

Editorial

Welcome to the seventh volume of the Irish Journal of Asian Studies (IJAS).

This issue consists of interdisciplinary papers submitted during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and so we greatly appreciate these contributions from our contributors. The papers all use quite different approaches, and we also have an original translation of a short story from Japanese to English in this issue.

The first article by Marilena Frisone is an ethnographic analysis of social practices in London among the Newar community from Nepal, related to food celebrations and food talks, and ranging from social events, music and singing to images and media that circulate in a transnational context. Frisone provides a fascinating look at the global connectedness of the Newar diaspora. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Nancy Munn, she follows the “reverberations” of Newar foodways, as they travel through feasts and religious festivals, online discussions on food heritage, and social media. In particular she looks at how, through such reverberations, the fame of *chhoyela* (roasted meat) and *yomari* (sweet, elongated dumplings) is constructed as these two dishes become iconic of Newar identity – *yomari* even gaining gastronomic recognition on the popular TV programme *MasterChef, The Professionals UK*. The paper argues that, as these two dishes circulate beyond the boundaries of the here and now of the Newar community in London, and beyond the limits of their traditional settings, they contribute to the expansion of Newar identity in space and time and convey multivocal understandings of what it means to be Newar, also giving us an insight into the “language of food” in an Asian diasporic community.

Melina Pirazolli provides us with an interesting examination of two stories by Li Xun (1881-1936), a key figure in modern Chinese literature, who also happened to be a supporter of the May Fourth Movement. Pirazolli has chosen to focus on “Medicine” and “Soap”, which allows her to engage with ideas related to the scent of objects, which she links to fetishism and consumption. Intellectuals from this time were dissatisfied not only with, what they considered to be Chinese social and cultural underdevelopment, but also with the poor sanitary and hygienic conditions of modern China. Li’s writings broach these topics, as sort of parables for the time, which also encourages ethical consumption practices. In her analysis of “Medicine,” Pirazolli shows how the author focuses on the object of a steamed bun, dipped in the blood of a revolutionary who was sentenced to death, and how this blood then becomes transformed into a “medicine” able to cure. “Soap” on the other hand, focuses on an imported western soap considered to be more effective than Chinese locust pods, and it is procured by a lustful husband who hopes to transform his bland wife into a scented seductress. Ultimately, both stories illustrate how objects are misread, misappropriated and misused.

Tatsuma Paduan explores the role of language, body and senses in relation to pilgrimages, from a more integrated perspective, attempting to move beyond such a Western epistemological divide. Paduan focuses on a contemporary pilgrimage in Japan, on Mt Kiso

Ontake, where pilgrims visit spirits' abodes (*reijinhi*) in order to hear ancestors' voices coming from the possessed body of a medium (*nakaza*). Through an ethnographic and semiotic analysis of somatic and oracular interactions between ancestors and pilgrims, he shows how, by opening the *individual body* of the medium, an intersensory, *collective body* of human and nonhuman members of the group is constructed. This allows us to consider the body-voice of the medium as a "moving shrine" where, through language, including sounds, screams and gestures occurring during the séances (*oza*), a sort of aesthetic contagion is actualised among pilgrims, and new subjectivities are produced, shattering supposed divisions between sense and senses, discourse and affect. This ethnographic analysis draws on the work of French linguist Émile Benveniste, as well as on ideas developed by Paris School semioticians—like Jean-Claude Coquet, Eric Landowski, and Paolo Fabbri—who proposed an antirepresentational theory of semiotics closely related to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, and views the semiotic and phenomenological as mutually inclusive, rather than mutually exclusive.

The coming year marks the 125th birthday of Unno Jūza, Japan's first prominent Science Fiction writer. Till Weingärtner has translated Unno's short story *The Secret of the Cosmic Dust*. The reader will recognise a number of common Science Fiction motifs, such as space travel and scientists ready to sacrifice everything for science. Learning from Weingärtner's introduction that many of Unno's stories were written as part of the wartime propaganda machine makes the story an unsettling read even today.

Chiara Giuliani has reviewed *Aspettando la fine della guerra. Lettere dei prigionieri cinesi nei campi di concentramento fascisti* [Waiting for the end of the war. Letters from Chinese prisoners in Fascist concentration camps] by Daniele Brigadoi Cologna, published in 2019. This important work retraces the events that led to the internment of Chinese subjects living in Italy during World War II and analyses a wide range of letters that describe life in Fascist concentration camps. It also addresses a neglected side of the history of Italy's resident Chinese community, while also re-narrating Italian history and offering memories of a shared past that need to be embroidered into Italian contemporary multicultural society.

This issue of *IJAS* has been one of the most varied and rich yet, in terms of approaches and topics, from the Newar community in London, to the Chinese community in Italy, as well as an examination of literature, pilgrimages and translation. The authors have provided us with high quality and thought-provoking research relevant to varied aspects of Asian Studies, making an excellent contribution for scholars and students, both in Ireland and internationally.

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