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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rethinking disconnection as in-betweenness: Nepal in Chinese knowledge production (1910s–1940s)

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Abstract

The relationship between Nepal and China during the 1910s to 1940s remains an underexplored topic. This article revisits this thirty-year period by examining Chinese knowledge production on Nepal as an early instance of inter-Asia engagement. First, it demonstrates how epistemological barriers – shaped by coloniality and asymmetrical worldviews – severely hindered direct Chinese understanding of Nepal, despite sustained intellectual efforts. It then interrogates the in-betweenness of this disconnection, arguing that these mediated engagements were not merely failures of direct contact. Instead, the article contends that the liminal, hybrid, and shifting nature of these mediated encounters enabled forms of subjectivity transference and affective affiliation that were productive in sustaining inter-Asian referencing. To support this claim, the article examines the writings of various Chinese political critics, officials, and diplomats on Nepal. Despite their limitations, these intellectual engagements are ultimately seen as productive. First, they expose the liminal, shifting, and dynamic nature of knowledge production, in contrast to the fixed forms associated with colonial epistemologies. Second, they enable forms of subjectivity transference that foster affective affiliations. They also offer renewed possibilities for understanding inter-Asian referencing as a methodological strategy for rethinking inter-Asian relationalities.

Keywords: Disconnection; in-betweenness; inter-Asia engagement; postcolonialism; Nepal–China relations

Introduction

On 10 June 1934, Li Hongyin had been working in the University of London's library for approximately twenty days. During this period, he meticulously examined nearly every available resource on Nepal, the Himalayan kingdom, housed within the library. The diverse materials piled on his desk – including Wright's The History of Nepal (1877), Hamilton's An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal (1819), Landon's recently published Nepal (1928), Powell's The Last Home of Mystery: Adventures in Nepal (1929), as well as the latest editions of *The Times* and *The Asiatic Review* – attested to his extensive efforts over the preceding weeks. His ambitious task was to synthesise over a century of European knowledge on Nepal and translate it into Chinese, making it accessible to his compatriots.

The outcome of his research was a twelve-page article, in which he systematically categorised information on Nepal into four sections: Natural Environment, General Social Conditions, Political Organisations, and Brief History and Relations with the United Kingdom. The introduction of his article contained a concise reflection on China's loss of suzerainty over Nepal and the latter's increasing alignment with British imperialists. This concern fuelled Li's sense of responsibility to research Nepal (Li 1934). Stylistically, the work resembled a concise encyclopaedic account.

Using Li's story as a starting point, this article seeks to explore long-overlooked knowledge production projects in the trans-Himalayan context between Nepal and China from the 1910s to the 1940s. By many measures, the period under consideration in Nepal–China relations can be characterised as a period of neglect. This period and its intellectual endeavours have largely been omitted from conventional historiography. Most notably, it remains largely invisible in current mainstream discourses, which tend to frame 1955 – the year the then Kingdom of Nepal and the People's Republic of China officially established diplomatic relations – as the starting point of modern Nepal–China relations. However, the absence of this period from prevailing historical narratives does not imply a historical void. On the contrary, many Chinese intellectuals actively engaged with Nepal as a reference point, producing a significant body of knowledge on the Himalayan kingdom. During this time, a considerable number of Chinese works on Nepal were circulated in diverse formats, including news reports, commentaries, governmental reports, travelogues, articles, monographs, and even comics. Yet, these texts have been largely marginalised, primarily due to nation-states' efforts to construct systematic, state-sanctioned narratives that emphasise friendship between the two contemporary states. As a result, the pre-1955 disconnection between Nepal and China represents not merely a lapse in historical continuity, but rather a deliberate deprivation of subjectivity – a condition strictly controlled and confined by the nation-state framework. This de-qualification of power and historical position within national historiography has, in turn, created a glaring gap in the long arc of national history, which is often expected to appear seamless and eternal.

It is important to note that, during the period under consideration, both Nepal and China attempted to establish formal relations, yet no sustainable progress was ever achieved. Physical obstacles, such as the poor transportation infrastructure across the Himalayas, certainly posed challenges. However, the human and geopolitical factors were equally, if not more, significant obstacles. Initially, the Chinese government maintained a deeply Sino-centric perspective on Nepal, viewing it as a former vassal state that had been forcibly severed from China by British colonial intervention. On rare occasions when Chinese officials considered diplomatic engagement with Nepal, they upheld the belief that the two states should restore their historical ties (Zhu 2016) and, in some cases, even proposed that Nepal join China's Five-Nation Republican Unity (Manandhar 1999). Unsurprisingly, Nepal rejected these propositions. Ironically, by the 1940s, as China began to accept the new geopolitical realities and acknowledge Nepal as an independent state, diplomatic engagement faced another major barrier – British influence over the Himalayan region. As wartime allies, China had to carefully navigate its foreign policy to avoid provoking British concerns over the Himalayas. Consequently, direct interactions between Nepal and China remained rare, with India often acting as the mediating third party, both through official diplomatic channels and informal exchanges.

The lack of direct contact between Nepal and China was not the primary challenge preventing China–Nepal referencing at the time. The more pressing dilemma lay in the medium through which knowledge of Nepal was acquired. In the early twentieth century, efforts to understand Nepal were constrained by the languages and perspectives of European colonial adventurers, historians, archaeologists, and philologists. Although narratives of long-standing historical friendship between Nepal and China had already emerged, it would take another thirty years before Chinese intellectuals actively substantiated this friendship with local materials. At that time, as the following discussion will illustrate, many Chinese intellectuals who turned to Nepal were elites trained in Western educational systems and were often directly based in Europe. Their engagement with Nepal was not driven by a genuine interest in its culture, history, or society, as inter-Asia referencing is conventionally understood. Rather, they were struck by Nepal's emergence as a dark horse in the process of modernisation. This linear, competitive logic of modernisation, combined with a reliance on European sources, contributed to the formation of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) describes as the colonial matrix of power – a structure that hindered direct epistemological engagement with Nepal. As the knowledge productions discussed below suggest, the Chinese intellectuals involved – whether consciously or unconsciously – were aware of the various manifestations of coloniality and the oppressive effects it entailed. However, their responses can be described, at best, as anti-colonial rather than decolonial.

Many were eager to transform China into a modern, independent nation-state by drawing comparisons with other Asian neighbours, such as Nepal, while simultaneously celebrating the grand colonial designs that underpinned the modern world order. Inspired by this tension, my analytical approach in this article is postcolonial, even though the period under examination is conventionally regarded as colonial. I adopt Stuart Hall's (1996) understanding of post as going beyond, exploring how early twentieth-century Asian – more specifically Chinese – intellectuals navigated the in-between spaces of coloniser/colonised, West/East, there/here, modern/history, and we/other. In doing so, they grappled with multiple temporalities and subjectivities while striving to construct a sense of internal coherence (Bhattacharya 2022) through engagement with other Asian actors – here, specifically Nepal.

It should be noted that despite these colonial constraints, the thirty years of supposed disconnect between Nepal and China still provided a productive in-between space in which Chinese intellectuals turned to Nepal to negotiate their own identity dilemmas. By looking at Nepal, they transferred both their individual subjectivities and their evolving imaginations of the Chinese nation – whether to reject or embrace its modernising trajectory – onto a largely unknown neighbour. In hindsight, the complex interplay of subjectivity transference between Nepal, China, and the West became a powerful force in sustaining trans-Himalayan referencing projects. These exchanges – though physically and epistemologically separated to a large extent – offered moments of contestation, interaction, and transformation, albeit in abrupt and uneven ways. Working within the frameworks of modernisation, Chinese intellectuals did not merely look towards Nepal – they were also, in a way, looking for themselves. Whether or not these efforts yielded fruitful results, the journey itself constituted a rite of passage (Turner 1995) – one that mutually transformed individual subjectivities and national imaginations. How do such intellectual journeys unfold? How do cultures encounter, contest, merge, and diverge when Chinese intellectuals approach Nepal with their epistemological burdens? Revisiting these historical narratives and early practices of learning from other Asian actors – and reintegrating them into contemporary discourse – offers alternative perspectives on the complex dynamics of inter-Asian referencing. This is particularly significant in our current moment, when those actors ostensibly tasked with safeguarding and facilitating mobility often appear to be moving in the opposite direction (Bhagat-Kennedy 2018).

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the "rise of Asia in global capitalism" (Chua 2015, p. 78) had intensified inter-Asia engagements, prompting scholars and intellectuals to increasingly use one another as reference points. This phenomenon is most notably conceptualised by Chen Kuan-Hsing (2010, p. 212) as Asia as Method, which advocates "using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, [so that] societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt." This approach is embedded within a broader decolonial agenda (Song 2025).

Scholars engaged in the movement (Chen and Chua, 2007) of Inter-Asian Cultural Studies emphasise the fluidity and plurality of Asian experiences, practices, and methods (Chen and Chua 2000; Niranjana 2000, 2015; Chua 2015, 2025), constructing inter-Asia as "a methodological field" (Morris 2014, p. 241) of possibilities rather than a rigid, predefined toolkit. However, its strong emphasis on horizontal connections, such as mutual understanding, shared histories, and productive similarities across Asia, often oversimplifies the uneven power dynamics that have historically shaped interactions between different Asian actors. Addressing this gap, this article examines the overlooked temporal and spatial nexuses of engagement between Nepal and China, highlighting disconnection as a conceptual lens to reaffirm the complexity of inter-Asian relations as a field of possibilities.

To clarify the concept of disconnection in this article and its relationship with inter-Asia referencing, it is necessary to revisit Li Hongyin's story. Li was not a professional scholar of Nepal; rather, he was a journalist and an officer working in the propaganda sector of the National Government of the Republic of China (ROC). At the time of writing this article, he was only around thirty years old and studying economics in London. Two years later, he returned to China, where he held various administrative positions in the local government of Henan province. As far as historical records indicate, he never engaged in Nepali studies again. Despite its encyclopaedic appearance, Li's article is

ultimately not about Nepal, but about China and its modern state-building project. As previously mentioned, he opens his narrative by lamenting the recent collapse of the traditional suzerain–vassal relationship between China and Nepal. He expresses anger at British imperialist incursions into China's borderlands, as well as his frustration with Nepal's alignment with Britain, facilitated by British tolerant policies that allowed Nepal to maintain a favourable relationship with the colonial power. For Li, understanding Nepal was first and foremost a matter of Chinese policymaking. This is evident in his concluding remark: "If (it) can lead to my compatriots' further research with more accuracy, serving as a reference for the government to handle border issues, then it would be my great honour" (Li 1934, p. 12). Li's ultimate objective was thus anti-imperialist, as he repeatedly frames British imperialism as the primary force undermining historical China–Nepal relations and, consequently, China's territorial security. However, this anti-imperialist stance does not align with conventional notions of de-imperialisation. Rather than advocating for the dismantling of imperial structures in the region, Li's perspective is driven by a sense of unfulfilled nostalgia – a desire to restore China's hierarchical, premodern imperial relationship with Nepal. Ironically, this aspiration is increasingly obstructed by China's own modern state-building process. Thus, for Li, researching Nepal was not an effort to understand the neighbouring country per se; rather, it was a means of reimagining and reconfirming China's role in the emerging international order. In the final analysis, his study of Nepal was fundamentally tied to China's ongoing and unfinished project of modern state formation, with Nepal serving as a point of reference rather than the primary subject of inquiry.

The absence of Nepali subjectivity in Li's article is not merely a consequence of the exclusive English–Chinese translation but, more importantly, a reflection of the unequal hierarchy of knowledge production underpinning this project. Li's effort to systematise information about Nepal through the intensive translation of European sources exemplifies a broader phenomenon: how modern Chinese intellectuals imagined their Himalayan neighbour as part of their ongoing struggle to safeguard China's national borders from imperialist expansion. As I will soon demonstrate, Chinese intellectuals actively turned to Nepal, hoping it could serve as a reference point for various modern concerns. However, their engagement with Nepal – whether in terms of routes, motivations, materials, or methods – was highly mediated and, at times, even obstructed. First, the perceptions of most of them were shaped by Han Chinese intellectuals' persistent adherence to the traditional tributary system in engaging with Asian neighbours. Later, direct colonial intervention and coercive duress (Stoler 2016) further disrupted these intellectual exchanges. This is what I refer to as disconnection in trans-Himalayan referencing – a concept that highlights the epistemological complexity of understanding each other, shaped by heterogeneous local perspectives that have been constrained by epistemological colonisation. As the narratives in this article reveal, Chinese intellectuals' efforts to understand Nepal – or rather, their imaginings of Nepal – were heavily mediated by European sources and Chinese worldviews, rather than direct encounters with Nepali culture. Does this disconnection suggest that inter-Asia referencing is merely a pseudo-proposition in similar contexts? Furthermore, if, as Chua (2025, p. 4) suggests, "inter-Asia referencing is motivated by a desire/need to understand a local condition with reference to a 'comparable' other(s)," what happens when the comparable other can never be fully grasped? Should instances of disconnection be regarded as exceptions to inter-Asia referencing and therefore excluded from the movement? Or rather, what is lost when we conceptualise them in such a way?

This article represents a preliminary but dedicated attempt to integrate trans-Himalayan referencing into broader debates on inter-Asia engagements, not only as a theoretical reflection but also as a practical intervention. Nearly two decades after the emergence of the inter-Asia movement, we now find ourselves in a moment when cross-border interaction is faltering, hostility towards national others is rising, and borders are becoming increasingly fixed. Under such conditions, the earlier possibilities for meaningful inter-Asia engagements appear to be fading day by day. Consequently, the call to "Use (trans)Asia as Method" (Chen 2010; De Kloet 2020) – to transcend colonial and national constraints and foster direct encounters among Asian actors – seems increasingly distant from our contemporary reality. Given these challenges, where should we stand today, and how should we act moving forward?

In-betweenness of disconnection

Disconnection, in various forms, is not a new concept in the social sciences and humanities. Relevant work interrogates the epistemological and asymmetrical structures that shape disconnected and uneven moments, statuses, and practices on scales that are at once macro and micro, challenging the grand myth of unrestricted border-crossing and exposing the underlying spatial power asymmetries. In a similar vein, from its inception, Inter-Asia Cultural Studies has been a transnational movement of epistemological decolonisation and reimagination, one that remains acutely aware of unequal power structures within and beyond Asia. Among these asymmetries, the disconnection of Asian intellectual exchange (Chen and Chua 2007; Iwabuchi 2013; Leung and Kim 2019) holds particular significance. As Chen (2016, p. 114) asserts, the movement seeks to "create conditions for our disconnected communities to interact and intersect." Moreover, Chatterjee (2018) eloquently demonstrates why, in postcolonial contexts, the project of connected history often remains an unfulfilled aspiration. More recently, the subfield of India–China cultural studies has seen a surge of interest in disconnection and other epistemological obstacles rooted in coloniality and local intricacies (Gvili 2023; Mangalagiri 2024; Wong 2025). Aiming to critically reassess the horizontality, parity, and mutual understanding often emphasised in inter-Asia engagements and South-South allyships, they have increasingly interrogated the unequal power dynamics that shape relationships between multiple subjectivities within Asia. Studies on China–India disconnections complicate the assumption of a horizontal relationship among multiple Asias, as well as the binary, vertical framing of the West as the oppressor and Asia as the oppressed. Rather than merely identifying specific instances of disconnection, tracing their causes, and proposing comparative strategies to avoid similar obstacles in the future, scholars in this field adopt a different approach. They seek to reframe disconnection itself, problematising it without treating it as a problem. Their central question is not how to eliminate disconnection but rather: what should we do if disconnection is unavoidable?

Their exploration of this question affirms the intricate, productive potential of disconnection, rather than merely acknowledging or denying its positive or negative impact. For instance, framing disconnection as an "imperial unconscious," Gvili (2022, p. 9) demonstrates how the imagined South-South allyship between China and India – as represented in literature and opera during the twentieth century – was inevitably mediated through the languages of the North. However, recognising the epistemic impact of colonial mediation does not lead her to pessimism about its inevitability. Instead, she highlights the cracks that Chinese writers managed to forge within these knowledge structures, arguing that these spaces of disruption provided sites where Chinese writers could reshape and contest their subjectivities through the imaginative construction of India (ibid., p. 19). By shifting attention to these gaps, interstices, and ruptures, Gvili suggests that it is precisely within these fragmented spaces of disconnection that new subjectivities emerge. Similarly, Mangalagiri (2023, p. 6) conceptualises disconnection as "a crisis of transnational relation." Through an analysis of three interrelated statuses of disconnection – friction, ellipsis, and contingency – she argues that disconnection can "give rise to its own particular logics of relation" (ibid., p. 193) and "spark new and unexpected possibilities of meaning-making" (ibid., p. 197). More recently, Wing-Kwong Wong has examined the negative moments in inter-Asian engagement, particularly those of mis-encounter, suggesting that "the inter-Asia encounters cannot but repeat and reenact the negative affect. Then the basic practices of Asia as a method as inter-referencing is not only about the reading and understanding of the comparable historical experience but perhaps also about the unavoidable misreading and misunderstanding" (Wong 2005, p. 22).

Borrowing from Niranjana's critical reframing of inter-Asia referencing as an inter-Asia referencing methodology – "a system of broad principles and practices" (Niranjana 2015, p. 5) – I describe these theoretical reflections on various forms of disconnection as an emerging inter-Asia disconnection methodology. Conventionally, disconnection is understood in terms of rupture, cessation, and separation, which often frames it negatively – as an abnormal deviation from an otherwise stable and continuous state. Within Asian historical narratives, we frequently encounter rhetoric celebrating an

unbroken history of friendship. Such narratives tend to establish a binary opposition, framing continuity as a natural state while positioning disconnection as an external, unnatural disturbance. However, this article challenges such dichotomies. Drawing on knowledge production projects between China and Nepal from the 1910s to the 1940s, this article seeks to contribute to this methodology by foregrounding the in-betweenness of disconnection. It does not conceptualise gaps and intricacies as empty voids but rather as active spaces of movement in-between – what Ingold (2015, p. 147) describes as: "a movement of generation and dissolution in a world of becoming, where things are not yet given – such that they might then be joined up – but on the way to being given."

In-betweenness in disconnection within inter-Asian engagements – while acknowledging its unbridgeability – signifies a liberation and transference of subjectivity from its embeddedness in a single system to shifting, multiple historical, social, cultural, geopolitical, and physical contexts. These contexts are not isolated but rather entangled and dynamically interacting. As a temporal–spatial nexus, in-betweenness functions as "a means to be passed over to make the thought move," which is "crucial to questioning rigidified knowledge frameworks and understanding these movements" (Wong et al. 2025, p. 2). However, rather than serving merely as a conduit between what is already known and what is yet to be discovered (Valeriani 2012), or as "a hope that there are other ways of articulating truths" (Hoveid 2012), in-betweenness, manifested in "heterogeneous modes of transmission" (de Vienne and Déléage 2024, p. 29), itself is inherent to knowledge, aligning with Dewey's assertion that "Society exists not only by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication" (1916, p. 5). Moreover, Wong (2025, p. 23) has insightfully observed that "This 'inter' is the in-betweenness, the interim, the interstice, the gap . . . the core of the experience of inter-Asia encounters of thoughts, which is the unbridgeable gap . . . in the inter-Asia transference . . . as an opening that could also be a rift or break." Thus, disconnection in inter-Asia engagements does not signify a state of absolute non-communication. Instead, it represents a "locus for social, cultural, and natural transformation," where the fluidity of becoming and openness to futurity surpasses the conservative drive for cohesion and unity (Grosz 2001, p. 90). The liminal, in-between, shifting, entangled, plural, and unstable nature of the knowledge production projects discussed here is precisely what the concept of disconnection seeks to capture.

As Li's story illustrates, the early twentieth century for Nepal–China knowledge production has exemplified such non-binary, and/or (Weber 2016), plural, and liminal nature of in-betweenness. On the one hand, the colonial imprint profoundly reshaped the epistemological foundations and hierarchical structures governing Chinese intellectual projects, in which Nepal was largely encoded through Western languages. On the other hand, such a power was not all-encompassing. Rather than operating as a totalising force, it paradoxically motivated Chinese intellectuals to recode China's relations with Nepal, retracing local, Sino-centric historical narratives as a self-critical means of interrogating China's contested geopolitical and international position. One might rightfully argue that Nepali subjectivity remains invisible in this matrix. However, it should not be entirely overlooked, as this matrix itself played a role in sustaining the momentum that paradoxically facilitated trans-Himalayan referencing. This process – though unstable – provided a productive foundation for knowledge-making. As Tsing (2011, pp. 4–5) insightfully observes, such "awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across differences" ultimately "lead to new arrangements of culture and power."

Conceptualising these mediating gaps as spaces in-between – what Bhabha (1994, p. 4) describes as the "interstitial passage . . . [that] opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity . . . without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" – allows for a more critical and comprehensive examination of Nepal–China mutual referencing projects. This perspective avoids both victimising them as mere products of colonial oppression and romanticising them as symbols of trans-Himalayan friendship. Reading Chinese intellectuals' efforts to position Nepal as a reference point in the early twentieth century through the lens of awkward engagements (Tsing 2011) or mis-encounters (Wong 2025), therefore, shifts attention to a liminal, experimental nexus of time and space, where Asian subjectivities are continuously contested, mediated, remixed, shaped, and reshaped through the knowledge-making process.

More broadly, theorists of inter-Asian engagements advocate for a reimagining of Asia as a dialogic communicative space, where intellectuals and cultural actors collaborate across borders to interconnect diverse voices, concerns, and issues within multiple, intersecting public arenas (Iwabuchi 2020). While this vision is optimistic and future-oriented, it remains incomplete, as it often overlooks the unbridgeable gaps that persist within these intersections. By reading disconnection as a productive temporal–spatial nexus in-between, I suggest that coloniality and the epistemological barriers it interweaves are not fixed but contingent, shifting, and structured within plural power geometries (Massey 2005). Recognising this fluidity does not diminish the structural inequalities embedded in inter-Asian knowledge production; rather, it provides a more nuanced understanding of the constraints and possibilities shaping these exchanges. This, in turn, allows for a lighter burden in approaching future inter-Asia engagements, making space for new modes of intellectual and cultural interaction.

Generally, I argue that it is precisely these non-binary dimensions of disconnection that open up new possibilities for reimagining inter-Asia exchanges, particularly in a world where colonial legacies have rendered intricacies and asymmetries inevitable. While coloniality has undeniably erected barriers that hinder direct modes of mutual understanding among Asian actors, it has also – consciously and unconsciously – given rise to contact zones (Pratt 1992), where Asian nations engage with one another as imagined referential objects to be studied, interpreted, and contested. It is through these countless disconnected moments that subjectivities – such as those of figures like Li Hongyin – and the modern imaginations of China, Nepal, and Asia are continually performed and articulated. In making this argument, I am not attempting to whitewash colonialism or frame coloniality as a necessary evil in the production of inter-Asia knowledge. Rather, my goal is to shift the discussion beyond the idealised framework of communication, urging readers to critically examine the unequal power structures that underlie inter-Asian interactions. To address this point, the next section examines an article published nearly two decades before Li Hongyin, highlighting an earlier instance in which a Chinese intellectual affirmed and reinforced confidence in China's transformative potential through a reference to Nepal.

Reimagining modernity through the tributary lens

On 11 and 13 August 1911, *Shen Bao* (申報, 1872–1949) – a pioneering and influential newspaper of the late Qing and Republican era in China – published a two-part article that critically examined the traditional tributary relationship between China and Nepal. Titled *The Discussion of Nepal* (lun Niboer 論尼泊爾, Qiu Tong 1911a, 1911b), this intensive and critical piece reevaluated the conventional Nepal–China relationship, arguing that, in light of a rapidly changing, Western-dominated global order, the tributary system had, in effect, been nullified. Consequently, the article dismissed the Chinese government's claims of suzerainty over Nepal.

The author of this article was the political activist Zhang Shizhao (1881–1973), who, at the time, was a 30-year-old political critic based in the United Kingdom. Writing under one of his many aliases, Qiu Tong (秋桐) (others included Qing Tong 青桐 and Gu Tong 孤桐), Zhang was a prominent figure in China's political turbulence at that time. To briefly contextualise Zhang's intellectual and political trajectory, he was an outspoken critic, publisher, and translator during the late Qing period, advocating for the overthrow of the monarchical system in China. In 1904, he took refuge in Japan, where he began learning English. Later, in 1908, he enrolled at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, where he studied law, politics, and logic. During this period, he engaged deeply with European, particularly British, political philosophy and governance structures, publishing numerous articles introducing Western ideas to Chinese audiences (Huang Pu 2011). After the establishment of the ROC, Zhang returned to China with his family and held various academic and governmental positions. However, despite his early enthusiasm for Western political systems, his intellectual stance evolved over time. While he had once actively promoted Western knowledge and institutions, he later turned to Chinese and broader Asian traditions, viewing morality, cultural heritage, and indigenous knowledge as the foundation for local identity, solutions to modern challenges, and pathways to the future – rather than simply adopting Western industrialisation (Li 2008; Zuo 2010; Yao 2016). At the core of his later

cultural philosophy was the theory of harmonised hybridisation (tiao he调和), which proposed that new cultures do not replace old ones in an abrupt, complete, or immediate manner. Instead, Zhang believed that cultural change occurs gradually and organically, with hybridity being a fundamental and inevitable process (Guo 2007). Although Zhang's theory primarily used Western culture as a reference point in analysing China's cultural transformations, he also actively engaged with other Asian countries, such as India, in his comparative studies. Thus, it could be argued that Zhang Shizhao was one of the early inter-Asia scholars.

In the opening paragraph of *The Discussion*, Zhang introduces his critique by juxtaposing two epistemological frameworks for understanding Nepal, using the divergent Chinese renderings of the country's name to exemplify their asymmetrical positions. He characterises the traditional Chinese term, *Kuo Er Ka* (廓爾喀 Gorkha), as imprecise and lacking analytical depth, in contrast to the Western appellation Nepal, which he presents as enabling a more rigorous and systematic engagement. This initial contrast sets the stage for Zhang's broader intervention. He subsequently discloses the immediate impetus for his writing: the Chinese state's recent attempt to reassert suzerainty over Nepal and Bhutan – an effort promptly rebuffed by Britain, which reaffirmed the independent status of both polities. Significantly, Zhang's critique is not aimed at Britain's dismissal per se, but rather at the Chinese government's unstrategic and ill-conceived assertion, which he frames as a humiliating symptom of the Qing empire's declining diplomatic capacity.

To support his argument, Zhang (Qiu Tong 1911a) scrutinises the basis of China's claim to suzerainty over Nepal, which, he argues, rests solely on the historical practice of Nepal sending tribute to Beijing every few years. He critiques this as part of China's outdated method of controlling and pacifying barbarians and ultimately concludes that no substantive political relationship exists between China and Nepal. This assertion directly challenges the foundational myths of China's imperial outreach. By contrast, Zhang highlights Nepal's relationship with Britain as an exemplary model of modern statecraft, emphasising their formal treaties and military alliances. While acknowledging the inherent inequalities of such arrangements, he argues that these alliances enabled Nepal to integrate into the global community of civilised nations, primarily through its special relationship with Britain. Moreover, Zhang commends the then Prime Minister of Nepal, for his diplomatic acumen in fostering positive relations with Britain, which, in turn, spared Nepal from colonisation. This portrayal reflects Zhang's admiration for realpolitik and strategic diplomacy, reinforcing his argument that China's antiquated tributary mindset was inadequate for navigating the complexities of modern geopolitics.

In the latter section of *The Discussion*, Zhang adopts a rhetorical strategy centred on a sequence of eight pointed interrogatives, each designed to systematically challenge the foundations of China's asserted suzerainty over Nepal. He contends that the failure to convincingly address even a single one of these questions would render China's claim untenable. Drawing upon principles of international law, the author argues that sovereignty must be grounded in demonstrable and effective power rather than abstract or historical declarations. In this context, he suggests that although China continues to lay claim to absolute suzerainty over Nepal, such authority has, in practical terms, been defunct for more than 120 years (Qiu Tong 1911b). Consequently, Zhang concludes that the Chinese state ought to shift its focus away from reviving obsolete diplomatic claims and instead prioritise comprehensive domestic reform to exert meaningful influence abroad.

Much like the reading of Li's work above, one may easily sense – and argue – that, despite the article's title, Nepal is largely absent or at least overshadowed in Zhang's discussion. While Zhang ostensibly sets out to analyse Nepal, his actual focus lies elsewhere – on the competition between different world orders, one dominated by China and the other by the West. In this context, Nepal functions less as a subject of inquiry and more as a comparative reference between these two competing systems. Moreover, it serves as a discursive channel through which Zhang projects both the hopes and anxieties surrounding the future of the Chinese nation-state. From this perspective, Nepal's own subjectivity – its culture, identity, and historical agency – is rendered unimportant. What matters is not what Nepal is, where Nepal is, or how Nepal exists as a subjective cultural entity, but rather how Nepal can be used as a fragmented coordinate to construct a larger narrative about China's position in the modern world.

Zhang Shizhao's approach to Nepal was not unique but was, with some nuances, shared by many of his contemporaries (e.g. Sun Yat-sen 1939; Gesangzeren 1931; Li, 1930; Song Hua, 1930), who also wrote or spoke about Nepal. For instance, approximately twenty years after *The Discussion*, Gesangzeren (1931), an ethnic Tibetan and a founding member of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission of the ROC (Wang 2019), published an article titled *The Previous Tribute from Nepal* (Niboer yiqian de jingong 尼泊爾以前的進貢). While both *The Discussion* and *Previous Tribute* discuss the historical tributary relationship between Nepal and China, *Previous Tribute* appears more progressive, as it critiques not only Western colonisers but also the Qing Empire's imperial policies. Unlike *The Discussion*, which laments China's failure to maintain suzerainty over Nepal, *Previous Tribute* condemns this historical relationship as a product of seduction by wealth and vain glory (Gesangzeren 1931). However, a closer reading of *Previous Tribute* reveals that, despite its anti-imperial stance, it remains deeply Sino-centric – or more precisely, modernity-centric. Like Zhang's work, it ignores Nepal's subjectivity, using it instead as a conceptual lens through which a progressive China can be imagined. Ultimately, this perspective is driven by the dominance of modernisation discourse, which frames historical progress within a linear, hierarchical timeline, positioning Nepal and China at different points of advancement and backwardness. As Gesangzeren (1931) describes, according to the report of a Chinese envoy who recently returned from Nepal, Nepal is more advanced in terms of material infrastructure, possesses a vast army with a militaristic spirit, and – borrowing a European figure of speech – is Japan in the mountains. Thus, while Gesangzeren ostensibly describes Nepal, he is, in reality, constructing an idealised model of modernity and projecting this imagination onto Nepal through a comparative framework with China. In this framing, Nepal is modern and ahead, while China is backward and insufficiently modern. Yet, interestingly, Gesangzeren does not adopt a pessimistic stance towards China's perceived backwardness. Instead, he optimistically argues that China, too, can progress and achieve modernisation, provided that it adheres to certain modernising principles (Ibid.).

To a large extent, the fundamental way in which Chinese intellectuals viewed Nepal did not significantly change between Zhang Shizhao and Gesangzeren over the span of twenty years. Nepal continued to be treated as a model of modernity, or a testing ground for China's own modernisation efforts. While Chinese intellectuals sought to reference Nepal as an Asian counterpart that could offer parallel experiences of modernisation and progress, what they actually encountered was not an independent, self-determined Nepal, but rather a projection of universalised modernisation doctrines – doctrines largely dictated by European colonial epistemologies. The dominance of colonial language and epistemology in Chinese knowledge production on Nepal becomes even more evident when analysing another Chinese article on Nepal published two years after *The Discussion*. It suggests that China lacked its own indigenous knowledge of Nepal and was therefore compelled to rely on European sources – a belief that was widespread among many Chinese intellectuals at the time (Shou Gong 1913). In hindsight, this belief did not indicate a total void of knowledge but rather pointed to a perceived gap in knowledge – one that conformed to Western academic norms and standards, deemed more authoritative and compatible with the evolving global order. This raises a fundamental question: What is the meaning of attempting to understand other Asian actors when such efforts remain so deeply mediated by the colonial intervention?

Let us return to Zhang Shizhao again. As far as I know, *The Discussion* is the only study Zhang ever conducted on Nepal. Soon after writing the article, he shifted his focus away from the Himalayan kingdom and likely never returned to the subject for the rest of his life. This spontaneous, episodic engagement was a defining feature of most Chinese writings on Nepal during this period. Broadly speaking, these works reflect two types of epistemic rupture. The first, as I have repeatedly emphasised, is the obstruction created by colonial knowledge structures. The second is the discontinuity within knowledge networks themselves. Despite the fact that this was a relatively short period of engagement, there was no sustained transmission of knowledge about Nepal in China. Each time later researchers sought to study Nepal, they seemed to be starting from scratch, exploring an empty field. In other words, during these thirty years, China's knowledge production on Nepal did not follow a stable

trajectory of accumulation or linear progression, nor did new knowledge continuously replace older knowledge. However, this does not mean that China's intellectual engagement with Nepal during this period was blank or a failure. I argue that these short-lived, disconnected moments of engagement were not entirely meaningless. Each time Nepal became an object of Chinese intellectual curiosity, it served as a vessel for projecting hopes and anxieties about China's modern future. This transference of imagination and aspiration onto Nepal provided an essential catalyst for Chinese intellectuals to take an interest in and attempt to understand Nepal. More importantly, each act of imagining Nepal was simultaneously a process of re-examining and rearranging the power structures that organise cultures. The way Chinese intellectuals nuanced their attitudes towards the overarching theme of China/Asian modernisation reveals its historically grounded, heterogeneous dimensions, challenging the idea that modernisation was a hegemonic monolith. Here, in-betweenness does not simply refer to the space between past and future, between here and there, or between the known and the unknown. Instead, it reflects a fluid, contingent epistemic space where intellectuals, when finding their subjectivities constrained by dominant power structures, could still carve out room for self-preservation and, with limited resources, sustain and expand this space. This is not merely an act of absolute resistance but rather a tactical negotiation of power structures and available resources. Because these tactical movements operate within constraints, the knowledge produced in-between is often inconsistent, fragmented, and hybrid. However, the knowledge emerging from disconnected intellectual encounters with other Asian actors can provide both time and space for tactical navigation. In doing so, it allows Asian subjectivities to be contested and reconfirmed in the very process of knowledge production.

What I also find particularly inspiring in Zhang Shizhao's analysis of Nepal is its focus on the transference of positive emotion and hope in the process of trying to understand other Asian actors. Allow me to take you back to *The Discussion*, in which, while Zhang strongly criticises the Chinese government's backwardness in the new international order and its lack of preparation in provoking Britain, he ultimately concludes on a note of encouragement and inspiration:

> Hence, the strategic imperative for our party lies in prioritising governmental reform. We must endeavour to refine its legal and administrative systems within the shortest feasible timeframe . . . Only through such institutional rectification can we . . . possess the requisite standing to confront imperial powers as equals. . . . These dual imperatives – institutional transformation and martial preparedness – constitute the sine qua non for reclaiming sovereignty over Nepal. However, under present exigencies, such grand designs must be temporarily deprioritised, for no undertaking can succeed when ends and means are inverted (Qiu Tong 1911b).

Here, Zhang's vision of modernisation and state-building suggests that cultural and political transformation is neither instantaneous nor absolute but rather gradual and strategic. His belief in China's capacity to adapt and progress is ultimately what allows him to situate China within a dynamic historical trajectory rather than a static hierarchy of civilisation. As Zhang's conclusion suggests, he remains optimistic despite China's weakened position in the face of imperialist powers. Rather than viewing China's weakness as an irreversible fate, he reframes it as a temporary condition, suggesting that it is ultimately a matter of time before China can regain its strength. In doing so, Zhang reconceptualises China's temporal weakness as an in-between status – situated between a negative present and a promising future yet to come. This positive outlook, sense of confidence, and emphasis on preparation do not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they are largely informed by Zhang's reading of Nepal, which he perceives as an example of successful modernisation. By referencing Nepal, Zhang affirms and reinforces his confidence in China's own potential for transformation.

Reflection and self-reflection through war

In this section, by examining war-triggered knowledge production in Chinese sources from the 1930s, I offer another example to demonstrate how seemingly disconnected moments between Asian actors

can, paradoxically, become productive sites for knowledge-making. These moments facilitated the transference of subjectivities among Asian intellectuals, shaping their geopolitical imaginations.

In hindsight, the 1910s was a comparatively dormant period for Nepal-related knowledge production in China. Based on the primary sources I have examined, only a few news reports and translated works were published during this time. Moreover, these limited publications circulated primarily within elite intellectual circles, functioning more as narcissistic reflections than as knowledge intended for broader public engagement (Luo 2013). One key reason for this limited engagement is that, despite their geographical proximity, Nepal has historically remained semi-agnostic towards China (Yang 2024). However, this relative indifference changed dramatically in the 1930s. During the early years of that decade, there was a notable increase in Chinese knowledge production on Nepal, sparking wider debates in China about Nepal. Interestingly, this surge in interest did not stem from growing friendly and peaceful ties between the two states. On the contrary, it was the prospect of war between Nepal and China – one of the most brutal forms of human friction – that led to a significant rise in knowledge production and circulation.

Scholars of transculturation have long recognised the productive dimensions of war, as vividly articulated by Ouyang (2019, p. 1), "War is a paradox . . . It can also be an arena of exuberant cultural exchange and meaning making." Ironically, the peaks of Nepal-related knowledge production in Chinese before the mid-twentieth century – including the spike in 1930 – were not the result of friendly engagement, as official narratives often suggest. Rather, they were triggered by wars or impending conflicts. Strictly speaking, the Nepal–China war of 1930 never materialised, as diplomatic efforts ultimately averted military confrontation. However, the debates surrounding the war's causes, potential developments, and strategic implications – particularly as a reminder of modern China's border security vulnerabilities – garnered unprecedented attention from a diverse range of Chinese actors.

In 1929, a Lhasa-based Nepali, Sherpa Gyalpo, was detained by Tibetan authorities for engaging in the illicit trade of cigarettes and tobacco. The jurisdictional dispute over his arrest escalated tensions between Nepal and Tibet, reaching a critical point when Tibetan officials forcibly removed Gyalpo from the Nepali Legation, where he had sought refuge, and incarcerated him once again. In response, Nepal swiftly mobilised its military, prompting fears of aggression from the south. This escalation compelled Tibetan officials to seek assistance from the central government (Mishra 1991; Uprety 1980; Zhu 2016). Although diplomatic efforts ultimately prevented open conflict, the incident garnered extensive coverage in the Chinese media, significantly amplifying Nepal's visibility within Chinese discourse. As a result, Nepal became a focal point for a range of national sentiments, including anti-imperialism, patriotism, and national pride, but also shock, insecurity, and, most critically, humiliation. At the time, a dominant theme in Chinese discussions on Nepal was the motif of national humiliation, which intricately linked concerns about border security and sovereignty with the broader discourse of national disgrace. This thematic engagement fostered a dialectical exchange among Chinese intellectuals – one that was both critical and deeply self-reflective, as observed by Callahan (2004, p. 207). However, this introspective discourse did not manifest as hostility towards Nepal. Instead, it provoked a more profound self-examination within the Chinese intellectual community. A central and complex question emerged: How had Nepal – once a tributary state – managed to outpace China?

For many Chinese intellectuals, the explanation for Nepal's comparative advancement lay in its successful strides towards modernisation, which starkly contrasted with China's relative stagnation. But how did contemporary Chinese intellectuals interpret Nepal's modernisation? The experiences of two Chinese envoys, who travelled to Nepal to ease tensions and strengthen diplomatic ties, may offer valuable insights. In May 1930, the Chinese government dispatched Bao Wenjun, an officer from the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission to Nepal for negotiations – perhaps making him the first Chinese official to visit Nepal in the twentieth century. Upon his return, Bao submitted official reports to the Chinese government, which were later cited in newspapers for public dissemination. In these reports, Bao highlighted Nepal's material development, emphasising its Western-style transportation and architecture, as well as its martial population (Shishi Xinbao 1939; The Sheng-Ching Shih Pao 1930). Approximately a year later, Zhang Ming was sent by the Chinese government to Nepal to confer

military ranks and present gifts to the Nepali Prime Minister, as part of an effort to develop diplomatic relations in the aftermath of potential military conflict. Upon his return, Zhang expressed deep admiration for Nepal's modernisation, citing its independence, industrial development, and national unity in interviews with journalists. He also praised the Nepali people's adherence to traditional Eastern morals, describing them as courteous, kind, and simple in their customs. Zhang further emphasised Nepal's military resilience, noting that it maintained a standing army of 100,000 with a reserve force of 200,000 and possessed ample arms and ammunition for self-defence. In times of foreign aggression, Zhang observed, Nepali citizens would spontaneously mobilise to defend their nation, without requiring government directives. He also noted that the government prioritised public opinion, which contributed to a strong and united nation capable of deterring external threats. One of Zhang's most striking observations was the Nepali people's reluctance to use foreign goods, relying instead on domestically produced items. Despite Nepal's small size and population, it was free from customs duties and consular jurisdiction, allowing it to function as a truly independent nation. In contrast, Zhang lamented China's backwardness, expressing pity that, despite its vast territory and large population, China lacked the same level of sovereignty and national cohesion (Shen Bao 1932).

Zhang's admiration for Nepal's modernisation resurfaced ten years later when he was invited to deliver a lecture to college students on the diplomatic history of modern China. In this speech, he revisited Nepal as a model for national transformation, emphasising its cultural and intellectual cohesion, its systematically maintained military capacity, and the absence of structural economic predation by foreign capital. He also highlighted Nepal's liberation from the legacy of unequal treaties that had codified imperialist prerogatives, the eradication of extraterritorial jurisdictions that had previously undermined territorial sovereignty, and its emancipation from asymmetric tariff regimes that perpetuated economic dependency. Concluding his speech, Zhang called for China to follow Nepal's example and become a modern and sovereign nation, free from foreign intervention and capable of asserting its full independence on the global stage (Zhang 1942).

Callahan (2006, p. 215) astutely observes that humiliation represents "a transnational model that . . . is intertwined not just with modern China but with modernity." Similarly, while Zhang experienced a sense of humiliation, it was not Nepal that humiliated him, but rather the overarching dominance of modernisation as an ideological force. Counterintuitively, Zhang was deeply impressed by Nepal's modern achievements and found in them a source of hope for China's own future. Thus, although he was addressing China's present struggles and weaknesses, his reflections were ultimately forward-looking and aspirational. For Zhang, Nepal was not merely a passive object of observation but an active participant in shaping the perspectives of those who gazed upon it. The imagined Nepal was not just a representation; it also played a transformative role in reshaping the subjectivities of its observers, offering a reference point for navigating the complexities of modernity. In this reciprocal process, the authenticity of subjectivities, if it ever truly existed, became distorted and redefined. However, what emerged from this dynamic was not just a loss of fixed identities but an ongoing process of reinvention. The hope, possibility, and momentum generated by this act of looking outwards continued to drive Asian intellectuals to engage with one another, seeking new ways to position themselves in an ever-shifting modern world.

Conclusion

Yang and Chen (2023) have written about Chinese knowledge production on Nepal in the 1940s and after, particularly focusing on the Chinese geographer Zhang Xilin and his works on Nepal. The intellectual works of this period became more systematic and locally grounded, marking the beginning of Chinese intellectuals' efforts to rediscover local materials in an attempt to substantiate the idea of Nepal–China friendship. While these works advocated for the restoration of historical ties between Nepal and China and, on this basis, imagined a peaceful, friendly, and cooperative future for Asia, one can correctly argue that even within this seemingly more progressive narrative, Nepal and China were never truly connected. First, although these narratives no longer emphasised China's historical suzerainty over Nepal, they remained deeply China-centric, relying predominantly on

Chinese-language sources that constructed an imagined Nepal rather than engaging with Nepal from its own perspective. Second, despite the efforts to develop localised knowledge, these works were encoded and expressed through colonial epistemologies and languages. Thus, while they sought to resist colonisation by envisioning a New Asia, they ultimately contributed to the reproduction of colonial structures. As Fanon (1963) elucidates, the participation of non-Western intellectual elites in learning, translating, and writing within Western-dominated knowledge frameworks – whether knowingly or unknowingly – has facilitated the perpetuation of colonial dominance. This process has not only disrupted the cultural fabric of subjugated communities but has also embedded colonial power hierarchies within local epistemologies, further reinforcing the supremacy of Western knowledge systems.

However, the dominance of colonial epistemologies was not entirely unchallenged. Chinese intellectuals, from Zhang Shizhao to Li Hongyin, then to Zhang Ming, exhibited a complex and ambivalent relationship with colonial knowledge paradigms. While they may have admired, adopted, and critically reflected upon these frameworks – and, at times, even aspired to participate within them – they also resisted complete subjugation to colonial dictates. Their diverse approaches to engaging with Nepal reveal a dynamic and contested field of transnational interaction, shaped by multiple actors, competing narratives, and intersecting voices. Rather than a one-dimensional reproduction of colonial knowledge, these engagements underscore the complexities and tensions inherent in the intellectual production of inter-Asian knowledge during this period.

Recognising the complexities of inter-Asian engagements and moving beyond binary perspectives underlie the analysis of this article. In this article, I have examined various forms of disconnection in knowledge production between Nepal and China from the 1910s to the 1940s. I have analysed the writings and imagined representations of Nepal by such as Li Hongyin, Zhang Shizhao, and Zhang Ming, treating them as early cases of trans-Himalayan and inter-Asian engagements. Through close reading, I found that while these intellectuals sought to understand Nepal, they never truly engaged with it, even in the case of Zhang Ming, who had physically visited the country. The disconnected nature of this knowledge production was not merely a consequence of geographical distance or logistical challenges but was primarily shaped by epistemological barriers. Trapped within an unequal discursive framework woven from binaries – China/West, modern/backward, powerful/weak, and progressive/conservative – Chinese intellectuals' representations of Nepal over these three decades resembled grasping at reflections in water or gazing at their own shadows. They either over-relied on knowledge filtered through Western epistemologies or treated Nepal as an unconscious mirror, using it solely as a means to construct their own subjectivity.

However, I approach these epistemic disconnections in Nepal–China knowledge production with a critical yet not entirely pessimistic perspective. The critique is necessary because, under colonial and other unequal power structures, Nepal's subjectivity was often obscured, misinterpreted, or erased. Furthermore, the Chinese intellectuals producing this knowledge were also diminished as subjects, even as their efforts were largely motivated by the search for and reaffirmation of their own subjectivity. Yet, these moments of interrupted, distorted, or constrained subject formation were not meaningless or inherently detrimental. On the contrary, I argue that such disconnections were an essential part of inter-Asian engagement, as they allowed different Asian actors to overcome both epistemological and physical constraints by projecting their subjectivity onto imagined versions of other Asian societies. As the works examined in this article demonstrate, this process of subjectivity transference often coincided with an emotional transference – one that generated positive affective currents, such as hope, friendship, progress, and solidarity. Of course, within these optimistic narratives, unequal power dynamics lurked beneath the surface. As demonstrated in the earlier analysis, Nepal remained voiceless within Chinese intellectual discourse, unable to articulate its own reality and instead passively serving as a reference point for Chinese imaginaries of modernity. Yet, despite these inherent asymmetries, the positive transference of emotions and ideas still opened pathways for learning and engagement between Nepal and China. In a way, even within these moments of epistemic disconnection, the possibility of connection emerged – disconnection, rather than signalling an end to dialogue, paradoxically created new opportunities for intellectual and cultural exchange.

The interwoven dynamics of rupture and connection in inter-Asian engagements create a perpetual state of in-betweenness, one that is dialectical, fluid, and constantly in motion. While emphasising historical development, this in-betweenness does not subscribe to a linear progression of history – it does not assume that the disconnection of today will inevitably disappear in the future. For instance, within the postcolonial condition, coloniality – functioning both as an obstructive force and as a mediating third party – remains an inescapable presence in the processes of trans-Himalayan referencing, whether in the past, present, or future. The disruptions it has created are now an inseparable part of the very structure of inter-Asian engagement. Rather than viewing in-betweenness as a temporary stage leading to resolution, it is more accurately understood as a condition that foregrounds contradiction and demands context-specific responses. Thus, disconnection as a state of in-betweenness always exists, yet paradoxically, it also has never truly existed as a singular, definable entity.

Revealingly, the contradictory in-betweenness of inter-Asian engagements is precisely reflected in the knowledge productions analysed above. Although they do not explicitly address inter-Asian referencing, I argue that their processual, hybrid, shifting, and non-binary character offers valuable insights for critically re-examining the dynamics of inter-Asian engagement. It sheds light on the gaps, voids, absences, and obstacles that emerge when Asian actors attempt to understand each other, repositioning them as productive moments by revealing the dialectical relationship between connection and disconnection and embedding them within an ongoing, never-ending process. By doing so, this article contributes to the critical interrogation of power hierarchies in inter-Asian engagements. It avoids essentialising the West as an immutable common enemy and rejects an uncritical acceptance of all forms of inter-Asian understanding. Instead, by shedding new light on the theorisation of disconnection among Asian actors across time and space, I reaffirm the productive power of unequal power dynamics in reshaping the arrangement of relations among multiple Asian actors.

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