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Call for Papers

Culture Chameleons: Narrative Code-Switching

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In December 2021, the Wang Leehom scandal exploded on the Asian Internet, with the Taiwanese-American pop icon swiftly falling from grace following accusations by his ex-wife of infidelity and abuse. Among the more interesting responses to this familiar story of sordid goings-on in the celebrity class was the claim that Wang had a habit of code-switching when in China, affecting a strong Beijing accent there, although he had been raised in the US by Taiwanese parents, and spoke with a noticeably different Mandarin accent when he was in Taiwan. Eryk Michael Smith, on ICRT's English-language *Taiwan This Week*, pointed out that other celebrities and businesspeople traveling to work in China did this as well, perhaps even unconsciously. But in Wang's case, the effort (whether unconscious or opportunist) was apparently all for naught, as Chinese companies lined up to dump him from sponsorship and the Chinese state-run media called for a permanent ban on the entertainer.

Code-switching is identified by linguistics scholar John Gumperz as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (*Language and Social Identity* 59)—the use of different languages or language varieties within the same speech event. Speakers may code-switch for numerous reasons, often to "fit in" with those around them and thus accrue certain benefits. Code-switching has been broadened to refer to "behavioral adjustment," observed, for example, in the African-American social context "as a strategy for Black people to navigate interracial interactions . . . [by] adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will

optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities” (McCluney et al., “The Costs of Code-Switching”).

Taiwan, an island inundated for centuries by colonial and cultural incursions (Spanish, Dutch, Japanese, mainland Chinese, American), has, not surprisingly, a rich history of code-switching. Taiwan’s great novel of the early twentieth century, *Orphan of Asia*, was originally written in Japanese in 1946 by Zhuoliu Wu, a Taiwanese native of Hakka ancestry, and later translated into English by Chinese scholars in the US. More recently, the use of Taiwanese has gained a cultural status among politicians, educators, and intellectuals that it never had either under the Japanese imperial rulers at the beginning of the twentieth century, or under the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalists) following the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek in 1947. Code-switching in spoken language has been studied in Taiwan in areas as diverse as cram schools (where teachers and students code-switch between English and Mandarin), in TV advertisements that code-switch between Mandarin and Taiwanese, and among local politicians, such as former president Chen Shui-bian, whose base expects proficiency in Taiwanese.

Taiwanese filmmaker Edward Yang’s masterpiece *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) is a case study in the uses of code-switching during the martial law-era Taiwan. The film has characters speaking Mandarin, Shanghainese, and Taiwanese; the English title is derived from an Elvis Presley song misheard by some of its youthful characters; and the Mandarin Chinese name of the film describes an entirely different situation (*Gu ling jie shao nian sha ren shi jian* (1991) 牯嶺街少年殺人事件, “Youth Murder Incident on Guling Street”). In his 2011 *New York Times* review of the film, titled “Displaced, Disaffected and Desperate to Connect,” A. O. Scott points out that “It is not clear if they [the characters] are temporarily or permanently in Taiwan, a place whose language and customs are not their own. . . . The boy and his friends, meanwhile, endure the usual identity crisis of modern adolescence compounded by the sense of not belonging in the only home they have known.”

This issue of *Concentric* aims to explore examples of code-switching and code-mixing as a social bonding strategy, a form of cultural masking, or a survival tactic in literary, cinematic, visual, and historical narratives in Taiwanese culture and globally, including Latinx narratives in North America and immigrant populations worldwide. Code-switching in spoken modes has been studied fairly extensively at the

conversational as well as the grammatical level, while interest in written code-switching has developed more slowly. Code-switching can indeed be viewed as a form of cultural appropriation, but with an entirely different power dynamic.

Among the possible topics for the issue would be the code-switching among Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Hakka in the films of Hou Hsiao-hsien to convey the textures of life in Taiwan during his childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. The code-switching among Taiwanese, Hakka, Japanese, and—briefly—Paiwan in *Kano* (Umin Boya 2014) underscores the political nature of language choice. Comedies such as *David Loman* (Chiu Li-Kwan 2013) and *Zone Pro Site* (Chen Yu-Hsun 2013) dramatize how the Taiwanese language can be used to undermine the cultural hegemony (and seriousness) of Mandarin. Code-switching also occurs in Wong Kar-wai films: between Mandarin and Cantonese in *Chungking Express*, between Cantonese and Shanghaiese in *In the Mood for Love*, and among Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shanghaiese in *The Grandmaster*. The code-switching between Japanese and Korean in Korean films of the colonial period is particularly fraught, as is the linguistic and cultural code-switching that occurs in Okinawa films. Other kinds of code-switching occur across related films, for example Mani Ratnam's two 2010 films reimagining the Ravana myth from the *Ramayana*: the Tamil language film *Raavanan* and the Hindi language film *Raavan*, which included casting the actor who played the charismatic "demon" in the Tamil film as the unsympathetic "hero" in the Hindi film.

Please send complete papers of 6,000-10,000 words, 5–8 keywords, and a brief biography to concentric.lit@deps.ntnu.edu.tw by June 30, 2022. Manuscripts should follow the latest edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Except for footnotes, which should be single-spaced, manuscripts must be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman. Please consult our style guide at <http://www.concentric-literature.url.tw>.

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diverse national and cultural backgrounds. In each issue of *Concentric* we publish groups of essays on a special topic as well as papers on more general issues.
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