

"Vernacularizing the Cosmopolitan? Regional Sanskrits, “Stuffed Latin,” “Variant Sinitic,” and the Problem of Hybridity"

Abstract:

Sheldon Pollock’s work on questions of “cosmopolitan and vernacular” in the history of premodern literary cultures, and especially his seminal *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, have served as an important wake-up call for scholars studying the comparative history of vernacularization processes around the world. This paper tackles a topic somewhat neglected by Sheldon Pollock in his work on the interactions between cosmopolitan and vernacular codes. That is, whereas Pollock has described and theorized the rise of “cosmopolitan vernaculars”—by which he means local languages “aspiring to cultural dominance through the appropriation of features of a superposed language”—he has invested comparatively less energy into investigating the reverse process whereby ostensibly cosmopolitan languages and texts can either mask or be infused with, infected/co-opted by, or otherwise mixed and hybridized with vernaculars. Thus, this chapter takes as its broader theme the hybridization or vernacularization of the cosmopolitan, a topic it explores by comparing first regional Sanskrits (a topic untouched by Pollock), “Stuffed Latin,” and “Variant Sinitic” in order to think more broadly about the question of regional admixture in the cosmopolitan.