SINCE THE FALL OF THE KHMER ROUGE REGIME in 1979 Cambodian politics has been dominated by Prime Minister Hun Sen and his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Profits of the widespread marketisation of natural resources, cheap labour and foreign investment are distributed among the elite of Cambodia's patrimonial society, whilst the majority of the population remains bereft of the advantages of economic growth. Taken together, the contributions to the Focus of this issue reveal a political modus operandi that has facilitated the CPP's domination, but which now provokes an increasing challenge to this hegemony.
China Connections

Foreigners in Treaty Port China

“I found the Chinese in Shanghai to be a very jolly people, much like colored folks at home. To tell the truth, I was more afraid of going into the world famous Cathay Hotel than I was of going into any public place in the Chinese quarters. Colored people are not welcomed at the Cathay. But beyond the gates of the International Settlement, color was no barrier. I could go anywhere”, Langston Hughes (1902-1967) writes in his autobiography about his visit to Shanghai in 1934.1 During its Treaty Port era (1843-1943), Shanghai transformed from a trading town of 270,000 residents to a world-renowned metropolis of over 5 million people, attracting fortune-hunters like businessmen, writers, musicians, architects, and refugees from all over the world.

Lena Scheen

THE ARTICLES IN THIS SECTION introduce us to some of these foreigners, such as the African-American Jazz pianist Teddy Weatherford (1903-1945), who Langston Hughes met during his visit: “a big, genial, dark man, something of a clown. Teddy could walk into almost any public place in the Orient and folks would break into applause”. In his article, Andrew Field shows how jazz musicians like Weatherford had an everlasting impact on the formation of new music genres in the Asia-Pacific region. Likewise, Robert Bickers describes, in his article on the amateur photographer Jack Ephgrave (1914-1979), how the work of the Artists’ Department at Capital Lithographers of the British American Tobacco in Shanghai, which Ephgrave headed, deeply influenced China’s modern visual culture. Moreover, the articles focus on the importance of the study of material culture to a better understanding of the roles these foreigners played in their new homeland. For this reason, this section highlights the important work of various archival projects, such as the University of Bristol’s ‘Historical Photographs of China’ and the Upton Sino-Foreign Archive (USFA) whose unique collection not only includes written materials, but also art works, trophies, medals, and photographs. It is the objects, songs, diaries, and pictures these foreigners left behind that provide us with a glimpse of the city through the eyes of its outsiders.

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Reference


Asian jazz diasporas: performing jazz in Pacific port cities, 1920-1945

Andrew Field

WHAT CAN THE SPREAD in Asia of the American popular music known as jazz, during its early period of the 1920s-40s, tell us about the dynamics of western colonialism and imperialism in this world region? How does the historian reconstruct and analyze the flow of jazz music as it spread into this part of the world? Who were the musicians who played key roles in spreading jazz in Asia and what were their trajectories? In what sorts of venues was jazz performed and who constituted the audiences for live jazz performances during this era? Finally, what was the overall impact of the jazz diaspora into Asia during this period, and is it really true that these jazz musicians laid the groundwork for the nativization of American popular music and the formation of modern pop music cultures in Asian countries?

While this paper cannot answer all of these questions in exhaustive detail, it constitutes a first attempt by the author to tackle a few and offer some initial answers. Many scholars and popular writers, including this author, have produced comprehensive book-length studies of the initial rise and spread of jazz in specific cities and countries, including Bombay, Shanghai, the Philippines, and Japan. Others have written articles about jazz and popular music in South and Southeast Asian countries and cities, particularly India, yet until now the vectors and networks by which jazz spread around Asia as a whole have remained somewhat mysterious.

One key observation is that the spread of jazz throughout Asia was carried out mainly through the vehicle of passenger liners that cruised along networks of port cities. The passenger liner was the ideal vehicle for jazz, since it brought the musicians themselves to far flung ports throughout the Asia Pacific. These musicians were sometimes given jobs on the liners entertaining passengers, and they could disembark at any port and explore and sometimes even settle in port cities where they might also find an audience for their music. In this sense, the spread of jazz in this world region is best understood through the oceanic networks of trade, commerce and culture that emerged through the forces of western colonialism and imperialism, but which were far more deeply embedded in the history of oceanic trading networks in Asia. Similarly, jazz was a modern western invention, and yet as it spread across the globe, it took on the trappings of local musical cultures, which often played a mediating role in bringing jazz to ‘native’ peoples in these countries and cities.

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arguably had the highest concentration of such spaces for jazz musicians in Asia between the 1920s and 1940s. Other port cities also served as important nodes for the concentration and distribution of jazz performers throughout Asian port cities. In addition to bringing American jazz artists, arguably the most influential and important of all, to Asia, these establishments also nurtured ‘native’ jazz movements, even if the musicians themselves were sometimes trained in other countries (as in the case of Japanese musicians learning jazz in Shanghai).

Even so, jazz was being performed in a much larger number of cities and countries throughout Asia. In China, jazz bands could be found in Beijing, Qingdao, Weihai, Tianjin, and other port treaty towns. Hong Kong also boasted its own lively jazz scene. In Japan, cities like Osaka, Kobe, and Yokohama had jazz clubs. In India, Calcutta and Delhi both featured jazz, as did Goa. Jazz also became popular in clubs and among expatriates in other Southeast Asian countries. Kuala Lumpur and Penang in present-day Malaysia had jazz bands, as did Batavia and Surabaya in Indonesia.

Wherever there was a steady presence of westerners (i.e., Europeans or Americans), there was an appetite for jazz, which meant that nearly every trading port and capital city in Asia featured at least one hotel with a ballroom and jazz band. Yet because jazz music and its associated dances spread so rapidly and became popularized so quickly, native elites also learned the dances and became fans of jazz, and in many cases, natives (and in some cases Eurasian or Anglo-Indian musicians) took up the jazz idiom and invested it with local musical cultures and meanings. Because of its tendency to be re-shaped by local cultures, jazz thus plays an ambiguous role as both a prop for western colonial imperialism and as a mode of resistance to colonial authority and power. The fact that jazz was first and foremost an African American cultural form further complicated the dynamics of jazz as a product of western colonialism and imperialism in Asia.

In order to flesh out the story of how jazz spread into Asia and what this transmission meant to Asian societies and cultures, it is essential to follow the threads of the stories of those who contributed to that spread. Probably the most important carriers of jazz into Asia, as mentioned above, were African American jazz musicians, who began to arrive in Asian port cities in the 1920s along with the growing craze for jazz music. Some of them were hired directly from the United States, while others came to Asia via Paris. Most of them made their way first to Shanghai, though by the 1930s Bombay began to assume a similar role as well. While there were some influential white musicians, including both American and Russian jazz artists, the African Americans were by far the most sought after and exerted the greatest influence on local jazz scenes including both fans and musicians. Yet it is important to also acknowledge the vital role that Filipino jazz musicians played in carrying jazz across the Pacific and Indian Ocean.
IN ABOUT 1929, shortly after he began working for the first time, a young man in Shanghai seems to have used his new earned wealth to buy a camera. With all the fearlessness and curiosity of a neophyte and, it turned out with some natural talent and technical skill, Jack Ephgrave then set about over the next five years documenting the city in which he lived, his workplace, and his family. And then, for over 70 years, the photographs lay carefully preserved but unseen outside his family.

John William Ephgrave (1914-79), always known as Jack, was born in Shanghai in October 1914. His father had arrived in the city in 1912 to work for a department store, and would in time become one of its directors. Jack started off as an apprentice in the printing department of British American Tobacco’s China operation (BAT), the British Cigarette Company (BCC), and later worked for its subsidiary Capital Lithographers Ltd. In later life he rose to hold a senior position in the company’s global headquarters in London before retirement in 1972. BAT, as well as being the single biggest tax-payer in Republican China, had a profound impact through its marketing and publicity operations on China’s modern visual culture. Its advertising hoardings, cigarette packet cards, and calendar posters, were designed by some of China’s most influential graphic artists, and Ephgrave by 1941 was one of the artists’ Department at Capital Lithographers.

The geography of the foreign presence in China certainly shapes the collection, as it also shaped the bodies of work produced by the famous. Chinese Maritime Customs staff, consuls, businessmen and missionaries largely moved on what became familiar circuits of postings from port to port. They also spent vacations in the same resorts, or went on sightseeing trips to the same temples or natural sights. But while there is always something predictable in any set that arrives in the office in Bristol, there is always something new, unusual and exciting, like the fruits of Jack Ephgrave’s first flush of love for the camera.

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The HPC’s Jack Ephgrave collection can be found at www.hpcbristol.net/collections/ephgrave-jack.

The latest large set of images, digitized by the project team and unveiled online, contains an extensive set of photographs documenting revolutionary events in Wuhan in 1911 (www.hpcbristol.net/collections/wyatt-smith-stanley), while the most recent collection to arrive in the office covers two years in the (off-duty) life of a British intelligence officer in early Communist Shanghai.