As a relatively nascent field, the study of transmedia is dominated by a small number of western academics writing from a mainly western perspective. To a certain degree this is reflected in this edited volume, with many of the contributors referencing University of California Professor Henry Jenkins, a pioneer in the field. But, while this is not the first collection to consider transmedia practices outside Europe and North America (see Freeman & Gambarato (eds.), 2019, and Freeman & Proctor (eds.), 2018)) nor even the first discrete treatment of Asia (see Dal Jong Yin’s special section on transmedia in East Asia in the International Journal of Communication, East Asian perspective in transmedia storytelling, 2019), this volume provides the first single volume work devoted solely to transmedia in the Asia-Pacific region.

The volume is edited by two of my former colleagues at the University of Nottingham’s China campus, Filippo Gilardi and Celia Lam, who importantly have brought together authors who for the most part work in the region itself. With a focus on the development of unofficial narratives, co-creation, and the use of transmedia for social and educational purposes, the volume is divided into three main parts:

- The relationship between corporate- and state-created narratives, and that produced by amateur creaters;
- How fan-fiction across national and cultural boundaries shapes understandings of transmedia texts;

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And the utilisation of transmedia both for social campaigns and teaching in higher education.

Space does not allow me to comment on every one of the 14 chapters, so I will instead focus on what I consider to be the most significant contributions that this book makes to the existing academic literature on transmedia.

There are two aspects of Jenkins’s theory of transmedia that the volume seeks to problematise. The first is “world-building” (Jenkins, 2007), the notion that the various media platforms that host a story’s content must adhere to a central coherent narrative. The second is the symbiosis between transmedia stories and the commercial media, something alluded to in Gilardi and Lam’s chapter’s reference to Jenkin’s supposition that its best to teach transmedia in places with a strong media industry (p. 282). One of the ways in which this volume critiques the idea of world-building is by highlighting the role of the audience as a creator or co-creator of meaning. Paradoxically, some of the best examples of this come from China, a country where increasingly the governing narrative subsumes all others. This is perhaps because of not in spite of the dearth of information that is in circulation about certain stories. Ng and Jiang’s chapter about the story of Yiyi, a child who survived the 2011 Wenzhou Train Crash, is illustrative of this. The authorities’ removal of posts from Weibo, no doubt to protect Yiyi as well as limiting discussion on a crash for which government officials were deemed to be negligent, fuelled the public’s curiosity for information about the life of this young girl. Despite these restrictions, the continued interest in and development of Yiyi’s stories through the fragments of Weibo and Weixin (WeChat) commentary was, in the words of Ng and Jiang: “not so much a “[world-] building” as it was an “uncovering” (p. 96).

The story of Yiyi also illustrates the importance of the non-fiction narrative in the process of world-building. In so doing, Ng and Jiang’s and other chapters are signposting a move away from Jenkins’s focus on fictional stories. While the non-fiction form, especially in relation to the documentary, can be financially successful, a focus on it usually implies the existence of transmedia forms that are not commercial. Gu and Zhao (p. 17) highlight the research of Gambarato and Tarcia (2016) in transmedia journalism as a means of demonstrating how non-fiction can incorporate story-telling elements. Their particular point of reference is the series of Amazing China documentary formats, through which the Chinese state media builds a strong positive narrative about China’s contemporary rise. Gu and Zhao conceptualise this as an “idea universe” (p. 15), which not only incorporates fictional and non-fictional elements, but also views from the audience in addition to those of the official narrative.

In this sense, an extension of the transmedia concept beyond the commercial realm can open up its adoption to the cause of social and political activism. In Munro’s chapter, an arts organization dedicated to promoting social change, Big hART, used transmedia to raise awareness of the disproportionately high rates of incarceration and deaths in custody of Indigenous Australians. Similarly, Bao analyses the way in which avant-garde theatre performance, About My Parents, uses various forms of media to encourage inter-generational discussion within families. This format enables participants to discuss difficult personal issues, including those, like sexuality, which are taboo in the mainstream media (pp. 248–252). Bao positions his paper as part of a project to build up from its present nascent state a strong literature on case studies of social uses of transmedia. For her part, Munro conceptualises this type of social activism as a version of Jenkins’s notion of co-creation transported from the commercial realm to the public sphere (p. 225). Similarly, Potter discusses the importance of co-creation in his exposition of his collaborative projects to develop participatory documentary films with indigenous people in Banlung, West Papua, and Sabah (p. 187). In their creation of transmedia content on indigenous knowledge, the projects not only proved to represent a more inclusive form of education for indigenous people, but also served to give that valuable knowledge a much wider audience.
This pedagogic function of transmedia is investigated in the final two chapters of the volume. Reid’s chapter focuses on a practice that has become increasingly common in higher education, and not only in the east Asian context in which his experimentation has taken place. That is the use of a transmedia assessment as an addition to, or replacement for, a more traditional form of assignment at the end of a university module. Educators often assume, absent of empirical evidence, that these types of assessments are beneficial and, here, Reid highlights some of the problems that the students encountered (p. 248). However, generally he makes a compelling case for the effectiveness of this approach for EAP (English for Academic Purposes) learners in east Asia. Gilardi and Lam’s practice differs in that transmedia is both the pedagogic practice and the subject of the assessment (indeed of the whole module) for their course. Gilardi and Lam’s stated intention is to adapt Henry Jenkins’s model transmedia module for use in their own teaching in the School of International Communications at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China (UNNC). Like Reid’s transmedia assessments, the learning outcomes of Gilardi and Lam’s module were designed with the practical goal of improving students’ understanding of the key concepts of transmedia in a context where the overwhelming majority of students were studying in a language that was not their primary one (pp. 288–290). The main difference between Jenkins’s model and the UNNC one is in the latter’s critiquing of a number of the former’s conceptual assumptions. One such example centres on the role of IP and media production in the construction of a transmedia canon. In the USA, this is facilitated through production regimes which are both highly protective of IP and, through the dominance of a small number of conglomerates, able to coordinate a number of different processes: production, marketing and distribution (Jenkins, 2006). Although this has changed in recent years, China’s less assiduous enforcement of IP has resulted in a flourishing of series’ fan-based content, what Gilardi and Lam refer to here as “fanon” (p. 283).

In its totality, this volume is an excellent and significant contribution to the existing literature on transmedia studies. While the editors stated that ‘we are not trying to define a “Pan-Asian transmedia”’ (p. 308), I would argue that the geographic spread of examples, and the success of many of the authors in introducing new conceptual frameworks through which we might understand practices in the Asia-Pacific region, arguably means that they have done just that.

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Since its emergence in London and New York in the late 1970s, punk music has subsequently become a global phenomenon (see Dines, Gordon, Guerra, & Bestley, 2019), spreading across the world to regions as diverse as Mexico (O’Connor, 2003), South Africa (Basson, 2007) and Indonesia (Prasetyo, 2017). In the early 1990s, punk music reached China. This book by Jian Xiao (with some co-authored sub-chapters by Jim Donaghey and Paula Guerra) situates this arrival within a global context, tracing the history of punk, its meanings, norms and identity, and referencing handouts and performances that capture the punk scene. The influence of punk music is generally understood in terms of how it challenged established meanings and narratives, including capitalism and globalisation. However, most of the narratives in question related to Western contexts, and the authors note a “general lack of discussion about punk phenomena in Asian contexts” (p. 1). This opens new avenues of interpretation that are likely to be of interest to cultural sociologists who explore meaning-making and those with an interest in post-colonialism.

The book’s nine chapters are organised as two main sections. The first (and longer) section investigates punk in China while the second compares the punk scenes in Indonesia and Portugal. All of the case studies emphasise the need to look beyond established narratives to understand these marginal punk scenes. As the opening chapter explains, a sub-cultural approach is inadequate in the Chinese context, where punk music is characterised by a plurality of styles and sub-genres, and its devotees come from diverse classes and professional backgrounds.

To develop this pluralistic notion of punk, the authors ground their theoretical approach in Howard Becker’s notion of art worlds and Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural fields. To more fully develop their interpretation, one might have welcomed a slightly riskier approach referencing authors who look beyond established Western narratives—for instance, Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of hybridity or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s Other—but these are surprisingly absent. Nevertheless, in acknowledging the role of the “myriad of complementary activities” (p. 8) in the production of cultural objects, the discussion of art worlds and cultural fields is somewhat adapted for the Chinese context.