Transnational Film and the Politics of Becoming: Negotiating East Asian Identity in Hong Kong Night Club and Moonlight Express

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Cultural Transnationalism in the East Asian Context

Recent years have witnessed the growth of a body of literature concerned with what Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu has termed “Chinese cinemas,”1 sparked by the increased international visibility of films from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and characterized by an emerging interest in the ways that such works negotiate both “the triumphantly universal and the resiliently particular”2 in their unique situatedness within both regional Chinese and global media markets. In the context of the 1997 return of Hong Kong to mainland China, this emphasis has engendered significant critical attention to issues of local Hong Kong identity within a dramatically altered political, social, and cultural climate, represented by two discursive trends that at once implicitly and explicitly reference 1997 as the seminal turning-point of Hong Kong’s media industries.

The first of these discourses reads 1997 as an ambiguous end-date, with critics such as Stephen Teo arguing the “end of Hong Kong cinema”3 through his observation that recent developments, both economic and industrial, “appear...to signal the closing of an era and the beginning of the age of uncertainty.”4 Teo describes Hong Kong films as embodying specific local aesthetics and industrial practices that have gradually come to constitute it as a discrete regional (in the absence of the national) cinema; against this, 1997 is characterized as an indistinct threat to Hong Kong’s precarious local (cultural) identity, sandwiched between the hegemonic forces of both colonial Great Britain and communist China.

Ackbar Abbas similarly theorizes Hong Kong within the context of 1997, describing it as “a culture of disappearance”5 in which any potential for a “new Hong Kong subjectivity”6 is (paradoxically) predicated on its “recogni[tion of] a politics of disappearance.”7 That is, where Teo goes to pains to situate Hong Kong culture within its historical contexts, Abbas argues that this history is itself problematic, contingent on memory -- with all the slippage that this entails -- and “posited on the immanence of its disappearance.”8 The possibility of a future Hong Kong identity, Abbas suggests, is thus dependent on “the very process of negotiating the mutations and permutations of colonialism, nationalism, and capitalism” in a process of creating a “subjectivity that is coaxed into being by the disappearance of old cultural bearings and orientations.”9 Yet, as in the case of Teo, this “disappearance” is rooted in an understanding of 1997 as the ambigu-
ously threatening defining moment of both past and future Hong Kong identity. Indeed, in his characterization of mainland China as “alien,”

16 hopelessly different from Hong Kong in its economic and political “achronicities,”

11 Abbas implicitly highlights the Cold War paradigm that characterizes this discursive trend, with China invariably cast in the role of a culturally and socially repressive force uneasily juxtaposed against a delicate (or, in Abbas’s argument, always already nonexistent) Hong Kong identity.

12 In contrast, a second discourse seeks to recover a post-1997 future for Hong Kong cinema through its attention to issues of transnational media flows between both “competing national/local Chinese cinemas,”

13 as well as East-West media industries. One notable example of such work is Lu’s anthology, *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender,* in which issues of historical continuity in Hong Kong -- and other -- Chinese cinemas are addressed through a project of “re-viewing and revisiting...the history of Chinese ‘national cinemas,’ as if to read the ‘prehistory’ of transnational filmic discourse backwards.”

14 Within this discourse, 1997 is understood as less of a threat to local Hong Kong identity than as a turning point in a long history of regional Chinese relations, with Hong Kong “revert[ing] to its ‘motherland,’”

15 becoming “once again part of the Chinese nation.”

In the specific context of media relations, such work avoids scapegoating mainland China in the context of the 1997 handover, instead focusing attention on the “long tradition of communication and cooperation between China and Hong Kong, between Hong Kong and Taiwan, and between Taiwan and the mainland.”

16 Contrasted with the somewhat retrogressive read of 1997 by critics such as Abbas and Teo, the emphasis here on the specific historical and cultural underpinnings of past, present, and even future Hong Kong cinemas appears comparatively more forward-looking: yet, this discourse also is not without its shortcomings. Specifically, to the extent that media transnationalization in the Hong Kong context is imagined as always involving either a more diasporic, albeit still-reified, notion of “Chineseness,”

17 or East-West film industry intersections

18 that similarly invoke a binary (rather than negotiation) of “sameness and difference,”

19 this discourse ultimately is contingent on national and cultural boundaries that confound its otherwise noteworthy attempts to address Hong Kong -- and other -- cinemas within their transnational contexts.

Neither of these discursive approaches is fundamentally flawed; indeed, read together, they highlight two specific issues that must be considered in any theory of Hong Kong cinema as it relates to questions of identity: the need, as argued by Abbas, to consider Hong Kong identity in terms of its present indeterminacy, and, as urged by Lu, the concomitant necessity of understanding any future Hong Kong identity within its broader historical and cultural contexts. Considered from the perspective of media studies, what is necessary is a theory of cultural transnationalism, in which the transnational is distinguished from the

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“global” in its embodiment of these dual concerns with reconceived future, and nationally-bounded past, identities. That is, cultural transnationalism might be defined as a site (both temporal and spatial) of negotiation between potential “multiple identities and the decentering of the social subject,” on the one hand, and the inevitable tug of historically and culturally situated local identities that check the utopian urge of such possibilities, on the other. In this sense, cultural transnationalism becomes a space for the rehearsal of post-national identities, in which the past is mediated to future purposes.

To the extent that both pre- and post-handover Hong Kong cinema has been characterized by an ambiguous identity politics, literally caught between sovereign nations in its search for new local subjectivities, it can be considered one of the most potent examples of this kind of cultural transnationalism. Yet, particularly in the post-handover period, this concern with local identity is but one aspect of a more multifaceted cultural transnationalism embodied in Hong Kong cinema, in which future identities are being considered not only at local, but also regional, levels. Through their analyses of emerging pan-Chinese cinemas, critics such as Lu, Esther Yau, Allen Chun and others have begun to address the ways in which such identities are being negotiated within regional contexts; yet, there remain unexplored transnational sites in which the regional is not necessarily implicated in redefined notions of “Chineseness,” but which, instead, suggest even broader possibilities for the configuration of East Asian identities. One particularly intriguing example is embodied in the proliferation of Hong Kong-Japanese film co-productions, the products of not only Hong Kong, but also Japanese, questions of future identity within a wider East Asian regional sphere. Characterized by not only these thematic concerns with identity, but also growing industrial and financial cooperation between Hong Kong and Japanese filmmakers, such works offer a productive counterpoint to discussions of Hong Kong cinema within both Chinese and East/West contexts, contributing nuance to the ways that cultural transnationalism may manifest itself in the negotiation of alternative identities.

Two films are particularly representative of the turn to East Asia manifest in recent Hong Kong-Japanese co-productions: Watanabe Takayoshi’s Hong Kong Night Club (Honkon daiso yakai/Xianggang dazong yehui, 1997) and Daniel Lee’s Moonlight Express (Mo ichido aitakute/Xingyue tonghua). These films -- each set in Hong Kong and marketed to both Japanese and Hong Kong audiences -- embody the specific concerns of a redefined cultural transnationalism in their negotiation of future East Asian identities within in the context of specific historical and cultural pasts. Moreover, they contribute to the discussion of East Asian cinematic identity questions of Japan’s historical role in Chinese/East Asian cinemas, as well as nuancing critiques of the homogenizing effects of Japanese popular culture in local Asian markets through their negotiations of the tension between similarity and difference in the context of a (re)emerging Japanese aware-
ness of its own Asian identity.

Japan in Hong Kong/Hong Kong in Japan

Recent transnational film collaborations between Hong Kong and Japan are particularly striking when considered against the backdrop of historical cinematic relations between the two regions. Just prior to the onset of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, Hong Kong filmmakers turned to the production of Japanese resistance films such as Moon Kwan’s Resist! (Dikang, 1936) and the Hong Kong film industry collaboration The Final Junction (Zuihou guantou, 1938), in which, despite officially neutral British relations with Japan, Japanese imperialist expansionism was obliquely condemned through stories of heroic opposition to an unnamed foreign aggressor. Hong Kong film production all but ceased with the invasion of Hong Kong by Japanese forces in December, 1941, and, following the Japanese surrender in 1945, memories of Japanese occupation of not only Hong Kong, but also mainland China and Taiwan, prompted a genre of war films in which the war served as both “a mere framework on which to hang such...movie plot elements as romance and action,” and as a more cathartic opportunity for filmmakers and audiences alike to confront wartime experiences at the hands of the Japanese.

Within the context of strong postwar anti-Japanese sentiment in Hong Kong, it is particularly interesting to note that this period also witnessed the first wave of Hong Kong-Japanese cinematic collaboration. Specifically, in the wake of increased international attention to such Japanese auteurs as Kurosawa and Mizoguchi, Japanese directors were hired by Hong Kong production companies seeking to capitalize on both Japanese technical expertise, as well as a somewhat paradoxical local interest in things Japanese. This period also saw the first transnational industrial collaboration between Hong Kong and Japan with a series of comedies produced by the Shaw-Cathay company MP&GI and Japan’s Toho studio in the 1960s. Featuring casts of both Hong Kong and Japanese actors such as You Min and Takarada Akira, these films achieved a certain popularity in Hong Kong, yet they were all but unknown in Japan. Indeed, in spite of Hong Kong and Japanese cinematic collaborations during the 1950s and 1960s, only three Hong Kong films were released in Japan prior to Bruce Lee’s posthumous debut in 1973: Zhu Shilin’s Sorrows of the Forbidden City (Qinggong mishi, 1948), Evan Yang’s Blood Will Tell (Haitanghong, 1954), and Li Hanxiang’s The Kingdom and the Beauty (Jiangshan meiren, 1958), released in Japan in 1953, 1957, and 1962, respectively. Japanese critic SatM Tadao has argued that the dearth of Hong Kong film releases in Japan prior to 1973 reflects the extent to which Japanese audiences were culturally ill-equipped to appreciate even the most spectacular Chinese films of the time; this lack of cultural understanding, I would further suggest, had its roots...
in Japan's postwar cultural turn to the West, revealed not only through the absence of Hong Kong films in Japan prior to the arrival of Bruce Lee, but also through Lee's early reception by older critics and audiences in Japan. That is, although Lee's films enjoyed spectacular success among Japanese audiences, critics of this success read in it signs of a degenerating Japanese audience. In particular, they compared Lee to suave French action star Alain Delon, Japan's reigning foreign action star at the time, disparaging the Chinese star for his raw lack of sophistication in the context of an implicit valorization of Western culture and aesthetics.

Although the subsequent Japanese popularity of Jackie Chan and, to a lesser extent, Michael Hui contributed to a reevaluation of Hong Kong stars and films within critical circles — particularly as they informed a nascent Japanese sense of Asian identity — it was not until the 1987 release of John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow* (*Yingxiong bense*, 1986) that Japanese discourses concerning Hong Kong films exhibited a noticeable shift in perception from one of ethnic "Chineseness" to one of Asian-style "cosmopolitanism." While comparisons of this and subsequent films of the Hong Kong New Wave with European cinema suggested the extent to which this turn was yet informed by "modern" Western aesthetics, it also gave rise to a new Japanese discourse of cinematic Asianization, in which locales such as Hong Kong were understood as being occupied with the same questions of non-Western, postmodern, and local/global identities as Japan. As Akira Tochigi notes:

> Since Western-style modernization began in Japan more than a century ago, the Japanese have struggled to seek their identity on Occidental lines. Admiring Western culture, they have neglected other Asian cultures or stereotyped them as cheap and underdeveloped....But certain realities have caused a questioning of such a position....In the context of this ideological shift [towards Asia], the popularization of Asian cinema mirrors a new Japanese stance in relation to other Asian cultures.

Thus, while the 1997 handover suggested to Western critics and commentators "the closing of an era and the beginning of the age of uncertainty," Hong Kong's own struggles with its post-1997 identity coincided with Japanese concerns about its future role as an Asian nation, the juxtaposition of which provided fertile ground for an emergent cultural transnationalism. Most recently, this turn has been embodied in an ongoing cinematic phenomenon of the late 1990s; namely, the rise of Hong Kong-Japanese film co-productions, in which Japanese and Hong Kong identities have been constructed not so much as distinct geographical and political entities existing outside of each other, but as coexistent locales within an amorphous and as-yet malleable East Asia.

*Hong Kong Night Club* and *Moonlight Express* together present a compelling example of the tensions between past history and future identity that characterize the central concerns of cultural transnationalism. Although both work through common tropes of nationhood, travel/migration, and gender in their ne-
gotiation of present and potential Hong Kong-Japan relationships, it is in their widely different approaches to these tropes, as well as the divergent conclusions each reaches concerning a future East Asian identity, that these films offer their most salient contributions to a better understanding of cultural transnationalism as a contested site of fluid identities.

Masculine Subjectivities and (Trans)national Identities in Hong Kong Night Club

Hong Kong Night Club was the product of profound Japanese ambivalence about the 1997 Hong Kong handover, characterized, on the one hand, by a tangible anxiety over Japanese (inter)national identity in the wake of a reconfigured Greater China, and, on the other hand, by a parallel vested interest in what a Japan-inclusive, post-colonial East Asian regionalism might entail. A confused comedy of errors, the film tells the story of a young Japanese photographer, Shibata (Katori Shingo), who accompanies seasoned tabloid journalist Tategami (Kishitani Goro) to Hong Kong for an expose on Triad drug activities. When the pair are caught witnessing a gang murder, Tategami forces Shibata to dress as a woman so they may pose as honeymooning Japanese newlyweds while attempting to secure a safe return to Japan. While in disguise, “Dutch” and “Maggie” inadvertently become stage performers in a local nightclub, where they meet aspiring Hong Kong singer Cora (Anita Yuen), prompting a series of sexual and romantic mix-ups through which ambivalence about Japan’s role within the East Asian sphere is enacted.

Released just prior to the July 1 handover, Hong Kong Night Club was targeted at both Japanese and Hong Kong audiences. Nonetheless, the film’s opening shot -- a close-up of a Japanese passport -- reveals its Japanese orientation, which is subsequently confirmed when Shibata, the film’s protagonist, confides to Tategami that this will be not only his first trip abroad, but his first trip to Asia. Hong Kong, as part of an outside “Asia,” is thus set apart from a geographically (and, by extension, culturally) bounded Japan, the filmic establishment of which runs counter to Japan’s historical role in Asia. Indeed, this idea of a discrete “Japan” is almost immediately challenged when, at the Tokyo airport, Shibata’s masculine identity is placed under siege by the amorous attentions of an obscenely stereotypically gay Tategami; when it is later revealed that Tategami also speaks fluent Cantonese and is conversant with local Hong Kong customs and culture, a connection is drawn between the loss of masculine subjectivity and that of a discrete national identity. Yet, it is the local configuration of Tategami’s transnational fluidity that marks both his gender and national ambiguity as threatening within the specific context of a newly redefined Greater China. That is, his identification with Hong Kong culture -- in spite of his Japanese nationality -- juxtaposed against his discomfiting, aggressive sexuality, serves

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to invoke Shibata’s/Japanese fears of the potential erosion of Japanese subjectivity within a China-centered East Asia.

If the Chinese-inflected regional identity Tategami represents evokes panic in the beleaguered Shibata, that suggested by Cora is somewhat less foreboding. Indeed, it is in the context of Cora’s besieged femininity that both contemporary mainland Chinese and historical Japanese prerogatives concerning a feminized Hong Kong are addressed: the object of Shibata’s own romantic interest, Cora is consistently equated with a Hong Kong vulnerable not only to mainland Chinese takeover, but also, synchronically, to past Japanese imperialism. Within this context, the film predicates any future regional affinity between Hong Kong and Japan on the resolution of such (historical) tensions. This is made particularly clear through a sequence towards the end of the film, in which Cora and Shibata (restored to a compromised masculine identity) visit a variety of Hong Kong sites that offer a stark contrast to the tourist-traps of the film’s opening scenes. The pair is pictured against the various backdrops of postmodern Hong Kong architecture as they fantasize about their bright, mutually-implicated futures: Cora as a famous singer and Shibata as the famous photographer who will one day return to Hong Kong to do her portrait. Here, the transnational couple is depicted as both young and equal, looking forward to the bright future promised by postmodern Asian cosmopolitanism.

Yet, the regional promise of this cosmopolitan future falters in the wake of Cora’s unsuccessful singing audition, where she is reminded that it is ultimately her femininity, rather than her talent as a performer, that is merchandisable; in other words, Cora’s failure thrusts her back into the world of gender/national hierarchies, in which the possibility of a utopian East Asian regionalism fades.

This tension between historical constraints and future possibilities inherent in the transnational encounter is revealed in a subsequent scene in which Cora
and Shibata discuss her future plans in the wake of her audition. Sitting together in an empty movie theater, a depressed Cora hands Shibata her cell phone number on a scrap of paper and asks him to call her from the lobby, explaining that she must tell him something that can only be expressed impersonally. Over the phone, Cora announces that she must become a “hostess” in a karaoke bar, and a shocked Shibata accuses Cora of forsaking her dreams of stardom, to which she retorts that his own imminent departure from Hong Kong is no different. That is, Cora accuses Shibata of abandoning their mutual dream of a shared future of cosmopolitan equality; as such, her only recourse is to a fate predetermined by gender/historical inequality. She ironically proposes that Shibata be her first customer, explaining in Cantonese, “They say Japanese men aren’t too big and they don’t take long...easy money...teach me how I should pretend to come.”

Here confronted not only with the anticipated future that awaits Cora/Hong Kong, but also with his/Japan’s own implied past objectification of its Asian “others,” Shibata uncomfortably hangs up the phone. A subsequent montage sequence, which crosscuts between a morose Tategami, reminiscing at various sites of Hong Kong’s “disappearance,” and Cora, made up in the style of a 1930’s Shanghai chanteuse -- situated within a Shanghai-style nightclub and singing Ye Lai Xiang -- reinforces the film’s equation of the handover with historical Japanese imperialism, further suggesting the extent to which Japan is irrevocably implicated in both the past and future of Hong Kong.

Their telephone exchange has the effect of at once castigating and reinvigorating Shibata who, recognizing his complicity in Cora’s subjugation, demands of Tategami one more day in Hong Kong in order to take a photograph that will ascertain future success “for Cora” as well as for him. Shibata’s renewed commitment to that future imagined by the pair on the streets of Hong Kong suggests the alternative possibility of a Japan-inclusive future regional identity, in which

Figure 2 Shibata and Cora gazing into the happy future

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the historical playing field is leveled through Japanese acknowledgement of its Asian past. Moreover, that this alternative identity includes not only Japan, but also a recovered “Greater China,” is suggested in the extra-narrative song sung by Katori, Yuen, and Kishitani throughout the film’s end credits sung in Mandarin to a Japanese SMAP-style beat.

Ultimately, *Hong Kong Night Club* stops short of a wholesale embracing of regional utopianism. Concluding with the trite epilogue, “Hong Kong will change but...Hong Kong is forever,” the film reassures (Japanese) viewers that change and continuity are two sides of the same coin, leaving open the potential for a return to Hong Kong without actually confronting the material difficulties inherent in any such return. Insofar as Shibata and Tategami do, in fact, return to Japan, the alternative identities proposed by the film’s narrative remain little more than hypothetical possibilities for the future. The film also serves to reinforce geographically-bounded, as well as gendered, national identities; that is, *Hong Kong Night Club* broaches the possibility of an East Asian regional identity, but ultimately leaves questions of its material viability unanswered.

**Gender, Hybridity, and Cosmopolitanism in *Moonlight Express***

As in the case of *Hong Kong Night Club*, Daniel Lee’s *Moonlight Express* was marketed to both Hong Kong and Japanese audiences; also like its predecessor, this film is clearly inscribed within a Japanese point of view. However, in contrast to the earlier film, this is made clear through not only the narrative structure of *Moonlight Express*, but also through its invocation of several familiar discourses surrounding Japanese female fandom of both Hong Kong movies and the film’s Hong Kong star, Leslie Cheung. Indeed, it is through the variety of associations between the film’s narrative and these discourses, as well as the relation of both to broader discourses of East Asian regionalism, that the film’s...
specifically future-oriented embodiment of cultural transnationalism is revealed. 

*Moonlight Express* is the story of a young Japanese woman, Hitomi (Tokiwa Takako), who is engaged to Tatsuya (Cheung), a Japan-raised Hong Kong Chinese. The couple has plans to move to Hong Kong so Tatsuya can begin work as general manager of a luxury hotel; however, on the eve of their departure, they are involved in an automobile accident that kills Tatsuya. A bereaved Hitomi decides to relocate to Hong Kong, where she takes up residence in the small apartment prepared for her by Tatsuya. While removing her fiancé’s belongings from his office one day, she bumps into Kar-bo (Cheung, in a dual role), an undercover detective who, fleeing from a botched meeting with an underworld boss, kisses Hitomi in an attempt to avoid discovery. Struck by his resemblance to Tatsuya, Hitomi later seeks out Kar-bo, and, following a series of misunderstandings and missteps, the pair initiates a romantic relationship distinguished by their mutual attempts to enter the other’s cultural and linguistic worlds.

Three specific discourses are invoked in the negotiation of Hong Kong-Japanese transnationality in *Moonlight Express*: gender, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism. In particular, instances of gender transgression are perhaps most relevant in setting the stage for subsequent discourses, insofar as they contribute to the construction of a Hong Kong imaginary as a site of fluid gender, and, by extension, national identities. That is, as Marjorie Garber notes in the context of transvestitism, the release from gender roles entails a “necessary critique of binary thinking,” revealing “space[s] of possibility” in which gender, sexual, and even national categorizations may be transcended in favor of “third” cultural, sexual, and transnational identities.  

It is in this sense that the film’s paratext of Cheung’s Japanese popularity is significant, insofar as it is characterized by his own gender ambiguity, as written

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through those cross-dressing performances in films such as *Farewell, My Concubine* and on the concert stage that inform his star persona as a whole. This is particularly the case in the Japanese context: indeed, as one Japanese fan notes, “The secret of Cheung Kwok-wing’s attractiveness comes down to his androgyny,” while another admires his “charm that overcomes age and sexual boundaries.” Thus, although *Moonlight Express* (mis)casts Cheung in the almost stereotypical role of a Hong Kong action hero, his depiction throughout the film as the object of a specifically Japanese female gaze -- often looked at by Hitomi in various stages of undress -- suggests the ways in which his star persona, as much as the character he portrays, inflects (Japanese) readings of the film. To the extent that such readings can be considered contingent on an understanding of Cheung’s disruption -- through his ambiguous sexuality -- of masculine subjectivity, they ultimately contribute to one aspect of the film’s negotiation of bounded identities in the transnational sphere.

This connection between Cheung’s own gender/sexual ambiguity and a more narrative negotiation of regional hybridity is reinforced through his dual portrayal of both the Japanized Tatsuya and Chinese Kar-boo, further marking the actor as a site of transnational fluidity. Yet, it should be noted that this particular fluidity exists within a specifically East Asian context, as revealed through an early scene in which Cheung’s Japanese popularity is implicitly contrasted against that of Hollywood stars: preparing for her departure to Hong Kong, Hitomi gives the parting gift of a cherished music box to an ebullient female friend, explaining that the box will grant wishes. Closing her eyes, Hitomi blissfully whispers “Tatsuya” as she cranks the small handle one last time. In contrast, her friend, the new gift in hand, also turns the handle, shouting “DiCaprio! I love you!” Here, the cultural choice between a physically and psychically distant West and an immediate and more familiar Asia is made clear, recalling even earlier Japanese discourses of Hong Kong stars in its negotiation of East-West desire, and it is in this sense that Hitomi’s choice of Asia, embodied in the transnational Cheung/Tatsuya/Kar-boo is of particular importance in contributing to the rhetorical strength of the film’s negotiation of a forward-looking regional identity.

As in *Hong Kong Night Club*, cosmopolitan Hong Kong, described in one Japanese women’s magazine as “the New York of Asia” and characterized by images of Hong Kong’s architectural (post)modernity, is similarly crucial in establishing the possibility of a future regional identity in *Moonlight Express*. Indeed, such cityscapes may be the seminal trope of Japanese visual discourses of East Asian regionalism, inasmuch as they elide issues of historical conflict through their very modernity. Within this context, it is significant that here, as well as in *Hong Kong Night Club*, it is amidst the city’s steely skyscrapers that a utopian future together seems most plausible. Thus are Hitomi and Kar-boo pictured walking along Hong Kong’s crowded streets, repeatedly framed, in shot after shot, against the backdrop of Hong Kong’s urban structures.

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Moreover, that this cosmopolitanism is not restricted to Hong Kong, but itself extends to an urban China, is suggested in a scene in which the couple escapes across the border to Shenzhen, in order to avoid Kar-bo’s capture by crooked police. It is here, in China, that the pair enjoys their first kiss, made significant in its recovery of a place for post-1997 mainland China within its definition of a future-oriented East Asian regional identity (of course, it should be noted that this recovery simultaneously suggests the extent to which any sense of a shared Chinese/Japanese identity is, perhaps, equally constrained by the “myth...of a common [cultural] history”).

That the solution to East Asia’s historical troubles comes packaged in the form of a particularly amnesiac cosmopolitanism seems troubling. As Hoiman Chan observes in his pessimistic depiction of Hong Kong’s “façade of cosmopolitanism”:

The passive and unreflective desire for the exotic, the chic, and fashionable -- for the “ins” and “outs” as defined someplace else in the world...The Hong Kong cultural world -- whether seen in consumerist, popular, material, or elitist terms - - is as a rule marked by the quick succession of fads and fashions, welding together somewhat arbitrarily the alleged latest trends in some legendary cultural capitals. This is certainly another distinctive mode of articulation in the problematic of internationalization, the mode that in fact endows Hong Kong with its prominent international, cos-mopolitan outlook.

Figure 5 Kar-bo and Hitomi on the town

In this sense, the anonymity of the cityscapes featured so prominently in both Hong Kong Night Club and Moonlight Express would seem to have been bought at the expense of local heterogeneity. Yet, the oddly homogenous Hong Kong culture posited here by Chan is belied not only by Teo’s convincing insistence on the strongly local inflection of Hong Kong cinema, but by scenes of Hong Kong life and culture peppered throughout Hong Kong Night Club and Moonlight Asian Cinema, Spring/Summer 2002
Express. Such scenes are clearly complicit in the “they-images” of the (imperialist) tourist gaze, particularly as they are played out as acts of looking at, rather than participating in, local culture. Yet, this complicity does not necessarily preclude their appropriation to more progressive ends. Indeed, if, as argued by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, practices of “transnational spectatorship can...mold a space of future-oriented desire, nourishing the imaginary of ‘internal émigrés,’ actively crystallizing a sense of a viable ‘elsewhere,’ giving it a local habitation and a name, evoking a possible ‘happy end’ in another nation,” then perhaps these various scenes of ahistorical cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and hyper-localized cinematic tourism, on the other, combine in always-fluid practices of transnational spectatorship towards the imagination, if not the material creation, of alternative future identities.

Conclusion: Utopian Futures and Historical Constraints

In the context of recent inter-Asian film industry cooperation, Japanese film historian and critic Yomota Inuhiko observes that

> Japanese participation in East Asian cinemas is likely to become even stronger in the first half of the 21st Century. We are on the brink of realizing a period in which neighboring countries, whose film industries have heretofore faced little other choice than the binary opposition of their indigenous cinemas set against the pressure of Hollywood films, may cooperate in the mutual creation of a cinema that transcends national borders.

The utopian promise of an East Asian cultural regionalism that Yomota’s assertion invokes is clearly manifest in such films as Hong Kong Night Club and Moonlight Express, themselves situated on the cusp of this anticipated regional film industry. Yet, the historical and local tensions that characterize the narratives of both films suggest the extent to which such a future must still be negotiated within the space afforded by a discourse of cultural transnationalism, in which local histories, identities, and cultures are understood as engaging with indeterminate futures for ascendancy. While attention to “national” film industries runs the risk of over-particularization, in which the always-already transnational nature of the cinematic medium is overlooked, the failure of theorists of transnational cinemas to fully interrogate the implications of historical tensions on possible future identities similarly highlights the necessity of such a site, if the theorization of future identities and cultures is to avoid simplistic equations of industrial cooperation with an imagined cultural and national parity. Indeed, although such a necessity is perhaps amplified through attention to the specific intersections of Japanese and Chinese film industries, it is no less relevant to the broader understanding of transnational cinemas, the very term implicitly marketing the presence of the national/local -- with its attendant histories and present situatedness -- within the promise of the transnational. Arjun Appadurai has argued, “The imagination has become an organized field of so--
cial practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (‘individuals’) and globally defined fields of possibility.”

Paraphrasing his assessment, I would suggest that one avenue of understanding the ways that these cinemas negotiate between future-oriented “sites of [utopian] agency,” on the one hand, and “glocally” constrained “fields of possibility,” on the other, is afforded in a redefined cultural transnationalism, in which the pull of the past and the promise of the future continually contend for control of (trans)national identities.

Endnotes


4. Ibid., 254.


6. Ibid., 11.

7. Ibid., 146.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Ibid., 11.

10. Ibid., 4.

11. Ibid., 6.

12. Particularly as read against the backdrop of hyperbolic press accounts of not only the handover, but also well-publicized cases of mainland “censorship” of films and other cultural products, this framework has the further effect of contributing to an erroneous impression that Chinese government interference has been largely responsible for recent problems in the Hong Kong film industry. In this sense, this discourse can be seen to work within an even broader discourse that implicitly appears to valorize reified understandings of Western “democracy” over Chinese “socialism,” reinforcing a particularly anachronistic binary of East vs. West that it ostensibly seeks to transcend.


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 2.

16. Yingjin Zhang, “Transnational Cinema: Mainland China, Hong Kong and


21. Although not specifically addressed here, the Japanese industrial role in Chinese cinematics transnationalism warrants further study; indeed, although critics often point to films such as Chen Kaige’s Farewell My Concubine as exemplary of pan-Chinese transnational filmmaking, almost no attention has been given to the material conditions of their production. In the case of Farewell My Concubine, post-production work on the film took place at Japanese facilities, with fourteen Japanese receiving production credit in the film, begging the question of the extent to which the film is perhaps more East Asian than pan-Chinese.


23. Ibid., 86.

24. Ibid., 90-93; Udagawa Koyo, “Eiga ni miru Honkon to Nihon no kankei” (The Relationship Between Hong Kong and Japan Through Movies), Kinema jumpo, 6 July 1996, 124-5. Udagawa offers an intriguing account of how these filmmakers managed to work within the strongly anti-Japanese climate of 1950s-60s Hong Kong: “Even before Inoue Umetsugu, there were two 1957 films directed by Wakasugi Mitsuo and photographed by Nishimoto Tadashi, one of which starred Ri Koran [Li Xiang-lan]. At about the same time as Inoue was working in Hong Kong, Nakahira Yasushi, Shima KMichi, Furukawa Takumi, Murayama Mitsuo, and others were also there...listed in the credits of their films by absurd-sounding Chinese names since...anti-Japanese sentiment was still strong. So, for example, as Nakahira’s given name was pronounced “Yasushi” in Japanese, his Chinese name was written “Yang Su-shi.” Shima Koichi was written “Shi Ma-shan,” or “Shima-san.” Furukawa Takumi was “Tai Ko-mei,” for “Takumi.” And Matsuo Akinori was “Mak Chi-wo”...the only person to be credited by his Japanese name was Inoue Umetsugu, which is perhaps proof of the success his Japanese films enjoyed in Hong Kong.” (124)
25. Foronoff, Silver Light, 92.
29. Kuroi Kazuo, “Kogyo-kai mo doragon no toshi datta” (Also a Year of the Dragon in the Entertainment World), Kinema jumpon, 15 January 1975, 92; Iida Tadashi, “Nihon ni okeru Honkon eiga no nagare” (Hong Kong Movies in Japan), Kinema jumpon, 15 March 1985, 44; Udagawa Koyo, “Burusu Rinoshutsugen kara henkan made” (From the Appearance of Bruce Lee to the Handover), Kinema jumpon, 14 March 1997, 106-7.
33. Teo, Hong Kong Cinema, 254.
34. Hong Kong Night Club was a collaboration between Nippon Television, Japan’s Amuse, and Hong Kong’s Golden Harvest; following the release of this film, Amuse and Golden Harvest established Golden Amuse with the aim of producing several romantic and musical features per year (“Sino-Japanese Film Talent Links Developing,” Screen Digest, February 1998: 41).
35. Such marketing is revealed in the film’s careful casting of stars well-known in both Japan and Hong Kong: the film’s Japanese performers, Katori Shingo (a member of the popular Japanese singing group SMAP) and Kishitani Goro both have been visible on Hong Kong television in Japanese import shows such as SMAPxSMAP and Tokyo Cinderella, while Hong Kong actress Anita Yuen achieved considerable popularity among Japanese audi-

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ences through her work in the Peter Chan Ho-sun film *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man*, as well as in Tsui Hark’s *The Chinese Feast*, both of which are visually referenced in *Hong Kong Night Club*.

36. In Japan, the Chinese song *Ye Lai Xiang* is generally associated with Man’ei star Ri Ko-ran (Li Xianglan), whose own complicities in Japanese pre-war and wartime cultural imperialism are well-documented (Shelley Stephenson offers a particularly useful account of the semiotics of Ri Ko-ran’s public image in ‘‘Her Traces are Found Everywhere’: Shanghai, Li Xianglan, and the ‘Greater East Asian Film Sphere’,” in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 221-245).

37. As with *Hong Kong Night Club*, casting was a significant factor in the film’s marketing to these audiences: Tokiwa Takako is well-known in Hong Kong for her Japanese television work, while Leslie Cheung enjoys a significant following among, in particular, Japanese female audiences. Moreover, his work in *He’s a Woman, She’s a Man* and *The Chinese Feast* serves as a tangible link between this film and *Hong Kong Night Club*.


39. Specifically, Cheung’s 1997 World Tour, which stopped in Tokyo and Osaka in both January and June, 1997, featured a controversial number, *Red*, in which he tangoed in red sequined high heels with his male choreographer.


41. This is particularly the case with Jackie Chan, whose earlier Japanese popularity was predicated on his being “more approachable than Western stars” (Sasaya Nanae, “Omowazu koe o dashite shimau hodo no migoto na ‘ugoki’” (Movement that Makes One Cry Out in Surprise), *Kinema jumpo*, 15 December 1984, 74-75.

42. “Honkon: Onna o maneku tabi” (Hong Kong: Trips that Invite Women) *Fujin Koron*, 22 March 1998, 129.


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