My Family First': An Analysis of Transnational Caregiving Among Filipino Migrant Adult Children in Melbourne, Australia," explores the role of technology in mobile networks of care. Examining the care delivery practices of six Filipino migrant adult children in Melbourne to their left-behind parents in the Philippines through mobile devices and networked communications platforms to deliver care, the article draws attention to the structures that constitute mobility.

The theme of migration and mobility is reiterated in the article "Essentialist Identities as Resistance to Immobilities: Communicative Mobilities of Vietnamese Foreign Brides in Singapore." Arul Chib and Hoan Nguyen examine the ways in which marriage migrants adopt resistant strategies against structures of social and regulatory oppression. Based on qualitative interviews and ethnographic research with Vietnamese foreign brides in Singapore, the article draws on an intersectionality framework and notes that, in response to the various forms of spatial and social immobilities they experience, the marriage migrants adopt essentialist identities that negotiate ethnicity, gender, and class.

Xie ZhuoXiao's essay "Im/materializing Cross-Border Mobility: A Study of Mainland China–Hong Kong *Daigou* (Cross-Border Shopping Services on Global Consumer Goods)" depicts a unique and novel transnational consumption practice conducted by cross-border shoppers known as *daigou*.

In "Precarities of Migrant Work in Singapore: Migration, (Im)mobility, and Neoliberal Governmentality," Mohan Jyoti Dutta and Satveer Kaur-Gill examine the immobilities of migrant labor in Singapore juxtaposed against the backdrop of the neoliberal discourses of mobility in Singapore, disrupting the elite narratives of Asian movements that serve state-market control and instead offering mobility as a conceptual anchor for resistance from the subaltern margins. Focusing on diasporic youth in Australia in "Media, Mobility, and Resilience Among Diasporic Young People," Audrey Yue offers a framework that sees the diasporic populations and their "resilience" in the system not through a logic of risk and vulnerability but through one that she terms "dividends."

In the article "Mobile Media Photography and Intergenerational Families," Jolynna Sinanan, Larissa Hjorth, Kana Ohashi, and Fumitoshi Kato explore the role of mobile media photography in maintaining intimacy in intergenerational families, comparing Japan and Australia. The concept of emotion work is explored by examining the ways in which ideals of family are circulated in images within the multicultural and monocultural contexts of Asian families.

In "Facebook, Long-Distance Marriages, and the Mediation of Intimacies," Kristel Anne Acadera and Brenda Yeoh explore the negotiations of digital intimacies among foreign domestic workers and their left-behind partners. Suggesting that these transnational couples engage in "performative mediated intimacies" that are shaped by gendered discourses and practices surrounding being "ideal" wives and husbands, the essay attends to the strategic ways in which digital media are deployed in constituting intimacies.

Dolly Kikon's article "Dreams and Desserts: Indigenous Migration, Service, and Mobility in India" explores the experiences of indigenous migrants from northeast India as workers in the hospitality industry, mapping the narratives of mobility and immobility. The interplay of desire and consumption on one hand and marginalization on the other shapes the contours of indigenous mobility.

In conclusion, the articles in this Special Section raise new questions about how to critically interrogate Asia as we theorize and attend to empirical observations from within the contexts of Asia. We interrogate critically the celebratory narratives of Asian pasts to resuscitate a monolithic imagination of Asia pitched to accompany the economic turn of Asian growth, instead calling for close attention to the everyday contexts of oppression and resistance in and across Asias, often constituted by the trajectories of growth.

The questions of movement, stasis, and displacements that are brought together in these essays also point to the constitutive role of communication when considering inequalities and differences in flows of power and control within and across Asia (Dutta & Basu, 2018). It is our hope that these conversations open up new grounds for working through concepts of mobilities of labor, capital, raw materials, and risks amid Asian capitalist transformations, critically interrogating the production of Asian images and narratives that serve the agendas of global capital.

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