

IN THE MOOD FOR TEXTURE**HONG KONG, BANGKOK, AND SHANGHAI'S URBAN AND MEDIA REVIVALS OF CHINESE COLONIAL MODERNITY AND THE NEW TRANSREGIONAL IMAGINATION OF ASIA**

Arnika Fuhrmann

The contemporary cinemas and hospitality industries of East and Southeast Asia exhibit a notable doubling of the cities of Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Shanghai. Film directors such as Wong Kar-wai – as well as hotels, bars, and clubs – revive 1930s Shanghai and 1960s Hong Kong modernities and exploit the aesthetics of Bangkok's old European trading quarters. In this context, both the colonial and Chinese urban pasts emerge as signifiers of the good life and of understandings of Asia in the present. The transregional Chineseness invoked is both virtual and anchored in material structures. How does a Shanghai-themed club in Bangkok (*Maggie Choo's*), or Hong Kong cinema's use of

Examining three Asian cities that figure as hot spots of shifting geopolitics, this project aims to uncover abiding, alternative notions of culture, ethnicity, and regional connectivity. To do so, it investigates shadow memories of *other* regional networks and models of collectivity that manifest in textured deployments of ruins, bodies, and affect. At the moment of the disappearance of their material remnants – as Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Shanghai undergo the greatest urban transformations in their histories – ephemeral infrastructures take up the work of historical memory. Thailand's semi-colonial temporality of the “never” and “yet still” of colonization – as well as the anomalous colonial temporalities of Shanghai and Hong Kong – and the functions that their aesthetics, regional networks,

The book project combines ethnographic and archival investigation of the revivification of Chinese modernity with cultural studies analysis. It engages scholarship in Chinese history, semi-coloniality, urban studies, critical regional and area studies, new materialism, gender studies, and media studies. In three sections, the book sheds light on the current conjuncture of historical imagination, re-regionalization, the transformation of cities and the role of media and design in Asia. The project is supported by a Distinguished Research Fellowship of the Advanced Research Collective at the City University of New York Graduate Center in New York in Spring 2020.



Web publicity for the SHANGHAI MANSION BANGKOK hotel © Shanghai Mansion Bangkok



In the Mood for Love (Wong Kar-wai), 2000

Bangkok as a filming location, rely on referencing a Chinese modernity that emerged under, but also exceeded, conditions of colonial and national governance? Why does the Southeast Asian city of Bangkok currently figure as the most “originary” Chinese city and is therefore charged with providing the “raw” material for these revivals?

What does this mean for transforming visions of regionality in the present? By asking these questions, my book project investigates how a historical transnational formation — that of “Chinese colonial modernity” — informs the present. The ubiquitous deployment of the features of a twentieth century translocal Chinese modernity points to enduring regional imaginaries that diverge from global notions of “China Rising,” the People's Republic's *One Belt One Road Initiative*, or the policies of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations.

and notions of power and temporality take on in the present stand at the heart of these phenomena. The city figures as a key site in which blueprints of prior cultural and social models are stored, imaged, and transformed. Across Southeast Asia and East Asia, images from urban design, new media, and cinema thereby emerge as salient archives for studies of the current political-historical conjuncture. The notion of “Asia” is thus currently being re-conceptualized from the location of *Southeast Asia*, as contemporary media and urban design projects encode a different notion of Asia than regional and transnational trade and governing bodies. Bangkok — as a *Chinese* city — stands at the center of these prominent revivals of a historical transregional Chineseness that speak of a different desire for Asia than those of official policy. It remains to be seen whether such experiments in the imagination of Asia from the site of Southeast Asia can yield more fine-tuned, egalitarian perspectives than the majority of inquiries to date, which are undertaken from the site of East Asian studies.

About the Author:

Arnika Fuhrmann is Associate Professor of Asian Studies at Cornell University. As an interdisciplinary scholar of Southeast Asia, she is working at the intersections of the region's aesthetic and political modernities. Her work



© Arnika Fuhrmann

seeks to model an approach to the study of Southeast Asia that is informed by affect, gender, urban, and media theory and anchored in thorough cultural, linguistic, and historical knowledge of the region.