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Praxis

Trans-cult-ural fandom: Desire, technology and the transformation of fan subjectivities in the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars

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0.1 Abstract—This essay examines the ways in which affective desire and new media technologies were mobilized by Japanese female fans of Hong Kong films and stars to produce a fan subjectivity that was at once cult and transcultural. The origins of this fandom, which flourished from around 1985 through the 1990s, lay in structural affinities of the Japanese and Hong Kong entertainment industries of the 1980s, as well as the ways in which popular stars of both places were expected to perform their stardom. In particular, a shared valuing of stars' relatability and approachability translated, for Japanese fans, into a seemingly paradoxical sense of intimacy with the stars of another culture, an intimacy that was fostered and heightened by women's pursuit of Hong Kong media outside the official distribution channels of the Japanese media industry. I examine the knowledges required by women to seek out favorite stars' films on VHS and VCD, as well as the sites of such consumption, which combined in the production of what I tentatively term a trans-cult-ural fan subjectivity that was at once cultish in its intensity and desire for ownership, as well as transcultural in its performance by fans.

0.2 Keywords—Cult fandom; Dōjinshi; Female fandom; Hong Kong cinema; Japan; Star fandom; Transcultural fandom; Video technology


1. Introduction

1.1 When Jackie Chan was making his final, successful bid for Hollywood stardom in the latter half of the 1990s, the story of his obsessive Japanese female fandom was a staple of interviews and profiles published online and in the American
press. An ever-evolving tale advanced by Chan himself in his 1998 autobiography, *I Am Jackie Chan*, its characterization of Japanese women as a barely contained mob of emotionally unstable hysterics effectively established the enormity of his pan-Asian superstardom to a mainstream Western audience heretofore unfamiliar with his extensive oeuvre. More importantly, it also served to flatter a predominantly male Western cult fandom of kung fu cinema that constituted itself in part through the structuring absence of overtly affective investment in Hong Kong stars. In singling out for critique Japanese women who got too close to him—both emotionally and physically—Chan, who trades on his physicality, legitimated a proper interest in his body by appealing to male fans' appreciation of the "corporeal authenticity" (Hunt 2003, 159) of his embodied stardom (note 1).

[1.2] Cult fandom historically has constituted women as the mainstream other against which fan identities are constituted. Cult, which is based on a system of cultural capital that privileges authentic opposition to social institutions, consumer capitalism, and cultural homogeneity, distances the female spectator as much through material practice as textual content (Hollows 2003, 36–38). Women's often unavoidable implication in the social organization of time and space results in the construction of a feminine-coded mainstream against which cult, emerging from what Joanne Hollows has termed the spatiotemporal "twilight zones" (41) of midnight movies and sleazy theaters, derives its oppositionality. Thus, if, as Sarah Thornton (1995) suggests, cult fandom positions itself "outside media and culture" as "grassroots cultures (which) resist and struggle with a colonizing mass-mediated corporate world" (quoted in Jancovich 2002, 315), women would seem to be precluded from participating in it by virtue of their social susceptibility to that same colonizing culture.

[1.3] I problematize this conceptualization of cult fandom through an examination of the intersection of women's affective interest in Hong Kong stars, new media technologies, and commodified practices of star-centered fandom in the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars in the late 1980s and 1990s, arguing that this intersection produced both a transcultural and a trans-cult-ural audience situated not only between the fan cultures of Hong Kong and Japan, but also between cult and star fan subjectivities. The term *transcultural* has been invoked with increasing frequency in scholarship of transnational media and fandoms as a means of capturing the dialogical possibilities of affinities of experience that both literally and
figuratively exceed the parameters of the nation-state (Lau 2003). While necessarily maintaining this sense of the term, my use of the term *trans-cult-ural* to describe the female fandom of Hong Kong stars in Japan is equally intended to foreground the "semiotic solidarity" (Lau 2003, 6) between cult and star fan modalities that are both produced by their industrial and technological contexts and themselves contribute to the production of new fan subjectivities.

[1.4] The Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars was composed of fans ranging in age from 20 to 59 (and even beyond, as in the case of one fan in her 80s who attended Leslie Cheung's 1997 Osaka concert in formal kimono), and spanning a diversity of occupations: everything from students and housewives to office ladies and even entertainment industry executives. They, as well as the businesses that sought both to cater to and capitalize on them, left a paper trail of fan letters, *dōjinshi* (fan magazines), advertisements, journalism, and fan-targeted publications that are at the center of this historical materialist analysis, in which I attempt to reconstruct the discursive surround of this fandom, the better to understand not only why and how fans consumed Hong Kong stars in Japan, but the implications of such consumption for how we understand transcultural—and trans-cult-ural—fandom in the main.

[1.5] I first interrogate the notion of cult fandom within an increasingly diversified media landscape, in which what was once the purview of twilight zones has been domesticated, in more than one sense, through the proliferation of home viewing technologies. I look at the contexts of women's uses and consumption of media technologies, in particular highlighting the ways in which the mainstream proliferation of Hong Kong movies on video CD (VCD) rendered female fans accidental connoisseurs of a technology that was, in the Japanese context, both masculine and highly niche. I then turn to discussion of the cultural geographies of Japanese women's fandom of Hong Kong stars; I pay particular attention to the ways in which fans' affective drive to procure star-centered media and paraphernalia combined with specific sites of acquisition to contribute to the transformation of female fans from mainstream to marginal cult consumers. This marginality, which produced and mobilized specialized knowledges of Hong Kong popular culture, translated to a mode of fandom that exceeded both prescribed female fandom and Japanese fandom, becoming the impetus for a transformation of these women's fan subjectivities from domestic, in both the household and broader national sense, to
trans-cultural.

2. The domesticity of cult

[2.1] In the United States and the United Kingdom, where cult historically has been the primary mode of Hong Kong film reception, tales of Jackie Chan's unhinged Japanese fans were among the first discourses to be associated with the star, at once confirming his status as a global superstar and implicitly affirming the cult sensibility of his Anglo-American audience. Similarly, even in Japan, where such stories went untold, women's association with commercial, mainstream media colored the perception of Chan's female fans by male martial arts aficionados. In the 1999 book *Ajian mubī jankīzu!!* (Asian movie junkies!!), four men take up the issue of Chan's mid-1980s transformation, implicitly conveying their own oppositional tastes through their critique of the star's marketing to a mainstream, mostly female audience:

[2.2] **Ginty:** In Jackie's case, fans' perception of him went from Jackie as an action star to [the book] *Okurimono* (All About Jackie Chan), in which he was promoted as an idol. And since I wanted information [about him], I wound up buying that book.

**Yashiro:** And then, it had pointless pictures of Jackie blowing out candles on a birthday cake and stuff.

**Ginty:** Even though he wasn't supposed to have a girlfriend, it was stuffed with information like how he had a double bed. And then in the latter half of the book, he had an advice column (laugh). That was the point at which everyone distanced themselves [from Chan].

**Kiuchi:** Yeah, that was a difficult period.

**Uechi:** The charming Jackie of those days was also good. But even though he came to Japan often, I have no recollection of him. After all, he was on TV programs like [Beat Takeshi’s] "Super Jockey."

**Kiuchi:** The "Challenge Jackie" series in the "Ganbareman" sketch was good. Jackie did a lot of appearances on variety shows...and he also did a
concert when *Five Lucky Stars* came out. At the Budōkan, with Sammo Hung and Yuen Biao.

**Yashiro:** It's a side of him that's hard to believe now. They were selling a Tōhō-Tōwa-style image of "everybody's Jackie."

**Kiuchi:** With people on TV like Grandma Komori saying stuff like "Jackie Chan is cute." (Kiuchi, Kobayashi, and Takeshi 1999, 42) (note 2)

![Raymond Chow, Jackie Chan, and Sibelle Hu with Komori Kazuko. My Lucky Stars film pamphlet, 1985.](View larger image]

[2.3] In this conversation, Chan's mainstream fandom, in which women, children, and even the elderly predominated, was signified through references to Chan's pop-idol promotion and the banality of pictures showcasing his soft side. Through the articulation of film studio and distributor Tōhō-Tōwa's marketing tactics with the mainstream audience to whom they were aimed, these fans were able to differentiate between their own authentic cult fandom and that of the feminized/infantilized masses.

[2.4] Yet the dividing line between male cult and female mainstream here is blurred by these men themselves in their reluctant admission of participation in and appreciation of Chan's popular persona, a blurring that, in fact, mirrors technological changes that transformed audiences' relationships to media in 1980s Japan. As Barbara Klinger (2006) has argued, the emergence of technologies that brought media into the home afforded cult fans an intensity of experience that strengthened the divide between detached mainstream and cult spectatorship. VHS and, in particular, DVD technologies allowed for the circulation of relatively rare
media texts outside official distribution channels, the collection of which reinforced an authentic cult identity. However, the very technologies that contributed to the reinforcement of an oppositionality critical to this cult subjectivity equally blurred the line between cult and mainstream fans by bringing cult media into the domestic sphere.

[2.5] Does it thus follow that cult becomes an empty category, or does it retain a hermeneutical usefulness? In his discussion of what he terms postmodern cult, Timothy Corrigan argues that conditions of film spectatorship, more than specific film texts themselves, have produced the "cultish formations and viewing activities" (1991, 81) associated with cult film. In particular, his observation of audiences' ownership of films—both material and affective—presaged more recent scholarship on the intersection of media technologies and intense fan subjectivities. The technology-enabled collecting of films on portable media is conceived as an exercise that, as Klinger argues, "surpasses and obscures the [collector's] function as a consumer in the marketplace" through media industrial deployment of "the rhetoric of intimacy...and mastery" (2006, 88–89). Such appeals to media and technological mastery are, as James Kendrick argues, "a way of reworking the gendered nature of television and its association with everydayness into a masculine domain of control" (2005, 65) and as such constitute an effective inoculation against the otherwise feminized and feminizing domestic sphere within which cult media are consumed.

[2.6] The intimacies of film collecting center on the behind-the-scenes minutiae of DVD extras that at once inundate the viewer with the "secrets" (Klinger 2006, 89) of production and, as Craig Hight writes in the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, "invite us into the closed and artificial world of the production...as if we have been invited into the homes of the cast and crew to view the film with them, listening as they tell stories of their production experience with the sound of the film turned down" (2005, 12). Thomas Doherty describes this "imaginary friendship nurtured in the vicarious dialogue between pantheon artist and mortal fan" as being "of a wholly new order of intimacy" (2001, 78), and it is in this sense that we may begin to discern within the practices of cult consumption a space for female star fandom, insofar as this kind of affective intimacy born of DVD collecting, in contrast with the paradoxically distanced intimacy of esoteric knowledges of media production, closely parallels women's fandom of stars. Particularly within the Japanese context, as William W. Kelly observes, such fans
[2.7] are not satisfied with the formal performances, with the mediated and staged glimpses of stars. They seek to get behind the curtain, to know more about the performers, to "possess" them through tokens like autographs and handprints and bootleg tapes. Jazz record collectors do not just like listening to jazz; they want ownership, physical possession of the very material objects of jazz performance. They want the visual and tactile intimacies of ownership, beyond—and sometimes quite apart from—the pleasures of hearing the music. Thus, intimacy can inhere in the physicality of a momentary handshake and the materiality of vinyl and the unique tremolo of a voice but also in the more ephemeral and virtual. (2004, 9)

[2.8] Kelly argues that Japanese star "fans are set apart from others in seeking intimacy—and paradoxically, seeking intimacy in highly commodified settings" (2004, 9). Equally paradoxical, at first glance, is the idea that such intimacy might be forged across both cultural and geographical borders. Yet as the abovementioned work on cult fan practices shows, a desire for precisely this kind of commodified, transcultural intimacy is, in fact, a defining characteristic of intense fandom in late capitalism, and one that is critical in producing a new, trans-cult-ural fan subjectivity.

3. "The VCD age has arrived!!"

[3.1] Mori Kei's 2001 self-published fan memoir, Machigatte itara gomen nasai (Forgive me if I'm wrong), begins with a protracted tease narrating her discovery of and gradual attraction to Hong Kong film and music star Leslie Cheung. Throughout the course of "seven or eight years" (2001, 13) during the 1990s, his name and image catch her largely indifferent eye through film reviews in the magazine she edits, gossip columns in the sports dailies through which she follows horse races, and snippets of Chinese-language TV programming that she watches while waiting for Serie A soccer matches to begin on cable TV. Yet it is not until her relocation from Tokyo's Setagaya Ward to Mitaka, a suburb largely devoid of cultural distractions such as cinemas, that she truly engages with Cheung's persona. On the recommendation of a friend, she rents Wong Kar-wai's Days of Being Wild (1993, dir. Wong Kar Wai) at a neighborhood video rental shop; Cheung's wounded
portrayal of the narcissistic Yuddy piques her interest to the extent that she begins first to notice his image everywhere—notably in a garish display advertising his latest CD at a local music shop—and then to actively seek out his works at Chinese entertainment specialty shops. Her sister, a fan of Japanese Taiwanese star Takeshi Kaneshiro, disabuses her of the preconception that she will have to venture as far as Yokohama's Chinatown—a trip of at least 2 hours—in order to find Cheung-related media and paraphernalia, instead directing Mori to Jasmine Tea, a small specialty shop located within nearby Nakano Broadway mall.

[3.2] The actual process of star discovery described here by Mori is in itself unremarkable. What is noteworthy about her account of near misses on an inexorable path leading to Leslie Cheung is its circuitous trajectory through both media and degrees of engagement. Her journey from print media to cable television to video to music CD reflects the mainstream circulation of Hong Kong stars in Japan in the 1980s and, in particular, the 1990s; equally, this initial engagement with Cheung, which she describes as "the beginning of it all (1)" (2001, 11), echoes that fragmented and distracted mode of reception described in scholarly research of both Anglo-American and Japanese women television viewers. Glimpses of Cheung within her everyday media environment pique her interest, but none sufficiently to spur her to fandom. Rather, her immersion in Cheung fandom—"the beginning of it all (2)" (17)—starts at the point at which she exhausts official channels of Hong Kong media circulation and turns to alternative sites and modes of media acquisition. The mutually intensifying affect and activity that characterizes Mori's growing fandom of Cheung is, in fact, characteristic of Japanese women's fandom of Hong Kong stars in the late 1980s and 1990s, emerging through a transforming technological landscape that exceeded the strategizing of Japanese media industries of the period.

[3.3] Given the peripheral role of Hong Kong cinema within the mainstream of Japanese popular culture, the rise of a discernible female fandom of Hong Kong stars in Japan during the 1980s and 1990s appears paradoxical. While viewed as potentially lucrative from the perspective of the Hong Kong film industry of the 1980s, the Japanese film market posed a number of difficulties for Hong Kong producers. Among these were incompatibilities in production and distribution cycles between Hong Kong and Japan (Yeung 2000); where Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and 1990s was distinguished by the speed with which films went from
concept to screen (Bordwell 2000), both Japanese production and distribution followed "meticulous" (Yeung 2000, 151) and highly structured timetables that translated to an inevitable lag between a film's completion and its release in Japan. Moreover, particularly in the case of television broadcasts of Hong Kong feature films, producers had "little say over whether the film [was] used simply to fill time slots or whether it [was] being run during prime time by its Japanese distributor" (Yeung 2000, 151), further inhibiting Hong Kong producers' drive to market to Japanese audiences.

[3.4] Not only differences of production and distribution but also difficulties in conceptualizing a Japanese audience for Hong Kong cinema proved to be a significant barrier to Hong Kong penetration of the Japanese film market. While the first flush of Bruce Lee's posthumous popularity in 1970s Japan indicated a male audience primed for Hong Kong's substantial martial arts output, only Jackie Chan, Jet Li, and comedian Michael Hui made a substantial impact on Japanese theater and television audiences through the mid-1980s (Kurata 1984, 130–32). Of these, only Jet Li could lay claim to the kind of sober kung fu that characterized Lee's earlier films. In contrast, Hui and Chan introduced a comedic complexification of the notion of Hong Kong cinema as a de facto martial arts tradition. In the Japanese context, particularly at the hands of distributors who carefully pitched their mainstream appeal to Japan's boys' manga and girls' pop idol markets, these latter-day Hong Kong films were perceived as immature and dasai (uncool) to the mass of adult moviegoers.

[3.5] In 1986, John Woo's action hit A Better Tomorrow became the highest-grossing local film in Hong Kong history, bringing in US$4.25 million at the box office. Intending to capitalize on its Hong Kong success, Nihon Herald released the film in Japan during the prime Golden Week window to a box-office take of only US$590 thousand, lagging far behind the 1987 box-office returns of other foreign films (note 3). In its South Korean release, as Jinsoo An has observed, A Better Tomorrow did equally poorly in mainstream theaters, which, he notes, were primarily a site of female filmgoing. The film's subsequent popularity among South Korean men resulted from its redistribution in minitheaters that catered primarily to teenaged males (2001, 104–5). In contrast, in Japan the film was revived not in urban minitheaters but on home video, the reach of which translated to the wider dissemination of Hong Kong films throughout the country and across genders.
[3.6] Japan's video rental market peaked at the same time as films such as *A Better Tomorrow* and *A Chinese Ghost Story* (1987, dir. Tsui Hark) were finding their way onto video rental shelves. During the 1986–1989 period, when video players achieved a 53% penetration of Japanese households (Nakamura 1996), over 300 Hong Kong films became available for rental on subtitled (or, in some cases, dubbed) VHS (Ui 1988). The majority of films released during this period were targeted at an audience of male martial arts and action film fans. Nonetheless, the low cost of obtaining Hong Kong film distribution rights, relative to those of Japanese and Hollywood films, meant that a wide variety of Hong Kong film genres—ranging from martial arts, action, and horror, to drama, romance, and comedy—received distribution, often through small-scale companies (Tochigi 1990). As Itō Takashi, the editor of a Hong Kong film-centered *dōjinshi*, retrospectively observed, "in the early period, Hong Kong films in Japan were discovered (*hakken sareta*) in video shops...titles were available in greater numbers in the late 1980s than today—as long as it was new, anything was stocked" (quoted in Shinohara 1998b, 24–25).

[3.7] As much as the diversity of titles stocked on video rental shelves, the sites of video rental activity were also critical in attracting female viewers to Hong Kong films. Although emerging rental chains such as Tsutaya often carried the widest range of videos, just over half of all rental activity occurred in small shops located near train stations and residential neighborhoods: *papamama* (mom and pop) home electronics shops, bookstores, and convenience stores, in particular (Nakamura 1996, 173). Such sites, whether in Tokyo or outlying Oita or rural Tottori, stood shoulder to shoulder with the grocery stores, dry cleaners, and coffee shops that women frequented, effectively enfolding Hong Kong cinema within the daily patterns of women's lives.

[3.8] Particularly outside urban areas, the inclusion of Hong Kong films among the rental offerings of a given shop was often random and unpublicized; as such, women's rental of such films was also frequently happenstance. As self-described fan Mari Shimamura wrote in the 1998 mook (magazine/book), *Mōsō tengoku* (Fantasy paradise),

[3.9] Suppose you, who have always hated Hong Kong films without seeing them (or completely disregarded them), reach out for the first time to pick up a film by Wong Kar-wai from the video rental shop...By the time
you've thought, "[That actor] has a certain coolness that Japanese don't have," it's all over. Even while its appeal is still unclear, you find yourself returning day after day to the 'Asia Corner' of the video store. (Shimamura 1998, 52)

[3.10] Despite the apparent randomness of such encounters, organization within video rental shops frequently reflected women's star-centric interests. While Japanese video rental shops of the 1980s and 1990s employed the same general organizational structure as their American counterparts, within specific genres (drama, horror, action) the films of popular performers and filmmakers were often grouped together where critical mass allowed. Between 1988 and 1997, Hong Kong films migrated throughout the organizational hierarchy of Japanese video stores, positioned first within an anonymous mass of genre offerings and gradually coalescing into a coherent Asia category organized by star. For example, in the case of Chow Yun-fat, cult action films such as A Better Tomorrow, City on Fire (1987, dir. Ringo Lam), and The Killer (1989, dir. John Woo) eventually came to stand alongside other films of Chow's oeuvre: the drama Love Unto Waste (1986, dir. Stanley Kwan), the romance Dream Lovers (1986, dir. Tony Au), and the A Better Tomorrow parody, The Romancing Star (1987, dir. Wong Jing). In fact, this breadth of work was an intrinsic part of the Hong Kong star system of the 1980s and 1990s, designed to capitalize on a relatively limited number of stars in such a way that they appealed to every imaginable demographic. Within the Japanese context, the malleability of star personae characteristic of Hong Kong cinema afforded star-centered Japanese female fans a way of sampling a wider variety of films than in markets where it was defined almost wholly as martial arts and action films. Nonetheless, such sampling was heavily circumscribed by what Japanese video distributors chose to market, ultimately leading fans to alternative avenues of media circulation.

[3.11] When both official and bootlegged VCDs supplanted VHS as the preferred method of aftermarket film distribution in Hong Kong, their light weight, standard CD size, and digital formatting made them an ideal medium for transnational circulation. VCDs were a technological precursor to DVDs, brought to the market in 1993 by Japan's Sony and Philips corporations (Wang 2003, 50). In Japan, they were a technology catering mainly to early adopters; players were commercially available, but primarily in the electronics districts of Tokyo's Akihabara and Osaka's
Den-Den Town. Yet as Jakob Nobuoka observes, Akihabara and Den-Den Town historically have been sites heavily coded as masculine through both the preponderance of computing and audiovisual hardware, as well as the ubiquity of "sexist and misogynistic [images], many of which amount to forms of pornography" (2010, 213). In this sense, Akihabara and Den-Den Town are akin to those twilight zones of cult consumption from which, as Hollows writes, women are excluded by design. Moreover, while commercial VCD software was available in more mainstream outlets, it was content rather than availability that discouraged its consumption by women in Japan. Anime, racing/car footage, and pornography constituted the vast majority of VCD software production in Japan, its low cost making the format suitable for such niche markets. Thus, in Japan VCDs were an implicitly masculine technology for which women had little need and which did not circulate within their own media landscapes.

[3.12] Nonetheless, on the back page of the October 1996 issue of Hong Kong Stars News, the media and star paraphernalia catalogue of specialty mail-order company Nishimoto Shōji (Nishimoto Trading), an in-house advertisement for the Sony VCP-S50 VCD player declared:

[3.13] From now on it is the age of the video CD. With their compactness and clear picture quality, they archive [media] eternally. For those of you who haven't been able to buy video CDs because you didn't have a player, let us introduce you to a veeery special [item]. We're offering a player that will bring the enjoyment of watching movie videos on a CD-sized disc closer to you! (Hong Kong Stars News, vol. 14, 1996, 12) (note 4)

[3.14] Given that VCDs were an intermediary technology bridging analog and digital video through low-resolution Mpeg-1 encoding, this was something of an overstatement designed to sell players that, if not as expensive as still-evolving DVD hardware, were nevertheless not cheap. Moreover, despite the ubiquity of VCD media in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian markets (Curtin 2007, 80–83), their relative obscurity in Japan made VCD players a niche item that could not be justified as a household purchase. In thus appealing to readers' desire to both see and own Hong Kong films unavailable in the mainstream Japanese media market, invoked particularly through enticing images of VCD cover art that punctuated the
pages of their monthly catalogs, Nishimoto Shōji presciently capitalized on the intersection of new technology and fans' affective desire for greater intimacy with favorite stars. In this sense, through their peripheral consumption of VCDs and their playback devices, female fans themselves entered into a materially and culturally peripheral subjectivity that intensified their sense of intimacy with Hong Kong stars, one that was at once cult and transcultural.

[3.15] Parenthetically, fans' domestic consumption of VCDs also signaled a convergence of family and fannish identity that seems nearly antithetical to the ways we have come to talk about women's media consumption in the home (note 5). In a 1997 fan letter to Nishimoto Shōji's monthly *Hong Kong Stars News* catalog, a Yokohama woman described her acquisition of a VCD player, writing,

> [3.16] I have finally obtained a VCD player for my home. Until now, I watched [movies] on my personal computer, but they just aren't the same on a small screen. Nonetheless, since it's just for my own enjoyment (here, the only software available is anime and X-rated...), I thought it was a little too expensive and didn't tell my husband that I wanted a player. But after seeing me look through the catalog at the end of every day, he just said, "If you want one that badly just buy it; in return, order me some Vivian or Rosamund VCDs." Without my knowledge, my husband had gotten into Hong Kong movies...now we watch Hong Kong films together every night...Isn't the good thing about video that you can watch just the good parts over and over? If you don't grasp everything on the first go, as you watch it again and again you start to figure out what's happening. (And every time you watch it, it's fun to discover new things.) My seven-year-old daughter is completely unable to read subtitles, but she manages to figure out the story and has fun watching. (S.K., *Hong Kong Stars News*, vol. 25, 1997, 12)

[3.17] While by no means a universal phenomenon, for some women fannish activities were facilitated by what Matt Hills has called the "tacit legitimation" (2002, 87) of family members. One Hokkaido woman concludes a detailed description of her 2-day trip to Tokyo for the purpose of attending Leslie Cheung's 1997 World Tour concert with thanks to "my husband, who sent me to Tokyo with money to spend, and to my three children, mom, and grandmother, who held down the fort
while I was gone" (160). Another writes of her mother and sister, "On a trip to China, they spotted a coat hanger with a picture of Jacky Cheung on it at a silk factory (in Huaxi Village), and asking for it as a souvenir for me, they were told 'No one has ever asked to have anything like that before,' as all the factory workers came to point and stare at the 'stupid Japanese.' Today, Jacky Cheung hangs in my closet wearing my overcoat" (K.K., Hong Kong Stars News, vol. 22, 1997, 12). Similarly, a Wakayama woman writes,

[3.18] Did everyone know there are star homepages on the Internet? (Did you know? Am I the only one who didn't know?). There was a very detailed article about the Internet in the monthly Honkon Tsūshin with a column of the homepages of famous stars. Imagine my happiness when I saw Jet Li's name! My heart danced when my son (a high school senior) agreed to my entreaties to access his page in exchange for a promise to raise his allowance. There was so much information there! (K.M., Hong Kong Stars News, vol. 18, 1996, 10)

[3.19] While a patriarchal hierarchy yet underlies the permission needed to attend a concert, or the gendered technological competence required in 1996 to access a webpage on the Internet, these anecdotes share in common a sense that women are participants in, not victims of, domestic life, a stark contrast with two-dimensional notions of marriage in Japan (or elsewhere) as a wholly patriarchal institution within which the wishes of wives are subordinate to those of husbands.

[3.20] VCDs also contributed to fans' sense of transcultural intimacy with Hong Kong stars in one other critical way. As an inexpensive media targeted at local and diasporic Chinese audiences of Hong Kong cinema, VCDs were subtitled in Chinese and, frequently, English of varying qualities. In this sense, Japanese fans arguably were disadvantaged within the transnational VCD market. Yet the use of dual subtitles on VCDs in fact prompted fans to draw on their knowledge of Chinese characters, from which written Japanese derives, and their limited English reading ability to decipher on-screen action and dialogue. Such reading strategies served to naturalize spoken Cantonese for fans; as Hosoda Seiko writes in her fan memoir, Yume miru Honkon (Hong Kong dreamland), "These days, because I watch too many Hong Kong films and listen to too many Cantonese tapes...even Japanese has wound up sounding like Cantonese. It's even occurred to me that Japanese sounds
a bit like Cantonese. Not so much in the pronunciation, but maybe in the intonation? Somehow, when I hear them, I've started to be unable to tell the difference" (1999, 42–43). The slippage between written Japanese and Chinese, coupled with fans' reliance on foreign-language rather than intermediating Japanese subtitles, encouraged fans' use of Chinese film and popular cultural terminology. Among these was the Chinese written word for movie, dianying, pronounced den'ei in Japanese and connoting a vague Chineseness analogous to the use of European terminology to convey a certain cinephilic sensibility in the English-language context. Such use of Chinese terminology, in fact, had precedents in a vast body of Japanese critical writing on Hong Kong and other Chinese cinemas, and its mobilization by fans signified an alternative enculturation within Hong Kong popular culture.

[3.21] More specific to fans, however, was the use of linguistic overlap between written Chinese and Japanese to naturalize and claim ownership of stars. This was effected both through the adoption of native Cantonese nicknames for certain stars (Gorgor [elder brother], for Leslie Cheung, and Wahjai [Little Wah], for Andy Lau Tak-wah, for example), as well as the Japanization of Chinese names (such as Gakuyū for Jacky Cheung Hok-yau, or Koharu for Jordan Chan Siu-chun, both of which derive from the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters comprising their given names). In his work on language performativity in transcultural hip-hop cultures, Alastair Pennycook argues for the consideration of "the ways by which transgressive meaning-making (writing on the walls of the city, mixing languages, sampling sound texts, walking the walk, wearing the clothes) may be seen not so much as adding meaning-making practices to a pre-existing language but rather as a performative making of meaning across many sites" (2007, 50). In the context of the female fandom of Hong Kong stars, this perspective allows us to understand fans' uses of Chinese terminology not as linguistic appropriation or misuse, but as a transculturally inflected mode of fanspeak that contributed to the formation of fans' trans-cult-ural subjectivity.

4. Towards a trans-cult-ural subjectivity

[4.1] While VCD and music CD acquisition was key to the circulation of Hong Kong star oeuvre among Japanese female fans, the act of buying them was easier said than done. As one Sapporo-based fan asked in a letter to the editors of Honkon
den’ei jō 3 (Hong Kong Movie Castle 3),

[4.2] Where does everyone see movies that haven't been released in Japan? In Hong Kong? I'm sure that there are cheap tours there from Tokyo, but...There's no Chinatown in Sapporo. And, of course, there are no video shops aimed at Chinese people here in Sapporo. You can hardly find CDs, and [in order to find] movies I have many member's cards [to video rental shops]!! Depending on the store, they sometimes organize by actors, and [once] when I saw "Andy" I cried out, "Ho ye!" But it was "Garcia." (Tōmon et al. 1998, 223) (note 6)

[4.3] Particularly for fans outside of Japan's urban centers, obtaining Hong Kong media required the expansion of fans' geographical repertoires to encompass not only local and area resources but also distant cities and even Hong Kong itself. In this way, alternative sites of Hong Kong media procurement also were critical in producing a transcultural fan subjectivity that drew as much from affective pleasures of discovery and ownership as from the transnational locus of such activity.

[4.4] By the mid-1990s urban fans had access to a growing number of specialty shops that targeted the growing fandom of Hong Kong cinema and, in particular, stars. In Tokyo, the latter were represented not only by film distributor Prénom H's upscale Cine City Hong Kong but also by such shops as the abovementioned Jasmine Tea, which primarily sold music CDs and music video DVDs, and Cactus Club, an apartment-cum-retail establishment that sold imported star goods, fan-produced dōjinshi, and magazines from both Hong Kong and Japan that focused on Hong Kong and other East Asian stars. Additionally, intrepid fans made use of the resources of shops such as Chubun Shoten (Chinese Bookstore), which were tailored to the expatriate Chinese community. Osaka's China Center, Hong Kong King in Kobe, and Nishimoto Shōji in Fukuoka further contributed to the wider accessibility of officially distributed Hong Kong media outside the Tokyo metropolitan area. Together, such specialty shops supplemented the unevenly available Hong Kong film offerings of neighborhood video rental outlets with media imported from Hong Kong and even bootlegged in Taiwan. At the same time, they responded to fans' demands for other star-centered media and goods—music CDs, Chinese-language entertainment tabloids, promotional posters, star figurines, and bromide
(celebrity photographs)—as well as offering outlets for the sale of fan-produced dōjinshi. Through the increased availability of such products, fans' relationship to Hong Kong stars shifted from simple spectatorship to active consumption, which had the effect of intensifying fans' sense of ownership of and intimacy with them, even as this was mediated by Japanese marketers of Hong Kong products.

[4.5] Independent distributor Prénom H was among the earliest retailers of Hong Kong film-related media and goods in Japan, establishing a small shop called Honkon Den'ei Fune (Hong Kong Film Ship) in 1991 that sold Hong Kong videos and CDs as well as star paraphernalia (Shinohara 1998a). In 1994, it relocated to a larger space and reopened as Cine City/Cine City Hong Kong. Situated just off of Aoyama Boulevard in the exclusive Omotesando residential district, and advertising itself as "Japan's premier specialty shop" (Cine City advertisement 1997) for Hong Kong pop culture-related goods, Cine City Hong Kong (CCHK)'s location and polished interior design, as well as the indie/experimental bent of coterminous Cine City, advanced an urban cinephilic sensibility that was fully in the service of the fashionable Wong Kar-wai films that Prénom H then distributed. Given its affiliation with Prénom H, CCHK necessarily hewed closely to products that were officially licensed in Japan: not only its in-house line of Prénom H films, books, postcards, and posters, but also professionally subtitled film videos and laser discs distributed by competitor Japanese companies, Japanese-language books about Hong Kong cinema and stars, and magazines such as PopAsia and Asian Pops Magazine. CCHK was also, in its earliest incarnation, the sole Japanese outlet for commemorative programs of the Hong Kong International Film Festival.

[4.6] Both the HKIFF and its substantial printed programs have been described by Hector Rodriguez as one facet of a "reflectionist framework" within which Hong Kong "critics as cultural connoisseurs [on] a pedagogic mission" sought "to establish the artistic values of Chinese directors by erecting a corpus of canonical filmmakers and film texts that in their view demanded or deserved authorial interpretation" (2001, 57–62). In thus making these texts available to Japanese connoisseurs of Hong Kong cinema, Prénom H both reflected a local and contributed to a transnational discourse of Hong Kong art cinema that was a potent counterpoint to the attractions of its commercial film industry, an assertion of difference that belied the mainstream underpinnings of all but the most experimental Hong Kong cinema of the period.
Figure 2. Cine City/Cine City Hong Kong exterior. Cine City advertisement, 1997. [View larger image.]

Figure 3. Interior of Cine City Hong Kong shortly after its 1994 opening, on Fuji TV’s AsiaNbeat show (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3CGDa7rKgs). [View larger image.]

[4.7] At the same time, Cine City Hong Kong evinced a fan orientation in its limited selection of imported CDs and VCDs, Chinese-language magazines, and, in
particular, fan-produced dōjinshi. Moreover, by way of aligning both the shop and its ancillary fan organization, the Yumcha Club, with the broader female fandom of Hong Kong stars, Prénom H sponsored an award for fan-producers of Hong Kong popular culture-centered mini-comi (minicomics). As one of the oldest and most publicized specialty shops catering to Hong Kong films and stars in Japan, both CCHK and its smaller Osaka and Fukuoka branches, opened in November 1997, were an integral part of Japanese fans' introduction to the wider world of Hong Kong star fandom. Ultimately, however, the combination of Prénom H's narrow focus and emerging competitors, both in Japan and—particularly as online sales gained in popularity in the 2000s—overseas, diminished CCHK's overall appeal within a rapidly diversifying market for Hong Kong films and star goods.

[4.8] Following the opening of Cine City Hong Kong in 1994, other retailers soon materialized to compete for fan business. Like CCHK, shops such as Tokyo's Jasmine Tea and Cactus Club, as well as China Center in Osaka, conveyed specific fan sensibilities through their location, design, and merchandise, albeit to different effect than CCHK. Jasmine Tea was situated within the labyrinthine otaku paradise of Nakano Broadway Mall, located about 15 minutes by train from central Tokyo. A subcultural destination for not only Japanese but also overseas fans of anime and manga, Broadway contains three floors of shops selling everything from newly released manga and anime-related collectibles to cosplay clothing, vintage scripts, and animation cells. The mall opened in 1966 as an American-style indoor shopping arcade catering to local residents of Nakano Ward (http://www.nbw.jp/new/swf/hist/hist.html). In 1987, used manga retailer Mandarake established business within the now-aging Broadway complex, ultimately expanding both its space and operations to include sales of dōjinshi as well as manga and anime-related goods (http://www.mandarake.co.jp/en/shop/). Mandarake's presence within Broadway mall attracted similar alternative culture-centered establishments, effectively transforming the mall into an otaku space within which cult consumption was and remains the norm.

[4.9] In this sense, Jasmine Tea, with its bright lighting, laminate wood floors, tastefully designed kanban (signboard), and frequently older female clientele was something of an anomaly within a site that catered more to cutting-edge kids and middle-aged male otaku. Nonetheless, the ways in which it organized and displayed Hong Kong CDs and VCDs reflected the same expectation of fans' intimate
knowledge of both Hong Kong stars and their popular cultural habitus as Jasmine Tea's more cultish neighbors, making use of stars' Chinese-character (as opposed to transliterated) names and capitalizing on limited space by forgoing explanatory signage in favor of stocking merchandise in every available nook and cranny. In so doing, Jasmine Tea interpellated female fans as cult aficionados of Hong Kong media, enfolding them both literally and figuratively within an *otaku* habitus.

![Figure 4. Jasmine Tea interior. Richard Jeffery, 2008.](View larger image.)

![Figure 5. Jasmine Tea kanban and hallway display. Richard Jeffery, 2008.](View larger image.)

[4.10] Located in a repurposed apartment building on a side street of Tokyo's trendy Shibuya district, Cactus Club similarly evinced an expectation of fans' familiarity with Hong Kong stars born of limited room and an abundance of imported merchandise. In contrast with Jasmine Tea, Cactus Club was an explicitly female
space that resembled nothing so much as the bedroom of an avid collector of star goods. Teetering bookshelves and cheap laminate cubbies—each brimming with Chinese-language entertainment tabloids and books about Hong Kong stars—lined the walls of the store, encircling small tables and chairs that themselves overflowed with assorted star paraphernalia. Where bookcases could not reach, the walls were covered in Hong Kong star and film posters.

**Figure 6.** Cactus Club interior. Daijōbu Nikki, 2008. [View larger image.]

**Figure 7.** Cactus Club interior from the entrance. Daijōbu Nikki, 2008. [View larger image.]

[4.11] As described by one fan-blogger, the experience of discovering Cactus Club was akin to that of the cult fan chancing upon a rare object:

[4.12] When I first became obsessed with Leslie in '95, I heard about
Cactus Club in a book, identifying it by its small signboard down a murky corridor on the 2nd floor of a multi-tenant building. "Is this Chungking Mansions?" [I thought]. It had the air of one of Hong Kong's dens of vice, and as I opened the door with mounting trepidation, I discovered inside a small room with mountains of Hong Kong star goods—a real treasure chest—that was crammed with 2 or 3 customers inside.

(http://sangyafaailok.at.webry.info/200812/article_3.html)

[4.13] Indeed, much of the appeal of Cactus Club lay in just such acts of discovery. The shop made use of only the broadest of star-centered organizational systems, within which merchandise was to be rummaged through like an attic, the possibility of finding some Precious Thing always just under the next magazine or rolled up in the next poster.

[4.14] Osaka's China Center similarly capitalized on space, sporting not only steel shelves teeming with Hong Kong music CDs, VCDs, and Chinese-language books and magazines but also walls plastered in original Hong Kong film and star promotional posters for sale. Originally located in a converted concrete house on a back street near Osaka's Abenobashi neighborhood, which was undergoing a gradual process of gentrification in the late 1990s, the shop—unlike Jasmine Tea—did not derive any cultish capital from its environs; rather, it conveyed a sense of cosy cult through its domestic setting, enhanced by the store requirement that patrons remove their shoes and don house slippers while browsing merchandise. Equally, the daily presence in the shop of the Japanese proprietor and his Hong Kong-born wife, combined with the handmade quality of its marketing, communicated an intimate, female-friendly, fan-centered site for the consumption of Hong Kong media and star goods.
Figure 8. China Center exterior. China Center flier, 1997. [View larger image.]

Figure 9. China Center interior. China Center flier, 1997. [View larger image.]

[4.15] For some outlying fans, such specialty shops were a destination; as a fan of Taiwanese boy band F4 wrote on her blog upon hearing of China Center's closing,

[4.16] This was the first place where I was able to touch F4. I can still remember the excitement that I—a country fan who had never seen [idol] goods—felt when I entered the store. At that time, the shop was located near Tennōji Station in Abeno Marche. It was a small shop, but my first impression was "There are so many F4 things..." It was fun just picking them up and looking at them, and there were so many things I wanted...
my daughter, who was with me, was mortified. After that, I'd use the excuse of checking up on my daughter to go to Kyoto, and while there I always made my way to the store. (http://tosa-f4.jugem.jp/?eid=59)

[4.17] For other fans, both urban and not, the drive to consumption of Hong Kong media and star-related goods became the impetus for overseas travel to Hong Kong itself. Particularly given the substantial price markup of VCDs in Japan, where one popular retailer regularly sold licensed Hong Kong movies on VCD for ¥3,980/title (a 300 percent increase over Hong Kong prices), as well as the strong yen of the late 1980s–mid-1990s and the relatively low cost of travel from Japan to Hong Kong (Sakai 2003), repeat travel to Hong Kong for the express purpose of star-centered shopping became a common activity among fans. As self-described Hong Kong addict Mizuta Naho wrote in 1996,

[4.18] When Hong Kong entertainment fans travel to Hong Kong, they don't really run around buying up brand-name goods. Instead, their goal is to pick up CDs that are half as expensive as in Japan, videos and LDs of films that haven't been released in Japan, idol albums and photographs; even more, connoisseurs corner the market on film and music specialty books at bookstores, and run around searching for out-of-print used records on Cat Street. I even have friends who regularly exceed economy class luggage weight restrictions by 10 kilos (that is, 30 kilos!) suitcases full of CDs. In fact, this is a different pattern of activity than that of regular tourists. Sometimes [fans] head towards the "weight-reducing soap," but only if it's on their way to someplace else. (86)

[4.19] Sarah Chaplin observes that buildings with a mainstream popular culture orientation generally align with "'high' Japanese architecture" that privileges the use of marble, glass, stonewall, and, more recently, cast concrete in the creation of an antimodernist aesthetic (2007, 84). In contrast, Broadway Mall in Nakano, Cactus Club's Dynast Building, and the converted house in which China Center was originally located were all, by the 1990s, several decades old, utilitarian in design, and wholly lacking in the light airiness of more contemporary urban commercial spaces. Thus, while not quite the twilight zones of cult fandom, these spaces were nonetheless materially peripheral to mainstream sites of consumption, which in turn contributed to the production of a fan subjectivity that was equally peripheral to
more mediated modes of star fandom in Japan. Moreover, the limited resources of space that characterized these specialty shops mirrored those of Hong Kong's Oriental 188 Shopping Centre and Sino Centre, both of which housed Hong Kong star and Japanese anime/manga-related specialty shops. In this sense, the expectation of fans' recognition of Chinese names and media titles resulting from, among other things, the lack of space for clear organization and explanatory signage in Japanese stores translated to an emergent, transcultural familiarity with the Chinese contexts of star-centered commerce.

[4.20] Through domestic travel to urban specialty shops in Japan and overseas travel to Hong Kong itself, as well as the use of mail order to obtain Hong Kong star-related media and goods, Japanese women became participants in a translocal marketplace that circumvented the narrow Japanese distribution of Hong Kong films. Articulated with the cult-inflected fan subjectivity produced by such sites of alternative consumption, this marketplace effectively mobilized the "emotional energies [that] travel across cultural boundaries" (Ma 2002, 133) in the transcultural reimagination of Japanese women's roles as media consumers.

[4.21] I have attempted to demonstrate how the specific confluence of Japanese women's interest in, and desire for intimacy with, Hong Kong stars in the 1980s and 1990s and the contemporaneous emergence of new, transnationally circulating media technologies engendered a fannish subjectivity that was at once transcultural and trans-cult-ural. Situated between both the official entertainment worlds of Hong Kong and Japan as well as gendered fannish subjectivities, this trans-cult-ural fandom for years elided the understanding of a Japanese media industry whose marketing of foreign stars was and remains predicated on their difference from Japanese entertainers. It enfolded Japanese fans, imperfectly, within the popular cultural practices of another place, and in this way it offers an alternative means by which to conceptualize how media circulate and thrive both transnationally and transculturally. It would be easy to understand or even misunderstand this phenomenon as an isolated case within the broader context of Japanese fandom. But the ways in which present-day star fans make use of online platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr to exchange real-time information and images of stars with other fans around the globe, often regardless of attempts to mediate this flow on the part of the mass media and marketers, suggests that it is but one iteration of a periodically occurring perfect storm of affective investment and the technological
means to pursue it across geographical borders that together constitute one critical facet of transcultural fandom.

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6. Notes

1. All translations are mine. Japanese names are given in Japanese order (surname first) except where an alternative precedent exists. Photographs are used by permission.

2. Grandma Komori (Komori no obāchama) was the nickname of film critic and TV personality Komori Kazuko (1909–2005).

3. Golden Week refers to four nearly consecutive holidays spanning the end of April and the beginning of May.

4. As advertised by Nishimoto, a discounted VCD player could be bought for ¥33,000 (US$275), compared with ¥68,000 (US$567) for the Pioneer DVL-9 DVD player, also retailed by Nishimoto.

5. Anglophone research on women's practices of media consumption within the home historically has centered on a binary between submission to and subversion of gender expectations, in which more time-consuming, invested fandoms constitute the greatest challenge to patriarchal institutions, articulating suppressed "dissatisfaction, longing, and protest" (Radway 1984, 138) over the less than ideal conditions within which women conduct their lives. See, for example, Janice Radway, Reading the Romance (1984), Ann Gray, Video Playtime (1992), and Camille Bacon-Smith, Enterprising Women (1992).

6. Ho ye is a Cantonese colloquialism meaning "great."
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