

# CFP

## *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*



### Issue 11.2

### **“The Asian Century: Idea, Method, and Media”**

**Deadlines | [verge@psu.edu](mailto:verge@psu.edu)**

**Convergence proposals:**

**September 8, 2023**

**Essays: May 1, 2024**

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What is the Asian Century? Are we living in it? Do its recent invocations—by writers and readers, politicians and pundits, journalists and academics—mark a return to earlier eras of relative Asian centrality on the world stage or announce a future we have yet to inhabit? Is it a paranoid, U.S.-centered discourse of Western decline or a triumphant announcement of Asian economic-semiotic arrival? Is the Asian Century an aspiration or a threat—and to whom?

The term “Asian Century” has more than one origin story. Narrators are multiple, located in both Asia and the West. In a 1988 summit, China’s Deng Xiaoping, alongside Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, may have coined the phrase by calling it into question: “In recent years, people have been saying that the next century will be the century of Asia and the Pacific, as if that were sure to be the case. I disagree with this view.” For Deng, skepticism about the inevitability of Asia’s rise was going to be crucial to the India-China partnership against the “developed” world; his skepticism hasn’t aged well. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared a “pivot to Asia” in “America’s

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Pacific Century.” Clinton’s emphatic recapitulation of the “Asian Century” revived Western tropes of Asian ascendancy that predated Asia’s contemporary economic rise by more than a hundred years, while betraying American anxieties about the decline of US hegemony. In fact, both Deng and Clinton were responding to a process that had been underway since at least the early-1970s: the “long downturn” or tendential decline in profitability of Western economies that ran alongside the “economic miracles” of many Asian economies, including Japan’s Cold War-era boom and India’s and China’s eventual liberalization. For some, the Asian Century was, or is, a solution. Now, in an era of mounting deglobalization, its contradictions are just as sharply felt as its curious staying power.

What distinguishes the current round of Asian Century discourse is perhaps its mutual construction by “Asians” and “Westerners” alike. When the Asian Century came into wide currency in the 1990s, replacing a then-regnant “Pacific Rim” and “Pacific Century” rhetoric, it remediated a long history of similarly totalizing visions that issued not least from the “Asians” themselves: from Japan’s monstrous pursuit of the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere and Ferdinand Marcos’s dictatorial imposition of neoliberal programs in the Philippines, to the advertisement of the “Singapore model” and even China’s “century of humiliation,” which continues to vouchsafe its nationalist *ressentiment*. As Wang Hui’s analysis of the politics of imagining Asia has shown, visions of the Asian Century betray contradictory regionalist and nationalist ambitions that are held in focus by the apparatuses of the state and the culture industries. Thus Asian Century discourse is typically inflected by a nation or speaker’s position vis-a-vis key market

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and state brokers. Given that the meaning of “Asia” looks different depending on the vantage of Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, or for that matter Saudi Arabia, what is the role of pan-Asian alliances and inter-Asian competition in constituting the Asian Century? Is Asia “one”—or only in the eyes of the West?

This special issue invites critical perspectives from scholars working in and across multiple languages and disciplines. We seek submissions that explore the Asian Century as idea, method, and media, and that examine its genealogies and itineraries from a range of contexts and histories, including of labor, empire, capital, war, technology, pandemics, dispossession, modernization, culture, and aesthetics. With “idea, method, and media,” we intend to inspire, but not circumscribe, the possible range of disciplinary approaches and primary sources that might be enlisted in responding to this call. Indeed, the idea of the Asian Century may very well be predicated on counter-articulations of its impossibility. While the Asian Century may appear at first as periodizing marker or geopolitical diagnostic, we propose that it can also be read across media and cultural forms, as an affective relation to the past, present, and future, as a structure of feeling, and as a visual and sensorial regime. Finally, in proposing the Asian Century as method, we seek to revisit and reimagine the interdisciplinary stakes of the longstanding conversation on “Asia as method.”

For example, what humanistic and social scientific methods can best track the concept's intellectual and institutional emergence, circulation, and mediation, including well before the 21st century? How might

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regional Asian rivalries shape the supply chains and the capital flows of emerging trade blocs like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)? How have cultural production and intellectual exchange furnished the cognitive and affective frameworks for these blocs, and for Asian visions of global expansion like China's "Belt and Road" initiative, South Korea's cultural exports, and Taiwan's advanced semiconductor industry? Given the increasing salience of the Asian Century as a concept for periodizing the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, how might we trace its effects and iterations in and beyond political economy? What *was* the Asian Century, understood as visions and projections of Asia's rise promoted by those who stood to benefit from such characterizations? What of the legacy and future of Third World decolonization and Indigenous struggles when Asian peripheries become, or have threatened to become, global powers? Rather than take for granted the rise of Asia as such, we seek to understand how and why Asia's ostensible ascendance has seen not a lessening but rather a retrenchment of the conditions of planetary inequality.

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### Convergence Feature Proposals

One of *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*' distinctive features is an opening section called Convergence, where we curate a rotating series of rubrics that emphasize collaborative intellectual engagement and exchange. Each issue features four of the following rubrics: **A&Q**, a responsive dialogue, either in interview or roundtable format, inspired by a set of questions; **Codex**, a collaborative discussion and assessment of books, films, or exhibits; **Translation**, for texts, primary or secondary, not yet available in English; **Field Trip**, reports from various subfields of the disciplines; **Portfolio**, commentaries on visual images; and **Interface**, texts exploring the resources of the print-digital world. We welcome those interested in these features to submit a Convergence proposal for the issue.

Proposals should be 1-2 pages in length and indicate what kind of feature is being proposed; demonstrate an awareness of the formats utilized by the journal; include an abstract and, if collaborative, a list of proposed contributors; and include a short (2 pg) cv.

The Convergence proposals deadline is **September 8, 2023**, however, we encourage those interested in submitting to contact co-editors about their ideas in advance of this date. Please direct all inquiries and submissions to [verge@psu.edu](mailto:verge@psu.edu).

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### Essay Submissions

Essays (between 6,000–10,000 words) and abstracts (125 words) should be submitted electronically through this submission form (<https://forms.gle/NcZfDjDRruhJChDE8>) by **May 1, 2024** and prepared according to the author-date + bibliography format of the Chicago Manual of Style. See section 2.38 of the University of Minnesota Press style guide or chapter 15 of the Chicago Manual of Style Online for additional formatting information.

Authors' names should not appear on manuscripts; instead, please include a separate document with the author's name, address, institutional affiliations, and the title of the article with your electronic submission. Authors should not refer to themselves in the first person in the submitted text or notes if such references would identify them; any necessary references to the author's previous work, for example, should be in the third person.

Please direct all inquiries to [verge@psu.edu](mailto:verge@psu.edu).