



## Unitec Research Committee

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### Executive Summary

*Cool New Asia: East Asian Popular Culture in a Local Context* was held at Unitec during the weekend of November 25-26<sup>th</sup>. The symposium attracted two international keynote speakers (Professor Koichi Iwabuchi and Professor Matt Allen), twenty-six speakers from both national and international tertiary environments and approximately one hundred and twenty attendees over the two days.

The papers delivered covered a range of disciplines and theoretical approaches and, as was hoped, reflected a broad interdisciplinary examination, from across the humanities, of ideas pertaining to popular culture in general, Asian popular culture (of a variety of forms), in particular, and other issues related to these two including population diaspora, second-language education, representation and self-representation, and community construction, location and relocation as a result of globalisation.

The weekend delivered a number of highlights; of these, the cultural performances by Madang Hannuri (a Korean performance troupe), the E-Pacs Lion Dance Team, and Hokushin Shinoh Ryu Iaido (a Japanese martial arts troupe) were the most popular and engaging. However, beyond the world of cultural performance, the symposium's chief success, we believe, was that it (a) successfully identified a hitherto overlooked area of study, (b) provided a forum for a rigorous examination of issues pertaining to these, and (c) offers an opportunity to continue this exploration as the *Cool New Asia* project moves into its second phase.

This second phase – discussed in the initial application for funding – refers to the manner with which Drs. Kolesova and Wilson are working to develop concrete research outcomes out of the material generated by the symposium. More information about this is provided below.

The symposium organizers wish to extend their enormous gratitude and thanks to the URC committee for making such a successful event possible. We would particularly like to acknowledge the incredible help provided by Brenda Massey.

### Background

*Cool New Asia: East Asian Popular Culture in a Local Context* emerged out of a recognition by the two researchers involved that there existed little research, of any kind, into the ways in which popular culture texts have concrete and productive lives beyond the landscapes of their immediate production and consumption. Given that the Faculty of Creative Industries and Business is, across its departments, concerned with popular culture production and reception (in a variety of ways and forms), it seemed both logical and opportune to seize upon this as a way of both encouraging international exploration of these ideas and, further, working to link this institution with that intellectual activity.

The vigorous national and international response to the symposium committee's call for abstracts and general participation reflects the overall need for the symposium, a fact further demonstrated by its success.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The project's objectives, as stated in our original URC application, are as follows:

- Comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the consumption of popular culture and the formation and performance of subjective identity.
- Illustration of individual and group hermeneutic practices and the manner with which these reveal facets of performed identity.
- Evidence supporting the relationship between individual self-assessment, object consumption, and future identity projects in the wake of this consumption.
- Evidence exploring the manner with which local knowledge production is influenced by the consumption of imported popular culture.
- Evidence exploring the manner with which the production of local popular culture is affected by, impacted upon, or reflects the importing of international popular culture.
- Unitec-hosted gathering of national and international scholars and experts to exchange ideas and further the exploration of these areas of study.
- Collation of material in an edited volume designed to function as a textbook for present and future tertiary courses and for interested (inter-) national readers.

These remained constant throughout the work towards, and during the symposium. And these aims were met as each of the symposium presentations was explicitly required to explore these issues, a point made clear in the various Calls for Papers that were issued locally and internationally (i.e.: on H-Net Asia; H-Net Film; Conferencealerts.com; MEDIANZ; CSAA) etc. Indeed, the further applicability of these objectives is demonstrated by the fact that they continue to act as functional objectives for phase two of the *Cool New Asia* project.

## **Methodology**

n/a

## **Outcomes/findings**

Because the symposium was designed to provide a platform for multiple and various explorations of the issues illustrated above, no single outcome or finding is possible with relation to the content of the symposium. Instead, it is useful to consider the outcome and finding of the symposium as reflecting a broader concern on behalf of the academic community who attended this event.

*Cool New Asia* demonstrated the clear desire, on the part of the academic community at large, to utilize such fora as a way of interrogating these vitally important issues. Beneath the seeming banal veneer of popular culture production and consumption lurk issues as complex and varied as any our species faces as it continues to explore itself in relation to the material (and increasingly immaterial) culture that so defines it, and which it uses to define and represent itself. The sheer variety of methodological approaches and disciplines reflected in the papers presented (and absolutely in the discussions held afterwards) demonstrates both the need for this symposium and the continued need for such opportunity for similar exchanges of ideas and practices.

Because the stated objectives of the project formed the terms of reference by which abstracts and paper submissions were assessed, each presentation attended to the broad concerns of the symposium in a rigorous and attentive manner. The end result, therefore, was the construction of a community of both practice and interest, who gathered at Unitec in order to share ideas, knowledge and concerns in a collegial and professional forum. Subsequent discussion has demonstrated that the symposium attendees were unanimously full of praise for the symposium, and for the institution that made such an opportunity available.

## Sample Feedback:

Dear Elena, Scott and Lisa

Many thanks for all the hard work you put into organising the Symposium. It was great to have so many people of similar interests together, and there was a good variety of interesting talks. I enjoyed the cultural performances on Friday too.

Thanks again, and thanks too to the other people who helped out over the two days.

Best wishes

Ken McNeil [japn0149@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:japn0149@waikato.ac.nz)

Dear Elena and Scott,

I wanted to thank you both again for organizing such a wonderful conference. It was intimate, enlightening, and full of humor and enthusiasm. A lot of people mentioned how they hoped that I felt it worth such a long trip, and I just wanted to assure the both of you that it absolutely was. I'm fairly new to the conference scene - Cool New Asia was only my second - but you've already given me a fairly high bar for other conferences to compete with.

Thank you very much and I look forward to our continued correspondence.

All the best,

Munib

Munib Rezaie

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Further to the points above, as a direct result of *Cool New Asia*, Unitec, as represented by Drs. Kolesove and Wilson, is involved in the *Overload 2012 NZ Manga and Anime Convention*, providing a theoretical and academic stream to match the presence of anime and manga practitioners and fans, including international visitors and guests.

## Conclusions

As noted above, because the nature of the symposium provided an opportunity for multiple explorations of a set of theoretical concerns, no singular conclusion is possible. Instead, what conclusions are available concern the value and relevance of the symposium itself and the many suggestions made by the participants for ongoing opportunities to explore these issues on a longer-term basis.

## Implications

The material generated by *Cool New Asia* will be of use internationally and, as we saw at the symposium, provides a set of intriguing methodologies for the exploration of popular culture in all forms, and from all locations. If anything, this might be the most important fact of the symposium beyond the points made above, for the exploration of popular culture concerns a number of disciplines and, necessarily, an enormous number of fields of cultural production. Any opportunity to develop new analytical tools is clearly of great interest to the international community and should be seized upon vigorously.

What also emerged at the symposium was a broad interest in the material itself; in the exploration of Asian popular culture both within and beyond the situation of its initial production. A number of requests were made for a *Cool New Asia II* and it is clear that, should this institution wish to develop these concerns into a second (or, perhaps, a biennial) symposium, national and international support exists for such an undertaking. Further to this, the symposium organizers are investigating possible themes for a 2013 symposium to continue the excellent work started with *Cool New Asia*.

## Recommendations

During the symposium, the organizers sought feedback from the participants about their experience of the event. The overall tenor of their responses was fully positive – with just a single recommendation for change. As will be clear from the symposium programme (provided as an appendix to this report), the organizers sought to include as many speakers as possible within the time frame made realistically possible by the level of institutional

funding. As a result, the weekend of the symposium was very full and left little time for the kinds of informal conversations that so typify events of this nature. We would therefore recommend that such considerations (and opportunities for delegates and guests to 'break out' of the programmed events) are factored into future conference and symposium events held in this institution.

### **Publications and dissemination**

Drs. Kolesova and Wilson are working to develop multiple publication outputs, as outlined in the original URC application's project milestones. The material for the conference proceedings, due for publication by Unitec's E-Press, is – as of this writing – being gathered and edited to conform to E-Press standards. At the same time, Drs. Kolesova and Wilson are preparing a book proposal – as of this writing, all-but-completed two months ahead of our original schedule – based on a selection of the papers presented at the symposium. We have received initial interest from three international publishers (Intellect; Cambridge Univ. Press; Continuum) and will be offering the book to a number of others (Routledge chief amongst them).