There has always been a certain tendency in academia. A theory, concept or discourse fascinates a large number of scholars at any given time and shapes their personal as well as collective pursuits of knowledge or “truth.” Although we media and cultural studies scholars strive to decipher and grasp our relation to our everyday lives, societies and the world through the critical analysis of cultural texts, we are often indolent when it comes to interrogating our own “structure of feeling” (in Raymond Williams’ sense) that characterizes our academic, intellectual, and cultural lives at a particular time and place. This volume of Spectator began as a form of a contemplative reflection on a knowledge system that has mesmerized our intellectual psyche and underwrote the film, media and cultural studies for the past decade or so: “transnationalism.” I should make it clear here that this volume, however, does not intend to ambitiously challenge, redefine, or redirect the discourse of transnationalism nor evaluate the relevancy of its dominant position and wide circulation within the film and media studies. At the same time this does not mean that this volume should be regarded as a mere echo of this particular intellectual trend that only repeats or reiterates what has been already uttered. What I suggest is that we need to allow for a greater distance from this powerful discourse that we call transnationalism in order to continue to develop and complicate the questions we ask. And to achieve this creative distance, we have to constantly mull over our own compulsion to fling ourselves into this grand narrative of knowledge-production.

This volume of Spectator is an effort to search for a critical distance that allows us to engage with the studies of transnationalism in a self-reflexive manner. It is specifically committed to expanding the historical understandings of transnationalism in its exploration of the convoluted associations between transnationalism and filmmaking in East Asia. In this regard, the essays in this volume are products of each and every author’s analysis of what has been said as well as not said in the studies of transnational East Asian cinema. This volume explores the extent to which transnational processes have influenced the shaping of East Asian cinema, focusing particularly on how film genres have reflected, employed, internalized or influenced the interactions and tensions between the local and global, and the national and transnational. East Asian remakes by Hollywood, regional and global film and media co-productions, and the global popularity of Japanese and Korean popular cultural products have received considerable attention of film and media scholars who explore the transnational movement of East Asian cinema because they
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

represent not only the intensified travels of East Asian films across the globe but also a reversal of the presumed flow of influence from Hollywood to other national cinemas. Not surprisingly, the studies of the ways in which East Asian cinema has traveled and been imagined to travel focus on this contemporary period of the globalization of East Asian cinema and often render a celebratory account of how East Asian cinema has finally “transcended” a number of “boundaries.” Yet there have been fewer attempts to offer a historical perspective and/or map the genealogy of this “border-crossing” nature of East Asian cinema. In fact, it is common to consider the transnational flows in East Asian cinema as exclusive practices of the late capitalism. This is problematic as it often disregards the complex histories of the transnational dissemination of culture across nations, regions and empires. Indeed, this kind of perspective tends to overemphasize recent transformations in the global configuration of capital, power, media and culture and thus define the terms “transnationalism” and “transnational” in sole relation to this limited temporality. Needless to say, I am not arguing for the dismissal of the importance of this specific form of transnationalism, but I would suggest it should be noted that this is a rather restrictive definition that fails to consider the historical formation of transnationalism and, most importantly, the fact that the modern concept of “nation” has always been contested. In her groundbreaking study of transnationalism Flexible Citizenship, Aihwa Ong notes that we often “overlook complicated accommodations, alliances, and creative tensions between the nation-state and mobile capital, or between diaspora and nationalisms, and attention to specific histories and geographical situations will reveal that such simple oppositions between transnational forces and the nation-state cannot be universally sustained.” Ong’s statement that calls for a historical approach to the discourse of transnationalism is particularly crucial in understanding East Asian transnationalism and its impact on filmmaking practices because the region’s modern histories—imperialism, nationalism and cold war politics, among others—have relentlessly generated tensions surrounding the notions of the national and the transnational. Consequently, the construction of national cinema across the region has been heavily influenced by the changing, unsteady notions of “nation” and “national identity.” As I discuss in detail elsewhere, the concept of national cinema in the East Asian context was already unstable from the start as Japanese imperialism vigorously and persistently altered territorial, political and cultural borders across the region upon the emergence of cinema, resulting in the blurring of the boundaries between national cinemas in the region. Therefore, transnationalism is defined in this volume not simply as a term that designates a kind of social system or symptom derived from the current shifts in economic or political mechanisms but rather as a broader one “burdened” with historically accumulated tensions that have constantly reshaped and contested the concepts of nation and national cinema.

While the historicity that leads us to look into the transnational paradigms across a range of historical contexts and legacies is the theoretical framework that defines this volume’s approach, the central subject that the essays explore in conjunction to transnationalism is film genre. Let me explain, we usually consider film genre in terms of generic conventions, industrial practices, audience expectations, or national cinema traditions, but we seldom think of genre films and genre classifications in relation to transnational influences and global geopolitics. In this light, it is worth pointing out that the majority of East Asian films remade in Hollywood over the past few years are genre films, such as Japanese horrors, Hong Kong gangster movies, and South Korean melodramas. Despite Hollywood’s penchant for these very specific kinds of movies and genres when producing its remakes, this apparent tendency has yet been explored as part of transnational East Asian cinema. As David Desser aptly points out, genre theory emerged as an attempt to account for nationally specific genres, and this theoretical legacy still directs a lot of contemporary genre studies. As a result, despite the fact that the transnational production and consumption of genre films and the transnational dissemination of genre formats and styles have been an integral part of genre films, little attention has been paid to the transnational nature of genres within traditional film genre studies. This volume examines the multifaceted relationship between transnationalism and film genres in East Asian Cinema, a seldom explored topic of transnational
film theory. By interrogating the transnational flows of genre aesthetics, styles, and industrial practices and examining film genres as sites for transnational struggles over meanings and identities, this volume’s endeavor is to expand our understanding of film genres beyond the confines of national borders.

In this volume’s opening article, “The Saga of Anatahan and Japan,” Sachiko Mizuno provides a historical view into transnational filmmaking practices through her analysis of The Saga of Anatahan (1953), a Japan-US co-produced film. Consulting with rich archival materials, such as preproduction records, still photos, letters, and film reviews, that have been only recently available, Mizuno excavates the unsettling history of this long-forgotten war film by noted director Joseph von Sternberg in her attempt to examine the film text, its audience reception, and its authorship in a new light. Especially, Mizuno describes how the tension derived from the historical and political relationship between Japan and the United States influenced not only the co-production of this war drama but also the reception of the film that evoked the painful memories of imperialism, war and American occupation among Japanese audiences.

Mike Dillon’s “Currencies of The World: Neoliberalism, National Cinema” analyzes the film The World (2004) by Jia Zhangke, a “sixth-generation” Chinese director, and the socio-political realities it draws upon in order to probe the numerous and coinciding anxieties in the wake of globalization employed in the film’s narrative. Dillon directs our attention to “dual contexts” (in his own terms) that The World was produced and in which its representations of a China in the midst of rapid social and political change open the film to several avenues of analysis. According to Dillon, for some thirty years now, the rapid emergence of China as a powerful player in world economics has been accompanied by the rising prominence of its national cinema among international audiences. By situating the film within China’s national and cinematic histories, Dillon addresses how The World figures into the volatile questions of “Chinese national cinema.” In particular, Dillon argues that the multiple local/global ambiguities present in the text are mirrored by the director’s aesthetic sensibilities, which can be categorized as “international art cinema.” Released at the most contemporary moment of a geopolitically irregular history of Chinese cinema that managed lengthy periods of relative autonomy from international spectactorship often taken for granted as binary between Hollywood and European art cinemas, Dillon writes, The World is in a complicated position between its “national” cinematic lineage and the global status of modern China it attempts to address.

The next two contributions that deal with contemporary South Korean cinema are great to be read in relation to one another, as each essay explores a similar subject – the ways in which the transitional has been encoded into recent South Korean film production—focusing on different genres: blockbuster and science fiction (monster films). In “The Politics of the Korean Blockbuster: Narrating the Nation and the Spectacle of ‘Glocalisation’ in 2009 Lost Memories,” Hye Young Ok examines the political economy of the movie blockbuster, which has become a major trend in the South Korean film industry, through the analysis of 2009 Lost Memories (2002). Ok discusses the Korean blockbuster as a ‘hybrid’ text that represents the contested terrain where the conflicts and negotiations between diverse discourses, such as nationalism, national cinema, the global and local, are manifest. Ok pays particular attention to the fact that the Korean blockbuster’s endeavor to globalize the national culture is closely associated with its persistent attempt to rewrite and “reconfigure” Korea’s traumatic modern history. By exploring the ways in which the nation and national histories are narrated in the film text, Ok sheds light on the ways in which the Korean blockbuster produces and mobilizes a type of collective national identity in order for the national film industry to effectively compete in the global economic environment. Hye Jeon Chung’s contribution, “The Host and D-War: Complex Intersections of National Imaginings and Transnational Aspirations,” interrogates the ways in which the two films – The Host (2006) and D-War (2007) – re-insert national ideas into concepts of transnationality, which creates tension by belying their rigorous efforts to categorize and promote themselves as global products. Chung argues that these films attempt to re-create and re-envision “Korean-ness,” even as they strive toward transnational relevancy by adopting and appropriating the easily translatable conventions and
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

forms of Hollywood films. According to Chung, as symptomatic products that reflect the anxieties of these global times, the two films are sites of cultural struggle in which the identity crisis between the national and the transnational takes place. She also notes that these two monster films are visually coded as transnational texts in that they materialize global flows and imaginings through de-territorialized and imaginary spaces created by digitally enhanced visual effects.

My interview with South Korean filmmaker Chung Chang-Hwa follows the transnational dissemination of action genre styles and aesthetics across the Asian film industry. Chung worked in both South Korean and Hong Kong film industries beginning in the 1950s and throughout the 1970s and became an instrumental figure in shaping the conventions and iconographies of action cinemas in East Asia. Chung’s remarkable career as an internationally sought-after action cinema director across different Asian film industries as well as the distribution of his works across the globe provide us valuable insight into the historical nature of transnational Asian action and martial arts genres. In their nuanced and self-reflexive approach to the issues in transnationalism, the contributors for this volume collectively seek to answer some of the important questions that have been marginalized in the studies of transnationalism and its impact on film texts and practices.

*Editor’s note: Throughout this volume, all Chinese, Japanese and Korean names (except those who have published in English, including the contributing authors for this volume) appear in the East Asian order of family name first.

Dong Hoon Kim is a postdoctoral fellow in the Division of Critical Studies of the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. He earned his Ph.D in Critical Studies at USC. His research interests include early cinema, film spectatorship, East Asian cinema, and the visual culture of Japanese empire. His dissertation entitled Eclipsed Cinemas: Colonial Modernity and Film Cultures in Korea under Japanese Colonial Rule explores the ways in which Japanese imperialism influenced and shaped the early development of cinema in East Asia, focusing on the mutually constitutive relationship between early Japanese and Korean cinema. He is currently turning his dissertation into a book manuscript.

End Notes

3 David Desser, “Global Noir: Genre Film in the Age of Transnationalism,” Film Genre Reader III, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 516.