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IMAGINING THE FRACTURED EAST ASIAN MODERN: COMMONALITY AND DIFFERENCE IN MASS-CULTURAL PRODUCTION

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It has been said (rightly) that the “opposition of center and periphery goes a long way, since it stretches from the great capitals and world cities to the most miserable, so-called ‘undeveloped’ regions and countries,” and that the “domination of centers . . . guarantees the homogeneous character of space [for i]t exercises control at all . . . points of view over peripheries that are both dominated and broken apart.”¹ What happens, though, when areas produced as subordinate and subordinated capitalist spaces start to assert their increasing centrality in the ongoing formation of a world market—and not only produce “things in space”² but also start to be producers of their own space, culturally and economically?

We can see all of the aforementioned in the emergence of a zone called “East Asia” during the two decades of the so-called East Asian Miracle, the 1980s and the 1990s. We are perhaps more familiar with the political and economic agents of the production of that space, but there are cultural agents who have contributed, as well. In this regard, a major cultural development of those decades is the highly intensified cultural innovation in and circulation of the visual arts³ and—even more prominently—mass culture in the 1990s within East or Pacific Asia, here taken to include Southeast Asia. Mass-consumed culture took the form of televisual programs, film, and pop music from Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong, plus Japanese anime. In toto, these phenomena broadly indicate the increasing economic centrality of a given area.

Using indicative Hong Kong cinema productions, I will argue that the post-1980s East Asia cultural production contributed to a shared vision of a “New” East Asia as a region predicated upon an interconnected capitalist modernization and modern culture, with intense urbanization as a major defining feature of the New East Asia. In general, such cultural productions do not evoke a primordial and exotic Asian-ness, or a pan-Asia drawn from cultural essentialisms formulated during the colonial

era. To “spatialize,” as the historian H. D. Harootunian has observed, is to side with modernization.⁴ Contemporary East Asia is located inside capitalist modernity and therefore shares the “homogeneous character of space” of the Western metropolitan centers, but the “points of view” that arise are also those of the semiperiphery and reflect their specific histories of the modern. There is an underlying totality here, but one that “unfurls violently,” even if at a broad level modernity is “an incessant production of difference as the same.”⁵

The presence of difference, though, does not mean that East Asia appears as a decentered, intercultural urban festival. The East Asian Modern that emerges, such as it is, is fractured. The historical and political divisions in the region make the recent cultural productivity, in some respects, unexpected. What can be called intra-Asia cinematic productions evocatively recognize both the shared contemporary desire for a First World East Asia *and* the historic ideational and militarily enforced formation of a Greater East Asia associated with Japan’s past attempts to leave “backward” Asia and modernize—or risk coming under Western colonial domination. The regional contemporary is haunted by modernity’s debilitating entry into the region, linked as it was with colonialism and the creation of the first modern Asian nation-state of Japan, which took on the characteristics of the Western nation-states’ colonizing modernity.⁶

Specifically, this essay will examine the increased dimensions of a New Asian regional identity since the 1980s through thinking of how Hong Kong cinema at the start of the twenty-first century attempted to rework itself in terms of this fractured modern New Asia. I particularly examine two films indicative of the cultural productiveness at stake. The first is Jingle Ma’s *Tokyo Raiders* (*Dongjing Gonglue*, 2000), a film consonant with what might be said to be the libidinization of market modernity in the region. The second is auteur director Johnnie To’s *Fulltime Killer* (*Quanzhi Shashou*, 2001; codirector Wai Ka-fai). Ma’s film was one of the most popular in Hong Kong in 2000 and is distinct both in being a Hong Kong film set almost entirely in Japan and in having extensive dialogue in Japanese. To’s even more multilingual film unavoidably becomes an allegory of the East Asian core states competing: two professional killers from Japan and China struggle to see who will be recognized as the region’s best.

The question of the *circulation* of culture and cultural products within the region is inextricably entwined with the questions of both *commonalities* and *differences*. The three concerns are not only conjoined but even thematized in cultural innovation. The central commonality is the ongoing growth of urban-modern lifestyles—understandable because cities

are major spaces for transnational and national capital investment. The differences are not only linguistic and national-cultural differences, but also the differences of the historico-political struggles to become modern in the first place. Finally, the very circulation of cultural products by their producers and intermediaries suggests that the *foregrounding* of the common and the different are that which, paradoxically, can generate a “cultural economy of . . . resonance.”⁷ Commonality-in-difference becomes suitable for deployment by the region’s culture industries, and the urban modern becomes that contemporary nodal point through which it can be narrativized and represented. Resonance may come in the form of audience identification with the representations of modernity in cultural products (as exemplified by *Tokyo Raiders*) or, alternatively, cultural products may reflect or otherwise mediate the region’s cultural and political concerns (as exemplified by *Fulltime Killer*).

The two films map the contemporary region as one containing urban spaces and cultures that are simultaneously not quite national and not quite transregional: “East Asia” remains a contingent, if still structured, cultural subjectivity and imaginary, a response to economic growth still semantically only partially emergent. The fundamental frame for intra-Asia cultural production, arguably, is less the resurgence of local realities in the First World parts of the former Third World,⁸ but more the complexity of region in the still-changing profile of successful but interdependent East Asian national economies and their new middle classes. Until recently, the world could be spatialized and represented as East or West, communist or non-/anticommunist. Such representation is less easy now, as witnessed, for example, by the national-fantasmatic entity of socialist-capitalist China trying to foster its own world cities.

Significantly, while regional cultural production does not compete at a global level as an effective counterbalance to American mass-cultural products, it has offered within the region what has been called the “cultural productivity” required so that regional economic development can continue to expand through (re)producing a shared or at least desired vision of everyday urban life—even as the tensions in the region are showcased in such regional productions.⁹

East Asia and the New

In considering the matter of cultural production and the representation of a region, it is necessary to start with postwar economic growth in East Asia, as this is the commonality that can help bridge historical fractures

and cultural differences in the production of what might be described as the intra-East Asia cultural imaginary.

As it has been noted, East Asian growth was “most rapid during the last half of the twentieth century, so it is here that social groups, cultures, and lifestyles [linked with urban transformation and growth] have probably changed most rapidly from a global perspective.”¹⁰ Economic and industrial development hastened urbanization in what the World Bank once described as “HPAEs”—high-performing Asian economies.¹¹ This expression primarily referred to the Little Tiger economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, which all followed, along with key Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia), to some extent, in Japan’s footsteps. Henri Lefebvre has referred to the city as “designed space,” as one of those important places where a “formidable force of homogenization exerts itself on a worldwide scale, producing a space whose every part is interchangeable (quantified, without qualities).”¹² The expansion of Seoul, Hong Kong, and Taipei, and more recently Beijing-Tianjin and Shanghai, has been “accompanied by more rapid economic growth, resulting in a[n urbanization] pattern . . . [similar] to that of Japan.”¹³

East Asia’s growth itself is part and parcel of the economic developments described as globalization, and what is significant is that, contrary to what one might expect, this has produced greater regional relations via trade.¹⁴ That China with its now-transformed Second World modernity, historically at odds with Japan, is now part of this economically enhanced region is one of those twists of history. The 1980s was the decade in which East Asia was seen to come into its own. Alternative spatial representations of the world appear, within which Asian urban centers could now claim to be key nodes within a major economic region and, more cynically, even represent supposed alternative and therefore oppositional capitalist modernities that capture authentic difference the former colonial West could no longer ignore.¹⁵ The appearance in that decade of often state-led discourses on “Asian values,” “Asian democracy,” and “economic (rather than human) rights” were assertive self-representational strategies not possible in the 1960s, during the era of decolonization,¹⁶ and identity politics played out at the nation-state level. It should be noted that the intra-Asia mass-cultural imaginary from the 1990s that accompanied the economic changes and urbanization processes, though, should be thought of in conjunction with, but *not* as the same as, state discourses and their politico-cultural practices. Nevertheless, this imaginary is a dynamic cultural production and representational process enhanced by modernization.¹⁷

While the basic pattern for economic cooperation in Japan's postwar "return" to Asia in the 1980s was set in place as foreign policy in the late 1950s, serious regionalization—the integration of markets across national borders within a macroregion for labor, capital, services, and goods—started after the 1985 Plaza Accord among the G-8 countries. That saw the revaluation of yen upward and led to an outflow of Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) and the offshoring of production into ASEAN countries. Business networks thus widened and deepened as the integration of national economies transpired. Korean and Taiwanese manufacturers followed suit, as their currencies, too, had appreciated. By 1992, China also began to draw in FDI, thereby competing with ASEAN. This led to an accumulation of regional manufacturing capacity marked by *both* collaboration and competition.¹⁸ The region "exists" economically but still competes internally.

There is also a direct connection between rapid growth and the expansion of consumption, and "the increasing speed of circulation of the 'new middle classes' throughout the region means a degree of cultural homogenization, for which Japan [once again] provided many of the critical models."¹⁹ This new homogenization is hence inseparable from the region's industrializing and urbanizing imperatives. The 1980s and 1990s inflow of FDI and finance capital from East Asia and the so-called overseas Chinese into Southeast Asia has had different impacts in different countries, but collectively it has led to the growth of these new middle classes and to a new horizontal solidarity in political and cultural expression that may be still dependent upon, but at the same time not limited by, their respective states. As Takashi Shiraishi argues,

Because the middle classes are constituted not solely through a homogeneous national culture but rather through networks of markets and global cultural and financial flows, middle-class consciousness is fostered through interactions between national governments and domestic and transnational markets. . . . The emergent regionwide middle classes are a crucial engine of East Asian region-making [as they constitute the expanding regional consumer market].²⁰

In terms of the urban-modern aspect of the commonalities in intra-Asia imaginary, what is important is that Japan's regional investments also led to an unprecedented focus on commercial land in Tokyo's central wards, as the infrastructure to turn it into a center for finance and transnational production and trade had to be built.²¹ The city's population has

expanded continuously since, and now this “postindustrial city . . . arguably serves as a reliable guide to what other cities in the region could experience,”²² given that the recent evolving of other potential postindustrial regional urban centers resemble Tokyo in the 1970s and 1980s in retaining manufacturing in outlying urban zones, even as services become more significant in the core urban areas. More recently, urban redevelopment also transpires because of the goal to foster premier world cities as assets in drawing in and retaining the flows of capital.

The foregoing is not to suggest that an essential phenomenon exists called the East Asian city, for putative world cities in the region are sites, as has been implied, where politico-economic and social processes that are common to other capitalist-urban centers in the metropolitan West manifest themselves. Nevertheless, there are similarities in the region’s cities to do with the relatively sustained periods of economic growth—Japan in the 1950s–70s, the Tiger economies thereafter, followed by China, leading to cityscapes morphing at an unsettling pace beyond that experienced in advanced Western cities²³—and historical regional relations certainly in terms of mass-cultural production and consumption; I will return to this later.

The contagion of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, precipitated by the devaluation of the Thai baht, dramatically showed how interdependent the region had become. China used the opportunity to display regional responsibility by not devaluing the renminbi. The crisis boosted Beijing’s confidence in trying to shape the region. Its market power since the late 1990s has already affected the production and consumption related to regional culture industries, including the Hong Kong film industry, and continues to do so.²⁴ (And, of course, China has substantially affected the idea of alternative Asian modernities, since its looming presence has diminished the prior attempts to discursively construct East Asia as a geopolitical and economic space centrally comprised of Japan, the Tiger economies, and ASEAN countries.) Despite the vicissitudes of post-1997 East Asian life, the modern-urban vision of development seems fairly entrenched. The refurbished *new* itself has become a key, if not *the* key, commonality for the different nation-states with their contrasting multi-cultures in the region.

The foregoing does not mean that old histories have receded. Japan’s entry into the modern era with the Meiji Restoration of 1868 was an attempt both to take the place of and to gain autonomy from China’s historic regional dominance and to confront the West. It tried “shedding Asia” (*Datsu-A Ron*, an infamous phrase of the Meiji-Enlightenment intellectual Fukuzawa Yukichi [1835–1901] in 1885²⁵), a region that, in

historicist thinking, was traditional/exotic, despotic, agrarian, and lacked nation-states. The regional contemporary, then, is a modernity aware of the new as a divisive factor and one that divided it in its colonial past. Regional state and nonstate actors from the commercial and artistic sectors were able to encompass that deterritorialized locale, East Asia, for political and cultural purposes in ways not quite possible before.

Circulation, Commonality, Difference, and the Urban Modern

The increasing export and circulation of culture within the region have become a part of the means of generating a contemporary Asian way of life that, in turn, is inextricably linked to the consumerism that is the “very linchpin of the [US] economic system.”²⁶ This is a lifestyle form extensively exported through American media products, but, as we might expect, East Asian culture industries do adapt the American way of life in their cultural productions to the region’s cultural pluralism and differing states of development levels in their direct or indirect support of various aspirations to First World living standards. But more than adaptation, they also and significantly draw upon local or regional ways of life and the region’s own history of modern mass-cultural production. *Americanization*—or *cultural globalization*, as a synonym for that term—facilitates not only US hegemony but also other cultural-economic transformations. By the 1990s, there was already a history of mass-cultural production that was not simple or at least not simplistic imitations of US material.²⁷

The circulation of culture and cultural products within the region therefore is tied up, necessarily, with the concerns of East Asian commonalities and differences, past and present. Conceptions of urban-modern Asia function as a major expression of a shared commonality-in-difference. They offer points of transnational connection within the region and a means of generating the sale and circulation of cultural products that can negotiate the zones of national-cultural differences and old political disputes, though this negotiation sometimes entails actually foregrounding difference.²⁸

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the urbanizing-industrializing practices related to the East Asian economic success in the 1980s, resulting in possibilities (and difficulties) of new ways of being in the world, would be enmeshed with 1990s cultural production.²⁹ Film and, it might be added, televisual dramas are aesthetic technologies well suited for the representation and narrativizing of social worlds—here, worlds related to a putative regional system. Narrative figurations, Fredric Jameson has contended,

have a “structure [that] encourages a soaking up of whatever ideas [are] in the air. . . . [Film as] narrative [text] today conflates ontology with geography and endlessly processes images of the unmappable [world capitalist] system.”³⁰ The qualification that must be made to Jameson’s assertion is that film and the culture industries, in general, from the East Asian economic semiperiphery are concerned not only with the region’s relationship to the world system but also with the region itself, with its shifting centers and fractious cultural identities. Thus, if only obliquely, Hong Kong cultural production at the end of the twentieth century must refer to the monumental event of the return to China in 1997, with its implications for Hong Kong’s ongoing experience of the new; and regional cultural production must also make reference to the current economic modernizing context—China’s gradual overtaking of Japan as economic center.

To begin with, we must realize that the intraregional flow of mass culture existed before the 1990s, when it increased by leaps and bounds. Much of the prior transnational-regional cultural circulation was composed of Chinese-language film, televisual, and music productions in Mandarin-, Cantonese-, and Hokkien-Chinese (or *minnan hua*) from Hong Kong and Taiwan that went out to ethnic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.³¹ However, Singapore, for example, also received Japanese TV programs in the 1960s and 1980s, and Hong Kong, during the 1970s–80s, took up to 30 percent of Japanese televisual programs.³² The differences between this earlier period and the 1990s is that the later surge of non-Chinese-language products rested on a much broader consumer base than had existed before and, quite surprisingly, seemed able to more substantially break through national and linguistic barriers. There was, first, a Japanese wave in the early 1990s, led by televisual dramas and, also, by pop music (J-pop), that exceeded an earlier wave in the 1980s, and then from the late 1990s, the Korean wave, led variously by Korean pop music (K-pop), film, and televisual dramas, as South Korean political and cultural life was liberalized.³³

Coproductions in East Asian film—effectively in early intra-Asia or pan-Asian film, as they also have been described³⁴—had a previous existence, and go back to the Japanese Daiei Motion Picture Company’s and the Hong Kong-based Shaw Brothers’ 1955 *Empress Yang Kwei Fei* (*Yang Guifei*; *Yōkichi* in Japan), directed by Mizoguchi Kenji, “the first picture to bear the common name of a ‘Hong Kong-Japan co-production.’”³⁵ In fact, in the 1960s, Hong Kong filmmakers had looked to Japan for its advanced technical and creative capacities. The earlier cultural events coproductions provided a precedent for the 1990s developments.

Even the combination of circulation, commonality, and difference is not without precedent in the region's modernizing processes. The thematization of difference in Sino-Japanese film is to be found in the 1971 coproduction by Daiei, Katsu Production Company, and the Shaw Brothers of Yasuda Kimiyoshi's *Zatoichi Meets the One-Armed Swordsman* (*Shin Zatoichi: Yabure! Tojin-ken*), which cultural critic Meaghan Morris takes to be "a fine symbolic starting point"³⁶ for East Asia-based but globally marketed action films. The twenty-second installment of the popular Zatoichi film series has the blind masseur-swordsman Zatoichi (played by Katsu Shintaro)³⁷ meet the popular hero of the Hong Kong director Zhang Che's *The One-Armed Swordsman* (*Dubi Dao*, 1967), Wang Kong (Jimmy Wang Yu).³⁸ The Chinese swordsman becomes an outlaw after rescuing a young boy from marauding samurais while visiting Japan. When Zatoichi finds the mortally wounded father of the boy, the father's last wish is that the former take care of his son. There is a deadly showdown between the two, because of mutual linguistic incomprehension—and this even though both are similarly constructed heroes. What is distinctive is not only that the studios took into account the different markets they were aiming at, but the *way* this occurred, given the historical enmity between the two polities. The film has both Mandarin and Japanese, and the ending for the Japanese audience has Wang Kong dying, whereas the version for Chinese-language markets has Zatoichi dying. National-cultural and linguistic differences—and, indeed, prejudice—are exploited. To ensure circulation, differentiated unhappy endings are *required*. Even in 1971, circulation, commonality, and difference could happily coalesce.

An instructive understanding of how commonality-in-difference could be deployed by the late 1990s to the early 2000s can be found through examining Hong Kong cinema. The heyday of Hong Kong cinema had been the 1980s–90s, and the late 1990s saw it in difficult times, with pressure on it to rethink what a regional market actually meant in terms of creative productions. The Asian economic crisis of 1997 seriously weakened the Southeast Asian markets for which Hong Kong cinema had relied on to consume its products.³⁹ With the understanding that the Hong Kong market and its previous markets may now be unable to sustain its cinema in a time of crisis, new strategies had to be found to reinvent Hong Kong film. The appropriation of Japanese mass culture—popular in Hong Kong and in much of the region, as already noted—had started earlier, in the 1990s, in the use of Japanese motifs and stars in televisual and film production. Also, distinct developments in Hong Kong intra-Asia cinema had already become noticeable: by the late 1990s, Hong

Kong cinema had incorporated mainland Chinese and Korean actors, and was paying more attention to new markets, including China.

What resulted has been described as “a strange cosmopolitan fantasy” with “pan-Asian” casting, as seen in Benny Chan’s *Gen-X Cops* (1999), a fluffy but well-choreographed action thriller with renegade young male cops with attitude dealing with a vicious punk and a Japanese arms dealer. In such films, the “multicultural ensembles . . . flawlessly switch from Cantonese to English or Japanese as they jet around the region.”⁴⁰ While we have seen some precedent for bilingual intra-Asia film, monolingual film remained the norm. The use of multilingualism to bridge regional differences was striking because the subtitling it required was more associated with art-house cinema.⁴¹ If linguistic and ethnonational differences pose continual challenges to mass-cultural circulation, a shared aspiration for a common urban-modern lifestyle offered one possible way by which to narrativize and spatially conceive the commonality-in-difference of the New Asia, assisted, when necessary, by a multilingual cosmopolitanism.⁴² Tokyo and Hong Kong become the noteworthy urban examples of the East Asian modern, as they arguably are the two most instantly recognizable of East Asian cities.

The dramatic difference between the current representation of a cosmopolitan East Asian Modern and that of a not-so-distant past becomes apparent when we consider a famous Western image from fifty years ago: charmingly decrepit Hong Kong as captured in Ray Stark’s production of Richard Quine’s *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), which premiered in Hong Kong in March 1961. While the film is a sort of a travelogue with an accompanying exotic melodrama, the bargirls in the film are sympathetically represented as dignified people, though, in the end, Suzie (Nancy Kwan) needs the Great American Hero Robert Lomax (William Holden) to save her. The quality of the depiction of Hong Kong street life—Central’s banking district; the markets of Yaumatei and Wan Chai; Wan Chai’s waterfront, Wan Chai’s bars with American soldiers—is crucial to the film’s appeal.⁴³ But the uncertain 1950s transit port city has been replaced by a financial center; Wan Chai’s waterfront is now composed of tall buildings; and Fenwick Harbour has become reclaimed land, with the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts sitting on top of it. An exotic, down-at-heel urban modernity has been supplanted by a less-exotic modernity. While of course oriented toward the West, such urban images were important to the region at large, if nothing else than as images that needed to be eradicated via development agendas.

When we jump to the 1990s, we have, in contrast, regional mass-cultural products emphasizing desirable, glossy, new urban lifestyles that

offer a progressive modern environment of personal freedom. That was depicted in Japanese TV dramas, which increased in sophistication from the early 1990s. Fuji TV's *Tokyo Love Story* (dir. Kozo Nagayama and Ouhiko Honma, 1991; *Tokyo rabu sutori*) was the drama that helped lead the revived Japanese cultural wave in televisual programs in the 1990s. Its heroine was presented as unhesitating in her choice of the man she wanted, even if she does not win him in the end from his more socially predictable former high-school classmate. On display was an emancipated attitude that contrasts with Suzie Wong's dependent attitude. It was a surprise hit in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and, in 1997, also in China, translated as *Dongjing Ai de Gushi*. Tokyo itself, as the foremost East Asian metropolis, seemed a key part of the serial's popularity.⁴⁴ The city had become more than just the home of technological innovations, but now could be depicted as a gleaming urban center that potentially could spread liberal attitudes through its culture industry products.

The increased pace of life in regional cities, though, can either open new horizons or be unsettling. These cities are part of the continuum of shared images of everyday life as generated and circulated by East Asian culture industries. The image of Hong Kong entrenched in director Wong Kar-wai's now-iconic art-house film *Chungking Express* (1994; *Chongqing Senlin*) offers us the more fragmented and therefore complementary urban counterpart to Tokyo's gloss. Wong's film revolves around two parallel stories of cops (played by Kaneshiro Takeshi⁴⁵ and Tony Leung Chiu Wai) and their attempts to find love. They live alone in small rental flats and do not interconnect, yet occupy the same urban spaces; both experience unrequited love. Time is important to both cops, yet time slips by them, establishing a feeling that Hong Kong itself seems too fast paced, becomes a blur, and so "[s]pace becomes ambiguous, things and objects around the foreground and background merge and blend with each other."⁴⁶ The locations—the déclassé, culturally diverse Kowloon;⁴⁷ a snack bar in the Central District, with its unique escalator climbing up the crowded slopes to the Mid-Levels of Hong Kong Island—become urban characters in their own right.

Chungking Express can even be a model for other forms of cultural production. A curator in a multicity set of Asian visual art exhibitions, *Under Construction* (1999–2002), holds up Wong's film as a paramount example of productive-fragmented creativity for more than Hong Kong people:

The movie captured everyday life in a contemporary Asia, conveying the atmosphere of its speed. . . . [Wong] turns his gaze . . . to sights from everyday life where elements

of culture from domestic and foreign are all mixed up. . . .
 The gaze of new-generation artists onto their everyday
 lives overlaps with that revealed in the movie . . . which . . .
 is inspired by urban daily life.⁴⁸

This is the now slightly clichéd rhetoric of the *global postmodern*: a rush of images signifying the transnational, cultural hybridity, and social fractures; yet, to say this without qualification is to dismiss the signifying capacity of the commonality-in-difference of the East Asian urban modern.

Hong Kong cinema in its attempts to reinvent itself in the 1990s and early 2000s appeared able to offer contrasting depictions of the urban modern, and map the region—a zone that is not quite a region but not quite only composed of nation-states—and at the same time juxtapose the newest of the new against the *old* new that still dogs the present.

The Gleaming Urban Modern: Jingle Ma's *Tokyo Raiders*

Jingle Ma's *Tokyo Raiders* is a notable example of the urbanized “cosmopolitan fantasy” strain in intra-Asia Hong Kong cinema, with cross-border casting featuring, from Hong Kong, Tony Leung Chiu Wai, Ekin Cheng, Kelly Chen, and, from Japan, leading actor Nakamura Toru, supported by actor Abe Hiroshi. Ma was a successful cinematographer who became a director with his first film in 1998, the futuristic action thriller *Hot War*. *Tokyo Raiders*, for which he was both director and cinematographer, was Hong Kong's top-grossing film in 2000.⁴⁹

Showcasing the New East Asia and thinking of an expanded regional market for this film required bilingual cultural production in which Japanese and Cantonese were used, and even the passing use of Mandarin-Chinese and English. *Tokyo Raiders* is a sparkling and humorous spy thriller spoof and pastiche in which surface, style, and verbal repartee are everything in its gleaming and urbane depiction of an East Asian urban modern—and yet oddly uncomfortable matters are raised, if only momentarily, and resolved.

Tokyo Raiders draws upon James Bond 007 as an intertext, in the line of other related Hong Kong action film since the mid-1960s.⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the early Hong Kong Bond look-alikes were directed by Japanese contract directors who were themselves using Japanese film models that used the Bond motif.⁵¹ *Tokyo Raiders* draws on earlier modern patterns of interactive intra-Asia productions and thus draws inspiration not

only from Anglo-American mass culture but references its own regional mass-cultural history in its display of a Tokyo that is a part of the region.

Contemporary Tokyo—evoked with its most gleaming built environment on display and as a global city with recognizable urban architectural icons—becomes one of the film's stars in this upbeat depiction of commonality-in-difference. The story line itself is intractably complicated, but humor, clever fight and chase sequences (including one on motorized skateboards), and Ma's light directorial touch propel it along. There are also unexpected plot twists that gesture to a new orientation toward (supposed) common regional interests, even if we are not to take the plot too seriously; and also a leading man who turns out to be biracial and bicultural—a Sino-Japanese character who can represent both Hong Kong's and Japan's interests in a neutral fashion. Plot detail is important, for we see that displaying the positive face of the New Asia requires a suppression of older dissensions.

The heroine, Macy (Chen), multilingual in Japanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, is left at the altar in Las Vegas by her Japanese fiancé Takahashi Yuji (Nakamura), who heads a US investment firm in Tokyo. The US–West is rapidly left behind as she returns to Hong Kong to find him. There, she learns he has gone to Tokyo and meets an interior designer, Yung (Cheng), who just happens to be a martial-arts expert and to whom her boyfriend owes a large sum of money. Yung trails her to Tokyo, and they link up with an impossibly cool private investigator, the transplanted Hong Konger Lam (played with droll panache by Leung, with many spy gadgets), and his team of four Charlie's Angels–type assistants. A Japanese *yakuza* (organized crime syndicate) boss, Ito (Abe), is after Takahashi, who has run off with Ito's woman.

The plot's major twists unfold: first, that Takahashi is a CIA agent tasked to flood Japan with counterfeit yen, when he became distracted with the gangster boss's woman; second, that Lam is really an officer of Sino-Japanese descent in the internal division of the Japanese Ministry of Defense, who has gone undercover to foil the dastardly American plot; and, finally, that Yung is a private bodyguard sent by Macy's rich banker father to protect her—her father had objected to Macy's liaison with a Japanese man. The implicit interethnic discomfiture is rapidly glossed over, becoming a suppressed moment of ethnonational difference in the film. All is resolved in the end, after a speedboat chase sequence in Tokyo Bay and the waterways of the Sumida River, which forms the film's set piece.

What is noteworthy is the way *cool* is evoked—clever dialogue and slick action sequences aside—via urban images from the start in *Tokyo*

Raiders. The opening sequence is representative. We first get a bird's-eye view of Tokyo and see the iconic orange-and-white Tokyo Tower in Shiba Park, taller than the Eiffel Tower and built in 1958 as an expression of Japan's 1950s boom, symbolizing Tokyo's postwar, modern rebirth. Then we see the Sumida River, and the camera zooms in on the commercial, urban-transit, and public-administrative hub that is Shinjuku (figure 1), a special ward of the city. The towers of west Shinjuku, with the modernist and metal-clad New Tokyo City Hall complex, designed by late modernist architect Tange Kenzo (1913–2005), stand out. The camera then settles down near the south entrance of Shinjuku Station, where we see the suited office crowds and young women wearing the youth fashions that emerged in the mid-1990s—platform boots (particularly highlighted) and designer accessories—that exert so much influence among the young in the region. The density of Tokyo's street life becomes apparent. There is no need to explain the architectural icons or the city's fashionableness and Shinjuku's stylishness—though the camera does momentarily rest on a stainless-steel sign in *kanji* (Chinese characters) that proclaims “Shinjuku”—any more than it is necessary to explain London's West End.

After the initial swoop, the camera moves to a Shinjuku alley, where Lam—with stylish (and stylishly camp) moves—using an umbrella, assorted gadgets, and martial-arts skills to fight yakuza villains, to the accompaniment of spirited Latin music—presumably signifying

Figure 1. Iconic Shinjuku in the opening of *Tokyo Raiders*.

sophistication—by Hong Kong composer Peter Kam. We have combined here the extended initial action sequence of every Bond film plus the American Western; this approach signals the director's self-reflexive, wink-wink-nod-nod stance throughout the film. Though *Tokyo Raiders* is lightweight, Ma, using his honed skills as a cinematographer, delivers a high-gloss visual style that captures Tokyo's daytime sheen with a life-style magazine's precision. This bilingual thriller implies and thus helps reinforce the idea of a shared, urban "us-ness" for Hong Kong and Japan, a world far removed from Suzie Wong's Oriental urbanism, even as we should keep in mind that Japanese capital contributed significantly to the region's economic development.

The lead characters are comfortable members of this cosmopolitan world. Macy's fluency in Japanese and clear comfort with Tokyo makes her "a Hong Kong character well and truly at home in the world. The worldliness of her world is enhanced with a Japanese setting and characters."⁵² What is unexpected is that Lam's sophisticated biculturalism is literalized, and he is made to be *miscegenated*, biracial. This enables him easily to fit the position of a sociopolitical and cultural interstice, embodying a third space between the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), now a part of the People's Republic of China and no longer a British colony, and Japan, *even while* he is an agent of the Japanese government. Any discomfort with Lam's position between and betwixt the two core states of East Asia is papered over—unusually—by the plot that makes the United States the ultimate villain in the story: for some unexplained reason, the United States wants to damage its most important East Asian ally by weakening the yen. While we should not take the film's gestures too seriously, it is nevertheless suggestive that a Sino-Japanese Asia even can be constructed in the first place to share a commonality that places it at odds with the US hegemon. Commonality trumps differences, and regional blemishes are powdered over in the happy face of urban-modern Asia.

Texts, whether filmic or literary, are capable of carrying varied and even contradictory significations, as *Tokyo Raiders* attests. Film also is "a cultural form [that is] permeated at every level by the practices and paradoxes of marketing—a postmodern practice that oscillates between the passive reproduction and the active remodelling of audiences";⁵³ this is attested to by *Tokyo Raiders*, as culture acts out its own commodification in the attempt to create a postnational product that can breach national and linguistic boundaries for the new middle classes "out there" in East Asia that are waiting to be reached. All this also applies in many respects to *Fulltime Killer*; however, the auteur status of its director and the more experimental and therefore

less-commercial artistic nature of the film, as we will see, allow the contradictory to move out more firmly into the foreground.

Competition in the New Asia: Johnnie To's *Fulltime Killer*

If *Tokyo Raider's* urban modern can offer a connecting East Asian commonality and a means to imagine regional space, what happens when entrenched regional differences are instead directly put on display in the cosmopolitan Asian city? As with the precedents of earlier intra-Asia cultural productions, the acknowledgment and thematization of difference, rather than direct resolution, may be enough to facilitate product circulation and regional identification. Hong Kong auteur director Johnnie To and codirector's Wai Ka-fai's *Fulltime Killer* offers a more reflexive and multitiered version than does *Tokyo Raiders* of the ideological and historical tensions between national-cultural identities and languages and of the challenges of the active remodeling an East Asian audience.

Johnnie To is a versatile filmmaker who has directed comedies, action movies, and crime movies. Despite the different genres, To's themes often focus on friendship and the changes in Hong Kong society. *Fulltime Killer* is at least consistent with the second of the themes, relating as it does to the return of Hong Kong to mainland China in 1997. His films make the rounds at international film festivals in Europe and the United States.

To has reflected directly on the difficulty on envisioning what an "Asian" film may look like at the start of the millennium for the region's new middle-class audiences:

Suppose we think of this movie [*Fulltime Killer*] as an "Asian" movie. . . . For international audiences, the language of the dialogue—whether it is Chinese, Japanese, or Korean—doesn't really matter. Hong Kong audiences may experience something new by having to pay close attention to subtitles when watching a Hong Kong film, but for Westerners, they probably won't notice a difference. If there's a Hong Kong movie that can be called an "Asian movie," I think something has changed then in Hong Kong cinema. . . . Of course I do hope it can be accepted by audiences in Asia, but it's not easy.⁵⁴

Linguistic differences are real, and he wonders whether the viewing practices of a cosmopolitan, if mainly Western, art-house audience can be

re-created among the mainstream of East Asian moviegoers less used to reading subtitles. Can the representation of linguistic-cultural differences be overcome in the representation of East Asia? To try to achieve this would then result in exceeding Hong Kong film's achievement thus far and gesture toward a way forward for Hong Kong cinema amid market challenges.

Fulltime Killer—a deconstructivist, antikiller genre film and psychodrama that obliquely critiques the John Woo/Ringo Lam-type gangster film genre of the 1980s—features, first, an emotionally inward-looking and deliberately unnamed, monolingual Japanese hitman, known only as “O” (Sorimachi Takashi); second, his mainland-Chinese competitor, Tok (Andy Lau), a self-dramatizing and showy cinephile who wants to exceed O's reputation and become a legend in his own time; and third, Chin (Kelly Lin), a Mandarin-, Japanese-, Cantonese-, and English-speaking Taiwanese woman—from a nationally uncertain “Chinese” area—working in a Japanese video rental store, who also cleans O's flat. She is confused, personally and culturally, and seems to be looking for adventure and self-fulfillment that the two rivals offer her. As with *Tokyo Raiders*, the plot details matter, and even more so.

Fulltime Killer is one of To's more stylistically experimental films, and he himself has said, “It's not a movie that a lot of people will like.”⁵⁵ The psychological accounts offered of the two professional killers are somewhat opaque: it is unclear why O lives in Hong Kong or why he is a loner; and although we are shown Tok's failure as an Olympic athlete, it is unclear why this failure should lead him to professional killing as a form of alternative achievement. These opacities and fractured subjectivities combined become an *excess* in the film that generates the allegory of the competition between two East Asian core states. The battles are fought mainly in Hong Kong SAR (Special Administrative Region), the regional stage on which diverse East Asians can meet. Hong Kong's ambiguous national status as a “mainland Chinese” city uncomfortable in being such makes it a suitable stage for the action. The film also functions largely in Japanese, and then English, but also features Cantonese and Mandarin; subtitles abound in this Hong Kong–“Chinese” film attempting to become an “‘Asian’ movie.”

Tok (real name Lok Tak-wah) was a failed participant in the shooting competition of the 1992 Olympic Games. He is epileptic, and his fits undermined his attempts to be the first mainland Chinese to win a gold medal in the event and even at his lovemaking attempts with Chin. Tok's older brother had a similar problem in the 1984 Olympics—there seems to be a lot to prove in the competition. There is also an English-speaking

Interpol cop from Singapore, Albert Lee (Simon Yam), who, obsessed by the titanic clash, cathartically turns to writing about the pair.

O only slowly realizes the challenge Tok poses. The latter knows that Chin works for O, so he courts her to contact O. A huge debacle for O occurs in Macau, where Tok undermines O's assassination assignment, and Chin and O end up on the run from both the police and mobsters. Toward the film's end, Chin meets now ex-inspector Lee in a café, who is so dysfunctional that he has left the police department. Chin recounts to him a near-titanic showdown between the two professionals in a warehouse with hidden weapons and says that Tok had finished off O. As Chin leaves, Lee realizes what the situation is and dashes out to see her being driven away in a Mercedes with O: he understands that O, for love and a private life, has retired as the reigning killer given the arriviste Chinese killer the legendary status he craves. Indeed, the pair got what they wanted: O a way out of the profession, and Tok legendary status. In reality, though, the fireworks that had been set off accidentally in the warehouse had also set off another epileptic fit. Lee decides that he will use the version that Chin had offered him.

The cartographic imaginary of the New East Asia is immediately put on display in the film. *Fulltime Killer* begins by literalizing the flow of competitive difference. While the film is set primarily in Hong Kong, the first ten minutes rush into stunning overkill. There are bravura set pieces of killings by the two, first by O in a train station in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;⁵⁶ then by Tok in a police station near the River Kwai, in Thailand, in a typically showy manner, riding a bike, using a shotgun hidden under a bouquet of flowers and hand grenades (figure 2). The contrasting styles establish our understanding of them. A confrontation between Tok and Fat Ice, the crime boss who hired him, follows in Harry's Bar at Boat Quay, Singapore. Finally, O meets with his agent in Busan, South Korea. This mapping of East Asia has Southeast Asia as a subsidiary realm to Northeast Asia, a mapping apropos for a post-1997 East Asia, during which the region's economic center has moved to Northeast Asia. The Southeast Asian–Singaporean Lee is thus the suitable scribe for the Northeast Asians' fight for dominance. From the start, it is difficult *not* to read the film allegorically as about the heterogeneity of intraregional competition for hegemony in Asia's New World (Dis)Order. O's and Tok's competition for the culturally confused Taiwanese Chin, with her unsettled linguistic and national identity (and given Taiwan's troubled relationship with the mainland), becomes a synecdoche of the larger issue of ego and shifting regional centers of power the film investigates.

Figure 2. *The Japanese killer O in Malaysia in Fulltime Killer.*

To's film in the first instance, though, draws upon themes investigated in previous films that Wai Ka-fai and he had produced for their Milkyway Image film company, started in 1996. The downturn in Hong Kong film-making in the 1990s led Milkyway to both follow and to challenge Hong Kong cinema's masculine tradition, though these films "end up choosing to reproduce [the tradition] instead of creating new male subjects."⁵⁷ The new development in *Fulltime Killer* lies in O's choice for love, and the change shifts *Fulltime Killer* from antikiller genre to intra-Asia allegory. This becomes apparent after O discovers he has been set up by his Korean handler—really Tok's brother, Lok Gan-wah. O travels to Busan to confront Lok Gan-wah but shoots Lok's right hand rather than kill him. Lok says that he had nearly won the gold medal in pistol shooting in his 1984 Olympic bid, but—and here there is plot confusion—in the end, O (who has not participated in any Olympic games) had bested both brothers. The scene's overdetermination suggests a displacement from psychological loss to larger issues of national identity and pride, even if the film never offers a direct explanation for this displacement.

Intentionality is at play in the film's disjunctures and representation of fractured regional identity. The main characters have been changed from the original Chinese-language novel, *Full Time Hitman* (1999), by

Edmond Pang, upon which the film is based. In the novel, O is a Chinese assassin and Tok is Eurasian.⁵⁸ The change in ethnic composition is suggestive. But *Fulltime Killer* is more than an adaptation of Pang's novel. The presence of many filmic intertexts manifests a self-reflexive craftsmanship at work, and the particular presence of two Japanese intertexts—one a film, the other actually a cartoon—reveals the film to be a careful exploration of contemporary regional tensions that appropriately uses the region's own modern cultural resources.⁵⁹ The vital intertexts embed regional ethnonational difference at the film's heart.

The first intertext is maverick Japanese director Suzuki Seijun's absurdist, self-mocking yakuza thriller *Branded to Kill* (1967; *Koroshi no rakūin*), now a cult classic. A third-ranked hitman, Hanada Goro (Shisido Jo), with a fetish for boiling rice, fumbles one of his jobs, and the legendary but nameless assassin, known as Number One Killer (Nanbara Koji), is sent to enact retribution for this mistake. The egotistic Number One toys with Hanada but ends up being shot by him in a boxing arena and dies—but not before returning the favor. As Number Three himself dies, he mutters that he is a champion and instinctively but accidentally shoots the woman he loves when she enters the arena. To adapt the yakuza urban myth, transforming the Hanada character who has learnt to love into the Number One O, who then forsakes his top ranking for love, though not for death. The lower-ranked Chinese Tok, much more than Hanada Goro as Number Three, becomes the aspirant who gains the top rank and becomes a legend—but is a dead legend. To's transformations are almost moralistic in their condemnation of self-seeking glorification.

The second intertext is even more vital. Tok had been visiting Chin at the video store while wearing a Bill Clinton mask, in a reprise of a scene from Kathryn Bigelow's *Point Break* (1991). At a café where Chin meets O monthly, Tok reveals his face and addresses her in Cantonese; thus far, he deliberately has spoken only in Japanese. He tells her that he is Chinese and wants to kill a Japanese assassin—possibly trying to draw sympathy to his cause through ethnic solidarity. Then he says that she is like Emu in *Crying Freeman*, a quiet girl transformed into a sexy woman after she meets an assassin, presumably referring to himself.

This cryptic, one-off reference is to a *manga* (Japanese comic), *Crying Freeman*, a series written by Koike Kazuo and with artwork by Ikegami Ryoichi, that originally appeared in *Weekly Big Comic Spirits* between 1986 and 1988.⁶⁰ *Fulltime Killer's* intertextuality encompasses nonfilmic East Asian texts, indicating that even the genre boundaries of different regional cultural texts are porous. The comic series was about a Japanese assassin, Hinomura Yo, who was originally a potter. He is kidnapped by

the 108 Dragons, a Chinese gang who, through hypnosis, turn him into a killer, sardonically dubbing him Freeman. He remains a sensitive soul who cries after every killing. One murder is witnessed by Hino Emu, a lonely artist. Instead of killing her, Hinomura falls in love and finally marries her. Finally, the heads of the 108 Dragons recognize Hinomura's talent and name him as the heir to assume leadership of the organization. New Chinese names are bestowed on Hino and Hinomura: Hu Qing-lan (tiger pure orchid) and Long Tai-yang (dragon sun), respectively. The second name is resonant with the gang's name. The two become honorary Chinese in Japan and gain a central place among the racially marginal in Japanese society—a marginal group that through violence has reordered their sociocultural identity.

As with the *Branded to Kill* intertext, *Crying Freeman* functions as a significant structuring device. O is clearly the sensitive Freeman: at the start of the film, O had mourned the death of his previous cleaner, killed for not divulging information about him. Tok is professional but insensitive, and he is using Chin. The film also shows him unable to complete his lovemaking with her, making his epileptic fits a metaphor for a greater weakness: overweening ambition, the desire to emerge not only as Number One but to become apotheosized into a legend.

The transposition of the *manga* story to *Fulltime Killer*, therefore, is complex. O and Chin are crowned—but they do not and do not *want* to take charge. Though *Crying Freeman* displays stereotyped views of Chinese gangsters in Japan, this isn't directly repudiated but instead translated into a larger field of competitive ethnonational differences in which there is some narrative repetition, if inverted, from the *manga* (a Japanese assassin is sanctioned the way Freeman is, and the love stories both bear fruit), and some deliberate disconnections (the Chinese killer Tok, unlike the Chinese gang, is unable to really gain control through violence). There is no attempt to resolve the problem of difference. The contradictions at the heart of *Fulltime Killer* are acknowledged by the Ancient Mariner figure in the film, ex-inspector Lee. To the arriviste Chinese killer goes the glory and the creation of the triumphant killer legend; the rest will accept a quieter life. What does this say of a rising China and its role in the New Asia? The memory of past violence and the reframed context of the history of old Sino-Japanese animosities and current intraregional politico-economic situations muddy up the ending of the film. *Fulltime Killer* as an "Asian movie" persistently displays and then contains the contradictions in the not-quite-mainland-Chinese city of Hong Kong.

Though East Asia remains an elusive cultural space, if taken in strict ideational-ideological terms, there has been enough shared or similar

economic development that it has become real enough to try to cater to it. But if East Asia is also changed—working fervently to participate in the “trancelike moods of contemporary consumer culture”⁶¹—that change is part of the context that some recent intra-Asia films take into account. What Johnnie To understands to be part of the new are the expanded middle classes who have been the beneficiaries of an urbanizing and modern East Asia that is fractured:

Only a few years ago, many movies in Hong Kong were, for example, films with a lot of dirty jokes or stories about gangsters. But now Hong Kong has changed very much, and in Asia I think something has changed too. . . . There has been a recent wave of Korean films, all alternative in a way because of their emphasis on a middle class setting. And in Japan, the films show more and more of the middle class, because of the economic changes there. The people have changed, and so movies have to change.⁶²

To’s remarks and film should lead us to reflect not only upon the relationship of “that most industrialized zone of a former Third World now called the Pacific Rim”⁶³ to the global or world system, but also upon the fractured yet interrelated region itself, and especially at the moment when China seems to be asserting its centrality in East Asian space. At one time, China vigorously resisted the capitalist mode of production. Once, it at least could be argued that “only the [mainland] Chinese way entails the effort to secure the (active) participation of an entire people in a dual process: the creation of wealth and of social life—and the production, in space, of space as a whole.”⁶⁴ But no more. At the same time, a socialist-capitalist China does not as yet have the imaginative mass-cultural capacity to create images of an East Asia that can resonate strongly in the region. Government censorship and insufficient investment capital make it difficult for innovative cultural forms to arise, though, in terms of cinema production, joint productions have somewhat relieved the latter difficulty.⁶⁵

China’s return to Asia reminds us that the ghosts of the earlier rupture caused by a colonial-era capitalist modernity are still with us, and we have enforced upon ourselves a recognition that “unevenness continues to constitute one of capitalism’s principle conditions of reproduction.”⁶⁶ And this present state of unevenness should lead us to rethink what the “opposition of center and periphery”⁶⁷ referred to at the start of this essay might now mean, given the ongoing valorization of the economic forms

that, despite recent economic crises, still reign in the capitalist places of East Asia.

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NOTES

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1. Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden; trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 215.
2. *Ibid.*, 202.
3. See "Intersections: Issues in Contemporary Art," ed. Joan Kee, special issue, *positions: east asia cultures critique* 12, no. 3 (2004); John Clark, "Histories of the Asian 'New': Bien-nales and Contemporary Asian Art," in *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Vishaka N. Desai, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts series (Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2007), 229–49; and C. J. W.-L. Wee, "'We Asians'?" *Modernity, Visual Art Exhibitions, and East Asia*, *boundary 2* 37, no. 1 (2010): 92–126.
4. Harry Harootian, "Ghostly Comparisons," in *Impacts of Modernities*, ed. Thomas Lamarre and Kang Nae-hui, Multilingual Series of Cultural Theory and Translation 3 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 39–52.
5. Thomas Lamarre, "Introduction: The Impacts of Modernities," in Lamarre and Kang, *Impacts of Modernities* (see note 4), 1–36, quotation on 18. The convention for proper nouns in some Asian languages places the family name first and the given name second. Sometimes translators reverse the order. In this essay, I follow the Asian convention, with the exception of texts written in English.
6. See, for example, Prasenjit Duara, "Imperialism and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century," in *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, State & Society East Asia series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 9–41.

7. Koichi Iwabuchi, "Pop Culture's *Lingua Franca*: Language and Regional Popular Cultural Flows in East Asia," in *Babel or Behemoth: Language Trends in Asia*, ed. Jennifer Lindsay and Tan Ying Ying (Singapore: Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2003), 161–74, quotation on 171–72. Media critic Iwabuchi's point is that *how exactly* translation (subtitling of dramas or pop songs incorporating more than one language) or how *cultural translation*—that which comes about when the viewer feels that there is *cultural proximity* between the TV program he/she is watching and his/her own urban context—led to the creation of regional cultural "resonance" is not apparent. My attempt here clearly is to think through this question of "resonance."
8. Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Perspectives series (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 115–55.
9. Fredric Jameson has observed that despite buying Columbia Pictures and MCA in the 1980s, and possessing financial and technological prowess, the "Japanese were unable to master the essentially cultural productivity required to secure the globalization process for any given competitor" ("Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, Post-Contemporary Interventions series [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998], 54–77, quotation on 67). The general point holds, but his position is unaware of and does not take into account the extraordinary burst of regional mass-cultural production and circulation in the 1990s that serves the effective purpose of supporting the globalization process within East Asia itself.
10. J. S. Eades, "Economic Miracles and Megacities: The Japanese Model and Urbanization in East and Southeast Asia," in *Understanding the City: Contemporary and Future Perspectives*, ed. John Eade and Christopher Mele, Studies in Urban and Social Change series (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 222–43, quotation on 222.
11. World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*, World Bank Policy Research Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
12. Lefebvre, *State, Space, World*, 204.
13. Eades, "Economic Miracles and Megacities," 232. Of course, urbanization can occur without economic growth—Manila is one example.
14. Göran Therborn, "Asia and Europe in the World: Locations in the Global Dynamics," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 3, no. 2 (2002): 287–307.
15. Even a political commentator as critical as historian Timothy Garton Ash inexcusably "others" the consolidating modernities of the "rise of the rest" as that that raise their threat level above that of normative great-power rivalry—a new East–West divide is proposed: "Russia and China are not just great powers challenging the west. . . . [T]he opening ceremony of the [2008] Beijing Olympics, like the skyscrapers of Shanghai, show us how authoritarian capitalism already stakes that claim [to be liberal capitalism's alternative]" ("Another 9/11 Isn't Our Worse Problem," *Guardian Weekly*, 19 September 2008, 20).
16. For a critique of the claims to alternative modernities, see C. J. W.-L. Wee, *The Asian Modern: Culture, Capitalist Development, Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 15–19.
17. Cf. Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital," in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, Public Culture Book series (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 279–306:

mass cultural Asianism is a symptom of deeper structural and historical changes in the ways Asia is being perceived as both a mode

of production and a regime of discursive practice in the Japanese [mass-cultural] imaginary. If the earlier Asianism was conditioned on the unequivocal difference between Asia and the West . . . in today's Asianism that difference itself exists only as a commodity, a spectacle to be consumed in a globalized capitalist system. (282)

In retrospect, it was clear by the late 1990s that "mass-cultural Asianism" was part and parcel of changes in the ways Asia is perceived in the larger regional and not only Japanese imaginary. Difference may be a commodity, but it is a commodity form that contributes toward the regional resonance of mass-cultural production. Many of the products circulate primarily within East Asia, though South Korea's culture industries, notably, have made attempts to get their music stars into the United States; see, for example, Hyunjoon Shin's discussion of singer and actor Rain, in "Have You Ever Seen the Rain? And Who'll Stop the Rain? The Globalizing Project of Korean Pop (K-Pop)," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 10, no. 4 (2009): 507–23.

18. Dieter Ernst, "Searching for a New Role in East Asian Regionalization: Japanese Production Networks in the Electronic Industry," in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi, Cornell Studies in Political Economy series (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 161–87.
19. Eades, "Economic Miracles," 222.
20. Takashi Shiraishi, "The Third Wave: Southeast Asia and Middle-Class Formation in the Making of a Region," in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, *Beyond Japan* (see note 18), 237–71, quotation on 241. Shiraishi also does go on to point out that, "far from being defined solely by their capacity to consume, the East Asian middle classes have also been constituted as political subjects . . . [with] important political consequences in reshaping their states and articulating new nationalisms" (245). New identities can also generate new regional tensions.
21. Mike Douglass, "The 'New' Tokyo Story: Restructuring Space and the Struggle for Place in a World City," in *Japanese Cities in the World Economy*, ed. Kuniko Fujita and Richard Child Hill, Conflicts in Urban & Regional Development series (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 83–119.
22. Shahid Yusuf and Kaoru Nabeshima, *Post-industrial East Asian Cities: Innovation for Growth* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; and Washington, DC: World Bank, 2006), 31.
23. Peter G. Rowe, *East Asia Modern: Shaping the Contemporary City* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005). The speed of regional urban development has long been commented upon; cf. the Dutch architect-theorist Rem Koolhaas: "Singapore is an apotheosis of urban renewal, a built answer to the shift from country to city which was though. 30 years ago, to force Asia to construct in 20 years the same amount of urban substance as the whole of Western Europe" ("Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis . . . or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa, Reconstruction, 1995," in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-large: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, ed. Jennifer Sigler [Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995], 1009–89, quotation on 1017).
24. Laikwan Pang, "Postcolonial Hong Kong Cinema: Utilitarianism and Trans(Local)," *Postcolonial Studies* 10, no. 4 (2007): 413–30; and Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
25. "On De-Asianization by Fukuzawa Yukichi," trans. Okada Hidehiro, in *The Meiji Japan through Contemporary Sources*, 3 vols. (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1969–72), 3:129–33, quotation on 129.

26. Jameson, "Notes on Globalization," 64.
27. Shunya Yoshimi and David Buist, "'America' as Desire and Violence: Americanization in Postwar Japan and Asia during the Cold War," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (2003): 433–50.
28. For an example of a study committed to denouncing any hint of an essentialized East Asia, see Kwai-Cheung Lo's "There Is No Such Thing as Asia: Racial Particularities in the 'Asian' Films of Hong Kong and Japan," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 133–58:

If Asia's heterogeneity is primordial and irreducible and if it designates a unity that can never be contained by any cinematic representation, should we understand those 'Asian' films of Japan and Hong Kong as tokens of presence for that which is absent? (143)
29. The new East Asian middle classes would be the beneficiaries of such new modes of being; see Richard Robison and David S. G. Goodman, eds., *The New Rich In Asia: Mobile Phones, McDonald's and Middle Class Revolution*, New Rich in Asia series (London: Routledge, 1995); and Beng-Huat Chua, ed., *Consumption in Asia: Lifestyle and Identities*, New Rich in Asia series (London: Routledge, 2000). Unsurprisingly, the dominant strand of cultural studies undertaken by East Asian scholars that can be found, for example, in the pages of the influential journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, focuses on subjects such as commercial pop and indie music, alternative lifestyles, and television drama, and film.
30. Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 4.
31. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997).
32. Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 123–36.
33. Koichi Iwabuchi, ed., *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Mark James Russell, *Pop Goes Korea: Behind the Revolution in Movies, Music, and the Internet Culture* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2008); and Chua Beng Huat, ed., *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, Transasia: Screen Cultures series (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008). In terms of the Japanese waves, the appearance of postwar Japanese capital in Southeast Asia may have raised the awareness of local populations to Japanese culture and ameliorated the negative perceptions of the Japanese engendered by the Pacific War. A potentially significant lifestyle development in Singapore, for instance, that may have further paved the way for the increased mass-cultural presence to come was the opening of department stores by Japanese retailers Isetan in 1972 and Yaohan in 1974 (see Hiroshi Shimizu, "The Blood-Debt Issue and Japan-Singapore Relations" and "Rise and Decline of Japanese Retailers in Singapore," in *Japanese Firms in Contemporary Singapore* [Singapore: NUS Press, 2008], 34–40, 184–217). Nevertheless, it remains hard to generalize the conditions that assisted the Japanese mass-cultural arrival in a region as diverse as East Asia. The Japanese government itself responded to, rather than was directly involved with, the Japanese cultural waves. The possibility of promoting mass culture as a form of "soft power" seemed to come about only after the publication of American journalist Douglas McGray's "Japan's Gross National Cool" (*Foreign Policy* 130 [2002]: 44–54). See also David Leheny, "A Narrow Place to Cross Swords: 'Soft Power' and the Politics of Japanese Popular Culture in East Asia," in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism* (see note 18), 211–34.

34. See Lo, "There Is No Such Thing," 138–43; and Yeh Yueh-Yu and Darrell William Davis, "Japan Hongscreen: Pan-Asian Cinemas and Flexible Accumulation," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 22, no. 1 (2002): 61–82.
35. Law Kar, in *Border Crossings in Hong Kong Cinema: The 24th Hong Kong International Film Festival*, ed. Law Kar (Hong Kong: Leisure and Cultural Services Department, 2000), 105; cited by Meaghan Morris, "Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema: Hong Kong and the Making of a Global Popular Culture," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 184–85. *Empress Yang Kwei Fei* was the only film in a non-Japanese setting by Mizoguchi.
36. Morris, "Transnational Imagination," 185.
37. Film versions of *Zatoichi* played by Katsu were produced from 1962 to 1973, with a final film made in 1989. There were television series, as well, in 1974, 1976, 1978, and 1979.
38. A sequel to *The One-Armed Swordsman*—*The Return of the One-Armed Swordsman*—was produced and released in 1969 by the same director.
39. Laikwan Pang, "Masculinity in Crisis: Films of Milkyway Image and Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema," *Feminist Media Studies* 2, no. 3 (2002): 325–40, esp. 325. The countries that are especially important are Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, where there are ethnic Chinese citizens. See Stephen Teo, "Local and Global Identity: Whither Hong Kong Cinema?" modified paper, Second International Conference on Chinese Cinema, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong, 9 April 2000, accessed 11 January 2012, *Senses of Cinema* no. 61, www.sensesofcinema.com/2000/7/asian-cinema/hongkong/.
40. Yeh and Davis, "Japan Hongscreen," 64, 65. Other films in the same "cosmopolitan fantasy" action mode include *Purple Storm* (dir. Teddy Chan, 1999) and *2000 AD* (dir. Gordon Chan, 2000). The latter film was coproduced by Hong Kong's Media Asia Films and People's Production Limited, and Singapore's MediaCorp Raintree Pictures. It was shot on location in both cities, and while it was not as financially successful as expected, it is indicative instance of another transnational/regional strategy of film coproduction.
41. The multilingual strategy to overcome difference also applies to pop music. A major representative example here is Lee Soo Man and the successful SM Entertainment Group he founded, one of South Korea's leading production houses. His ambitions run beyond the South Korean border. BoA (real name, Gwon Bo-A), who learned Japanese and English and was deliberately prepared for the Japanese market, was SM's first major overseas success. Her debut Japanese-language album in 2002 was the first (then only) non-Japanese Asian album to reach number one in *Oricon* magazine's album charts. Lee's sights also turned to China, and, in an interview, he predicted that the China market will exceed Japan's by 2010; when queried as to why he was not thinking of the US market, Lee's response was revealing: "China will soon become the U.S.; why waste energy by entering the U.S. market? It's Asians after Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Even if I go there, it would be difficult to get out of minor market" ("Interview with Lee Soo Man," BoAjjang Forums, 1 September 2005, accessed 26 September 2006, <http://forums.boajjang.com/index.php?act=ST&f=1&t=34315>). This has meant, for example, that the popular SM K-pop boy-band TVXQ (debuted 2003) had their first album, *Tri-Angle* (Avex Trax, AVKCD80152A), also released in China under the title *Dongfang Shenqi* (CRC [China Record Corporation], CCD-1994), the group's Chinese name. The China version had three of the songs appear twice, first in Korean and then in (slightly strained) Mandarin-Chinese. In Korean, TVXQ are known as *Dong Bang Shin Ki*, and in Mandarin-Chinese *Dongfang Shenqi*, both meaning "Gods rising in the East." They later fared well on the Japanese charts, under the name *Tōhōshinki*, which has the same meaning as the Korean and Chinese names, and their singles appeared in multiple language versions, though the focus has clearly moved

to Japan from China, given the notoriously poor intellectual property protection in the latter country. Despite their overall Japanese success (despite declining popularity in South Korea itself), SM suspended all activities by TVXQ on 3 April 2010 owing to contractual problems with three of the singers. The revamped boyband that appeared in early 2011 comprised only two members of the original five. Newer Korean boybands follow the pattern of recording in Japanese. For example, Beast, debuting in 2009 and managed by Cube Entertainment, released their mixed Japanese and Korean album in 2011, entitled *So Beast* on the Universal Music Japan label (UMCF-1062). The album went to the number-three spot on Japan's *Oricon* charts.

42. Also see Chua Beng Huat, "Conceptualizing an East Asian Popular Culture," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 200–221.
43. The obvious mistake in the *The World of Suzie Wong*'s main urban location—the Wan Chai District where Suzie is to be found is actually Hollywood Road and Ladder Street in the Central District—does not in itself detract from the film's overall representation of the then-colony's urbancape.
44. Cf. Yu-fen Ko: "Research on Japanese idol dramas in Taiwan point out that Taiwanese youths consider the urban Tokyo setting as the major reason for their popularity" ("The Desired Form: Japanese Idol Dramas in Taiwan," in Iwabuchi, *Feeling Asian Modernities* [see note 33], 107–28, quotation on 118). In 1999, Liao Hsiang-siong, a deputy director of the Kuomintang's Department of Cultural Affairs, observed, "The Taiwanese can easily reflect upon their own lives while watching Japanese TV dramas. Yet, Japan is much more advanced and trendy, and they hope to become like the Japanese" (cited in Sayuri Daimon, "Taiwanese Youths Becoming Japan Fans," *Japan Times*, 13 September 1999, accessed 5 July 2005, www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn19990913a9.html).
45. Kaneshiro himself, as a leading man in film and television productions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and China, embodies transregional elements: of Taiwanese-Japanese parentage, he speaks English, Mandarin-Chinese, Cantonese, Taiwanese, and Japanese (see Eva Tsai, "Kaneshiro Takeshi: Transnational Stardom and the Media and Culture Industries in Asia's Global/Postcolonial Age," *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 17, no. 1 [2004]: 100–132).
46. Janice Tong, "Chungking Express: Time and Its Displacements," in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry (Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 64–72, quotation on 67; also see Ackbar Abbas on his argument for the film's feeling of *déjà disparu* (*Hong Kong and the Politics of Disappearance*, Public Worlds series [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997], 25).
47. A notable building in the film is Chungking Mansions, located at 36–44 Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui. It famously draws South Asians, Middle Easterners, and Nigerians to its vicinity (see, for example, Gordon Matthews, "Chungking Mansions: A Center of 'Low-End Globalization,'" *Ethnology* 46, no. 2 [2007]: 169–83).
48. Kamiya Yukie, "Communicative Approach, from Asia," in Japan Foundation Asia Center, *Under Construction: New Dimensions of Asian Art*, ed. Kataoka Mami, exhibition catalog (Tokyo: Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2002), 133–136, quotation on 133.
49. It grossed HK\$28 million, equivalent to US\$3.5 million (Derek Elley, "Tokyo Raiders," *Variety*, 23 October 2000, accessed 29 November 2007, www.variety.com/review/VE1117788435?refcatid=31).
50. David Bordwell, *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 150.
51. Yeh and Davis, "Japan Hongscreen," 63.

52. Ibid., 65.
53. Colin McCabe, preface to Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic* (see note 8), ix–xx, quotation on xiv.
54. Quoted in Charles Leary, “Full Time Cinema: An Interview with Johnnie To,” *Offscreen* 8, no. 6 (2004), accessed 15 November 2007, www.horschamp.qc.ca/new_offscreen/to_interview.html.
55. Cited by Stephen Teo, *Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007), 239.
56. This scene from *Fulltime Killer* was actually shot at the railway station in Singapore.
57. Pang, “Masculinity in Crisis,” 337. In these earlier films, the male characters are often insecure and fearful, with hesitant relationships between the men and lacking the confidence to master the opposite sex.
58. Teo, *Director in Action*.
59. References are made to other films such as Richard Donner’s *Assassins* (1995) and John Ford’s classic Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). As has been noted, *Fulltime Killer* is a “transnational collage” of action films that “far exceeds any notion of Asia” (Lo, “There is No Such Thing,” 150) yet also engages with contemporary East Asia.
60. In 1988, Toei Animation adapted the *manga* *Crying Freeman* for an anime original video animation (OVA), meaning that it was a direct-to-video product.
61. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Wellek Library Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 3.
62. Quotation from Leary, “Full Time Cinema.”
63. Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, 1.
64. Lefebvre, *State, Space, World*, 206.
65. Curtin, *Playing*, 283–84.
66. Harootunian, “Ghostly Comparisons,” 51.
67. Lefebvre, *State, Space, World*, 215.

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