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Asian Popular Culture is a collection of articles covering the theme of popular art and enter-
tainment in Asian countries. Under the rubric of "popular culture," the book covers a wide
range of cultural phenomena: popular music, films, cartoons, comic books, comic magazines,
games, toys, etc. Interesting case studies from various Asian countries are presented: popular
music in Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand; movies in Hong Kong and Japan; cartoons in
Sri Lanka and China; comic magazines in Malaysia and Japan; coffee shop culture in
Manila, the Philippines, etc.

   The authors are journalists as well as scholars in various disciplines: anthropology, soci-
ology, Asian studies, English, journalism, mass communication, film, and music. They all
have firsthand field experiences in their areas of studies. Therefore, various methodologies
and approaches are used: textual analysis, historical, ethnographic—observation and inter-
viewing. However, most articles in this book focus on the impact of modernization and
Westernization upon popular culture, and give an analysis of each genre of popular culture
in its social context that enhances the reader's ability to see how such popular art and culture
develops, exists, and becomes part of its society and culture.

   The first grouping of articles concerns popular music. Craig A. Lockard, a professor at
the University of Wisconsin, illustrates how Malaysian popular music reflects Malaysian soci-
ety. Malaysia is a pluralist society with Malaysian, Indian, and Chinese ethnic groups, which
each has its own musical taste; thus, Chinese favored films and music from Singapore,
Taiwan, and Hong Kong, while Indian pop music was mostly imported from India, and
Malaysian pop music and culture followed Indonesian and Middle Eastern cultures.
However, Western (Anglo-American) popular music and entertainment have a strong influ-
ence over all three dominant ethnic groups: rock music in the 1960s and 1970s, Michael
Jackson and Madonna in the 1980s, and rap music and performance in the 1990s.

   For Singapore, Alan Wells, a professor at Temple University, Tokyo, and Lee Chun
Wah, a lecturer at Nanyang University in Singapore, present the music business phenomena
as a part of the global (Anglo-American) music industry. The six largest record companies in
Singapore are used as field sites. Information on local markets, retail record business, local
musicians, and favorite types of music is provided. It is shown that Singaporean music is
heavily influenced by multinational music companies. The music business reflects an import
consumerism with Anglo-Americans acting as wholesalers. This phenomenon is called by the
authors "duty free music."

   For Thai music, Deborah Wong, an ethnomusicologist from the University of
Pennsylvania who has done extensive fieldwork in Thailand, compares two contrasting tra-
ditions of tape cassette production by focusing on two individuals: Khru Thiap, a Thai clas-
sical music teacher representing Thai classical music; and Anchalee Chongkadikij, a female
popular singer representing contemporary pop music. Anchalee's image of a new era
woman—a strong, aggressive man-woman—was created. Thai classical music, on the other
hand, occupies much less air time with much less promotion. Anchalee's music is the type
that can be created for the sake of promotion and profits. The music is designed to be a com-
modity and the musician to be an icon with her own phenomena, which are quite different
from those of Khru Thiap. Anchalee's tape cassettes are commercially promoted by radio, tel-
evision, and music video, and in the process, as it is similarly done in the West, she becomes

an image or icon of pop music in Thailand.

The second grouping of articles concerns cartoons, comic art, and comic and humor magazines. These articles present many interesting aspects of the relationship between a society and its popular culture.

Leonard Rifas, a Sri Lankan leader in producing educational comics, introduces an editorial cartoonist who was pushed to resign from a newspaper because of his strong criticism of the government. His antigovernment cartoon series even led to death threats. Rifas examines this cartoonist's failed attempt to use cartoons as a weapon of political criticism.

Mary Ann Farguhar, a faculty member at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, who has done research on Chinese children's literature, focuses on "Sanmao," a cartoon strip that creates the image of new class consciousness. Sanmao is an orphan boy who symbolizes the gap between rich and poor. Since cartoons belong to the general population, not the elite, Sanmao, as an orphan, ill-fed and impoverished, represents ordinary Chinese people; he is thus much loved by the Chinese audience. The author illustrates the development of different "Sanmao" comic strips. In 1935, when "Sanmao" began, the cartoon was just for humor and entertainment. In 1945, there was "Sanmao Following the Army" in which Sanmao became a hero single-handedly defeating a Japanese platoon armed with a cannon while he had only four hand grenades. In 1947, he was presented in "An Orphan on the Streets" in which he was imprisoned because he stole rice. In 1949, there was another series "Dogs Are Better Off than People" in which Sanmao followed two well-fed dogs of a rich lady. The people empathized with Sanmao and felt pity for him. The latest version, "Sanmao Yesterday and Today," in which Sanmao has a home and food, came in the midst of the post-Liberation age. Sanmao in the latest version also plays, goes to school, and earns a student award. The "Sanmao" cartoon, a genre of popular culture used for socialist and Marxist ideology, represents the Chinese people and indicates the relationship between popular art and sociopolitical revolution in China.

Kinko Ito, University of Arkansas, who has done research on Japanese popular culture, deals with the comic magazine business in Japan. Comic magazines are very popular among Japanese males and can be found almost everywhere: street vending machines, newsstands, restaurants, barbershops, etc. These comic magazines represent the male-dominated Japanese society, particularly regarding occupations, social roles, gender, power structure, and sexual relations. Women are portrayed as warm, supportive, nurturing, submissive, and indulging, while men are aggressive, strong, intelligent, and lustful. Stories in the comic magazines are mainly about sex and violence, and include scenes of rape and gang rape. Ito argues that "comic magazines function as substitutes for x-rated movies."

A comparison case study of humor magazines from Malaysia is presented, which represents a completely different social reality than in Japan. Malaysian humor magazines, as Ronald Provencher from Northern Illinois University notes, function as modern "folklore" since they represent the "shared fantasies" of Malaysian Malays. In Malaysia, there are three prominent ethnic groups: Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Indians, and Malaysian Malays. Malaysian Malays, the indigenous people of Malaysia, historically have been involved in traditional performance, e.g., shadow plays, drama, and theatre. Art and humor are deeply ingrained in the hearts of indigenous Malays. The Malaysian Malays make up one-half of the population, over 17 million people, and they are the largest readership of the comic magazines, which are published in the Malay language. The magazines often depict themes and stories from traditional shadow puppet plays, theatre, and literature representing the modern thoughts of Malaysian Malays in the political, cultural, and economic realms, which are different from those of Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians. This constitutes the main reason why these magazines represent the "shared fantasies" of Malaysian Malays.

Apart from cartoons, comic art, and comic magazines, another genre of popular enter-
tainment is also examined: movies. Barbara Ryan of the University of North Carolina dis-
cusses the Hong Kong gangster movies that reflect the contemporary issues in Hong Kong
and Taiwan. Though the great majority of people living in the ROC, PRC, and Hong Kong
are taught to believe in "one China" or that they are a united "Chinese" people, some ROC
and Hong Kong Chinese feel a resistance to this idea. During the 1980s, gangster films played
a crucial role in the explosive growth of the Hong Kong film industry. While Chinese films
value brotherhood and fraternal loyalty, Hong Kong gangster films force the heroes to choose
between their kin family and the gang. The gangster films then challenge the old Chinese
values of family ties and loyalty.

Several other articles, which do not fall into the major categories delineated here, dis-
cuss other interesting phenomena of modern popular culture. For example, Ron Tanner, a fic-
tion writer as well as a scholar, focuses on the Japanese toy industries. He illustrates the devel-
opment of Japanese toy robots, which shows Japanese technological mastery (over the
Americans). Laura Miller, whose research interests include contemporary Japanese language
and culture, raises the issue of how the Japanese language is a means of showing Japanese
identity. The Japanese language used by *gaijin tarento* (foreign stars who appear on television)
is analyzed to show how foreigners are seen as "the other" who can never speak the unique
language like "us" Japanese.

In conclusion, it can be said that this book presents an overview of various genres of art
and entertainment in various Asian countries with various approaches, written by various
scholars in Asia and the United States. Eclectic as it may seem, it provides one common pic-
ture: the modern popular art and entertainment that is influenced by, and adjusted in reac-
tion to, modernization.

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