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# Local Love In APAC

# We've been noticing a *tension.*

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Our APAC-wide work with our KIN network over the past nine months has illuminated an interesting cultural tension - a kind of cultural cognitive dissonance between:

- The seemingly inescapable pull of globalism; desire to be citizens of the world, plugged into the pulse of global culture.
- Vs. the innate sense of place, connection and pride in localism; the celebration of what makes us different from the rest of the world.



The seemingly inescapable pull of **globalism**

*The desire to be citizens of the world, plugged into the pulse of global culture.*

The innate sense of place, connection and pride in **localism**

*The celebration of what makes us different from the rest of the world, rather than the same.*

Our KIN

# KIN Connects

KIN Connects is our quarterly webinar series that deep dives into a theme of relevance for our APAC clients. Our very first edition (hot off the press!) features KIN contributors from China, South Korea, India, Indonesia, and Singapore.



**China:**  
**Bonnie Wang**

Bonnie is an experienced researcher, specialising in cultural insight, futures and semiotics, specifically examining the relationships between culture, creative industry, and urban regeneration in China.



**South Korea:**  
**Jun Bae**

Jun is former culture director at Seoul's RYSE Hotel. Now with her own boutique creative agency, Jun connects brands with Korean culture and trends, all while exploring the intersection of art and design.



**India:**  
**Sucharita Iyer**

Sucharita is an anthropologist at Mumbai-based not-for-profit, Dasra, where she works with, and for, adolescent girls. She's passionate about understanding, and reforming, the role of gender in the modern world.



**Indonesia:**  
**Julius Kensan**

Julius runs Manual, an online city guide for locals and returning Indonesians. Rather than listing 'what's cool', it aims to educate people on a deeper, more substantive set of experiences, in line with its educated, globalised and cultured young readership.



**Singapore:**  
**Tse Hao Guang**

Hao Guang is a poet and editor of the cross-genre, collaborative journal OF ZOOS, as well as a 2016 fellow of the University Of Iowa International Writing Program. He's well-versed in exploring and connecting literary genres.



The result?

# Local Love.

This context is leading to a shift that we describe as ‘local love’; a ‘cultural reimagining’, where expressions of ‘fast culture’ (think food and ‘fits’) are starting to draw again from their ‘slow culture’ roots (think history and tradition).

# It's not (just) a result of covid.

Covid, of course, has had a role to play, forcing us into living more insular lives and seeking inspiration from what's near, rather than far. But the pandemic isn't the lone driver; we've also witnessed:



## Growing fear of global monoculture:

The cross-border adoption of homogenised 'fast culture', from fusion foods (that end up bearing no resemblance to their sources of inspiration) to a kind of 'norm core' global home aesthetic where even our private spaces are looking increasingly similar.

We're looking at a world where you'll be sure to find an Ektorp Ikea sofa in any apartment block across the world.



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*Koreans are looking at how America has handled the pandemic... and how we've done quite well in South Korea... and we're questioning... about who we look to and for what.*

- Jun, South Korea

## Birth of new global superpowers:

The heart of the global economy now beats in different (and more) locations. The economic rise of nations throughout the region - especially China - has realigned the cultural orbit. We now draw inspiration from, and engage with, different sources of influence than we once did.



## Rising creator culture:

Everything is content, everything is entertainment, and everyone can create it. APAC is home to more than 1bn 15-29 year olds. It's quite literally the most youthful region globally. This audience are digital natives, inspired by the spirit of entrepreneurship, and empowered to become the voice of diverse audiences around the world.



*It's a 'cultural  
reimagining'.*

A refocusing and reassessment of the power and potency of place; a kind of renewed confidence and celebration of hyperlocalism in the global era.

Cultural reimagining isn't (entirely) a homage to the past, cyclical trends, or the familiar re-run of fashion, food, beverage and beauty. It's about re-examining deep historical roots through a contemporary perspective.

# Flexibility is at the core.

Driven by curiosity and an appetite for discovery, this cultural reimagining is about flexibility; it's a site of constant compromise between identity (who I am), roots and heritage (where I came from), as well as culture (what am I influenced by).



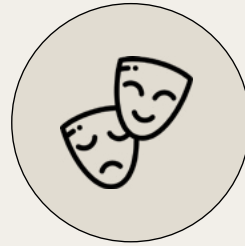
## Identity

(who I am)



## Roots & heritage

(where I came from)



## Culture

(what I am influenced by)

## ... And it's led by youth.

They're looking at the cultural identity of their parents, but this time in the context of globally connected lives lived online. Rather than rejecting one for the other, they're drawing inspiration from hybridising old and new, local and foreign, to forge their own unique cultural identity. They're constantly evolving to adapt to challenges and also to reinvent themselves. At the same time, they seek to maintain a sense of belonging and grounding to feel like they're home.

By shaping their own cultural identities, they're paving the way for more personally-defined expressions of identity on a journey of reinventing themselves, and their culture.



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*I would describe India's national identity as being what each person defines for themselves, only because of how huge the country is and the virtue of how many cultures, languages, religions, and how much geography we encompass. The idea that you can't nail down a single 'Indianness' as really one thing and it really means that you can shape it for yourself.*

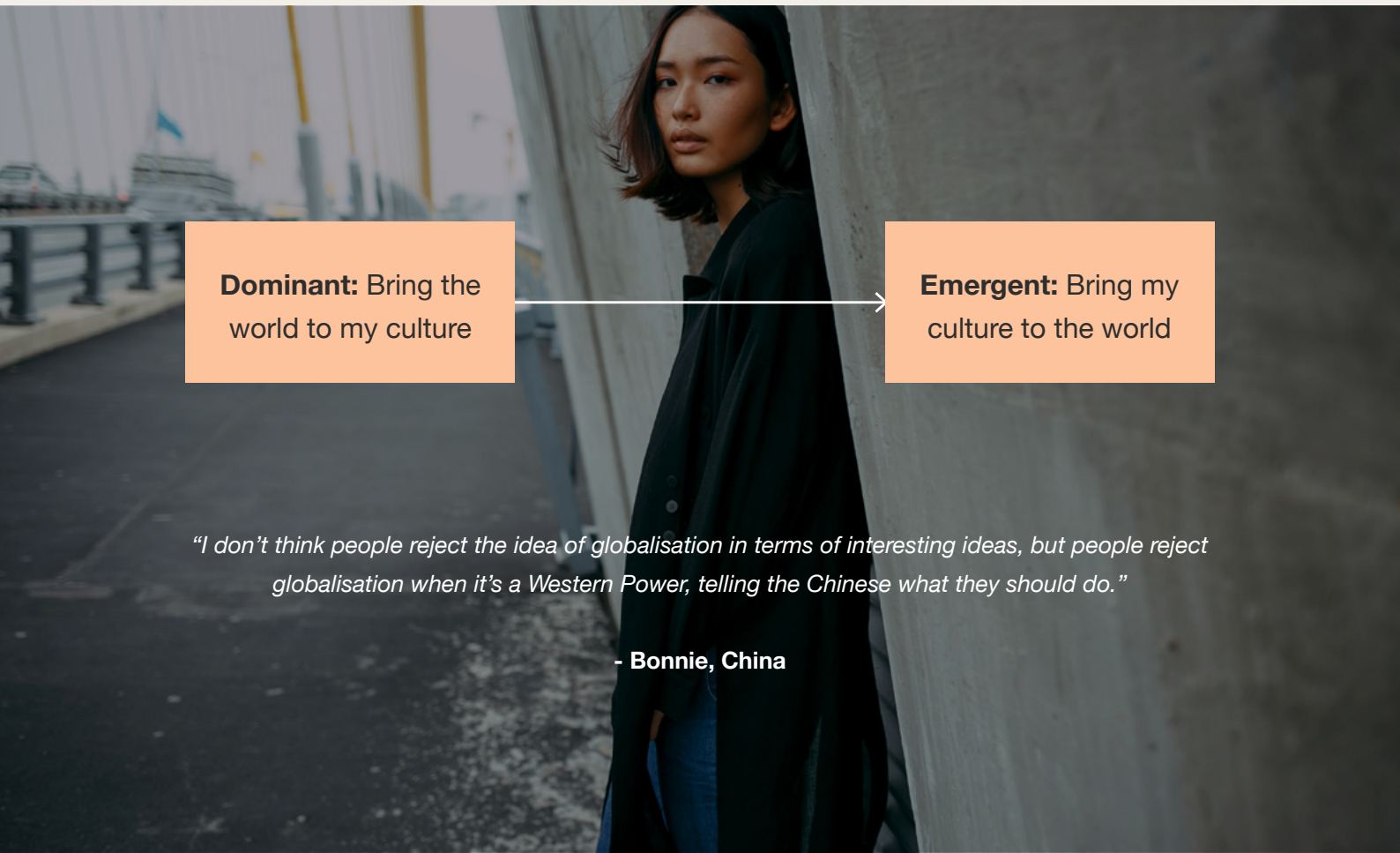
- Sucharita, India

# It challenges traditionally Western cultural hegemony.

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Now more than ever, Asian youth are rejecting an imposed 'external' definition of their cultural identity by challenging stereotypes; they're defining and celebrating who they are in their own terms. And thanks to the internet, they are more empowered than ever to access a global conversation with local voices.

It's an act of agency through which the Western dominance is being challenged and the global cultural flow reversed.



**Dominant:** Bring the world to my culture

**Emergent:** Bring my culture to the world

*"I don't think people reject the idea of globalisation in terms of interesting ideas, but people reject globalisation when it's a Western Power, telling the Chinese what they should do."*

- Bonnie, China

## South Korea: The apex of this phenomenon

Situated between two cultural powerhouses China and Japan, South Korea historically had to fight to retain its cultural identity, and this has been the political narrative defining them for so long. But pressure makes diamonds!

Now with a dedicated goal to become one of the world's leading exporters of popular culture, South Korea is finding its feet - and firmly planting them - on the world stage with the explosion of the Korean Wave (also known as hallyu). Their philosophy of 'ppalli ppalli' - meaning 'fast fast' - gives them drive and a sense of immediacy to project

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*South Korea is such a small country, and Koreans always want to win global success. It kind of feels powerful, something coming from this small country going global. Especially when we don't have such huge [entertainment] infrastructure like China or the US. [It's a sense of empowerment], similar to how Koreans feel about Yuna Kim.\**

- Jun, South Korea

*\*Yuna Kim, Korean national figure skating icon, gold medalist at 2010 Winter Olympics*

# It heralds a new wave of Asian representation.

From music to film to fashion, the new Asian representation is not only challenging stereotypes but also exploring the tensions between maintaining local traditions and heritage, and establishing a unique identity in a globalised world.

1



## 88Rising

The Asian-led record label and media company has been supporting and promoting Asian artists from countries like Indonesia, Philippines and Japan through the unique intersection of hip-hop and Asian cultures.

## Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)

From the first Asian superhero Shang Chi to Pakistani Muslim teen superheroine Ms. Marvel, MCU is finally telling stories other than how white, privileged men come to be superheroes - with Asian characters taking centre stage.

2



3



## Asia Fashion Collection (NYFW)

At this year's Fashion Week, the Asia Fashion Collective answered the call for more representation by spotlighting emerging designers of Asian descent - WooLeeX, Sung Ju, DOKKA vivid, Glenda Garcia, Yuuna Ichikawa, and Cocotono.



# How does 'Local Love' show up?

We're noticing three emerging shifts within this new wave of Asian representation that can help us better understand, connect to and communicate with the 'culturally collaborative' APAC generation.

## Shift 1: (From) Homogenised cultural ideals ➔ (To) Remix culture

*Redefining the process of cultural production by incorporating paradoxical and contrasting elements together to create something truly unique, yet universal at the same time.*

In a globalised world where everything is easily commodified, cultural products tend to become standardised, prescriptive and homogenised in order to sell - at the expense of eroding cultural integrity. Asian brands are increasingly showing how they can reimagine local identity in ways that still honour it while also appealing to the global mass market.

This shows up in the seamless juxtaposition of cultural elements in two different ways:

- **Local and global**
- **Tradition and modernity**

# Remixing local and global.

National pride has grown stronger than ever among Asian youth today. They're embracing the values and norms they grew up with as part of their identity, without rejecting global influences.



## The result?

A hybrid reimagining of local cultural identity that resonates across the world stage.

Chinese brands best epitomise this by actively redefining their local image on the global stage. No longer 'Made in China', local designers are moving away from the label's negative connotations as 'cheap, fake and poorly made' to promote unique, authentic and quality creation. Labels like 'Made by China' and 'China Chic' are the new mantra used to reframe global perceptions of Chinese design, showcasing local aesthetics as a competitive advantage and Chinese youth's pride for being distinguishable from global Western cultural norms.

# Asian brand examples: Embracing local identity and storytelling in ways that are globally resonant.



South Korean cosmetics brand **Amore Pacific** has embraced its Asian identity by touting its use of traditional Asian botanicals—green tea, bamboo sap, and red ginseng to name a few—in its skincare and beauty lines, and by casting South Korean models to



Mongolian fashion label **Michel & Amazonka** is known for creating ready-to-wear and couture designs that distinctly mix rich Mongolian traditional clothing techniques with European flair.

# Remixing tradition and modernity.

Asian youth want to stay true to their roots and maintain cultural integrity, but they're also constantly renegotiating the meaning of heritage and tradition in ways that allow them to, not only keep up, but shape the contemporary world.



## The result?

Rising interplay between the old and the new, fostering a modernity that is shaped by tradition.

Japan exemplifies this blend of the past and the future - a pioneer at blending high-tech, tradition and trends in one. The paradoxical nature of its culture has inspired local brands to build their image around imagining the modern future while embracing the traditional past. The hybridity of past and present - where age-old Japanese philosophies of mastery, craft, and precision meet with tech and innovation - is what makes contemporary Japan unique.

# Asian brand examples: Reinterpreting heritage and tradition through a contemporary perspective.



Indonesian brand **Toton** aims to ‘recontextualize Indonesian heritage’ by reinterpreting traditional garments. Stylistically it incorporates ceremonial wear techniques with modern and quirky elements, such as sculpted corset and lace trims.



Co-founded by 26-year-old Zain Ahmad, Pakistani label **Rastah** is a Lahore-based streetwear that honours South Asian tradition “but rejects nostalgia” by remixing Eastern motifs with contemporary art.

# *How does 'Local Love' show up?*

We're noticing three emerging shifts within this new wave of Asian representation that can help us better understand, connect to and communicate with the 'culturally collaborative' APAC generation.

## Shift 2: (From) Simplistic narratives ➤ (To) Enriched & nuanced


*Pushing against simplicity, moving beyond tropes and stereotypes, to flexibly reinvent who we are individually and collectively - creating richer and more nuanced cultural narratives.*

Cultural narratives are moving beyond symbolic tropes and stereotypes - making them less static, rigid, and puristic - while opening up the space for reinventing identities. Culture is not binary; it's not about choosing between fully conforming to the status quo or breaking it. Increasingly, Asian youth are exploring their identities, breaking down conventional labels, while creating new cultural narratives that are more fluid, experimental and truly reflect their continual journey of self-invention.

# Singapore: a 'melting pot' or 'salad bowl'?

Much of Singapore's approach to diversity is defined by principles of pragmatism and ethnic categorisation. Its national identity of multiculturalism is a result of carefully crafted narratives around equal ethnic representation.

Nascent now is a reassessment of cultural identity and history, pushing against a narrative that is too simplistic or 'manufactured'. A sense of agency, where grassroots communities are creatively adapting through intersectional experimentation, rather than conform to a given definition of 'authenticity'.



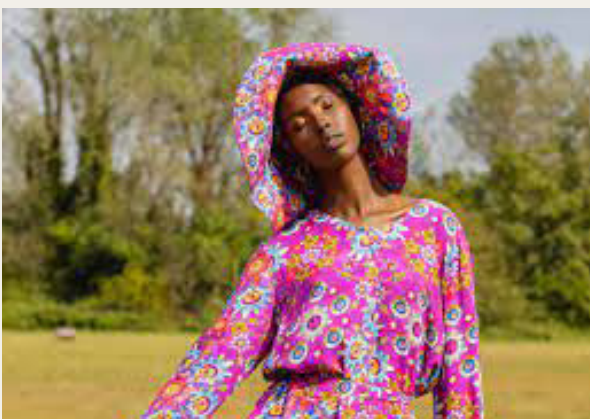
*It's being culturally specific, but not about what country you were born in; culturally specific about the fact that you don't just belong to one culture. I think they are shaped in a way by Singapore's official narrative of multiculturalism. And I think that affects the way we think about ourselves as a culture, because traditionally cities are seen as a metropolitan, cosmopolitan, melting pot of countries.*

- Hao Guang, Singapore

# Asian brand examples: Embracing the layers, complexity and intersectionality of cultural identities without stereotyping and oversimplifying them.



**DUXTON** draws its name and identity from a street in its home city. Its diverse approach to design (vibrant, locally-inspired, tropical prints) is attributed to its team of people from all across the globe who have come to call Singapore home - drawing parallels to the city itself being a melting pot of varied diversities.



The creation of Indian-American brand **Abacaxi** was inspired by its founder, young Indian-American designer Sheena Sood's childhood memories, travel journeys and South Asian heritage. The result is an eclectic mix of attire that bridges different cultures by hybridising youthful, tropical spirit with South Asian textiles and NYC street style.

# How does 'Local Love' show up?

We're noticing three emerging shifts within this new wave of Asian representation that can help us better understand, connect to and communicate

## Shift 3: (From) Passive consumption ➤ (To) Cultural co-creation

*No longer passive audiences, young Asians are now turning into active creators and curators of culture thanks to social media, enabling them to not only participate in but also shape the next zeitgeist.*

This is about shifting the right to cultural authorship and democratising access to cultural producers. Consumption of culture used to be passive, but thanks to social media, everyone can now participate in its creation.

Asian youth are using this to their advantage, feeling empowered to set their own cultural narratives in such a borderless space where they can easily connect with each other, form communities and inspire.

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*The internet has really revolutionised India's young people. They have become much more confident and empowered with the agency to make decisions that challenge generational dynamics and trauma.*

- Sucharita, India

# The rise of young Asian influencers.

These influencers and creators cultivate distinct virtual identities and use their platforms to educate about their culture online.

1



## Cyber Bunny

Tokyo-based Japanese American YouTube and TikTok content creator who creates and produces segments for people to learn about Japanese language, grammar and culture.

## Niharika Nm

Los-Angeles based Indian comedian and content creator Niharika Nm charms the online world with relatable and funny reels, all presented with South Indian flavour.

2



## Alffy Rev

Indonesian music content creator is known for combining folk and patriotic songs with digital tech. His 10-minute video called 'Wonderland Indonesia' went viral for showcasing a mix of traditional songs.

3



# Asian brand examples: Amplifying authentic voices by providing the space for local communities to be in control over their own narratives.



Indonesian fashion brand **Sukkha Citta** capitalises on the image of 'traditional sophistication' to empower local communities. Its aim is to create a positive impact by connecting us to the people behind the clothes, and keeping heritage traditions alive.



Founded by two first-gen Vietnamese sisters, Kim and Vanessa Pham, **Omsom** is an Asian food retailer that celebrates all kinds of Southeast and East Asian dishes. It also provides a blog and community space for locals to share stories, recipes and everything that connects food with their identities.

# How can brands implement ‘Local Love’?

Understanding different manifestations of Local Love is important, and brands need to learn how to implement it meaningfully in APAC.



## No more tokenism or tick-box diversity.

Stretch cultural identities by curbing your unconscious bias and represent the complexity, nuance, layers of one's cultural identity.

Understanding and tapping into cultural reimagining can help us avoid tokenistic portrayals and relegating the complexity of one's culture to oversimplification and over-generalisation.

This allows brands to unlock more powerful localisation strategies that:

- **Avoid the 'clichés':** Move away from trivial, outdated and stereotypical semiotics and cultural tropes.
- **Embrace depth and intersectionality:** Celebrate the overlaps of old/new, fast/slow culture, stretching cultural identities in strategy, communications and advertising depictions.

## Remix & Reinvent.

**Culture isn't static, it's made and remade... and remix culture celebrates this.**

This opportunity is all about encouraging experimentalism; celebrating and devising strategy that sits in the overlaps of tradition and modernity, fast and slow culture.

This is all about ideating ways that your brand can have a hand in creating new ways for local audiences themselves to explore and experiment with the interaction of old, new, tradition, modernity, urban, rural, local, global.





# Advocate rather than appropriate.

Champion local voices, talents and communities, not mimic their culture without understanding the context. Brands can amplify the voices of those at the 'cultural frontline' who are creating new expressions through acts of Local Love:

- **Fostering collaborations and co-creation** with local talents, creators and communities
- Providing them with the **platform to become advocates** of their own cultural identity and narratives

# Reverse the flow.

Help our audience activate Local Love and become a new global cultural orbit. At the end of the day, we need to challenge the traditional 'one way' flow of cultural exchange that has seen the same stories about the same culture being told by the same group of people over and over.

**Enable authorship** for local audiences to be the authors of their own cultural narratives, providing them the space to tell their own stories to a global audience.





# Introducing KIN.

KIN is our global network of creators and connectors. Leading edge collaborators ready to help brands stay at the forefront of culture.

Our global network of 1,000+ contributors includes all types of expertise from academics and economists to food bloggers and music sub-culture specialists. They help us to pinpoint emerging behaviours and document change, ensuring brands stay at the forefront of culture.

Using KIN, we get answers that mainstream audiences can't always articulate. This is particularly powerful in a fast moving, ever-evolving region like APAC.



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**Cultural Insights & Strategy**  
London, Amsterdam, New York,  
Singapore, Sydney, Stockholm

hello@crowdDNA.com | www.crowdDNA.com

# Crowd DNA

Crowd DNA is a cultural insights and strategy consultancy with offices in London, Amsterdam, New York, Singapore, Sydney and Stockholm.

Formed in 2008, operating in 70+ markets, we bring together trends specialists, researchers, data analysts, strategists, data analysts, writers, designers and film-makers, creating culturally charged commercial advantage for the world's most exciting brands.

## Crowd DNA APAC

There's perhaps no region more diverse, youthful or in need of understanding the fine balance between globalism and localism than APAC. We've been operating (officially) in the region for five years and, today, we've a thriving team of over 20 spread across our main hubs Sydney and Singapore; with smaller satellite teams operating out of Melbourne and Kuala Lumpur.

