Returning to Asia

Japan in the Cultural Dynamics of Globalisation, Localisation and Asianisation

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in University of Western Sydney, Nepean

1999
PLEASE NOTE

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Declaration

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Summary of the thesis

This thesis explores the re-articulation of Japan’s cultural connections with Asia in the 1990s through popular cultural flows. This is a time when the ascent of Asian economic power has encouraged Japan to stress its Asian identity again, and the forces of media globalisation have facilitated intra-regional cultural flow in Asia. In this context, popular culture, particularly TV programmes and popular music, which arguably embody the ongoing formation of Asian cultural modernity through cultural indigenisation of Western cultural influence, has become a key site where Japan’s historically constituted ambivalent relation with other Asian nations has been newly articulated. I shall look at various facets of Japan’s ‘return to Asia’ through the analysis of Japanese discourses on its international cultural influence; through the empirical examination of the promotion, production and reception of Japanese popular music and TV programmes in East and Southeast Asian markets; and through the analysis of Japanese media representation of Asian societies and Japanese fans’ reception of Hong Kong popular culture. ‘Asia’ in the 1990s has evoked Japan’s repetitious nationalist desire for a trans-Asian expansion of its cultural imaginary. However, as popular cultural flows have made Japan’s encounter with Asia more immediate and concrete, Japan’s cultural nationalist project has been reconfigured within a transnational framework which increasingly capitalises on the regional cultural resonance in Asia. In the process, the asymmetrical power relationship between Japan and (the rest of) Asia and Japan’s condescending sense of being ‘in and above Asia’ have been renewed, ruptured and refracted in complex and contradictory ways.
Acknowledgment

So many people supported me in various ways writing up this thesis. I most thank Professor Len Ang for her always rigorous and productive criticisms and suggestions on my earlier drafts and her caring supervision. I also owe thanks to those who read and commented on my earlier draft such as Judith Snodgrass, Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Mandy Thomas and Shuhei Hosokawa; and to those who, with excellent editorial expertise, helped me improve my English expression such as Eduardo Ugarte, Roberta James, Adrian Snodgrass, Sandra Wilson, David Wells and David Kelly. My thanks also go to those who assisted my field work in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore; to mention just a few, Hara Yumiko, Adachi Miki, Kimura Akiko, Honda Shūrō, Yoshimi Shunya, Georgette Wang, Lee Tain-Dow, Su Yu-Ling, Grace Wang, Tanaka Akira and Yao Souchou. I also wish to thank to all the people who spared their precious time for my interview, as anonymously shown in Appendix A.

I am grateful that I received financial assistance from several institutions and organisations. My research was financially supported by a Nepean Postgraduate Research Award from the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. My field research was supported by a Toyota Foundation Grant 1996-1997. The School of Cultural Histories and Futures, University of Western Sydney, Nepean also supported field research as well as the copy-editing of the manuscript. In Singapore in January 1995, my research was conducted as a research associate of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. In Tokyo, the Institute of Socio-information and Communication Studies of the University of Tokyo and NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute generously allowed me to access their library resources.

My final thanks are given to my wife and daughter, Michiyao and Lina, who shared and endured frustrating years of doctorate candidacy. Hey, it’s over now!
Note on Japanese Names

This thesis follows the Japanese convention that family names precede personal names. However, the names of the Japanese authors of English language works (except translations) follow the English convention of the personal name preceding the family name (e.g., Kosaku Yoshino). Macrons are put on long Japanese vowels except in the case of place names (e.g., Tokyo), words commonly used in English (e.g., Shinto) and authors' names which usually appear without a macron in their English language works (e.g., Shuhei Hosokawa).
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Introduction:

Taking Japanese transnational cultural power seriously

This study was motivated by my sense of surprise and curiosity aroused in 1993, when I first heard and read about the recent international circulation of Japanese audiovisual popular cultural forms and the successful entry of Japanese cultural industries into booming East and Southeast Asian markets. I was surprised, not least, because Japanese cultural export to other Asian countries seemed to me a provocative and contentious issue in light of Japan’s colonialist past and lingering economic imperialism in the region. An argument for the lack of Japanese cultural influence in Asia was, in my perception, more sustainable. This perception goes together with a more generalised assumption that Japanese culture would not be accepted or appealing outside the cultural context of Japan. As a Japanese, I had implicitly accepted the idea of Japan as a faceless economic superpower: Japan has money and technology but does not have a cultural influence on the world.

My apprehension on the inherent tension of this paradox conforms with a rather common discourse on Japan which suggests that such a lack of cultural power confers upon Japan a curious ‘quasi-Third World’ status. Ōe Kenzaburō, a Nobel Prize winning Japanese novelist, once lamented the Japanese image of faceless economy, saying that: ‘You know why Honda is great. But we don’t care about Honda. We care that our cultural life is unknown to you’ (quoted in Bartu 1992: 189). Ōe (1995) expressed the discrepancy between economic power and cultural influence in terms of Japan’s ambiguous (‘aimaina’) identity in the world as it internalises and articulates both first-worldliness and third-worldliness. No matter how strong its economy becomes, Japan is culturally and psychologically dominated by the West. Edward Said (1994) makes a similar suggestion in Culture and Imperialism. Said refers to Masao Miyoshi’s (1991) remark on the impoverishment of Japanese contemporary
culture, arguing that:

Miyoshi diagnosed a new problematic for culture as corollary to the country’s staggering financial resources, an absolute disparity between the total novelty and global dominance in the economic sphere, and the impoverishing retreat and dependence on the West in cultural discourse. (Said 1994: 400)

For Said (1994: 399), Japan is ‘extraordinarily symptomatic’ of a distorted modernity which urges us to consider ‘how we are going to keep up life itself when the quotidian demands of the present threaten to outstrip the human presence’. Said’s evaluation of Japanese modernity is compelling indeed. What is no less remarkable, however, is the total absence of a consideration of Japanese imperialism/colonialism in his analysis of imperialism and culture. Said treats Japan predominantly as a non-Western, quasi-third-world nation which has been a victim of Western (American) cultural domination. Japan’s double status as an ex-imperial, lingering economic and, to a lesser extent, cultural power in Asia, on the one hand, and a culturally subordinated non-Western nation, on the other, disappears behind a totalised notion of Western global cultural power.

However, in the 1990s, the asymmetrical cultural relation between Japan and other Asian nations has come into renewed focus with the development of media globalisation. Along with the forces of media globalisation, the strengthened economic power of Asian countries has led to the intensification of media and cultural flows in Asian markets, dramatically increasing the circulation of Japanese popular culture in the region. Best illustrated by the emergence of pan-Asian satellite broadcasting, such as STAR TV in 1991, the idea of the actual and simultaneous reach of the same media products and popular culture in many parts of Asia has been an irresistible one for transnational media industries. Japanese cultural industries also have become more active in their efforts to penetrate the fast-growing Asian markets. Accordingly, the hitherto domestic-oriented Japanese cultural formation has turned more extroverted in the 1990s.

The recent development of Japanese audiovisual cultural export, particularly to
East and Southeast Asia, urges me to problematise widely held assumptions about the lack of Japanese transnational cultural power and to attend to the duality of Japanese cultural power relations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine Japanese transnational cultural power in light of intra-Asian popular cultural flows against the backdrop of the significant historical shift which has emerged in the 1990s. This moment can be described as Japan’s return to and reorientation towards ‘Asia’. Japan’s ‘return to Asia’, like Australia’s ‘Asianisation’ project (see Ang & Stratton 1996), has been driven by the rising economic power of several modernised Asian countries, but its impact is extended well into the cultural sphere. Japan began re-asserting its Asian identity in the early 1990s after a long retreat following the defeat of World War II. The cultural geography of ‘Asia’ has recurred to the Japanese national imaginary as Japan faces the challenge of (re)constructing its national/cultural identity in the era of globalisation.

Through an analysis of Japanese discourses on Japan’s popular cultural export to Asia and the empirical study of strategies used by Japanese cultural industries to enter Asian markets, as well as the asymmetrical bilateral consumption of Japanese and other Asian popular culture, I will show the various ways in which burgeoning popular cultural flows have given a new substance to the ambiguous imaginary space of ‘Asia’, with which Japanese intellectuals, cultural industries and consumers must come to terms (Mizakoshi 1998). A key concern of this thesis is how Japan has for the first time encountered other Asian nations as ‘modern’ cultural neighbours. Across the Asian region, vast urban spaces have emerged in the last few decades, where the experience of West-inflicted capitalist modernity has been indigenised in such a way that it is a source of the articulation of a new notional Asian cultural commonality. At the same time, in this emerging landscape of modern Asia, it will be argued, Japanese transnational cultural power, while admittedly subordinate to Western cultural hegemony, has been articulated and asserted precisely through its receptivity to, on-going cultural appropriation of, and negotiation with Western cultural influence.
Thus, in this thesis, I will attempt to elucidate that the transnational popular cultural flow has become a significant site in which Japan’s historically constituted relation with Asia is newly articulated in a time-space context where cultural similarity, developmental temporality and different modes of negotiating with Western cultural influences are disjunctively intermingled with each other.

Japan-Asia-the West triad

The relative lacuna of discussion on Japanese transnational cultural power in Asia is not simply contingent, but implicated in the shift in Japanese cultural orientation after World War II. To put it bluntly, the idea of Japan lacking in external cultural power has been collusive with a postwar strategy of constructing an exclusive and unique Japanese national identity. It is often argued that Japanese people themselves are reluctant to diffuse Japanese culture in the world, as Hannerz (1989: 67-8) argues:

[The Japanese . . . find it a strange notion that anyone can “become Japanese”, and they put Japanese culture on exhibit, in the framework of organised international contacts, as a way of displaying irreducible distinctiveness rather than in order to make it spread.]

Japan’s obsession with the uniqueness of its own culture has been widely observed in the popularity of Nihonjinron discourses (theories of Japanese and Japanese culture) which try to explain Japan and Japanese culture in essentialist terms (e.g., Mumper & Sugimoto 1986; Dale 1986; Beu 1987; Yoshino 1992). Japanese cultural practices and materials which have been internationally exhibited or represented in the global forum have been predominantly officially-sanctioned items of ‘traditional’ culture which have little to do with contemporary Japanese urban culture. ‘Traditional Japanese culture’ is a culture to be displayed in order to demarcate Japan’s unique, supposedly homogeneous national identity.

Many studies show that Japanese national/cultural identity has been constructed in an essentialist manner through its conscious self-Orientalising discourse, a narrative which at once testifies to a firm incorporation into, and subtle exploitation of, Western
Orientalist discourse (see Sakai 1989; Ivy 1995; Iwabuchi 1994; Kondo 1998). Japan is represented and represents itself as culturally exclusive, homogeneous and uniquely particularistic through the operation of a strategic binary opposition between two imaginary cultural entities, ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’. This is not to say that ‘Asia’ has no cultural significance in the construction of Japanese national identity. Rather, Hamnerz’s astute observation about Japanese national identity illuminates an historical rupture, brought about by the defeat of World War II, which dramatically changed Japanese cultural orientation from extroverted to introverted focus through the suppression of Japanese colonial connections with other Asian countries. In other words, the complicity between Western Orientalism and Japan’s self-Orientalism effectively works only when Japanese cultural power in Asia is subsumed under Japan’s cultural subordination to the West; i.e., when Japan’s peculiar position as the only modern, non-Western imperial/colonial power tends to be translated with a great skew towards Japan’s relation with the West.

While Japan’s construction of its national identity through unambiguous comparison of itself with ‘the West’ is a historically embedded project, Japan’s modern national identity has, I would argue, always been imagined in an asymmetrical totalising triad between ‘Asia’, ‘the West’ and ‘Japan’. It is widely observed that Japan and Asia tend to be discussed and perceived within Japan as two separate geographies, its inherent contradiction unquestioned. Japan is unequivocally located in a geography called ‘Asia’ but it no less unambiguously exists outside a cultural imaginary of ‘Asia’ in Japanese mental maps (e.g., Mizukoshi 1999:181-182; Ueda 1997: 34).¹ This points to the fact that ‘Asia’ has overtly or covertly played a constitutive part in Japan’s construction of national identity. While ‘the West’ played the role of the modern Other to be emulated, ‘Asia’ was cast as the image of Japan’s past, a negative picture which tells of the extent to which Japan has been successfully

¹ Murai et al. (1988) found in their survey of Japanese high school students that almost sixty percent of the respondents said that Japan is not a part of Asia.
modernised according to the Western standard (Tanaka 1993; Kang 1996). *Datsua nyūdo* (‘escape Asia, enter the West’) is a well-known late nineteenth century Japanese slogan which first articulated Japan’s will to become a modern imperial power, not to be colonised by the West through the effort of de-Asianisation. *Datsua nyūdo* signifies less an actual departure from an existing coherent entity of Asia than a process of fabricating essentialised, imaginary geographies of ‘Asia’, ‘the West’ and ‘Japan’ in the course of Japanese imperialist modernisation. Takeuchi (1993: 96-100, 278-285) argues that there were two major approaches to Asia in prewar Japan. One is *datsua* (‘escape from Asia’) and the other is *kōa* (expressing Asian solidarity in resisting Western imperial domination). Takeuchi (1993: 103) points out that the Japanese invasion of Asia was the ultimate point where the former absorbed and exploited the latter. In the process of Japanese imperial expansion, Japan was perceived to rise above other Asian countries and ‘Japan’ and ‘Asia’ became two separate entities in Japanese discourse. The binary oppositioning between ‘traditional’ or ‘underdeveloped’ Asia and the ‘developed’ West has been necessary for Japan to be able to construct its national identity in a modern and West-dominated world order. Japan has constructed an oriental Orientalism against inferior Asia (Robertson 1998a: 97-101).

However, the Japanese discursive construction of ‘Asia’ is marked by the impossibility of clear separation between Japan and Asia. As Stefan Tanaka (1993: 3) commented when discussing Japanese Orientalism in the early twentieth century, Japan’s ‘Asia’ poses an uneasy question of ‘how to become modern while simultaneously shedding the objectivistic category of Oriental and yet not lose an identity’. While an essentialist pan-Asianism had been expressed along with de-Asianisation since the late nineteenth century, the 1930s and 1940s particularly saw the passionate advocacy of pan-Asianist ideology by Japanese nationalistic thinkers, who understood the issue of ‘commonality and difference’ in Japan’s

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2 The most famous statement on the matter has been Okakura Tenshin’s ‘Asia is one’ (Okakura 1904; see also Ching 1998). I will discuss more about Okakura’s assertion in Chapter 6.
relationship to other Asian nations mostly in terms such as 'similar but superior' or 'in but above Asia' (see Tanaka 1993; Kang 1996). As the only non-Western imperial and colonial power which invaded geographically, racially and culturally contiguous Asian regions, Japan resorted to an ideology of pan-Asianism to camouflage its imperial ambitions. The idea of the Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, promulgated at the time, was a claim for an Asian solidarity based on an inherent 'Asian' bond able to counter Western evil.

The advocacy of cultural and racial commonality between Japan and other Asian nations naturally conferred upon Japan a mission to rid Asia of Western imperial domination and, itself, to civilise other Asians instead (Peattie 1984; Lebra 1975). Undoubtedly such a conception of its mission was highly motivated by Japanese anti-Western sentiment in response to the Western racist refusal to allow Japan to become a member of the Imperial club (Dower 1986). The assertion of Japanese cultural commonality with other Asian countries was necessary for any confirmation of Japan's superior position in the region, a confirmation which would sustain Japan's bid for the same status as that of Western imperial powers. At the same time, Japan's mission civilatrice in the region paradoxically confirmed its subordination to the West. Japan's claim of its superiority to other Asians was based upon its experience of quick, successful Westernisation (Duus 1995). Only submission to Western cultural power made it at all possible for Japan to differentiate itself from other 'backward' Asians. As I will discuss later, this issue of derived cultural superiority still lingers as a source of ambivalence which has long governed Japanese discourses on its relation with Asia.

Japan’s defeat in World War II and the subsequent American occupation drastically changed, even curtailed, Japanese cultural orientation towards other Asian countries.

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1 This was an ideology forged by Japanese academics in the 1930s and formalised in 1940. It attempted to conceive a coherent Asian space in order to counter Western imperial power. However, the unambiguous assumption of Japanese superiority in the sphere inevitably resulted in justifying Japanese imperialism in the region under the name of the solidarity and self-sufficiency of Asia and liberation from Western imperial power.
as a colonial power. The American vision of the cold war has deeply influenced the restructuring as well as the intellectual analysis of post-war Japan (Harootunian 1993; Ishida 1995). Attention has focused on Japan's cultural relation with 'the West', especially the United States, as Japan's most significant cultural other against which Japanese national identity has been constructed.

A glance at transformations in the meaning of the term, 'Japanisation', which articulates Japanese transnational cultural power, reveals a shift in Japanese cultural orientation. In prewar Japan, 'Japanisation' was articulated in the term *kōninka*, which means the assimilation of ethnic others (such as Ainu, Okinawans, Taiwanese and Koreans) into Japanese imperial citizenship under the Emperor's benevolence. 'Japanisation' also referred to the indigenisation and domestication of foreign (Western) culture. The famous slogan 'wakon yōai' ('Japanese spirit, Western technologies') exemplifies the latter usage. These two different meanings of 'Japanisation' – the assimilation of the colonised (Asians) into Japanese society and the indigenisation of Western culture – coexisted in prewar Japan (see Robertson 1998a: 89–138). After the war, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, the usage of the term, 'Japanisation', suppressed

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[^1]: Kawamura Minato (1992: 133), writing about Japanese prewar literature which depicted other Asian people in an Orientalist manner, argues that Japanese authors mistook Japanese military and economic superiority for cultural and racial superiority. Japanese Orientalism was, according to him, based upon a groundless conviction of cultural superiority over other Asians. Although it is true that Western Orientalism cannot be dissociated from its unambiguous military and economic hegemony, it can be argued that culture played a significant constitutive role in Western imperial expansion and colonisation of Others. As Thomas (1994: 2) argues: 'Colonialism has always, equally importantly and deeply, been a cultural process … Colonial cultures are not simply ideologies that mask, mystify or rationalise forms of oppression that are external to them; they are also expressive and constitutive of colonial relationships in themselves'. Japanese colonial power is instead interpreted as concerted and self-satisfied. Japanese dehumanising discourse on Asian others is not seen to be productive as an instrument of colonial domination. Kawamura seems to suggest that because Japanese cultural power is always secondary and borrowed from the West, Japanese Asian colonies could not be regarded less civilised than Japan itself, especially in light of a long-standing Chinese influences across the region, including Japan (see also Komagome 1996).

[^2]: Needless to say, this process is not unique to Japan. We can find dual meanings in 'Americanisation' too. As Ewen and Ewen (1983) argue, Americanisation was originally about the assimilation of immigrants into the American melting pot through the spread of consumer culture. This mode was expanded internationally since the 1920s. The spread of American style consumption and American media products became the most familiar usage of 'Americanisation'. The meaning of any 'nationalisation' includes internal assimilation and external domination, both of which are necessary to the construction of imperial nationhood.
its prewar meaning of assimilation of Asian others and focused on the Japanese indigenisation or domestication of Western (primarily American) capitalist consumer cultures. The term used to express the process of indigenising the foreign (the West) has changed from 'imitation', which connotes Japan's inferior status, to 'domestication' or 'appropriation', which emphasises the active agency of the Japanese (see Tobin 1992). Japanese cultural capacity is conceived, if at all, as its introverted urge to counter external dominant Western cultures.

As what Harootunian (1993) calls 'America's Japan' has long governed Japan's vision of itself, Japan's connections with 'Asia' has been truncated in various ways. The most notorious is Japan's avoidance or refusal to take responsibility for its part in the war and its inability to offer an official apology and compensation for its victims. Japanese cultural introversion after the war was accompanied by Japan's project of forgetting its imperial history, of burying in oblivion the fact that Japan did try to force its colonial subjects to become Japanese as part of its assimilationist colonial policy. As Gluck (1993) argues, Japan has long been imprisoned within a never-ending 'postwar' which is mainly constructed by its relation to the United States. Its war memory has been persistently imagined in terms of its own victimhood. Japan's conception of 'postwar', which negates continuity with the past, made it possible for Japan not to face seriously the aftermath of its own imperialist violence in the former colonies and occupied territories.

Under the umbrella of American global power, Japanese interest in and connection with Asia in the postwar period has not just tended to eschew East Asia, which had previously been the main region for Japanese imperial expansion, but also focused on the economic aspect. Here, the issue of Japan's war compensation for Asian countries was not dealt with as an opportunity for Japan's sincere expression of its war responsibility. Rather, it was subtly exploited as the first step for Japan's economic

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*This is not to affirm the effectiveness of Japanese assimilation policy. See Komagome's (1996a) excellent analysis of the contradictory and ambivalent nature of Japanese assimilation policies and its implementation.*
expansion in the region in the form of official economic aid (Ishida 1995). Accordingly, the sense of being the leader of Asia lingered in economic terms as shown by the regional rise of the theory of the ‘flying geese pattern of economic development’ in which Japan is assumed to play a leading role in that development (see Korhonen 1994). This has been particularly so since the 1960s when Japan was in the midst of high economic growth. Although regional anti-Japanese sentiment in the early 1970s urged the Japanese government to develop a cultural diplomacy to smooth its economic expansion in Southeast Asia, and although there were also transient ‘Asian booms’ in popular culture and tourism in Japan, the imaginary distance between ‘Japan’ and ‘Asia’ has been firmly kept wide (Murai et al. 1988: 12-29). The latter only signified lack and poverty. ‘Asia’, therefore, covertly sustained the complicit oppositioning between Japanese self-Orientalisation and Western Orientalisation.

**Return to modernised Asia**

Not until the 1990s has the rise of global Asian economic power urged Japan to stress its ‘Asian’ identity again. Even Gluck (1998) remarks that Japan’s postwar is finally ending, observing significant changes occurring in Japanese society. These changes resonate with those of world geopolitics of the early 1990s, recumbent on the end of the cold war and the rise of Asian economic power. The loss of the unambiguous cold war ideological enemy and the relative decline of Western, particularly American, hegemonic power urged conservative American thinkers, such as Huntington (1993) to worry about cultural/civilisational difference as the main source of conflict in the twenty-first century. In contrast, several leaders of Southeast Asian countries such as Lee Kuan-Yew and Mahathir Mohamad earnestly advocated ‘Asian values’ as keys to understanding the recent economic success in the region.

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7 This is an ideal pattern of economic development in Asia argued by the Japanese economist Akamatsu Kaname (1959). As flying geese form a group headed by a leading goose, this pattern refers to Japan’s role as guiding other Asian countries so that they can form an economic group based upon a cooperative relation.
(Zakaria 1994; Mahathir & Ishihara 1995). In the atmosphere of increasing regionalism during this period — manifest in the emergence of the EU (European Union) and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area) — these Asian leaders tried to promote Asian economic regionalisation. The United States warned that Japan should attach importance to APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum), which includes Western countries such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand, rather than the EAEC (East Asia Economic Caucus), which excluded these ‘white’ economies (see Berger & Borer 1997). Japan has obeyed the U.S., which prompted it to not join EAEC. Nonetheless, it could not neglect Asia as a vital market for its products and a new Asianism emerged in Japan in the early 1990s. Although the craze was somewhat cooled down by the Asian economic crisis in the late 1990s, how to return to Asia has re-emerged as an important economic question for Japan.

The legacy of pan-Asianism can be still discerned in Japan’s newly articulated interest in Asian identity in the 1990s. Economic motives of Asian return have often been disguised by nostalgic racial and/or cultural justifications. As the president of Fuji Xerox claims: ‘[J]ust as Gorbachev once declared that Russia’s home was in Europe, so it is only natural for us to say that Japan’s home is in Asia, not in the United States or Europe’ (quoted in Saitô 1992: 17). Political ambition, deeply motivated by an anti-West sentiment, is again expressed in terms of inherent commonalities amongst Asian nations. Some advocate exclusivist and essentialist views of a new Asianism. Prominent Asianists such as Ogura (1993), for example, champion pan-Asian solidarity and have pointed out the common cultures, traditions, values and racial origins shared by Japan and Asia. Ishihara (1995: 205), in his The Voice of Asia, co-authored book with Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad, in which an Asian unity is strongly asserted to counter perceived Western political and economic domination, proudly declares Japanese natural ties with other Asian nations in that Japan has never been a mono-racial nation but a hybrid nation of many Asian races.

1 The original Japanese version was published in 1994.
This is possibly a shamelessly strategic comment, as he is known to have made the exact opposite statement on an earlier occasion (Oguma 1996).

In this strategic project of reorienting its own position within a familiar pan-Asianist narrative, Japan’s homecoming has still less to do with its will to become an interlocutor among neighbours than with its narcissistic search for a Japanese national identity (Hein & Hammond 1995). We can still discern a strong impetus to keep the mutually exclusive trichotomy, mentioned above, intact. Many slogans emergent during early 1990s show this tendency. The most famous one is *datsu-nō-nyūa* (‘escape the West, enter Asia’), an inversion of *datsu-nē-nyūn*. Others, cautious of excluding the USA, advocate *nyūn-nyūa* (‘enter the West and Asia’), *datsu-nē-nyūyō* (‘escape Asia, enter the Pacific’) or *hanō-nyūa* (‘enter Asia together with the West’). An underlying common assumption of these slogans is that ‘Asia’ and ‘the West’ are imaginary entities which are demarcated from each other, between which ‘Japan’ is floating as a leader of the former.

However, the Asia which Japan encounters in the 1990s is no longer contained by the image of traditional, underdeveloped, backward neighbours to be civilised by Japan. Other Asian societies have become more assertive and confident in articulating their Asianness and in making the concept of Asia more substantial. Japan needs to come to terms with the increasingly visible gap between a discursively constructed ‘backward’ ‘Asia’ and the rapidly developing economic power of geographically-specific Asian nations. The clearly demarcated trichotomy, ‘Asia’, ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’ has been put in question (Yamamura 1998; Satō 1998). In this regard, it is important to stress that what has substantiated the cultural geography of ‘Asia’ in the 1990s is less some essential and distinct ‘Asian values’ than the advent of global capitalism in the Asian region. As Dirlik (1994: 51-52) argues, ‘what makes something like the East Asian Confucian revival plausible is not its offer of alternative values to

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* As a prominent scholar of Japanese Asian studies, Tsunomi Yoshiyuki once clearly stated, Asia must be conceived as a poor victim in order for Japanese to engage the issue of Japan’s imperial history and lingering economic exploitation (Kadoya 1998).
those of Euro-American origin, but its articulation of native culture into a capitalist narrative. No matter how ‘Asian’ values are emphasised as a key to the economic growth in Asia, the rise of ‘Asian’ capitalism signifies a transnational configuration where the global spread of Western-origin capitalism has made any attempt at a clear discursive demarcation of ‘the West’ and ‘Asia’ (and ‘Japan’) fallacious.

The process of globalisation has made the conception of rigidly demarcated national and cultural boundaries implausible and tenous (e.g., Appadurai 1990; Hannen 1996). The rise of the discourse of ‘Asian values’ and Japan’s cultural project of ‘return to Asia’ should be considered in this context. Stuart Hall (1995: 190) neatly defines the concept:

Globalisation is the process by which the relatively separate areas of the globe come to intersect in a single imaginary “space”; when their respective histories are convened in a time-zone or time-frame dominated by the time of the West; when the sharp boundaries reinforced by space and distance are bridged by connections (travel, trade, conquest, colonisation, markets, capital and the flows of labour, goods and profits) which gradually eroded the clear-cut distinction between “inside” and “outside”.

As Hall emphasises, globalisation is not a new phenomenon but should be considered in light of the long history of Western imperialism. The experience of globalisation is unequivocally marked by uneven power relations in a West-dominated modern history. However, the historical process of globalisation has not simply produced the Westernisation of the world. Its impact on the constitution of the world is much more heterogeneous and contradictory. The unambiguously dominant Western cultural, political, economic and military power has constructed a modern world-system covering the whole globe (Wallerstein 1991), but at the same time the experience of “the forced appropriation of modernity” in the non-West has produced polymorphic indigenised modernities in the world (Ang & Stratton 1996). As a corollary of on-going asymmetrical cultural encounters in the course of the spread of Western modernity, as Ang and Stratton (1996: 22-24) argue, we have come to live in “a world where all cultures are both (like) “us” and (not like) “us””, one where familiar difference and bizarre sameness are simultaneously articulated in multiple ways through the
unpredictable dynamic of uneven global cultural encounters.

The recent rise of Asian economic power and the advocacy of Asian values can be grasped as a manifestation of the self-assertion of non-Western modernities. The global reach of capitalist modernity has destabilised the exclusive equation of modernity with the Western world and given birth to various modes of indigenised modernities in Asian regions. In this dynamic context of the 1990s, Japan encounters Asia as modernised cultural neighbours vis-à-vis a common but different experience of indigenising modernity under Western cultural dominance. I will conduct an investigation of this encounter through a focus on the circulation of commercial popular and consumer culture, such as TV programmes and popular music, in the Asian region. These cultural forms are undoubtedly deeply imbricated in U.S. cultural imaginaries, but they well articulate the juxtaposed sameness and difference among contemporaneous indigenised modernities in Asia.

The impact of cultural globalisation on Japan’s engagement with Asia is contradictory. On the one hand, the increasing spread of Japanese popular culture to Asia has presented a ground for the rearticulation and reassertion of Japan’s cultural power in Asia. On the other hand, the simultaneous achievement of capitalist modernity by several Asian nations has made it clear that the subtle cultural mixing of ‘the local’ and ‘the foreign’ (the West) is not exclusively a Japanese experience but a common feature in the formation of non-Western modernity. Popular cultural flows urge Japan to encounter familiar but different modes of Asian indigenised modernities in both cultural production and consumption. The cross-border cultural flow in East and Southeast Asian regions is, though admittedly uneven, becoming more multi-lateral. The increasing intra-Asian cultural flow precipitates a Japanese dialogue with modernised (or rapidly modernising) Asia not through reified notions of ‘traditional, authentic culture’ or ‘Asian values’ but through popular cultural forms which embody people’s skillful negotiation with the symbolic power of West-dominated global capitalism.
Thus, my analysis of these cultural dynamics will highlight both the rupture as well as the continuity of Japanese condescension, as expressed in its conception of its own superior position and asymmetrical relation vis-à-vis other Asian nations. The Japanese popular cultural encounter with other Asian countries in the 1990s is overdetermined by Japanese imperial history. Nevertheless, it is more multiple, contradictory and ambivalent than a totalising and cavalier Japanese Orientalist conception of ‘Asia’ would suggest.

‘Japanisation’?: transnational cultural power reconsidered

Before delineating the chapter structure and the methodology of this thesis, let me bring up a theoretical consideration concerning the recent rise of Japanese transnational cultural power and the way that it might be situated in the study of cultural globalisation. Here I suggest some new and significant insights it offers.

The predominant association of ‘Japanisation’ with domestication of the West, as mentioned earlier, neglects outflows from Japan in favour of a one-way flow from the West into Japan. As Japan has become the second biggest economic power in the world, its external influence has come to be discussed in terms of the export of Japanese management, industrial relations and organisational cultures (e.g., Oliver & Wilkinson 1992; Bratton 1992; Elgar & Smith 1994; Thorne & McAuley 1992). Such discourses started in the 1970s when many Western scholars advocated that the West should learn lessons from the Japanese economic success (e.g., Dore 1973; Vogel 1979). Although not exclusively representing post-Fordism, ‘Japanisation’ of industrial relations and organisational cultures was discussed specifically in the search for post-Fordist industrial models, where ‘Toyotism’, for example, attracted much attention as a more flexible production system than Fordism (Dohse et al. 1985; Lash & Urry 1994; ch 3; Waters 1995: 82-85).

It was not until the late 1980s that the significance of Japan in the global cultural market finally began attracting wider international academic and media attention. It
was a time when Sony and Matsushita bought out Hollywood film studios and the animation film *Akira* was a hit in the Western markets. In the English-language academic world, many books and articles have been published on Japanese animations, computer games and the Japanese advance in Hollywood since then (e.g., *Mediamatic* 1991; *Wark* 1991; 1994; *Morley & Robins* 1995; *Schodt* 1989; 1995; *Levi* 1996). The Sony Walkman is now chosen for analysis, as the most appropriate example of a global cultural product, by a British Open University cultural studies textbook, itself prepared for global distribution (du Gay *et al.* 1997).

Undoubtedly, the emergence of discourses on the popularity of Japanese cultural products in the world reflects the fact that Japanese cultural industries and cultural forms, such as animations and computer games, are playing a substantial role in the global flow of culture. It seems that Japanese cultural power may finally match its economic dominance, but crucial questions remain unanswered: what kind of cultural power (if any) is conferred on Japan? How similar or different is it from American cultural hegemony? The cultural presence of a foreign country is usually interpreted either as a threat to national identity and/or the national interest, or as the sign of the foreign country’s status as an object of yearning in the recipient country. In either case, it marks the foreign country’s cultural power. Here, the notion of Americanisation and cultural imperialism have long informed the discussion of the cultural imposition of a dominant country over others. As Said (1994: 387) argues, ‘Rarely before in human history has there been so massive an intervention of force and ideas from one culture to another as there is today from America to the rest of the world’. The unprecedented global reach of American power is all-inclusive, a complex of political, economic, military and cultural hegemony. In the cold-war era, it is well known, the United States strategically disseminated an American model of modern, affluent, open and democratic society to win the ideological battle against the communist bloc. Mass media and consumer culture were the major vehicles of ‘Americanisation’.

An American conservative political scientist, Joseph Nye (1990: 188) argues that a
significant factor that confers on the United States a global hegemony is ‘soft co-optic power’, that is, the power of ‘getting others to want what you want’ through symbolic power resources such as media and consumer culture: ‘If [a dominant country’s] culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow’ (Nye 1990: 32).

In contrast, Nye contends that Japan is a one-dimensional economic power and its consumer commodities, no matter how globally spread, still lack an associated ‘appeal to a broader set of values’ (Nye 1990: 194). This is not simply due to the fact that since conditions imposed at the end of World War II, Japan has had no manifest policy of political, military or ideological/cultural exertion of its transnational power. More importantly, the comparative invisibility of Japan’s cultural presence in the world has much to do with its peculiar position in the global cultural market as an exporter of what may be called ‘culturally odourless’ products such as the Walkman, animations and computer games. As I will elaborate in Chapter 3, my use of the term ‘cultural odour’ is to suggest the relative lack of specifically Japanese characteristics in Japanese audiovisual products. These cultural products are made in Japan but their existence does not evoke a sense of consuming ‘Japan’. Japanese audiovisual exports, in contrast to U.S. export icons such as Coca Cola or McDonald’s, do not immediately conjure up attractive images and life-styles of the country of origin in the minds of consumers. Sony’s buy-out of Columbia certainly articulated Japanese cultural and economic power as a threat to the United States. However, it is contentious what power status (image of power) does the ‘invisible colonisation’ (Borsche 1996) through the global spread of Japanese consumer technologies, animations and computer games grant Japan, if consumers and audiences do not care about the Japanese origin of these products or these products do not evoke a distinctively Japanese way of life. No matter how much karaoke is diffused around the globe, one would hesitate to call this ‘Japanisation’, as it does not sell the Japanese way of life (see Mitsuji & Hosokawa 1998). There is a different logic of global cultural influence operating here. Some
(U.S. and Western) influences tend to be easily articulated, particularly by the recipient nation. Others are not. It is one thing that the cultural presence of others can be detected, but quite another that such a presence is associated with the images of the exporting nation.

The recognition of the distinctiveness of Japanese transnational cultural power in Asia raises similar issues. Here, Japan’s cultural power is differently but more clearly manifested. Japanese export is not restricted to culturally odourless products but includes popular music, TV dramas and fashion magazines, in all of which textual appeal has much to do with visible ‘Japaneseness’ (e.g., Ching 1994; Moeran forthcoming). In interpreting the popularity of Japanese popular culture in Asian regions, some Japanese intellectuals argue that Japan has replaced the United States as an object of yearning. This view is held mostly by right-wing Asianists in Japan who deduce Japanese cultural superiority to the West based upon Japan’s economic and technological success (e.g., Ishihara & Morita 1989). This view is countered by others who argue that what is consumed in Asia is not an image or idea of Japan but simply consumer commodities. No matter how Japanese commodities are eagerly consumed and the ‘made-in-Japan’ sign assures consumers of the high quality of high-tech commodities, a sense of yearning for Japan is never aroused in Asia. A Singaporean scholar, Wee Wan-ling (1997), for example, warns us not to confuse the economic presence of Japanese consumer commodities in Singapore with a ‘Japanisation’ signifying a substantial influence on ideas. Congruent with the view disregarding Japanese imperialism’s cultural power over other Asians as derivative discussed earlier, this argument sees no specifically ‘Japanese’ influence in the spread of Japanese popular and consumer culture in other parts of Asia. What is experienced through Japanese popular culture is actually a Japanese imitation of the American ‘original’.

It is possible and perhaps more productive, however, to take the awkwardness denoted by the term ‘Japanisation’ as an opportunity to reconsider the meaning of
transnational cultural power rather than to dismiss the pervasiveness of Japanese influence. The rise of Japanese cultural export can, I suggest, be read as a symptom of the shifting nature of transnational cultural power in a context in which intensified global cultural flows have vitalised local practices of appropriation and consumption of foreign cultural products and meanings. It does not seem entirely contingent that the manifestation of Japanese cultural power has occurred in the last decade. This is a period when the historical process of globalisation as defined by Hall (1995) has been accelerated by several interconnected factors. These include the global integration of markets and capital by powerful transnational corporations; the development of communication technologies which easily and simultaneously connect all over the globe; the emergence of an affluent middle class in non-Western countries, especially in Asia; and the increasing number of people moving from one place to another by migration and tourism. Theoretical reformulation has become imperative in order to cope with these globalising forces that make transnational cultural flow much more disjunctive, non-isomorphic and complex than can be understood in terms of a center-periphery paradigm (Appadurai 1990).

In the cultural realm, globalisation does not simply bring about homogenisation through the global distribution of the same commodities, images and capital from the Western metropolitan centres. It also produces new cultural diversity (e.g., Robins 1998; Hall 1992). 'Transculturalization' refers to such a process of globalisation in which the asymmetrical encounter of various cultures results in the transformation of an existing cultural artifact and the creation of a new style, as Pratt (1992: 6) puts it:

While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own and what they use for it.

Although Pratt's usage of this concept is concerned with analysing the colonial encounter in a 'contact zone' through the reading of Western imperial travel writings, the concept of 'transculturalization' is helpful for us to understand that it is through the engagement with West-dominated global cultural power that non-Western modernities
articulate their specificity (Hall 1995). In contrast to the homogenisation thesis, this view is concerned more with sites of local negotiation. It suggests that foreign goods and texts are creatively misused, recontextualised in local sites, differently interpreted according to local cultural meaning. Something new is produced in this process by mixing the foreign and the local (e.g., Hannerz 1992; Lull 1995; Ang 1996). The ascent of Japanese transnational cultural power should be considered in the context of this wider vista of theoretical paradigm shifts which attempt to attend simultaneously to the homogenising forces of globalisation and the transformative local practices in the formation of non-Western indigenised modernity.

**Global-local complexity: from cultural imperialism to globalisation**

One of the most significant theoretical shifts in studies of transnational cultural flows in the last decade is the questioning of the 'cultural imperialism thesis' and the rise of globalisation theories. The cultural imperialism thesis emphasises the unidirectional flow of culture from the dominant (in most cases equated with the United States) to the dominated. It argues that American popular culture, combined with economic and political hegemony, is disseminated all over the globe, instilling American consumerist values and ideologies. The cultural imperialism thesis tends to describe the relationship between the West (America) and the Rest as one of unambiguous cultural domination and exploitation (e.g., Schiller 1969, 1976, 1991; Mattelart et al. 1984; Hamelink 1983). Particularly problematic with the thesis is the neglect of any empirical evidence regarding the audience reception in subordinate cultures. In considering the global cultural flow and foreign cultural influence on a particular region, 'cultural domination' is in many cases a discursive construct rather than the reflection of the subordinate people's actual experience. This is what Tomlinson (1991) convincingly discusses in his book on cultural imperialism and is also demonstrated by other excellent studies on the discourse of 'Americanisation' (e.g., Kuise 1993). The cultural imperialism thesis bases its argument of domination on a political economy approach and does
not pay adequate attention to whether, and how, audiences are culturally dominated through the act of consuming media texts from the centre. The thesis explicitly or implicitly sees audiences as passive cultural dupes who, apparently without a critical cultural lens, automatically absorb any messages and ideologies from the dominant centre. However, such a simplifying view of cultural exchange has been refuted by many ethnographic studies which show that audiences actively and creatively consume media texts and cultural products (e.g., Ang 1985; Morley 1984; 1992; Radway 1984).

Theories of globalisation instead emphasise the de-centralising tendency of global cultural flows in reconsidering the nature of transnational cultural power (Tomlinson 1991; Appadurai 1990). The shift from an emphasis on centre-periphery relations to diffusion of cultural power marks the relative decline of the main actor, the United States. It is often pointed out that, contrary to the logic of cultural imperialism, U.S. TV programmes are not as popular as ‘local’ or domestically-produced programmes in many countries (e.g., Siji 1988; Lee 1991; Straubhaar 1991; Tomlinson 1991). The unambiguous American cultural domination of the globe is also questioned by the rise of other global players such as Brazil (e.g., Sinclair 1992; Tomlinson 1997). Tunstall (1995: 16), the author of *The Media are American* (1977), argues that American media are still influential but no longer dominant: ‘the United States is the only media superpower, but it is a media superpower in gradual decline against the world as a whole’. Tunstall argues that American TV programmes are becoming less popular in the world not because their quality is degrading but, rather, because there exists a process of local indigenisation of original American TV formats.

This does not mean that the U.S. has lost its cultural hegemony. Even if the global popularity of American TV programmes has declined, American cultural power is still articulated in the recognition that media and cultural forms which originate in America have been fully globalised (Morley & Robins 1995: 223-224). As Bell & Bell (1995: 131) argue, ‘“America” has rather come to symbolise the very processes...
of social and cultural modernisation themselves'. Likewise, Yoshimi (1997) in his studies of the ‘Americanisation’ of Japan argues, with a particular emphasis on Tokyo Disneyland, that ‘America’ shifted from symbol to invisible system in the 1980s. While the American way of life lost its manifest appeal in Japan, according to Yoshimi, the Japanese cultural scene has been saturated with the logic of American consumer capitalism. Baudrillard (1988: 76) also declares that ‘America is the original version of modernity and Europe is the ‘dubbed or subtitled version’. Although admitting that American hegemonic power is in decline, Baudrillard (1988: 107) argues that the decline rather shows the changing nature of power:

> It [America] has become the orbit of an imaginary power to which everyone now refers. From the point of view of competition, hegemony, and ‘imperialism’, it has certainly lost ground, but from the exponential point of view, it has gained some.

According to Baudrillard (1988: 115), American power has entered a new stage of ‘hysteresis’ which is ‘the process whereby something continues to develop by inertia, whereby an effect persists even when its cause has disappeared’. America is now ubiquitous as the unmarked model for (post)modern culture.

It is an open question if this transformation of the nature of America’s global cultural influence is the pinnacle of Americanisation or the demise of Americanisation. Smart (1993) criticises Baudrillard by arguing that an exclusive comparison between Europe and America leads to a failure to realise the limits and decline of all-powerful Western/American modernity. Baudrillard is, deliberately or not, ‘indifferent to the possibility that America may no longer be the model for business, performance and international style, no longer the “uncontested and uncontestable” model of modernity’ (Smart 1993: 66). While Smart emphatically refers to Japan as an emerging model of postmodernity, the critical issue here is not the substitution or addition of new cultural centres but overcoming a nation-centric view of global cultural flows. At the high point in the development of modernisation theories, discussions of non-Western modernisation either stressed divergence or convergence with the Western model. Or
conversely, Western countries were thought to follow the Japanese modernisation model as a process of reverse-convergence (Dore 1973; see also Mouter & Sugimoto 1986). However, the late twentieth century is marked by the fact that there is no absolute societal model to follow (Scott 1997).

The disappearance of an absolute centre of global power is often interpreted as evidence that Americanisation has not melted into air but into global capitalism. Spark (1996: 96-7) makes the point astutely, referring to the British context:

Americanisation might better be considered as only the evidential characteristic of modern consumer capitalism, with the appellation 'American' referring only to the prime, originating characteristics of the model. In this sense, America is not acting to subordinate foreign cultures: the process is one of globalised modernisation, and as the experience of the British with America reveals, it is reciprocal.

Sklair (1995: 153) extends Spark’s point further when he criticises the view that media and cultural imperialism tend to be equated with ‘Americanisation’:

It implies that if American influence could be excluded, then cultural and media imperialism would end. This could only be true in a purely definitional sense. Americanisation itself is a contingent form of a process that is necessary to global capitalism, the culture-ideology of consumerism.

Sklair’s argument captures the fundamental force of globalisation, that generated by the logic of the ever-expanding reach of capital, and few would disagree with this point (Tomlinson 1997: 139-140). However this argument seems too sweeping: a generalisation of transnational cultural flows to capture the contradiction and ambivalence articulated in local practices. Hall (1992) is more sensitive to the decentralising feature of global capitalism. He coins the term ‘global mass culture’ to characterise the emerging global diffusion of media images. While acknowledging the supremacy of American and Western hegemony in this process, Hall (1992: 28) points out that this is a ‘peculiar form of homogenisation’ which does not destroy but rather respects cultural differences in the globe: ‘[Global mass culture] is wanting to recognise and absorb those differences within the larger, overarching framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world’. Capital does not try to obliterate differences but ‘operate through them’ (Hall 1992: 28). Unprecedented
concentration of capital in transnational corporations has generated the second feature of de-centralisation, where the recognition of cultural diversity and difference is increasingly exploited by transnational cultural industries.

**Globalisation as structuring differences**

The theoretical shift from cultural imperialism to globalisation accompanies a turn from the notion of a straightforward globally homogenising cultural dominant toward the idea of an organised heterogenisation under the sign of globalising forces; from an emphasis on content to the form of cultural products which structure diversity and difference in the ever-increasing interconnection of the world (e.g., Flanerz 1996; Wilk 1996; Robins 1998).

The expansive force of globalisation, the transmission of cultural forms from the dominant to the rest via communication technologies and transportation systems has brought about a 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989), or the shrinking of the distance between one place and another. As the merger and cooperation of transnational corporations of different countries of origin intensifies, various markets are increasingly integrated and interrelated. This, together with the development of communication technologies, leads to an increasing simultaneity in the cultural flow of information, images and commodities emanating from a handful of powerful nations including Japan to urban spaces across the globe. The speed and quantity of the global distribution of cultural commodities has been rapidly accelerating. The recent simultaneous popularity, and quick decline, of Spice Girls and Tamagotchi (a tiny gadget of digital pet keeping) in many parts of the world testifies to this trend. Under these developments, discourse on globalisation has tended to facilitate myths of global harmony and coherence (Ferguson 1992) by its evocation of a nightmare of global homogenisation or a utopian view of world unity in the same way that Macluhan's famous term 'global village' connotes a sense of bonding, togetherness and immediacy.

However, globalisation simultaneously promotes heterogenisation. The
transnational and cross-cultural encounter has highlighted the incommensurability of cultural difference and cultural mixing in many parts of the globe. Attention turns to the production of a new kind of cultural diversity and difference in many locales (e.g., Miller 1995; Howes 1996). Globalisation brings about, as Hauser (1996: 102) put it, ‘an organisation of diversity rather than a replication of uniformity’ or a ‘repatriation of difference’, which is produced by the local absorption and indigenisation of homogenising forces (see also Appadurai 1990). A binary view of global-local would fail to acknowledge the complex, juxtaposed and fractured nature of cultural globalisation. We should consider, instead, what David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995: 116) call the ‘global-local nexus’:

> Whilst globalisation may be the prevailing force of our times, this does not mean that localism is without significance... Globalisation is, in fact, also associated with new dynamics of re-localisation. It is about the achievement of a new global-local nexus, about new and intricate relations between global space and local space. (emphasis in original)

The conception of globalisation as an organising force of new diversity and particularity is also argued by Robertson (1992; 1995). He refers to globalisation in terms of the form in which global interconnection is structured and a new kind of particularism is globally institutionalised (Robertson 1995: 38). Robertson is cautious to distance his view from the ‘naive functionalist mode’ of integration. He emphasises that homogenisation and heterogenisation, like globalisation and localisation, are ‘complementary and interpenetrative’ phenomena (Robertson 1995: 40).

Newly articulated particularism or localism in the local negotiation with globalising forces testifies to the spread of common forms in which difference and diversity can be claimed. Arguments of ‘hybridity’ which try to deconstruct the essentialisation of ‘originals’ have gained intellectual currency. However, this is not simply a celebration of the creative practices of the dominated, but rather a recognition that global homogenising power is a constitutive and generative part of any local cultural practice (e.g., Hall 1991; 1992; Appadurai 1996; Garca Canclini 1995; Lull 1995). Arguing that the hybridisation perspective should shift our conception of culture from a
territorial/static mode to one of a translocal/fluid movement, Pieterse (1995) defines
globalisation as an on-going production of a ‘global mélange’ through hybridisation
processes. He distinguishes structural hybridisation, where the production of various
hybrid forms is facilitated by ‘the increase in the available modes of organisation’,
(Pieterse 1995: 50) and cultural hybridisation, where such hybrid forms represent
‘new translocal cultural expressions’ (Pieterse 1995: 64). The ever-increasing
hybridisation in these two processes actually testifies to ‘transcultural convergence’,
as Pieterse (1995: 60) argues; ‘the very process of hybridisation shows the difference
to be relative and, with a slight shift of perspective, the relationship can also be
described in terms of an affirmation of similarity’ (emphasis in original).

Likewise, in discussing the discourse of Japanese cultural uniqueness in the wider
context of globalisation, Morris-Suzuki (1998: 164) emphasises the ‘formatting of
difference’, by which she means ‘the creation of a single underlying common framework
or set of rules which is used to coordinate local subregimes’ as a significant structuring
force of globalisation. Difference can be convincingly and successfully advocated
precisely because of the diffusion of a common format. As I will discuss in detail in
Chapter 5, if it can be argued that the hegemony of the global cultural system is
articulated in globally shared ‘forms’ (Wilk 1995), the latter also promotes the
production of multiple, distinct indigenised modernities in the world. Any convincing
analysis of the nature of global interconnectedness should go beyond a global-local
binary opposition. The operation of global cultural power can only be found in local
practice while cultural reworking and appropriation at the local level necessarily
takes place within the matrix of global homogenising forces.

The Japanese cultural presence under a global gaze

The de-centralising forces of globalisation open the way for Japanese transnational
cultural power to be seen in a different light from that of ‘Americanisation’. The
increasing emphasis on the de-centralisation of global cultural power does not mean
there are no longer dominant centres. The suppliers of transnational cultural products and ‘forms’ — which make creative local hybridisation possible — are still limited to a small number of centres. Cultural commodities and images are predominantly produced by a small number of wealthy countries, including Japan, and many parts of the world still cannot even afford to enjoy global cultural consumption (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1991). From an American point of view, the globalisation process testifies to the de-centralisation and decline of American/Western power. From a Japanese point of view, however, it represents a re-centralisation via which new globally powerful nations such as Japan have successfully re-positioned themselves.

Nevertheless, it should be reiterated that this re-configuration of transnational cultural power is occurring in the context in which uneven distribution and circulation of such cultural products are becoming more difficult to trace, and the origins of images and commodities become increasingly insignificant and irrelevant. Ang (1996: 13) argues that there has been a significant shift in audience reception of TV texts in the postmodern age in that audiences are expected to be active, not simply in theory but in their real-life situations, producing meaning out of multifarious media texts. Likewise, the local has to be creative in articulating difference by indigenising the global. With the proliferation and accelerated speed of globally circulated images and commodities, the local transculturation process has come to be a quotidian site where the local negotiates and appropriates the global rather than that of the unambiguous cultural domination by the centre of the periphery (see Miller 1992; Appadurai 1990; Hannerz 1991).

Disappearing in this process is the experience, not the fact, of derivative modernity. the sense that ‘our’ modernity is borrowed from a modernity that happened elsewhere (see Chatterjee 1986; Chakrabarty 1992). Ubiquitous modernity, in contrast, is based on a sense that ‘our’ modernity is the one that is simultaneously happening everywhere. To put it differently, the Western gaze which has long dominated the material and discursive construction of non-Western modernity is now melting into a global gaze
which subtly resists either a condemnation of ‘cultural imperialism’ or ‘cultural domination’ or admiration for (Western) cultural superiority. To use Lash and Urry’s (1994: 29) words about cultural flows emanating from the core to the rest, ‘it is there, it is pervasive, but it is not the object of judgement — one does not assent to it or reject it’. This shift is as much about our interpretive framework as about ‘reality’. The age of ‘Americanisation’, in which cross-cultural consumption was predominantly discussed in terms of the production of a sense of ‘yearning’ for (and a clear-cut protest against) a way of life and ideas of a dominant country, is over.

It is the shift from a Western gaze to a de-centred global gaze manifested in the process of indigenising modernity that the new meaning of ‘Japanisation’ thrives on. Japanese cultural power has paradoxically become visible and conspicuous as the absolute symbolic centre no longer belongs to a particular country or region and transnational cultural power is deeply intermingled with local indigenising processes. Transnationally circulated images and commodities, I would argue, tend to become culturally odourless as origins are to be subsumed by the local transculturation process. By appropriating, hybridising, indigenising and consuming images and commodities of ‘foreign’ origin in multiple unforeseeable ways, even American culture is conceived as ‘ours’ in many places. McDonald’s is so much a part of their own world that it no longer represents an American way of life to Japanese or Taiwanese young consumers (Watson 1997).

The multiplicity of indigenised modernities brought about by local creative practices has, for one thing, spotlighted the Japanese experience of transculturation as an exemplar to be followed by other non-Western countries. As mimesis has become associated less with second-hand cheapness and superficiality than with creativity and originality (Taussig 1993), the borrowed nature of Japanese cultural power has come to be seen as not totally groundless. Tunstall (1995) suggests, in arguing the relative decline of American media power in the world, that the Japanese mode of indigenisation of American original media products can be seen as a pattern of the
development of non-Western TV industries which, he predicts, other non-Western countries such as China or India will follow. Local indigenisation and consumption is, moreover, consciously incorporated into the global marketing strategy of Japanese transnational corporations such as Sony’s articulate strategy of ‘global localisation’ (see Askoy & Robins 1991, du Gay et al. 1997; Barnett & Cavanagh 1994). The Japanese capacity for indigenising the foreign is re-evaluated in globalisation theories and Toyotism has now been replaced by Sonyism (Wark 1991). Sony’s strategy of globalisation has come to signify a new meaning of ‘Japanisation’. As Featherstone (1996: 9) argues:

if the term Japanisation of the world means anything it is in terms of a market strategy built around the notion of dochaku, or globalism. The term refers to a global strategy which does not seek to impose a standard product or image, but instead is tailored to the demands of the local market. This has become a popular strategy for multinationals in other parts of the world who seek to join the rhetoric of localism.

Although the exclusive association of Japanisation with ‘globalism’ looks somewhat tenuous, Featherstone’s observation is derived from the fact that Japanese ‘global localisation’ — or ‘glocalisation’ — marketing strategies are credited as a leading formula for global corporations in the 1990s (Robertson 1995). Glocalisation simultaneously musters local negotiations and global structural control, as transnational corporations are convinced that the former process is marketable and lucrative. Profits brought about by cultural power are articulated less in association with the symbolic and ideological domination by the powerful nation-state and more with local camouflage which smooths the economic expansion of transnational corporations.

Power re-configured in the intra-regional cultural flow

However, as mentioned earlier, the ascent of Japanese transnational cultural power is best illustrated in the specific cultural geography of East and Southeast Asia. Although the wide range of Sony’s transnational activity can be called ‘global’ and the strategy of ‘global localisation’ is deployed in multiple locales in the world, the application of
the strategy to the production of popular music and TV programmes, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, is clearly limited to the Asian region. Moreover, Japanese TV programmes, popular music and even Japanese animations are far more popular in East and Southeast Asian countries than elsewhere (Igarashi 1998). Those Asian markets were at the receiving end of almost half of the total number of Japanese TV programme exports in 1995 (Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications 1997). This suggests that a Japanese mode of indigenised cultural modernity embodied in popular cultural production is not simply the model for localising strategy. Japanese cultural products themselves have come to hold a certain symbolic appeal to other Asian nations in the context of the proliferation of non-Western indigenised modernities.

The specificity of the spread and consumption of Japanese popular and consumer culture in Asia reminds us of one important caveat: unsubstantiated use of the two relational concepts ‘global’ and ‘local’ as empty categories would risk over-exaggerating the reach and the impact of transnational cultural flows (Chua 1998; Ferguson 1992). It would under-estimate ‘the historical and cultural situatedness of spaces traversed by [the disjunctive cultural] flows’ (Ang & Stratton 1996: 28). Even if it has become a common view that globalisation processes are too chaotic, decentralising and disjunctive to be explained by a centre-periphery model (e.g., Lash & Urry 1994; Appadurai 1990), as Ang and Stratton (1996) argue, we should not assume that such disjunctive flows totally replace the old power relations, as the current cultural flows are always-already overdetermined by the power relations and geopolitics embedded in the history of imperialism and colonialism. While, together with the dissolution of the cultural and economic imperialism perspective, fifty years would seem long enough for former colonies, South Korea and Taiwan, to become more tolerant towards, if not to forget, the legacy of Japanese imperialism, this does not mean that Japanese cultural power has altogether vanished. Focusing on

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Footnote: Taiwan removed its ban on broadcasting Japanese language TV programs and music in 1993 and, in 1998, the new president of South Korea has publicly announced a step-by-step abolition of the restrictions on importing Japanese cultural products.
supra-national regional flows presents a productive way to analyse how globalisation re-inscribes Japanese transnational cultural power in a new configuration of more complex, multiple and intersecting power relations in Asia.

The concentration of Japanese cultural export in East and Southeast Asian regions testifies to another facet of the de-centralising globalisation process, in which local practices increasingly acquire another importance: the relative decline of American cultural power has brought about the capitalisation on intra-regional cultural flows with the emergence of regional media and cultural centres such as Brazil, Egypt, Hong Kong and Japan (e.g., Straubhaar 1991; Sinclair et al. 1996; Lii 1998). Given the limited reverse cultural flow from these non-Western semi-centres to Western metropoles, the rise of non-Western economic power and its transnational corporations in the global arena has not seriously challenged the Western-dominated 'power geometry' (Massey 1991). Nevertheless, the analysis of intra-regional cultural flows would highlight alternative patterns of transnationalisation of media and popular culture to the sweeping view which equates globalisation with Americanisation, by turning our attention to another significant facet of 'locality' — the transnational appeal of a non-Western mode of indigenised modernity for culturally and/or geographically contiguous nations (Sinclair et al. 1996).

Of particular concern for this thesis is the question of how transnational cultural power is embedded in the perception of cultural distance. Complexity articulated in the intensification of intra-regional cultural flows is closely related with the ambiguity of the meaning of cultural intimacy and distance associated with 'locality' in which audiences are thought to find pleasure through the consumption of cultural products from supposedly culturally similar nations (Straubhaar 1991; Sinclair et al. 1996). The reservation about claims for Japanese cultural power in Asia occurs not simply because of Japanese cultural products lacking 'odour', the signification of substantially Japanese ideas and life-styles, as well as of the lingering unambiguous Western cultural hegemony. Japanese cultural power in Asia, I suggest, also tends to slip into
a seemingly power-free perception of cultural similarity and local intimacy which are derived from narrower temporal and spatial distance perceived among East and Southeast Asian countries than the latter’s relation to the West.

However, it should be stressed that the sense of ‘cultural proximity’ (Straubhaar 1991) is never a given attribute equally embodied in cultural products in a specific region and experienced by various strata of people. Rather, the production of locality (cf. Appadurai 1996: 178-199) itself is to be considered as a site at which a regional cultural power is articulated. The perception of cultural distance among non-Western nations has tended to be swayed by their relative temporal proximity to Western modernity, the standard by which the developmental ranking of the non-West has been determined (cf. Fabian 1983). As an apt illustration, such a developmental yardstick was earlier exploited by Japanese imperialist ideology to confirm Japan’s superiority to other racially and culturally similar Asian nations and justify the Japanese mission to civilise Asia (e.g., Duus 1996; Oguma 1996).

The recent spread of Japanese popular culture in other Asian nations in turn suggests a possibility that the diminishing temporal lag between them (re)activates the sense of spatial affiliation in the region. A certain degree of economic growth might have brought about commonalities underlying the formation of modern Asian cultures. However, as testified by the increase in Japanese export of media and cultural products, it also produces the asymmetry in which the Japanese mode of indigenised cultural modernity embodied in popular cultural forms becomes more appealing in other parts of Asia. As I will show in Chapter 5 and 6, the different ways in which Taiwanese and Japanese perceive cultural and temporal distance in consuming other Asian cultural products — one marked by a sense of coevalness, the other by one of nostalgia — demonstrate that unequal cultural power relations are deeply inscribed in the way of people’s spatio-temporal experiencing of ‘familiar difference’ in popular cultural products of cultural neighbours. While the consumption of Japanese popular culture in other Asian nations might not produce the same kind
of a sense of yeaming for Japan as does (or did) its American counterpart. Japan’s relatively dominant position in intra-Asian cultural flows can be noticed in Asian consumption of Japanese popular culture generating a positive sense of cultural proximity and immediacy.

Although offering stimulating new insights into the investigation of de-centred global cultural power relations, intra-regional cultural interaction is an under-explored area in the study of cultural globalisation. In recent years, theories of modernity and modernisation have been criticised for their Eurocentric perspective. Now that many non-Western countries have achieved a certain degree of modernisation, it has been fully, though belatedly, recognised that spatial differences were unjustifiably subsumed by the developmental temporality of Western Modernity and that emphasis should be placed on space so that academics engage seriously with modernities in the ‘plural’ (e.g., Featherstone et al. 1995). Although globalisation perspectives surely complicate the straight-forward argument for the homogenisation of the world based on Western Modernity, the arguments for transculturation, heterogenisation, hybridisation and creolisation still tend not to transcend the West-Rest paradigm. We still tend to think of global-local interactions in terms of how the non-West responds to the West and to underexplore how non-Western countries ‘rework modernities’ (Ong 1996: 64).

This tendency is most clearly elucidated in the study of what Appadurai (1990) calls ‘mediascapes’. The globalisation of media and popular culture is still based upon an assumption of the unbeatable Western (American) domination and the arguments are focused on how the Rest resists, imitates or appropriates the West. There have been fascinating analyses of (non-Western) local consumption of Western media texts (e.g., Miller 1992, 1995), which transcend a dichotomised perspective of the global and the local. Nevertheless, ‘global’ still tends to be exclusively associated with the West. Likewise, the rise of non-Western cultural centres of power such as Japan and Brazil has been often pointed out to refute a straight-forward view of Western cultural domination and to support an argument for de-centralised Western
cultural hegemony (e.g., Tomlinson 1997; Morley & Robins 1995; Barker 1997). However, seriously under-explored has been how such emerging non-Western semi-centres exert cultural power through their dynamic interaction with other non-Western modernities. This thesis aims to contribute to taking a further step in the analysis of de-centred global cultural power relations by exploring from a Japanese perspective the dynamic and asymmetrical relations between Asian modernities.

Chapter outline: trans/nationalism, localisation, Asianisation

The following chapters deal with several aspects of Japan’s cultural ‘return to Asia’ in which Japanese transnational cultural power is reasserted and articulated in terms of indigenised modernity. This thesis examines three themes in the cultural globalisation process, each with discursive and empirical dimensions, associated with Japanese transnational cultural power in Asia. First, I look at the nationalistic Japanese discourse on increasing Japanese cultural export. Second, I will go into more detail about how localisation as a marketing strategy is used by Japanese cultural industries. Third, I will discuss Asianisation as the increasingly multi-lateral flow and consumption of popular culture in East Asia.

Chapter 2 and 3 discuss various discourses of trans/nationalism in Japan. While, as Watson (1997: 11) argues, ‘[t]ransnationalism describes a condition by which people, commodities, and ideas literally cross — transgress — national boundaries and are not identified with a single place of origin’, trans/nationalism in Japan is a reactionary discourse, a claim for a distinctive Japanese cultural power against all the odds of transnational cultural flows. As indigenisation refers to the local appropriation of foreign cultures and cultural products by mixing them up with local tradition and culture, it does not necessarily mean the incorporation of a new cultural form into a pre-given, unchangeable indigenous cultural patterns but suggests ‘a product of collective and spectacular experiments with modernity’ (Appadurai 1996: 90). Although cultural indigenisation is often accompanied by a substantial modern
transformation of existing cultural forms and social structures, the discourse on indigenisation tends to emphasise the immortality of local cultural patterns in the appropriation of the foreign. As Buell (1994: 243) argues concerning the African scholar, Ngũgĩ’s *Decolonising the Mind*, this conceptualisation of transcultural encounter articulates an attempt to ‘empower the local [the dominated] by indigenising, or internalising in a primordial manner, the global [the dominant]’. Its essentialist configuration of indigenisation, what I will call hybridism, is a key to understanding how Japanese national identity is re-imagined in the context of ever-increasing transnational cultural flows. In Chapter 2, I will first explore the theoretical issues of the global-local dialectic and the construction of national identity from a Japanese perspective. Japan’s response to globalisation is producing less a straightforward exclusive national identity than a curiously inclusive imagining of its culture or civilisation in the global cultural flow. I will explore the construction of a Japanese affirmative hybridism by which the putative Japanese national essence is imagined in terms of its exceptional capacity for cultural absorption of the foreign.

Hybridism has long had its place in Japanese nationalistic discourse, but there is a significant shift in the 1990s. It is a time when discussions about civilisational divides have gained momentum in many parts of the world, particularly as the ascendancy of ‘Asia’ has become so conspicuous politically as well as economically. Under these circumstances, the Japanese discourse of hybridism changes from an introverted form where Japan’s domestic culture is seen as characterised by its ability to absorb the foreign (the West) to an extroverted form where Japan is seen as having a special role in developing hybrid cultural forms suitable to other Asian societies. The latter can be most clearly discerned in Japanese civilisation theories which reconfigure Japan’s role in Asia as a translator or mediator between ‘Asia’ and ‘the West’, presenting Japan as a prototype of the fusion of global and local. As in the prewar era, the search for commonality between Japan and Asia and the articulation of Japan’s leading role in Asia are two sides of the same coin. Different from the
The prewar situation is that this time, Japanese commonality with other Asian nations is sought in terms of modern consumerism and an affluent middle class culture. Popular and consumer culture have become hot fields where Japanese commentators try to identify Japan’s Asian identity and to newly assert Japan’s position ‘in and above’ Asia. The hybridism discourse is echoed in the strategy of Japanese cultural industries for penetrating East and Southeast Asian markets and the search for commonality between Japan and Asia in the consumption of Asian popular cultures, both of which are the themes in Chapter 4 and 6.

The Japanese discourse of trans/nationalism is not restricted to hybridism. The Japanese observation of international consumption of Japanese cultural products generates a nationalist discourse which argues that the spread of Japanese popular culture illustrates the elevation of Japan’s cultural image and status in the world. In Chapter 3, I will look more closely at how the transnationalisation of Japanese popular culture is developed and interpreted through a wide range of Japanese popular media texts as well as academic discussions. First I will overview the development of Japanese cultural products in an international context. Japan’s main exports are what can be called ‘culturally odourless’ or mukokuseki (expressing non-nationality or the erasure of national/cultural/racial traits) products, such as animation, comics, and consumer technologies. Since the late 1980s these odourless Japanese products have come to be well-recognised as ‘Japanese’ and this attests to the shifts in the global cultural flow and Japan’s active involvement in it. Japanese media and cultural industries have been responsive to the restructuring forces of media globalisation, but unlike other Asian countries whose responses to media globalisation tend to be defensive, at issue for Japan is the expansion of its domestic market into international markets. While some Asian countries try to reconstruct national identity by asserting that Western evils are destroying Asian values (see Yao 1994), media globalisation has generated what I will call ‘soft-nationalism’ in Japan: Japanese intellectuals and media have begun reconsidering national identity in terms of how its transnational
cultural (software) products are consumed and indigenised in the world. Animations and computer games have become another source of national pride. With the possibility of becoming leading Japanese industries in the new millennium, the encouragement and support of these multi-media businesses is widely discussed in Japan.

In cultural terms, the eager reception of Japanese animations and computer games among some Western fans arouses a nationalist claim that Japan has become the object of international yearning, as America once was for Japanese. In this discourse, the main thread is not so much concerned with the way in which recipient countries creatively and subversively indigenise Japanese culturally odourless products as a narcissistic obsession with retaining a sense of superiority as a cultural exporter by disregarding the dynamic world-wide process of cultural indigenisation. I will argue that there is a discernible ambivalence in the nationalistic claims concerning Japanese cultural export. The ambivalence is generated by the desperate attempt to discern an original ‘Japaneseness’ of these culturally odourless products in the context of accelerated transnational cultural flows, which have gradually made it difficult, and possibly insignificant, to specify the original source of transnationally circulated cultural products in the first place.

In contrast to the spread of Japanese culturally odourless products in Western countries, Japanese export to Asia cannot be discussed simply in terms of the relative invisibility of Japanese cultural presence. Here, the suppression of the precarious nature of Japanese cultural power in disjunctive transnational cultural flows is manifest in the shape of the discussion of the significance of exporting Japanese media products to other parts of Asia for the national interest of countering Japan’s image as an oppressor in Asia. Popular culture is thus conceived to help Japan forge a dialogue with other Asian nations by overcoming the legacy of its history of imperial aggression in the region. I will illustrate the implausibility of a view of a mass-mediated dialogue through asymmetrical cultural flows through the analysis of a popular Japanese film on the ‘Japanisation of Asia’. Moreover, an Asian mimesis of Japanese popular
culture reminds Japanese intellectuals and cultural producers of the hitherto suppressed precarious nature of Japanese transnational cultural power, itself based upon Japan’s own imitative practices with American popular culture. As discussed in Chapter 6, this many-layered process of cultural borrowing provides the common ground on which Japan meets other Asians and appreciates other ways of indigenising Western modernity.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 elucidate the nature of Japanese cultural power, the decentralising force of globalisation and the (im)possibility of transnational dialogue via cross-cultural consumption through empirical study. If the borrowed nature of Japanese cultural formations causes ambivalence in Japanese discourse on its transnational cultural power, Japan’s asymmetrical relation with Asia is displayed in these chapters as occurring in more contradictory ways in the real world than in the discourses discussed in earlier chapters, whose totalising, taxonomic conception of ‘Asia’ is destabilised by the multiple ways of Japan’s popular cultural encounter with other Asian nations.

Chapter 4 is concerned with ‘localisation’, the strategy adopted by Japanese cultural industries for entry into Asian markets by exporting a Japanese experience of local indigenisation of Western popular culture. Although Japanese corporations, particularly Sony, are thought to be champions of global localisation strategies (Askoy & Robins 1991; du Gay et al. 1997), there are few empirical studies of how the strategies actually work in audiovisual markets (see Negus 1997). As Howes (1996: 7) warns, the discussions of globalisation which do not attend to empirical contradictions and ruptures of global marketing strategies, tend to be remarkably similar to the language of the transnational corporation executive. Chapter 4 examines Japanese cultural industries’ strategies of localisation in Asian markets and shows both failure and contradiction as well as success. In spite of increasing concern with the export of Japanese TV programmes to booming Asian TV markets, the main strategy taken by Japanese cultural industries in the early 1990s was the application of Japanese know-
how in localising American popular culture. This is most evident in the strategies for finding local popular stars in Asia, an export of the Japanese system of pop music production, developed through the process of indigenising American cultural influences. Based on my interviews with Japanese producers of cultural industries concerning their strategies in Asian markets, I will explore how these people imagine the Japanese position in the global cultural flow and its relation with other Asian nations. Like the civilisation theorists, discussed in Chapter 2, Japanese cultural industries see their strength as a capacity for indigenising American popular culture. They also share an interest in Japan’s role in guiding other Asians on how to do it.

What distinguished the understandings of Japanese cultural industries from those of the civilisation theorists is their sober recognition that other Asian countries often by-pass Japan and directly absorb American popular culture.

Their anxiety is reflected in the fact that the strategy of finding pop idols in Asia, particularly China, is partly successful but not consistently so. However, what has instead become conspicuous is the growing prominence of Japanese TV programmes and pop music in several mature East Asian markets such as Taiwan and Hong Kong through the promotion of Japanese products by local industries. The presence of Japanese popular cultural forms in Asia is becoming increasingly conspicuous in the 1990s as the expansion of local markets urges cultural industries in Asia to develop a new niche market and Japanese products are promising alternatives to American and local products. As the strategy of localising Japanese popular culture in East Asian markets shifts its emphasis from the export of Japanese know-how to the direct marketing of Japanese popular culture by local industries, Japanese cultural presence in Asian markets has been enhanced.

Chapters 5 and 6 elaborate on this emerging phenomenon of ‘Asianisation’, the intra-regional cultural consumption and resonance in East Asia. The main issue is how asymmetrical power relations in East Asia are articulated in the consumption of the media texts of neighbouring countries. My focus is the intra-regional flows among...
Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong. I did not include South Korea in my fieldwork due to its restrictions on the import of Japanese popular culture, apart from time and funding considerations. Nor have I included China in my study due to its relatively new and less affluent consumer market.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss how Japanese cultural forms are consumed in East Asia, with a particular focus on Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan, the largest and most receptive market for Japanese popular culture. In the study of (non-Western) intra-regional media flows, it has been argued that audiences presumably prefer programmes from ‘culturally proximate’ regions to those from other regions, including the United States (Straubhaar 1991; Sinclair et al. 1996). The shortcoming of this notion of ‘cultural proximity’ is that it only refers to the general propensities of audience preference and says little about the way in which cultural proximity actually works at the level of consumption. Failure to give attention to the latter leads to a tautologous essentialised conception of culture (e.g., the suggestion that Chinese people prefer Hong Kong programmes because they are culturally related). I instead try to elucidate a dynamic process of intra-regional cultural flow in East Asia through the analysis of the popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan. My emphasis is on the way in which several forces are articulated together in the surging popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan during the mid-1990s and the way that Japanese cultural power productively works to generate a sense of cultural resonance for Taiwanese audiences in these contexts.

My research in Taipei and Hong Kong suggests that many young viewers relate more easily to Japanese TV dramas and find them more attractive than American dramas, because of both cultural and bodily similarity and textual subtlety. This is neither to say that Japan has become an object of yearning in other parts of Asia, nor that a priori cultural proximity generates regionalisation. Rather, under globalising forces, cultural similarities and resonances in the region are newly articulated. It also reflects an emerging sense of sharing the same temporality based upon the narrowing
economic gap, simultaneous circulation of information, the abundance of global commodities and the common experience of urbanisation which has particularly sustained a Japanese cultural presence in Taiwan.

Chapter 6 concerns the other trajectory of intra-regional cultural flow: the promotion, consumption and discourse surrounding various Asian popular cultural forms in 1990s Japan. It highlights the asymmetry in the intra-regional cultural flow in East Asia by showing that Japanese audiences, contrary to Taiwanese audiences of Japanese TV dramas, tend to emphasise difference rather than similarity, nostalgia rather than contemporaneity, in their appreciation of other Asian popular cultures.

The activated intra-regional cultural flows have brought about an unprecedented influx of Asian pop culture into Japan in the 1990s. However, Japanese consumption of Asian popular culture is overdetermined by Japan’s historically constituted relationship with ‘Asia’. In consuming popular culture from other parts of Asia, Japan’s double claim for a sameness with and a sense of superiority to ‘Asia’ is again marked by the conception of temporal difference between Japan and other modernising Asian nations. As Japan struggled with an economic slump after the so-called bubble economy and other Asian nations enjoyed high economic growth since the early 1990s, Japanese media representation of Asian popular culture and Asian societies was sharply marked by a nostalgic longing for a lost social vigour. This posture displays Japanese failure and refusal to see other Asians as modern equals who share the same temporality.

However, the empirical study of Japanese female fans of Hong Kong films and pop stars shows that these are not simply consumed as an inferior other, whose images and cultural forms are cannibalised by Japan’s desire for claiming sameness and superiority simultaneously. ‘Modern’ Hong Kong also fascinates Japanese fans, because it represents a different mode of Asian modernity, negotiating with the West and cultural hybridisation on equal terms with Japan itself. While the Japanese consumption of ‘Asia’ is in the final instance pervaded by a perceived temporal lag.
between Japan and the rest of Asia, which prevents Japanese from meeting the latter on equal terms, I will show through empirical and textual analyses that Japan’s popular Asianism is more nuanced and ambivalent than the discourse of a trans/nationalist Asianism explored in chapter 2 and 3 suggests.

What these chapters illustrate are multiple dimensions of Japanese relations with other Asian nations in terms of the formation of Asian indigenised modernity by way of negotiating Western cultural power. Depending on the context, it can be a source of Japanese discursive assertion of its cultural/civilisational superiority; a common dialogical ground with other Asian countries; manifestation of Japanese cultural power by way of a subtle reworking of ‘original’ Western modernity and the production of cultural similarity; and the irreducible difference in the mode of modernity between Japan and other Asian countries. These contradictory Japanese postures towards Asia are illuminated by the analysis of ever-increasing intra-Asian pop cultural flows.

Methodology

My approach to this thesis is inter-disciplinary. This thesis engages with various theoretical arguments on global/transnational cultural flows and intercultural encounters which range from sociology, anthropology, history, media and cultural studies to area studies such as Japanese studies and Asian studies. The methodology of this thesis includes discourse analysis, i.e., the analysis of Japanese discourse on its cultural export and media representation of Japan’s popular cultural encounter with ‘Asia’, and field research on the promotion and consumption of Japanese popular culture in Asian markets and ‘Asian’ popular culture in Japan. Material for discourse and representation analysis has been collected in an exhaustive manner from a wide range of major publications in Japan, from academic literature, semi-academic journals to popular magazines and TV programmes. I have also consulted the Ōya Library in Tokyo, where I conducted an on-line search of print media including a vast number of popular weekly, bi-weekly and monthly magazines published between the late
Field research was conducted in Tokyo in October 1994, mid-January to late
February in 1997, and from mid-March to late April 1998; Singapore in January
1996 and early December 1996; Kuala Lumpur in mid-January in 1996; Taipei from
mid-December to mid-January and late May in 1997; Hong Kong from late February
to mid-March in 1997 (see Appendix A). I interviewed more than 100 people who
work for TV stations, music industries, publishing companies and advertising agencies
in Tokyo, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia concerning the promotion
and reception of Japanese popular culture in Asia and of Asian popular culture in
Japan (Appendix A). In Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, I observed the production
process of a star search programme, *Asia Bagus!*, co-produced by Japan, Singapore,
Indonesia and Malaysia, and conducted a questionnaire survey of studio audiences
for the programme in Singapore (Appendix B). A questionnaire survey of Taiwanese
audiences of a Japanese popular music concert concerning the reception of Japanese
popular culture was conducted in Taipei in May 1997 (Appendix C).

I also conducted informal depth interviews with 18 young viewers (age ranging
from seventeen year old to late 20s) of Japanese TV dramas in Taipei and with 24
female ‘fans’ (age ranging from early 20s to 50s) of Hong Kong films and pop music
singers in Tokyo. These informants were selected mostly through personal introductions
and therefore do not properly represent the total audience community. My purpose of
interviewing these people was to identify the pleasure audiences articulate when
consuming Japanese TV dramas and Hong Kong pop stars, respectively.
2

Hybridism:
The discourse on Japan in the global cultural/civilisational flow

In this chapter I will discuss the recent shift in Japan’s hitherto introverted cultural orientation towards an exaltation of its transnational influence, particularly in Asia. Discussion will proceed via an analysis of Western and Japanese academic discourses on Japan’s own tradition of cultural borrowing from, and absorption of, external cultural influences. While the evaluation of this historical tradition has fluctuated over time, the Japanese capacity for cultural indigenisation has long been articulated as an essential facet of Japanese national identity. After delineating this ‘hybridism’ discourse in comparison with the notion of ‘hybridity’ in cultural theory, I will look at the development of hybridism discourse in prewar and postwar Japan, with a particular attention to the rupture caused by the defeat of World War II. Japanese prewar hybridism had to accommodate itself to the necessity of justifying Japanese colonial rule of other Asians. However, hybridism discourses in the postwar era became entirely introverted by focussing on Japan’s capacity for symbolic domestication of Western cultural influence. I will show that this discourse of Japan’s introverted hybridism gained momentum in the English language academic world as well, with the rise to prominence of cross-cultural encounters between the West and the non-West in the era of globalisation.

I will then move to a renewed attention to hybridism paid by those Japanese who advocate a theory of Japanese civilisational distinctiveness in the early 1990s. There is an interesting shift from an introverted hybridism, wherein Japanese national identity is constructed in terms of Japan’s ability to absorb the foreign and domesticate the West, to an extroverted hybridism. The rise of Asian economic power in the 1990s caused Japanese intellectuals to turn their attention to its connections with Asia. Japanese national identity — the dominant articulation of which has been a self-
essentialising and selective comparison with ‘the West’ since World War II — has been re-constructed in terms of Japan’s cultural presence and influence in Asia. In this instance, as was the case in Japanese imperialist ideologies in the 1930s and early 1940s, Japan is seen as both having a special role in developing hybrid cultural and civilisational forms suitable to other Asian countries as well as in reconciling the civilisational divide between the East and the West. The underlying assumption of this discourse is that Japan has most successfully indigenised Western culture and thus is a model for other Asian societies to follow. Above all, the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia is often referred to by Japanese intellectuals as evidence of the cultural commonality between Japan and other parts of Asia, while nevertheless simultaneously articulating Japanese superiority.

**Hybridity and Hybridism**

It has become commonplace to argue that national identity is never naturally given but discursively constructed, invented and imagined. Such a conception has been developed out of excellent studies of the origin of national identity or nationalism (e.g., Hobshawn & Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983). It is argued that the precariousness of national identity is becoming more visible and conspicuous as a result of globalisation processes which have increasingly interconnected the world in multiple, contradictory and disjunctive ways (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Hall 1992). The concept of ‘hybridity’, developed in postcolonial theories, articulates such doubleness and in-betweenness. Hybridity usefully counters exclusivist notions of imagined community as well as the essentialism and ‘ethnic absolutism’ involved in ideas of cultural ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’. Hybridity creates:

> the “third space” which enables other positions to emerge... [It] displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha 1990: 211)

The concept fruitfully transforms the coloniality of our perspective, which has been
previously based upon a binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised, to one of postcoloniality which ‘oblige(s) us to re-read the binaries as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the here/there cultural binaries for ever’ (Hall, 1995:247).¹

In the study of transnational cultural flows and cultural globalisation, the concepts of hybridity and hybridisation, together with others such as creolisation (Hannerz 1991) and indigenisation (Appadurai 1996), also articulate the dynamic on-going uneven, but creative, process of cultural interconnection, transgression, appropriation, reworking and cross-fertilisation.² The accelerating flow of media images and people all over the globe not only generates the multiplicity of differences within a nation but highlights the porousness of any apparently bounded cultural entity. As Hannerz (1996: 18) argues, ‘[t]hat image of a cultural mosaic, where each culture would have been a territorial entity with clear, sharp, enduring edges, never really corresponded with realities’ (see also Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Buell 1994). Theorising hybridisation propels us to problematise the notion of nationally-bounded cultures organically integrated and clearly demarcated from each other.

In the Japanese context, however, the discussion of cultural hybridity and hybridisation is generated by a strong nationalistic impulse. Japan’s impurity is articulated in the image of a vociferously assimilating culture; the Japanese modern experience is described in terms of appropriation, domestication and indigenisation.

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¹ There is criticism of the concept, the excessive popularity of which risks becoming what Morelli calls ‘a fashionable theoretical passport’ (quoted in Trinh 1995: 9). Detractors (e.g., Parry 1994; Thomas 1994; Young 1994) are critical of indiscriminate and celebratory overuse of the concept of hybridity. They find problematic the concept’s implicit assumption of two (or more) pure ‘origins’ to be mixed as well as its negation of agency, neglect of materiality in favour of textual performance, racial and biologism connotations and failure to discuss the specific applicability of the concept in different and unique contexts.

² Hybridisation and hybridity are the most common terms, despite criticisms against them. It is argued that ‘creolisation’ too closely suggests Caribbean and Latin American experiences of cultural mixing. ‘Indigenisation’, or the appropriation of the foreign into one’s own culture, is intimately interrelated with ‘hybridisation’ or ‘creolisation’. In this thesis, I am not concerned with the subtle theoretical differences between these concepts and I will use them interchangeably. For conceptual arguments see e.g., Ashcroft et al. 1998; Hannerz 1996; Lull 1995; Appadurai 1996; Young 1994; Friedman 1994.
of the foreign (predominantly associated with the West) in a way that an exclusivist notion of Japanese national/cultural identity is reinforced. Thus impurity paradoxically sustains purity.

It is in this sense that I argue that the Japanese capacity for cultural borrowing and appropriation does not simply articulate a process of hybridisation in practice but is strategically represented as a key feature of Japanese national identity itself. This mode of self-representation I would like to call strategic ‘hybridism’. Japanese hybridism aims to discursively construct an image of an organic cultural entity, ‘Japan’, that absorbs foreign cultures without changing its national/cultural core. In other words, hybridism essentialises hybridity and hybridisation as an organic and ahistorical aspect of Japanese national/cultural identity. Japan’s hybridism strategically attempts to suppress ambivalence generated by the act of cross-fertilisation, relentlessly linking the issue of cultural contamination with an exclusivist national identity. As Yoshimoto (1994: 196) argues, the problematic of hybridism arises from the reconciliation of two ‘contradictory principles of cultural production—obsession with native uniqueness and the indifference of origins’. Foreign origin is supposed to be purged by the Japanese tradition of cultural indigenisation. The capacity to appropriate, domesticate and simulate foreign cultures is imagined as a uniquely Japanese practice. Hybridism is thus based upon the concentric assimilation of culture, while hybridity emphasises the incommensurability of cultural difference. Hybridism assumes that anything foreign can be domesticated into the familiar while hybridity assumes an ‘awareness of the untranslatable bit that lingers on in translation’ (Papastergiadis 1995: 18). Hybridity thus destabilises the very notion of identity, whereas hybridism does not create a liminal space which blurs fixed and exclusive national/cultural boundaries. Rather, it reinforces the rigidity of these boundaries.

The discourse on Japanese cultural hybridisation articulates exactly ‘the trap of assuming that, because essentialism has been deconstructed theoretically therefore it has been displaced politically’ (Hall 1996: 249). The force of essentialisation is
still strong in practice. In this sense, hybridism might be called a fluid essentialism. The snare of a static essentialism is to imagine a ‘pure, internally homogeneous, authentic, indigenous culture, which then becomes subverted or corrupted by foreign influences’ (Morley 1996: 330). In a fluid essentialism, by contrast, identity is represented as a sponge that is constantly absorbing foreign cultures without changing its essence and wholeness. As Friedman (1994: 209) argues, ‘[t]he establishment and maintenance of creole identity are a social act rather than a cultural fact’. The fact of cultural contamination and hybridisation can be a source for the reconstruction of an essentialised, exclusive Japanese national identity in the context of ever-increasing cross-cultural encounter.

**Imagining Japan as a hybrid nation**

Within Japan, assimilation of foreign cultures has not always been viewed positively. It has also caused relatively negative, self-defensive or ironical discourses on cultural borrowing. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the threat of colonisation by the West has urged Japanese leaders to try hard to emulate Western modernity. Indeed, rapid and selective Westernisation was at one time official policy (Westney 1987). In the face of apparent Western domination, at the same time, the search for, and claim of, an ‘uncontaminated’ Japanese essence had become an imperative for the construction of a Japanese national/cultural identity. Westernisation must be balanced by Japanisation. The slogan, *wakan yōsai* (‘Japanese spirit, Western technologies’) — a modified version of *wakan kansai* (‘Japanese spirit, Chinese technique’), a mid-nineteenth century slogan that articulated Japan’s cultural indebtedness to China — is a manifestation of this need (Kawamura 1982; Wilkinson 1991). The search for a national ‘essence’ in the sphere of race, culture and language has been a recurrent

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1 In relation to this point, it can be argued that the concept of hybridity has been deployed and examined only in certain contexts and geographies. For example, hybridity is discussed mostly in terms of non-Western cultural mixing under Western influences. The whole subject of hybridity as it relates to cultural exchange and cross-fertilisation between different parts of the non-West remains to be explored.
theme in modern Japanese history (Minami 1994). Indeed, the indigenous discussion of Japanese culture is notorious for an obsessive claim of racial/ethnic purity and homogeneity (e.g., Dower 1986; Yoshino 1992; Moyer & Sugimoto 1986; Iwabuchi 1994). Thus, the search for, and construction of, a pure ‘Japaneseness’ has gone hand in hand with the acceptance of significant Western influence.

During the twentieth century, however, a defensive view of cultural borrowing and an associated discourse on Japanese racial purity and superiority have been juxtaposed with a more confident and aggressive one, particularly as Japan became an imperial power in the early twentieth century (Oguma 1995). The Japanese capacity for assimilation (‘dōka’) of the foreign without changing Japanese essence has been promoted and characterised as a great quality of Japaneseness which justifies Japanese colonial rule of other Asian nations. Numerous prominent scholars and political leaders such as Shiratori Kokichi or Gotō Shinpei maintained that this capacity is not only a characteristic of Japanese culture and civilisation but an evidence of Japanese superiority to the West (see Oguma 1995; Kang 1996: ch.4). An official statement of nationalist ideology, Kokutai no Honki (‘Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan’), published and distributed to Japanese schools of all levels in 1937 as a teaching guide on the distinctiveness of the Japanese nation, demonstrates that the Japanese capacity for assimilating the foreign was clearly defined as a unique Japanese characteristic:

Our present mission as a people is to build up a new Japanese culture by adopting and sublimating Western cultures with our national entity as the basis, and to contribute spontaneously to the advancement of world culture. Our nation early saw the introduction of Chinese and Indian cultures, and even succeeded in evolving original creations and developments. This was made possible, indeed, by the profound and boundless nature of our national entity; so that the mission of the people to whom it is bequeathed is truly great in its historical significance. (Hall 1946: 183)

It should be noted that the Japanese capacity for assimilation was discussed from the perspective of the racially mixed origins of the Japanese people as well as the history of importing foreign cultures in prewar Japan. This point is particularly
important when we consider how the image of the Japanese fusion of East and West was firmly incorporated into Japanese imperial ideology which regarded the Japanese sovereignty over Asia as a national mission. In the first part of twentieth century, Japan, as a colonising centre, was concerned with the assimilation of non-Western (Asian) racial and cultural others into the empire as well as managing the absorption of Western ideas, technologies and culture. As Oguma Eiji (1995) shows in detail, there were competing arguments in prewar Japan, first evoked by Western scientific discourse, about the racial origin of the Japanese. Some advocated Japanese racial purity, stressing the blood linkage of the nation to a ceaseless imperial family (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 88-90). A no less powerful argument in prewar Japan emphasised the hybrid racial origin of Japanese: a Japanese nation was formed by the mixture of Northern and Southern Asian races in ancient times and a vast number of Chinese and Koreans settled in Japan from the late fourth century to the early eighth century and introduced the culture of the continent to the country (Oguma 1995; Morris-Suzuki 1998: 90-95).

Discourse on the racially mixed origin of the Japanese was readily appropriated to justify Japanese colonial rule over other Asian nations; since Japan had long successfully assimilated foreign (Asian) races as well as culture, Japan is endowed with the capacity to harmoniously assimilate colonial subjects in Taiwan and Korea. Therefore, so the argument goes, Japanese colonial rule and assimilation policy, unlike those of its Western counterparts, is not based on racism (see e.g., Peattie 1984; Oguma 1995; Duus 1995; Morris-Suzuki 1998). Needless to say, this ideology of Japanese racial hybridism sharply contradicted the reality of Japanese colonial rule and its harsh racial discrimination against Koreans and Taiwanese (Weiner 1994; Komagome 1996). This contradictory dynamic is similar to the co-optive hybridity of Latin American nations which often subtly smooth over the existence of racial hierarchies, officially

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1 See also Dower (1986) for an excellent analysis of Japan’s representation of its racial purity during the Pacific war between Japan and the United States.
priding themselves on their racial hybridity as a source of national identity (Shohat & Stam 1994: 43).

Ambivalence concerning the evaluation of Japan’s assimilation of the foreign has continued on after World War II into the second half of the twentieth century. However, there is a fundamental difference between prewar and postwar Japan. After the war, Japan no longer had to consider racial differences within the nation to claim Japanese uniqueness. Japan’s defeat in World War II and its consequent occupation by the Allied Forces, led by the United States, allowed Japan to avoid seriously confronting the consequence of its imperialism/colonialism. The postcolonial moment for Japan was articulated predominantly by its subordinate position to the United States: Japan was a victim, not an oppressor. While Japan as an imperial/colonial power had to face seriously the cultural and ethnic difference within the empire of the prewar era, postwar Japan was free of this burden. It was allowed to forget its colonising past and to become obsessed with claiming its racial purity and homogeneity through the binary opposition of two culturally organic entities, ‘Japan’ and the ‘West’. Through this collusive ‘othering’, Japanese cultural uniqueness became exclusively associated with an homogenous Japanese nation (Iwabuchi 1994).

Here, the loss of Japanese imperial power in Asia was accompanied by an introverted shift of emphasis in discourse on Japan’s hybridity from racial to symbolic/cultural mixing. Japan’s hybridism changed from an outwardly-directed state ideology of Japanese imperialism and colonialism to a internally-oriented nationalistic discourse on Japanese cultural hybridity. Katô Shûichi’s two essays on zasshû bunka (‘the hybridity of Japanese culture’) (1979: 5–46), which were originally published in 1955, launched the postwar discourse on Japanese hybridism. Katô’s main point was not to evoke nationalistic sentiment but to find a third way of seeing Japanese culture, that is, a way beyond the two extreme views of purity: a self-disparaging view of modernity as ‘pure’ Westernisation, or alternatively, a nostalgic nationalistic turn to its traditional ‘purity’. Katô tried to affirm the hybrid formation of Japanese
culture which could be seen in everyday life as an alternative to the discourse of an ‘authentic Japan’. However, Katō’s critique failed to discern the similarity of the two purities in terms of their nationalistic orientations. As Yoshimoto (1994: 196) argues:

to the extent that the impulse to modernise and Westernise Japan is inseparable from a strong nationalistic sentiment, what first appear to be two opposite manifestations of Japanese obsession with purity are only two different modes of Japanese nationalism.

Recognising the similarity between these two modes of nationalism exposes the flaw in Katō’s claim of transcending Japanese ‘purity’. Not only was his argument for Japanese hybrid culture blind to the common nationalistic orientation of the two views of purity, it also shares with them an essentialist assumption of Japanese culture. Katō saw the Japanese way of actively adopting Western things and ideas as unique in comparison with other Asian countries, which he thought directly imported ‘the West’. The comparison he made was not based on a rigorous analysis. Rather, an intuitive comparison of the outlook of Singapore and Kobe was convincing enough to make him conclude that Japanese culture is fundamentally and typically hybrid, because only Japan absorbs Western influence in a way that suits local contexts. Hybridity seemed to him a cardinal characteristic of Japanese culture. While Katō suggested the impossibility of ‘purifying’ Japanese hybrid culture in terms of either ‘authentic tradition’ or ‘Western modernity’, his essentialist assumption of ‘Japanese culture’ turned his critique into another discursive purification of Japanese culture.

Historical context should also be taken into consideration in evaluating Katō’s arguments. His articles were published in 1955 in two prestigious opinion magazines, Shisō and Chūō Kōron. This was just after the end of the postwar occupation and at the beginning of Japanese economic recovery. In this sense, his affirmation of Japanese hybridity (‘zasshoku’i’) reflected the recovery of confidence by Japanese in their own culture (Minami 1994; Aoki 1990). While the Japanese practice of indigenising the foreign without changing its cultural core has been a recurrent theme of Japanese scholarly investigation in postwar Japan (e.g., Maruyama 1961, 1991; Tsurumi 1972;
Kozakai 1996), it is above all in the decades after Japan attained the status of a leading economic power, particularly since the 1980s, that the positive image of assimilator has gained currency in Japan. This is a moment when the nationalist slogan of kokusaika (‘internationalisation’) became prevalent in Japan (Belfu 1987; Yoshimoto 1989; Iwabuchi 1994). The increasing encounter with foreign (predominantly Western) people and cultures enhanced the drive for embracing the Japanese skill of absorbing the West without losing a definite demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As Ivy (1995: 3) argues, ‘the foreign — because of its very threat — must be transformed into a manageable sign of order’. The confrontation with cultural difference is subtly replaced by pleasurable consumption of foreign cultures that are destined to be indigenised into Japanese soil. Ivy (1995: 1) succinctly describes it:

The image of Japan as the great assimilator arises to explain away any epistemological snags or historical confusion: Japan assimilates, if not immigrants and American automobiles, then everything else, retaining the traditional, immutable core of culture while incorporating the shiny trappings of (post)modernity in a dizzying round of production, accumulation, and consumption.

In this context, the practice of cultural appropriation, or Japan’s ‘genius for simulacra’ (Buell 1994), has become a well accepted feature of the prosperous Japanese nation; so much so that many people in Japan now accept the view that the capacity for absorption and indigenisation of foreign cultures is uniquely Japanese. In his study on the consumption of Nihonjinron, Yoshino (1992: 114) finds that almost half of 71 respondents agreed with the view of ‘the active receptivity of the Japanese towards foreign cultures, as well as their ability to blend them with Japanese culture to create a distinctive form of culture, as [another] example of Japanese uniqueness’.

Even in Tokyo Disneyland, we find this familiar narrative of Japan’s long history of cultural appropriation. As Brannen (1992) discussed in detail, an exhibition called ‘Meet the World’, an original Japanese attraction in Tokyo Disneyland, teaches

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1 These are not necessarily celebratory of Japanese cultural borrowing but nevertheless tend to be based on essentialist assumptions of Japanese culture and nation. See footnote 7 on Maruyama’s argument.
Japan’s history in terms of Japan’s encounter with Others and the way Japan has successfully indigenised foreign cultures to create a unique culture out of foreign input. The attraction confidently tells us that even before encountering the West, Japan had a long history of cultural borrowing from China, as mentioned earlier. Japan’s long tradition of cultural indigenisation is now celebrated as the secret of Japan’s prosperity and as the core of Japan’s national sense of Self.

**Japan’s genius for domesticating the West**

In the same period, Western interest in Japan’s ability of cultural indigenisation was also generated. The spectacle of Japan’s domestication of foreign culture has become an object of intrigue and analysis in the Western academy, particularly the way that Japan has successfully purged the impurity of foreign cultural contamination. Robertson (1992), for example, seeks the secret of the Japanese capacity for cultural absorption in Japanese religious syncretism. While Robertson (1992: 94) hints at the difference between hybridity and hybridism by pointing out that Japanese religious syncretism is “indeed an ‘ism’, in the sense that it is a kind of ‘ideology’”, he nevertheless argues that the traditional Shinto rituals of purification, Japan’s indigenous religion, helped minimise contamination from foreign ideas:

The great concern with purification itself has a religiocultural basis of the capacity to reject some externally generated ideas and to “purify” those others that are imported. So when ideas were imported, most dramatically during the early Meiji period (Westney 1987), they were “decontaminated” and rendered Japanese through a variety of practices, including the practice of not importing many sets of ideas concerning the establishment of new institutions from a single foreign source. (Robertson 1992: 95)

As Robertson sees it, Japanese boundary-making between self and other when importing the foreign is never an innocent cultural practice but a highly nationalismistic discursive strategy to ‘purify’ foreignness. It is quite another thing to say, however, that this strategy has been successful enough to minimise Japan’s contamination. Robertson seems to subsume any actual ‘contamination’ or influence in the discursive construction of Japanese as the skilful domestication of foreign influence. A crucial question
still remains unanswered; how can we know that Japan is not relatively contaminated? How can we assess the degree of cultural ‘uncontaminatedness’ by the foreign? Or more fundamentally, what does ‘cultural contamination’ mean?

It is my contention that Western (critical) analysis of Japan’s domestication of the West has tended to perpetuate notions of Japan as a great assimilator. Recent Western discourses have colluded in lifting Japanese strategic hybridism to the level of a recognised national essence. This is not to underestimate the strong force of hybridism in Japanese culture. Rather, I argue that the unquestioning acceptance of the efficacy of Japan’s skillful boundary-making in opposition to the foreign, whether under the name of domestication, indigenisation or self/counter-Orientalism, tends to result in an essentialist celebration of the object of analysis and in conceiving ‘Japan’ as a porous yet stable, unchanging entity. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is criticised for its reification of ‘a general structure of colonial dominance’ by seeing resistance and subversiveness as ‘deeply conditioned by it [colonial enunciation]’ (Thomas 1994: 56) and ‘expressed on the ground defined by the oppressor’ (Thomas 1994: 57). If Bhabha is criticised for his neglect of the autonomy of the colonised (see also Parry 1987; 1994), conversely, the prevailing analysis of Japan’s hybridism should be criticised for too much emphasis on intentional counter-Western-domination enunciation and the apparent success of nationalist strategies of ‘decontamination’.

The Western interest in Japan’s capacity for boundary-making has been focused on its indigenisation of Western culture. Here, the analysis of the Japanese domestication of the West is entangled with a supposed dichotomy of ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’. Japan-meets-the-West becomes the theme, under the aegis of which all questions are reduced to whether Japan ‘domesticates’ the West or is ‘colonised’ by the West. The edited collection, Remade in Japan (Tobin 1992), deals solely with Japan’s domestication of the West. The book sees ‘the Japanese as engaged in an ongoing creative synthesis of the exotic with the familiar, the foreign with the domestic, the modern with the traditional, the Western with the Japanese’ (Tobin 1992: 4). In a
wider context, this view corresponds to a critique of the ‘cultural imperialism thesis’ in which the non-West is a mere victim of Western cultural domination (Tomlinson 1991). Such a position can also be put in the context of recent anthropological interest in the local consumption of global (Western) cultural products (e.g., Miller 1992; 1995; Howes 1996). *Remade in Japan*, despite its alignment with a recent theoretical shift in the study of consumption, is quite distinctive in its strong emphasis on Japan’s demarcation of the boundary between Japan and the West. As the result, while offering intriguing analyses of Japanese domestication of the West, most of the essays in the book do not deal with the dynamic socio-cultural transformations engendered by cultural hybridisation and/or the internal cultural politics of difference pertaining to race, ethnicity, gender and class.

Mary Yoko Brannen (1992: 219), for example, argues concerning the importation of Disneyland into Japan that:

> the process of assimilation of the West, the recontextualisation of Western simulacra, demonstrates not that the Japanese are being dominated by Western ideologies but they differentiate their identity from the West in a way that reinforces their sense of their own cultural uniqueness and superiority, or what we might call Japanese hegemony.

She sees the process as ‘a specifically Japanese form of cultural imperialism’ (Brannen 1992: 219). Here the assimilation of the foreign is appropriated for ‘continually reinforcing the distinction between Japan and the Other, keeping the exotic exotic’ (Brannen 1992: 227) rather than just ‘domesticating’ it or making it familiar. The main problem with Brannen’s argument, as Yoshimi (1997: 212) argues, is that it regards the Japanese cultural and historical context as given and everlasting; the ‘West’ is domesticated and indigenised into a ‘Japan’ whose essence never changes and where a stable hybrid ‘Japaneseness’ is constantly reproduced. We should think seriously whether the analysis of Japanese domestication of the West actually lends itself to keeping Japanese ‘Japanese’.⁶

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⁶ Similarly, Skov (1996: 136) criticises Kondo’s (1992) position on Japanese fashion for its reduction of ‘complex changes in both the fashion industry and global consumer patterns to a simplified “East versus West” model’, obsessed with the question ‘what is so Japanese about that?’.
While Japan is arguably one of the keenest importers of Western culture (and American culture in particular), its cultural hybridisation tends to be interpreted in terms of a rivalry between Japan and the West. Exploring cultural hybridity and syncretism in the non-West, Pico Iyer (1988: 410) writes that whereas other Asian nations appropriate and indigenise the West in creative and enjoyable ways, 'Japan had taken in the West only, so it seemed, to take it over'. Iyer (1988: 405) points to the example of baseball which was imported from the United States, and sufficiently domesticated into Japan for an American ex-baseball player to say, 'They've out-Americanised America', based on Japan's victory over the United States at the Los Angeles Olympics. By claiming its superiority over the West, so the theory goes, Japan has violated the postcolonial rule of 'a carnivalesque profusion of hybrid forms' (Buell 1994: 11). As a non-Western society that has achieved a degree of modernisation comparable to or higher than the West, Japan is an extreme example of successful domestication of the West. It therefore seems to subvert the assumption of a Western Orientalism. However, precisely because this kind of argument is based upon the presumed demarcation of a fixed and absolute boundary between Japan and the West, it results in reproducing some essential difference between these two entities and in concealing internal differences within them. The exclusive attention to the relation between the West and the non-West (Japan) is problematic because it reinforces 'a tendency to encourage an analytic binarisation of the field of culture, into “indigenous” (traditional, local) and “imported” (modern, global) elements' (Barber & Waterman 1995: 241).

Thus, postwar hybridism, both inside and outside Japan, exploits Japan's difference in a unitary mode of opposition to 'the West'. Both Japanese hybridism and the Western discourse on it tend to be exclusively concerned with Japan's relation to the West. In this way, the binary opposition of 'Japan' to the 'West' continues to be reproduced, even if the postulated absolute difference is no longer between 'traditional' and 'modern' (as in classic Orientalist discourse), but between different modes of
modernity. The deployment of the binary opposition ‘Japan’ and ‘West’ not only homogenises the two cultural entities but also directs our attention away from the doubleness of the Japanese (post)colonial experience as a non-Western coloniser. The marginalisation of postcolonial discourse in Japan might be the other side of the predominance of other ‘posts’—postwar, postmodern, poststructuralism, all of which are, in Japan’s case, products of an exclusive engagement with the West.

Rumi Sakamoto (1996) analyses such Japan’s doubleness, at the same time demonstrating the pitfalls of conflating hybridity and hybridism by presuming the nation as a given unit of analysis. Referring to the dual process of the construction of Japanese national identity, in which, since Japan’s modernisation during the late nineteenth century, ‘Asia’ has been conceived as Japan’s negative evolutionary identity in an Eurocentric hierarchy of development, Sakamoto (1996) argues that Homi Bhabha’s theory of hybridity cannot adequately analyse Japan’s doubled colonial discourse. Sakamoto analyses the late nineteenth century discourse on Japan’s encounter with the West, particularly the writings on Japanese national identity by Fukuzawa Yukichi, a leading advocate of massive Westernisation at that time. Sakamoto (1996: 114) argues that Fukuzawa’s writing ‘contains . . . an image of “hybrid” identity which radically breaks away from essentialist representations of national identity’. Sakamoto (1996: 120) describes Fukuzawa’s conception of Japanese national identity as ‘origin-free’ and ‘impure’; adding that Fukuzawa had ‘no nostalgic aspiration for [the] purity of this identity’. Nevertheless, Sakamoto (1996: 124) contends, Fukuzawa simultaneously constructs an essentialist Japan/Asia binary by fixing ‘Asia’s difference from Japan in its inability and unwillingness to Westernise’.

This seems to be the logical outcome of Fukuzawa’s discourse on hybridism. Since Fukuzawa’s purpose was to build a nation-state as strong and ‘civilised’ as those of the West, he might have de-essentialised a pure, traditional Japan, but re-essentialised an impure, Westernised, civilised Japan. But this does not concern Sakamoto. Instead she attributes Japan’s double standard not to a logical consequence
of Fukuzawa’s construction of a ‘pure impurity’ but to a limitation in Bhabha’s theory of hybridity:

While he [Bhabha] portrays hybridity as a new space of resistance to essentialist politics of either/or, I would argue that this assumption is naive and optimistic. The notion of non-essential hybrid identity is neither new nor necessarily liberating... While Bhabha ignores the creation of yet another dichotomy, other than the primary dichotomy of the West versus non-West, the dual construction of Japanese identity in terms of the West and Asia indicates a possible pitfall of hybridisation theory. (Sakamoto 1996: 114)

It seems to me that it is Sakamoto’s assumption of hybridity, not Bhabha’s theory that is naive. She fails to recognise that the key assumption in her arguments on hybridity is the putative identity of Japan as a nation-state. Her image of Japanese cultural contamination (she uses the term ‘translation’) by the West is still based upon the presumption of Japan as a coherent cultural entity. If the concept of hybridity is meaningful at all for Japanese contexts, it must at once disrupt any binary between ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’ or ‘Japan’ and ‘Asia’ and deconstruct the imagined coherence of Japan’s identity. Hybridism (fluid essentialism) masks what hybridity (postcolonial deconstruction of essences) should reveal in the case of Japan: hybrid subjects that Japanese colonialism has produced. The latter urges us to counter the (post)modern complicity between Japan and the West, exploring postcolonial interconnections between Japan and Asia, countering Japan’s symbolic hybridism with actual ethnic/racial hybridity, which might, in turn, question the putative subject of hybridisation, ‘Japan’.

Japan’s hybridism as a champion of globalisation

Although reminding us that the Japanese modern experience articulates the tripartite, uneven, power relations between ‘the West’, ‘Japan’ and ‘Asia’, Sakamoto’s argument nevertheless highlights the trap of presuming the nation as a given unit of analysis. The same problem is shared by Western academic attention to the Japanese modern experience in globalisation theories. Japan’s long history of appropriating foreign
dominant cultures seems to be a conspicuous counter-example to Eurocentric views of modernity. Western discourses on Japanese strategic hybridism do not celebrate Japanese cultural 'uniqueness'. Rather, they attempt to displace Eurocentric views of history and simplified views of one-way cultural domination by the West over 'the Rest'. Such attempts, however, prove futile when 'Japan' is discussed as though it were an organic cultural entity whose cardinal body is eternally unchanged. Without deconstructing this assumption, any analysis of Japanese hybridism runs the risk of attributing an unwarranted substance to the object of study; the image of Japan’s genius for assimilating the foreign tends to be reified as an ahistorical essence.

Postmodern globalisation theorists emphasise relational, spatial and processual aspects of culture. The conceptualisation of 'society' as an unambiguous unit of analysis has recently been called into question, particularly in sociology. Mike Featherstone (1995: 137) argues that sociology had tended to see society as an integrated whole and underestimated 'inter- and trans-societal processes' in favour of the intra-societal dimension. This image of society is similar to anthropology's central concept of 'culture' which tends to foreground the 'inherent patterning to culture' where there is little sense of intercultural transculturation. In emphasising the global interconnectedness of societies and cultures, Featherstone refers to Japan as a representative counter-example. Although widely regarded as a closed country until

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7 Yoshimoto (1994) distinguishes between 'genuine hybridity' and 'Japanese selective hybridity' in terms of the transformation of the subject. Yoshimoto (1994: 197) refers to Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg. "If the genuine hybridity invokes the image of the cyborg, it is because true hybridisation would be impossible without simultaneously transforming the subject of hybridisation. In contrast, the selective hybridity of the Japanese merely dehistoricises foreign cultures, and the identity and purity of the body as a receptor of foreign cultures are never questioned". Although the term 'genuine' risks another essentialisation, paying attention to the transformation of the subject seems fundamental to the project of deconstructing the Japanese national/cultural imaginary. Yoshimoto sees 'small hope' in the recent influx of cheap foreign labour into Japan. The Japanese public are presented not with 'images but real people' who therefore 'cannot be quickly "consumed"' and "discarded"' (Yoshimoto 1994: 198–9). We can also find 'hope' in the new assertiveness of long-standing minority groups such as Koreans, Ainu or Okinawans who eloquently testify that such a transformation has been happening, that Japanese colonialism has produced the (post)colonial subjects. A postcolonial perspective transforms our conception of colonialism by suggesting that colonialism also happens internal to the colonial centre (Chambers 1994; Hall 1996; Pieterse and Patinkin 1995). If the concept of hybridity is to articulate such ambiguity, doubtfulness and in-betweeness, its subject is already within Japan and not just 'out there'.
the mid-nineteenth century, Japan maintained close outside relationships, especially with China. It was never closed but always connected to the outside world through cultural borrowing:

The cultural borrowings and syncretisms which have resulted from this process... cannot but put a big question mark against the long-held notions of culture within sociology and anthropology which emphasise organic or aesthetic unity. (Featherstone 1995: 135)

Featherstone's discussion of 'the death of society', by which is meant a limit to conceiving 'society' as a clearly demarcated unit of sociological analysis, is relevant to Japan's long history of relational and processual construction of culture and identity. Still, such conceptions tend to ignore the extent to which Japan's construction of an exclusivist national identity has been based precisely upon its history of inter-societal relativisation (Iwabuchi 1994). Moreover, Featherstone does not ask whether the Japanese experience of cultural borrowing and syncretism destabilises the conception of 'Japan' as a cultural organic unity. While Featherstone deconstructs the assumption of an 'inherent patterning to culture', he paradoxically sees in Japan a pattern of inherent, essential hybridisation. The issue at stake is whether or not Japan's practice of constructing a national identity based upon cultural borrowing amounts to the postulation of a transhistorical cultural essence for Japan.

Naoki Sakai's (1989) critique of David Pollack's (1986) book, The Fracture of Meaning, is useful here. Sakai (1989: 481) severely criticises Pollack's essentialist equation of 'the three unities of Japanese language, Japanese culture and the Japanese nation'. He rejects the implicit assertion that Japan has been from the outset a "natural" community, [that] has never constituted itself as a "modern" nation" (Sakai 1989: 484). Is not a similar sort of essentialism at work in the discourse of Japan as a great assimilator? Even if we contend that there was a practice of cultural borrowing in Japanese history, such a past was arguably discursively appropriated and reformulated in the course of constructing a modern Japanese national identity so that Japan's 'obession with native uniqueness and the indifference of origins' (Yoshimoto 1994, 61)
196) could be articulated as a distinctive tradition.\(^1\)

In highlighting the relativity of the Eurocentric modern world view with the ascent of non-Western power, Featherstone (1995) actually refers to Sakai’s article in which the difference between monistic and world history is argued; history is ‘not only temporal and chronological but spatial and relational’ (Sakai 1989: 488). Featherstone quotes Sakai to emphasise that Eurocentric monistic history cannot appropriately deal with a world in which difference and heterogeneity are irreducible. However, the wider context in which Sakai discusses world history is missing from Featherstone’s account. It was in the 1930s that Japanese intellectuals argued strongly for the demise of monistic history and the emergence of world history. However, world history was a conceptual tool for Japanese intellectuals, enabling them to imagine Japan’s position in the centre of the world, a position which was denied by Eurocentric monistic history. Sakai criticises Kōyama Iwao, a young Japanese philosopher of the 1930s, whose view of world history, due to his essentialist conception of heterogeneity and otherness, easily became another version of monistic history that justified Japanese imperial power. Sakai (1989: 489) argues that:

> this notion of otherness and heterogeneity was always defined in terms of differences among or between nations, cultures, and histories as if there had been no differences and heterogeneity within one nation, culture, and history.

Thus, Sakai’s main argument is less about the conceptual shift from monistic (modern) to world, pluralistic (postmodern) history than about the difficulty of transcending

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\(^1\) We can see a similar problem in the work of a prominent scholar of political thought in postwar Japan, Maruyama Masao. Maruyama (1961, 1991) struggled to theorise a pattern in the development of Japanese thought by gauging at historical changes and foreign influences without essentialising the process. Maruyama (1991) was cautious to distinguish uniqueness and individuality in considering the history of Japanese thought. In order not to have his argument taken for essentialisation, he changed the words for describing the pattern from genkei (‘prototype’), kosō (‘basic strata’) to shūyōtei (‘basso ostinato’). Bassò ostinato is a musical term which means a persistent sound pattern of the bass register which juxtaposes with the main melody. Maruyama, like Featherstone, sees a characteristic of Japanese thought not in terms of a distinctive unchanging thought (main melody) but in the very patterning of change (the bass register). In spite of a cautious and critical approach to the specificity of the patterning of Japanese thought, Maruyama’s work is clouded by an obsession with something that is unambiguously ‘Japanese’. Like Pollock, Maruyama’s interrogation, contrary to his intention, results in constructing an ahistorical continuum of Japanese thought by assuming an unchanging transtemporal ethno-national community. See also Sakai (1996).
the former and the danger of the latter being subsumed in the former by equating the subject of world history with the nation. Such a danger becomes an urgent issue when Japanese hybridism extends its reach to external geopolitical relations, as was the case in the 1930s.

In this regard, it should be stressed that unlike the domestication thesis, some globalisation perspectives tend to conceive Japan’s experience of appropriating foreign dominant cultures not simply as a domestic Japanese trait but as a possible model for other nations. Baudrillard, for example, articulates a postmodern image of Japan. He mentions in passing that Japan represents a ‘weightless artificial satellite’ which is concerned neither with origin nor authenticity but knows ‘how to exploit that situation to the full’, and that the future of the world will belong to such a weightless satellite (Baudrillard 1988: 76). Although we cannot generalise Baudrillard’s conception as the Western image of Japan, it appears that Western evaluations of the Japanese genius for imitation or mimicry has also shifted from negative to positive, along with a new interpretation of the historical dynamic in the age of globalisation. This has much to do with theoretical shifts from modern to postmodern, from production to consumption, and from a view of societies as separate entities to that of global interconnectedness. David Morley (1996: 351), for example, referring to Claxton’s discussion of Singer’s History of Technology, argues that the rise of Western modernity was heavily based on imitation and improvement of Near Eastern [sic] techniques, and this ‘can be seen to be in close parallel with the relation of Japanese to EuroAmerican technologies in the late twentieth century, in which the originally inferior imitators finally surpass their erstwhile “masters”’.

Robertson suggests that the answer to the secret of ‘Japan’s high degree of careful selectivity concerning what is to be accepted or rejected from without’ lies in ‘the new globality-globalisation problem’. Robertson (1992: 90) argues that:

whereas the old, but still surviving way of considering Japan was in terms of its externally stimulated internal transformation along an objective path of modernisation, the new, more appropriate form of consideration
should take as its starting point Japan’s relatively great capacity not merely to adapt selectively to and systematically import ideas from other societies in the global arena but also, in very recent times, to seek explicitly to become, in a specifically Japanese way, a global society.

With the ascent of globalisation theory, Japanese cultural hybridisation takes centre stage: ‘Japan is an effective generator of specific conceptions of world order’ (Robertson 1992: 96). Robertson (1992: 86) further emphasises Japan’s capacity as a model for emulation:

Japan is of great sociological interest not because it is “unique” and “successful”, but because it fulfils the function in the contemporary world of the society from which “leaders” of other societies can learn how to learn about many societies. That is what makes Japan a global society, in spite of claims to the contrary. (emphasis in original)

The suggestion of a turn to the Japanese experience of cultural hybridisation as a model in the age of globalisation has also been increasingly articulated by Japanese nationalistic discourse. We will next consider the way in which the latter is implicated in the extroverted shift in Japan’s cultural orientation in the 1990s.

From culture to civilisation: Re-evaluating Japan’s hybridism

In the 1990s, the increasing attention to Japan’s history of cultural absorption of the foreign as a corrective to the Eurocentric view of history and globalisation in Western scholarship has an interesting convergence with a similar emerging Japanese discourse on the transnational influence of its hybridism. Japan’s hybridism this time is talked about within Japan not in terms of Japanese culture but in terms of Japanese civilisation. Japanese civilisation theory was first espoused by Umesao Tadao in his article, ‘Banmei no sei'ai shikan’ (‘Civilisation from the perspective of ecological history’) (1989), which was originally published in the same period as Kato’s papers on hybrid culture. Rejecting a Eurocentric view of evolution and the associated dichotomy of West and East, Umesao classifies Eurasian civilisational geography into two regions: Japan and Western Europe, situated on the fringes, make up the first region. The desert area of central Eurasia, including such areas as China, India and Russia,
constitutes the second region. Umesao’s argument is that the similarities between Japan and Western Europe in terms of their ecological history produce a parallel civilisation evolution to each other. Umesao insists that Japan does not therefore belong in Asia as it is much closer to Western Europe than to Asia, by the yardstick of the historical process of civilisation from agricultural civilisation to industrial civilisation. Umesao’s argument, like Katō’s, tries to positively re-evaluate Japanese culture/civilisation, which had been negatively regarded as a cheap imitation of the West since defeat in World War II, by dissociating Japan from ‘backward’ Asia (Aoki 1990: 70-76).

Umesao’s work undoubtedly has had a great influence on contemporary civilisation theory, particularly in the keenness to place Japanese civilisation on a par with Western civilisation by rejecting the Eurocentric world view as well as the teleological Marxist view of social evolution (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 142-3). It is in the 1990s, however, that Japanese civilisation has been more eagerly and assertively discussed (for a good overview and critique, see Morris-Suzuki 1993, 1995, 1998). While there is diversity in the arguments and approaches of civilisation theories in Japan, there are some common assumptions. Although emphasising historical dynamics and spatial differences in the creation of multiple civilisations, the notion of ‘civilisation’ in those discussions is derived from the essentialist view of organic culture (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 152). Like the cultural hybridism discourse, Japanese civilisation theories take the existence of clearly demarcated integrated cultural entities as given. More significantly, there is a general agreement among Japanese scholars in regard to the difference between culture and civilisation. While ‘culture’ is the way of life of a social group, ‘civilisation’ articulates a higher stage which a particular culture has reached in the course of historical evolution (e.g., Ueyama 1990: 42-43; Kawakatsu 1991: 22-24; Hirano 1994: 31; see also Morris-Suzuki 1998: 143-144). This view is clearly expressed by the well-known cultural critic, Yamazaki Masakazu (1996: 115), when he distinguishes culture and civilisation:
Culture is a way of life, a conventional order, physically acquired and rooted in subliminal consciousness. Civilisation, in contrast, is a consciously recognised ideational order . . . Cultures die hard, but their spheres of dominance are limited. Civilisations can become widespread, but they may be deliberately abandoned.

‘Culture’ signifies something particularistic, but ‘civilisation’ has much to do with universal principles which can be willingly adopted by other cultures and civilisations.

This shift in the attention from particularistic culture to universal civilisation has accompanied an important transformation of the conception of hybridism in the 1990s. The main concern of Japanese civilisation theorists in the 1990s is less with discerning a parallel between Japan and the West than with advocating a distinct and exportable Japanese civilisational pattern. If civilisation and culture are to be distinguished in terms of the capacity for external influence, the term ‘civilisation’ connotes an active extraversion endorsed by confidence in its own cultural export capacity, while ‘culture’ is more introverted (Kawakatsu & Tsunoyama 1995: 231).

In other words, the articulation of Japanese civilisation theories in the 1990s is strongly motivated by the desire to put Japan at the centre of human history, to present Japanese civilisation as a new guiding principle of global history. As Morris-Suzuki (1998: 178) argues, the shift reflects a growing belief that:

the distinctive features of Japanese society are no longer merely national issues, but offer a pattern for others to follow, just as the patterns of Egyptian, Greek or Roman civilisation once shaped the development of wide realms of world history.

It is in terms of this emerging concern with civilisation’s capacity for expansive spatial spread that a leading civilisation theorist, Ueyama Shunpei, who edited seven volumes on the history of Japanese civilisation, attracted criticism from other scholars of Japanese civilisation theory. Ueyama distinguishes Japanese and Western civilisation in terms of their propensity to cross-cultural influence. Western societies are marked by a ‘convex culture’, willing to exert influence on others. Japanese culture is a ‘concave’ culture, receptive to foreign influences (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 144-145). Tsunoyama (1994: 32) criticises Ueyama’s view that unlike Umesao, who insisted on
the parallel development of Japanese and European civilisation, Ueyama’s evaluation
of ‘concave’ Japanese culture reduces Japanese industrial civilisation to that of a
follower of European civilisation. Likewise, Kawakatsu (1991: 23-4), another leading
scholar of Japanese civilisation, refutes Ueyama’s (1990) attempt to articulate a
distinct Japanese civilisation through the development of the Japanese Emperor system,
arguing that the Emperor system is too particularistic to be analysed in a civilisational
framework. For Tsunoyama and Kawakatsu, any civilisation is not secondary to
others but inevitably has a significant transnational impact in the first place.

One of the core principles of Japanese civilisation is a familiar narrative of hybridism,
that is, its capacity for assimilating the best from other parts of the world. Kawakatsu
(1991: 244-247) argues that unlike other nations which have resisted absorbing foreign
civilisation, Japanese civilisation has a superior capacity for taking the best out of
foreign civilisations. The time has come, according to Kawakatsu, for Japan to conceive
foreign cultural influence not in terms of either worshiping or denying Western
influence. Japan should positively regard its own capacity for cultural mixing so that
it can present itself to the world as a distinguished model of making good use of the
diverse world civilisations. Japan is, Kawakatsu (1995: 81-82) argues, a living museum
and a great laboratory in which world civilisations coexist.

Japan’s civilisational mission of reconciling the East and the West

There are two inter-related contextual factors behind the Japanese re-evaluation of its
civilisation in the 1990s. Firstly, the rise of civilisation discourse in Japan coincides
with the decline of Nihonjinron discourse which emphasised Japan’s unique cultural
traits in essentialising ways. Nihonjinron was powerful and popular during the 1970s
and 1980s. It explained the secret of the Japanese economic miracle and defended
Japan’s trade friction with the United States (Iwahuchi 1994). In the late 1980s when
the trade friction between Japan and the United States became a serious issue, however,
so-called revisionists came to the centre stage of American foreign policy (e.g.,
Fallows 1989, Wolfen 1989). They insisted that Japan is indeed different in terms of its inhumane and undemocratic social systems and institutions, and accused Japan of utilising cultural difference to justify an unfair trade game (Miyoshi 1991). Japan’s supposed cultural uniqueness had changed from an object of admiration to that of criticism. Under these circumstances, it is not a coincidence that the discourse on Japanese national identity departed from the discourse on particularistic culture in the 1990s (see Kawakatu 1991: 244-247). Umesao, in his discussion with Kawakatsu (1998: 276), stresses that Japan should not aim to disseminate its uniqueness but its universal parts to the world. He extends Kawakatsu’s idea of Japan as a living museum of civilisations by proposing that Japan strives to become ‘a department store of civilisations’ where ‘universal Japan’ is favourably on sale.

In relation to this point, other significant factors behind the shift of emphasis in Japanese discourses of national identity from its domestic-oriented culture to its world civilisational role are the rise of Asian economic power and the relative decline of Western hegemony in the post-Cold War period. The rapid economic growth of several countries in Asia is for the first time in history turning negative meanings associated with the term ‘Asia’ into positive ones. Although the recent economic crisis in Asia has become a tense issue in the late 1990s, the ascent of Asian power in the early 1990s was strongly marked by successive moments of ‘Asia saying ‘No’ to the West’. These geo-political and economic changes were accompanied by a reactionary argument on the antagonistic East-West divide. The most (in)famous is American political scientist, Samuel Huntington’s article, ‘The clash of civilisations?’ (1993) published in the conservative American journal, Foreign Affairs. Dividing the world into seven or eight clearly demarcated civilisations which he defined, like Japanese civilisation theories, as the largest organically integrated cultural entities. Huntington argued that civilisational differences will be the major cause of international

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9 For example, consider the case where in Singapore an American teenager, convicted of vandalism, was caned, Malaysia’s boycott of APEC, and the then Australian prime minister, Paul Keating’s subsequent remark referring to the Malaysian leader, Mahathir Mohamad, as ‘recalcitrant’.
conflicts in the post-Cold War era. Huntington's argument was countered by the
discourse of 'Asian values', in which several Asian leaders emphasised the limitation
of the universality of the Western modernisation model and its associated social and
cultural values, such as democracy and human rights. Outspoken former Singaporean
Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, for example, was invited to express an essentialist
voice from Asia in the same journal to the effect that culture is destiny and the West
should not impose its values on 'us' (Zakaria 1994). Although they are in sharp
conflict with each other in terms of political interests, the relationship of the two
discourses can be described as a collusive interplay as they share much in essentialising
the cultural/civilisational difference between West and East.

In this respect, Asian values discourses are surprisingly similar to the debate on
the uniqueness of Japanese culture, in which Confucian values or consensus-oriented
groupism are attributed to the secret of the Japanese economic 'miracle' in the 1970s
and early 1980s. It seems that no lesson has been learned from the debate. What is
more relevant here is that the Japanese experience of modernisation and its economic
power are no longer perceived as scandalous or spectacular as the ascent of the Asian
power is becoming more important to the West. While Japan also said 'No' to the
United States in connection with trade friction, the most assertive Asianists have
been the leaders of Southeast Asian countries, notably Singapore and Malaysia.
Although Huntington recognises the uniqueness of Japanese civilisation, the only
case where a civilisational unit corresponds to that of the nation-state, with attention
focused more on 'Asian values' and Asian political assertiveness with increasing
economic power, Japan is losing its uniqueness vis-à-vis the West.

In this context, in which the construction of Japanese national identity could no
longer successfully be forged solely in terms of Japan's 'unique' receptive power
vis-à-vis the West, emphasising Japanese external influence becomes an attractive

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38 They are Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilisations.
alternative narrative. There are two ways in which Japan’s hybridism is being extrovertedly articulated in reimagining its relation with modern, assertive Asia. The first is to re-emphasise Japan’s mission of reconciling tensions between East and West in an emerging chaotic and antagonistic world order; and the second is to re-assert Japan’s ‘in but above’ position in Asia through the spread of Japanese popular and consumer culture. In response to the ‘Asian values’ discourse and the ‘clash of civilisations’ thesis, we observe the emergence of a new Asianism in Japan which advocates a solidarity with Asia, stressing a natural tie with Asia and Japan’s Asian identity, to counter Western power, as I mentioned in Chapter 1 (e.g., Ogura 1993; Mahathir & Ishihara 1994; 1995). However, it should be stressed that these exclusive discourses, which try to demarcate the rigid boundary between East and West, have attracted more criticism than acclaims in Japan. What is advocated instead is Japan’s distinctive civilisational role in the world. The major tone of the discussion is that Japan should not identify itself with either side, West or East, but rather attempt to play a mediating role between the two. Here, Japanese capacity for hybridisation is seen as a prototype for fusing various, different civilisations in the age of global interconnection which otherwise supposedly engenders a sense of uncertainty and antagonism to cultural difference in the world at large.

Several Japanese journals have had special issues on the ‘clash of civilisations’ debate. For example, the title of a 1994 issue of Hikaku Bunmei is ‘Towards the coexistence of civilisations: beyond the clash of civilisations’. In this issue, Yuasa (1994) convincingly criticises Huntington for his totalising view of cultures and civilisations and his essentialist assumption of a West-East dichotomy. However, Yuasa then argues that the shortcoming of Huntington’s thesis has much to do with the underestimation of the role of Japanese civilisation in world history. Huntington, according to Yuasa, cannot offer a productive vision for the future because he does not take seriously Japan’s successful experience of fusing Western and non-Western civilisations. Yuasa emphasises that Japan’s unique cultural capacity of absorbing
multiple cultural values should be re-evaluated in terms of the reconciliation of cultural and civilisational differences. The point is more clearly articulated by the well-known sociologist, Imada Takatoshi (1994). Imada argues that what is required for the present chaotic world — where neither Western universal hegemony nor modern principles such as functionalism, rationalism, efficiency and unity, any longer produce centripetal forces — is to negotiate difference without suppressing or negating it. It is the capacity for ‘editing’ different cultures and civilisations that should characterise the new civilisation in the 1990s and beyond. Although he concedes that Japan has not yet fulfilled its mission, Japan’s long experience of editing Western and Eastern civilisation would qualify Japan as a principal world editor.

A prominent scholar of international relations, Iokibe Makoto (1994), in his article in a special issue of *Asuiein* on the clash of civilisations, also refers to Japan’s experience of indigenising foreign civilisations, refuting Huntington’s binary opposition between the West and the non-West. Huntington’s thesis reminds Iokibe of Japan’s experience of antagonistic confrontation with Western culture or civilisation in the prewar era. In Iokibe’s view, the lesson learned from this bitter experience might confer on Japan the role of accommodating the antagonistic schism between the West and the non-West. As McCormack (1996: 171) summarises:

> ... while perhaps right in seeing Japan as “different”, Huntington may have missed the fact that Japan’s difference might lie, not in the surface manifestations of distinctiveness, but at a deeper level, where it might actually have achieved the reconciliation of civilisations. Hybrid was much more beautiful than pure. Japan might be seen as evidence that the confrontation and contradiction between civilisations, far from being absolute, was becoming a thing of the past.

Iokibe finds in APEC the best opportunity for Japan to play such a role. He insists that Japan should actively try to reconcile the relationship between ‘Asia’ and ‘the West’, working from Japan’s experience in overcoming the apparent inevitability of its identity being torn apart between the two. Iokibe is not the only one who sees a great possibility in APEC for Japan to act as a global mediator. Takenaka Heizō (1995: 22), a noted economist, also insists that Japan should play the role of ‘an
adhesive holding together the APEC membership'. The general chief of the American
bureau of Asahi Shimbun, Yoichi Funabashi, has been most eloquent in this respect.
He published an English book, Asia Pacific Fusion: Japan's Role in APEC (1995),
which deals with the historical significance of APEC and Japan's role in its construction.
He suggested that Japan should become a 'global civilian power' by actively
contributing to the creation of APEC. It is time for Japan not only to contemplate its
mediating role but to actually create "the civilisation" of the international community'
(1995: 246). By creating a new, Asia-Pacific melting-pot civilisational space, Japan,
for the first time in its modern history, would be able to go beyond an assigned role
of 'bridging East and West' and thus 'avoid the uncomfortable choice between East

To be fair, the imagining of Japan's mission as a mediating leader is not necessarily
motivated by reactive or chauvinistic sentiment. It is advocated as a well-intentioned,
practical political strategy of healing the wounds of a cultural/civilisational divide.
Fukibe (1994) makes the good point that the prevalence of Western values and
institutions in the modern world is not just the victory of Western civilisation. It is
also the victory of the non-West for its successful indigenisation of Western civilisations.
He tries to reject a zero-sum game view of the encounter of different civilisations and
cultures, basing his argument on a recognition that the world is always-already inter-
contaminated. Nevertheless, those discourses on Japan's role in reconciling world
disorder remind us of the coexistence of the two seemingly competing Asianist
discourses in prewar Japan. Koschmann (1997) distinguishes two kinds of Asianism
in prewar Japan: 'exoteric' and 'esoteric'. 'Exoteric' Asianism stresses a harmonious,
natural, organic, quasi-family Asian entity which is based upon cultural and racial
commonalities. 'Esoteric' Asianism instead emphasises the constructive process of
an inclusive Asian community which is based less upon natural ties than upon the
creation of new culture. A leading proponent of the 'esoteric' view, Miki Takashi,
referred to the Japanese cultural capacity of assimilating foreign cultures as a significant
spirit for the creation of an inclusive Asian community appreciative of cultural particularities: ‘Indeed, the depth and breadth of the Japanese mind are aptly revealed in this practical unification of objectively incompatible entities’ (quoted in Koschmann 1997: 92).

Over the course of Japan’s imperialism, as Koschmann points out, the esoteric view was utilised to justify Japan’s invasion of Asia by representing Japan not as an imperial exploiter but as a mediating leader. The impetus for complicity between an esoteric view and Japanese imperialism at the time requires a comprehensive historical research on contemporary political, economic and social elements. However, the continuity of the esoteric view discerned in the renewed Asianism in Japan in the 1990s is remarkable. It is clear that unlike the 1930s and 1940s, when Japan advocated the Great Asian Co-prosperity Sphere, global civilisationism in the 1990s has little to do with Japan’s imperialist ambition. Neither is it concerned with the unification of Asia but with the fusion of East and West. Nevertheless, remembering Japan’s rejection of an exclusivist Asianism and its proposal for an inclusive globalism, the advocate of Japan’s role as an editor, translator or mediator in creating a new civilisational space in the 1990s has much in common with the prewar version of esoteric Asianism. Both assert Japan’s unique leading role in Asia, possess the motivation to counter an Eurocentric view and structure, and articulate ‘certain world-historical pretensions, according to which Japan is destined in the twenty-first century to transcend the modern era and move to the forefront of not only Asia but the world’ (Koschmann 1997: 106).

As ‘Asia’ is resurfacing as a significant Other to Japan, the familiar discourse of Japan’s role as a leading mediator is gaining more currency. Iokibe and Fumabashi see Japan’s in-between positioning as a dilemma which should, and can, be solved. However, we have to ask if this is not a dilemma that Japan creates and fosters for itself in order to construct an exclusivist national identity. If the late-nineteenth century slogan of ‘escape from Asia, enter the West’ has lent itself to constructing an
imaginary binary of ‘Asia’ and ‘the West’ rather than signifying an actual escape from premodern Asia, through current slogans Japan is now reimagining its distinct position in the world to accord with the emerging, strong, modern Asia. If Singapore (as, perhaps, are other Asian countries), is trying ‘to resolve its contradictions between localisation and globalisation by asserting a new coherent identity that is regional’ (Berry 1994: 82), Japan strategically does not identify with either of the clearly demarcated entities, ‘Asia’ or ‘the West’. More precisely, Japan resists subsuming itself under the category of Asia or the West, and is still trying to find a unique place between them. Japan tries to distance itself from either side in order to retain its distinct identity, and thus to reconstruct the trichotomy between ‘Asia’, ‘Japan’ and ‘the West’.

**Japanese popular culture and an Asian civilisation**

The shift from culture to civilisation, from inward hybridism to outward hybridism is also marked by Japan’s search for its cultural superiority through asserting commonality with other Asian nations. This urge is strongly inscribed, as I discussed in the introductory chapter, by an historically constituted ambivalence of the Japanese conception of ‘Asia’, a cultural geography offering Japan at once a shared identity with other parts of Asia and the source of Japanese superiority (Tanaka 1993). However, as Ching (1999) points out, while the similarity between prewar pan-Asianism exemplified by Okakura Tenshin’s (1904) ‘Asia is one’ and the 1990s pan-Asianism uttered by Japanese nationalists is remarkable, the object of such discourse has significantly shifted from aesthetics or high culture to commercialised popular culture. The recent discourse finds the commonality between Japan and Asia less in Asian origin or values than in the common experience of absorption of Western modern civilisation.

This view is different from, and even critical of, an Asianism which emphasises and essentialises the existence of primordial racial and cultural commonalities. While,
as mentioned above, the distinction between culture and civilisation is discussed by
Japanese scholars in order to assert Japan's external influence, it was also a critique
of such exclusivist views, such as those of Huntington and the advocates of Asian
values. As Yamazaki (1996: 115-116) argues:

Failure to distinguish clearly between culture and civilisation marks the
thought of the prophets of the clash of civilisations. The thesis is predicated
on the mistaken notion that a civilisation can be as predetermined property
of an ethnic group as its culture and that a culture can be as universal and
expansive as a civilisation. Working from these misconceptions, it follows
that a stubborn and irrational culture posing as a civilisation could assert
itself politically, stirring up conflict.

Yamazaki argues that history shows how Asia has been marked by the existence of
incommensurable cultural differences without any civilisational umbrella which
brought coherence to Asian regions, until the spread of Western modern civilisation
offered a common ground, if not common attributes or values, to Japan and other
Asian cultures. According to Yamazaki (1996: 117), each nation now has a dual
structure of civilisation and a three-tiered structure of culture-civilisation mix: a
Western world civilisation, a distinct national civilisation, and national culture.
Although the difference between national civilisation and national culture is not
clearly theorised, his point is that 'a world civilisation belongs not to any one group
but to all' and it is precisely the umbrella of a Western world civilisation that has
brought about Asia's integration as a region. If the notion of 'Asia' has any substantial
meaning at all, Yamazaki (1996: 112-113) argues, it is based not upon traditional,
authentic values and culture but on the contemporaneous experience of modernisation.
As Saeki Keishi (1998: 26), a prominent economist, succinctly paraphrases Yamazaki's
point:

Asian modernity should not be regarded as a stage of the teleological
civilisational evolution. It might be characterised by the greediness to
absorb anything universal, irrespective of its origin, in a twinkle and to
assimilate and hybride various foreign things with its own "culture"
according to the yardstick of convenience and pleasure.

It is the keen indigenisation of Western modern civilisation that is giving birth to a
shared (East) Asian civilisation for the first time in history.
Likewise, a sociologist, Kōtō (1998) argues that the universal transportability of Western modernity is the basis of non-Western modernity. He depicts the latter as ‘hybrid modern’ which is created by indigenising the former. Kōtō stresses the difference between ‘hybrid modern’ and ‘postmodern’ in terms of the transformation of modernity: while in the former modernity is transfigured by spatial movement from Western origin to other cultures, the latter is a product of the passage of time and historical change in the West. The examination of Japanese hybrid modernity, Kōtō (1998: 396) argues, is significant in deconstructing the ‘modern’ from an Asian perspective, as it would lead to a better understanding of the rise of East Asian economic power and its modern constitution.

Yamazaki’s and Kōtō’s arguments do not directly address the issue of Japan’s role in Asia, a civilisation in the making, although Yamazaki does refer to the long-standing Japanese capacity for absorbing foreign civilisations and cultures as ‘a prototype of a dual structure’ of civilisations (Yamazaki 1996: 111). However, the argument that Japan and Asia share the common experience of ‘hybrid’ modernisation is easily developed into the assertion that the former experience can be a model for the latter’s emulation — a position which presumes that Japan is a non-Western nation that has most sincerely and successfully absorbed Western civilisation and culture (e.g., Kawakatsu 1991: 244-247; 1995: 81). Here, an exoteric view is again cannibalised by an esoteric view: the Japanese mode of indigenised modernity is articulated as the model for other (East) Asian nations where Western civilisation has been rapidly and eagerly indigenised.

Interestingly, as the indigenisation and appropriation of Western modernity is thought to be a common ground for Japan and other Asian societies, the spread of common popular and consumer culture in many parts of Asia is often referred to as evidence of the ‘Asiasisation of Asia’. Funabashi (1993: 77) argues that if the Asiasisation observed in several Asian societies in the 1990s is marked by the fact that Asian societies have begun defining ‘Asia’ in a positive way, this is less a ‘re-Asiasisation’
than an ‘Asianisation’ because the search for Asian identity is ‘predominantly affirmative and forward-thinking, not reactionary or nostalgic’. Such ‘Asianness’ is more a ‘workaday pragmatism, the social awakening of a flourishing middle class’ (Funabashi 1993: 75). Economic strength is the basis of emerging modernity in Asia, destroying the pre-determined role of Asia as the shadow of Western modernity. For the first time in history, ‘Asia’ is gaining a substantial and positive connotation. Here, the urban middle-class culture widely discerned across Asia is seen as proof of Japan having something in common with Asia. Notably, the ‘Asianness’ is primarily articulated in the shared pursuit of urban consumption of Americanised (Westernised) popular culture. As Funabashi (1993: 78) argues, ‘Asia, which lacks a common heritage of aristocratic class culture, has increasingly become a hotbed of middle-class globalism’ where the cultural links between the middle classes of various Asian countries are strengthening through the development of consumerism and electronic communication technology. This ‘nouveau riche Asianness’ is to be taken positively by Japan, because it signifies ‘the birth of real Asia’ (Ogura 1993) and ‘the first commonness in the history between Japan and Asia’ (Aoki 1993).

In this claim of a shared popular and consumer culture in Asia, shared consumer culture among Asians has tended to be utilised by some intellectuals as a reactionary alibi for secondarily confirming the existence of, or justifying the search for, shared Asian values such as Confucian values, work ethic or collectivism, all of which are at odds with hedonistic consumerism. For example, one of the most eloquent Japanese Asianists, Ogura Kazuo (1993), cites the influence of American popular culture as a common ground for Asian societies, but quickly makes his point that in order to make ‘the real Asia’ more substantial, Asian people should search for features of the ‘Asian spirit’ which could be offered to the rest of the world as universal values, some of which may be diligence, discipline and group harmony. This search should be done through a re-examination of traditional values and educating the Westernised youth who are ignorant of Asian culture.
More importantly, the spread of a common culture cited as evidence of an 'Asianisation of Asia' often means the prevalence of Japanese popular culture in Asia. For Japanese nationalists, the spread of Japanese popular culture to other Asian regions demonstrates Japanese cultural hegemony in the region, while also inferring a sameness between the Japanese and Asian populaces. Although Japan's prolonged economic recession in the late 1990s seems to have been detrimental to the legitimacy of the argument, the spread of Japanese popular culture in other parts of Asia easily led to the 'Asia-yearning-for-Japan' idea which confirms the shift of power from the United States to Japan around the 1990s. The most eloquent right-wing Asianist in Japan, Ishihara Shintarō, asserted in *Japan that Can Say No!*, a book claiming the rise of Japanese power and the decline of American power:

Japanese popular songs are sung throughout East and Southeast Asia, a phenomenon similar to the impact of American pop music on Japan after World War II. We hummed the Top Ten tunes, became fascinated with the American way of life, and created a U.S.-style mass consumption society. (Morita & Ishihara 1989: 151)

This view reflected a belief that Asian people are now yearning for Japanese affluence, technology and popular culture in exactly the same way that the Japanese people once yearned for the American way of life in the postwar era. This tends to stress an evolutionary time lag between Japan and Asia. Asia is behind Japan, but is becoming like 'us'.

This unambiguous claim of Japanese cultural superiority to other Asian countries is, again, camouflaged by apparent cultural commonality. This is clearly shown by Ishihara's subtle shift in emphasis in observing the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia from Japanese cultural superiority to that of Asian commonality. In a controversial book co-authored with Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir, *The Voice of Asia* (1995), Ishihara refers to the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia as a manifestation of the 'natural' commonality shared by Asians (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995: 87-89). Ishihara argues, referring to the spread of Japanese popular culture throughout Asia, that 'our popular culture strikes a sympathetic chord across Asia.'
No hard sell is necessary: the audience is receptive' (Mahathir & Ishihara 1995: 88). It is true that the export of Japanese popular culture to Asia includes Japanese TV dramas, pop idols, character goods and fashion magazines, most of which have rarely found receptive consumers in the West. Even animations, which are well-received in the West, are more eagerly consumed in Asia and some animations and comics can only be exported to Asia (e.g., Ono 1992; 1998; Kawatake 1995). However, these facts are easily exploited as evidence for the commonality among Asians, which, at the same time, make it possible for Japanese Asianist-nationalists to implicitly claim Japanese cultural superiority.

Similarly, Funabashi (1996: 223-4) argues that ‘increasing interaction with Asia and the sharing of popular culture have revealed to the Japanese people the mutual interests they share with other Asians’. Funabashi, however, refers to the popularity of Japanese cultural products, such as Oshin\(^1\) or animations such as Doraemon\(^2\) as main examples of ‘cross-fertilisation’ in Asia, in which he seems to assume that Japan occupies the central position. Thus, the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia, like the prewar pan-Asianism discourse, does not simply generate an essentialised claim of Asian commonality but an ideological assertion that Japan’s national identity should no longer be constructed simply in terms of its ‘original’ and ‘unique’ receptiveness to Western modernity. Rather, its capacity for producing attractive cultural products and disseminating them abroad, particularly to Asia, and its leading role in creating an Asian popular cultural sphere should feature in any such construction.

In fostering the newly articulated modern common between Japan and Asia, Japan’s capacity for cultural assimilation is criticised for being too introverted and self-contained. Aoki (1988), for example, criticises Japanese practices of cultural

\(^1\) Oshin is a Japanese soap opera, first broadcast in Japan in 1989. It soon became popularly received in many non-Western countries, not only in Asia but also in Arabic countries and Cuba. I will discuss the Japanese discourse on the popularity of Oshin in chapter 3.

\(^2\) Doraemon is a Japanese animation TV programme about a cat-like robot who makes the wishes of its friend come true. It is one of the most popular animation series in many Asian countries. However, it has never become popular in Western countries.
assimilation. Contrary to civilisation theorists, Aoki argues that the Japanese capacity for cultural assimilation would itself be an obstacle in the age of internationalisation, when it is less assimilation than coexistence and co-prosperity with cultural others that matters. Aoki elsewhere develops this point, arguing that the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia offers a great opportunity for Japan to go beyond a particularistic national shell (Kawakatsu et al. 1997: 83-89). For Aoki popular culture shared by the emerging urban middle-classes in Asia will not only strengthen ‘horizontal connections’ between Asian nations but also lead to the universalisation of the Japanese cultural system in Asia (Kawakatsu et al. 1997: 86). This point is made explicit by another journalist, working for the same newspaper as Funabashi:

In the age of the global village, we should think seriously of how “Asian wisdom” can contribute to the hitherto Western-dominated global TV culture. Numerous possibilities are open for Japan, as the most “Westernised” country in Asia, to internationally play a significant role in mediating Western and Eastern cultures. (Kumamoto 1993a: 218)

Kumamoto clearly asserts Japan’s role as a mediator between Asia and the West. This view is shared by a media studies scholar, Kawatake (1995). He argues that the significance of the export of Japanese TV programmes to Asian markets lies in countering the massive advance of Western media in Asian markets, reminiscent of the high point in Hollywood’s conquest of the world. The advance of Japanese TV programmes, Kawatake (1995) expects, would lead to the creation of a shared TV culture in Asia. As an Asian nation, Japan could lead the globalisation of Asian media markets.

A more clear-cut remark concerning Japan’s leading role in the creation of Asian

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13 The insistence on overcoming an inward-looking hybridism by exponents of extroverted hybridism should not prevent us from discerning their shared assumptions. Aoki believes cultural assimilation is an essential part of Japanese culture. His view of Japanese culture is still one that sees it as an organic entity (Morris-Suzuki 1995). Aoki finds cultural Others only outside Japan, as if Japan had perfectly assimilated all cultural Others. Aoki’s position highlights that any effective critique of hybridism must start with deconstructing the imagined organic cultural entity of ‘Japan’. Otherwise, even a critical argument about Japanese practices of assimilating foreign cultures reinforces the essentialist discourse on Japan, mistaking hybridism, as a discursive construct, for something intrinsic to Japanese culture, the authenticity of which is beyond question. In this sense, the dynamics of cross-cultural mixing articulated through popular culture re-essentialises the boundaries between ‘Japan’ and ‘Asia’ without remembering Japan’s (post)colonial hybrid subjects.
modern civilisation was uttered by a bureaucrat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a conversational article on how Japan should present itself to the world, featured in 
_Gaiko Forum_, a journal of cultural diplomacy published by the ministry. Referring to _Doraemon_ as a made-in-Japan universal character and the popularity of TV dramas in Asia and Tokyo Disneyland as a favourite destination for Asian youth, he argues that Japan embodies a new, modern civilisation for Asia:

> We are now observing the birth of Asian modern civilisation which is different from American modern civilisation. In this process, Japan not only plays a leading role but, I think, the creation of a new Asian civilisation is becoming a constitutive part of Japanese national identity (Ansart et al. 1994: 54).

Thus, Japanese popular culture has clearly come to feature in the Japanese department store of civilisation. What has been left to answer is how Asian and American modern civilisations are different and how Japanese popular cultural formations articulate Japan’s role in creating an Asian modern civilisation. Tsunoyama Sakae (1995) attempts to answer the question by interpreting the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia in terms of Japan’s civilisational role in indigenising Western material culture/civilisation to suit Asian conditions. The notion of material culture is deployed as an analytical tool by Kawakatsu (1991; 1995) to explore the history of a distinctive Japanese civilisation. Kawakatsu argues that every nation or ethnic group (‘minzoku’) has a unique ‘product mix’ (‘bussan fukugô’) which produces a distinctive cultural ethos or values which he calls a ‘cultural complex’ (‘bunka fukugô’). Tsunoyama (1995) extends Kawakatsu’s argument on ‘product mix’ by distinguishing products (‘bussan’) and commodities (‘shôhin’). Products, he argues, embody a culture of a particular country or region, but do not circulate outside its boundaries. It is commodities, circulating internationally, which testify the universality of a particular culture. Thus culture embodied in a particular product is elevated to the status of a universal civilisation. Tsunoyama (Tsunoyama & Kawakatsu 1995) agrees that products of Asia, such as sugar, cotton, tea, and pottery, have had a great impact on the European way of life and on the European industrial revolution in the seventeenth
century, but he emphasises that the modern materialist civilisation began together with capitalism in the nineteenth century, when Europe, after the industrial revolution, successfully transformed products to commodities. Unlike products, commodities do not distinguish consumers in terms of class, race or culture. With money, commodities can be obtained and consumed by anyone in any part of the world. According to Tsunoyama (1995; see also Tsunoyama & Kawakatsu 1995), Japanese consumer goods therefore offer a clue in understanding the distinctive features of Japanese civilisation. They are spread internationally due to the universal appeal of their functional convenience in everyday life.

Tsunoyama (1995: 98-114) contends that the significant role played by Japanese civilisation is evident in its diffusion of Western material civilisation in the production of affordable commodities for Asian markets. In his view, Japan has acted as a 'transformer sub-station' which successfully refashions original Western commodities to suit the taste and material conditions of consumers in Asia. Tsunoyama (1995: 102-104) further argues that the capacity of Japanese indigenisation of things Western has elevated Japan to a new power plant in the world, a major exporter of many kinds of commodities, even to Western markets. Nevertheless, in articulating Japan's civilisational role, he puts a particular emphasis on the Asian context, where Japanese civilisation has consequently become a model for other parts of Asia to follow:

Western countries might see Japanese civilisation as a cheap imitation or a mere extension of Western civilisation. However, it is people in Asia who are now enthusiastically looking up to Japan as a familiar but yearned for nation. A rapid industrialisation of postwar Japan... is a familiar model for other Asians to emulate (Tsunoyama 1995: 189).

Japan, Tsunoyama further argues, does not simply present itself as a prototype of industrialisation to Asia. Tsunoyama (1995: 189-192) applies his metaphor of Japanese civilisation as a sub-station and a new power plant for Asia to the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia:

It is obvious that the origin of Japanese popular culture can be found in American popular culture. The Japanese indigenised American popular culture into something that suited Japanese tastes. Filtration
through a Japanese prism has made American popular culture something more familiar to people in Asia. The Japanese sub-station has made American popular culture more universal, acceptable even for East Asian youths. . . . the universal appeal of Japanese popular culture in Asia is based upon its erasure of any nationality ("mukokuseki") from popular culture of American origin. (Tsunoyama 1995: 191)

The term *mukokuseki* is widely used in Japan in two different ways: to suggest the mixing and juxtaposition of elements of multiple cultural origins; and to imply the erasure of visible ethnic and cultural characteristics. While, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the latter meaning is closely associated with animation and computer games, it is via the former meaning that Tsunoyama explains the spread of Japanese popular culture to Asian regions. Tsunoyama (1995: 191) stresses that Japanese popular culture is not appreciated in Asia for its "authentic" cultural appeal. Rather, it is Japan's skill of indigenising Western culture in Asian contexts that articulates the transnational appeal of Japanese popular culture. Here, Tsunoyama does not simply assert that Japanised American popular culture is *naturally* appealing to Asian audiences. More significantly, the claim of Japanese cultural superiority is still accompanied by a self-praising assertion of supposed cultural commonality between Japan and 'Asia'. Because Japan has subtly imitated and indigenised American popular/consumer culture, Tsunoyama (1995: 189-190) argues, other Asians appreciate Japanese popular culture and 'Japan has come to be the object of yearning for young people in other Asian countries again'.

A main problem with Tsunoyama's argument is, as with other hybridism discourses, a failure to appreciate the existence of other modes of cultural mixing. Conferring a distinctive 'Japanese-ness' on *mukokuseki* Japanese cultural products, Tsunoyama assumes that Japan is the first and final stop in the indigenisation process in global cultural flows. Hybridism discourse can hold good only so far as it can defer acknowledgment and appreciation of the multifarious and contradictory ways of

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44 The term *mukokuseki* was first used to describe a new film genre in the early 1960s by a newspaper film critic in Japan (Koi 1989: 290). Parodying Hollywood Western films such as *Shane*, a Japanese film production house, Nikkatsu, produced a series of action films which featured a (Japanese) guitar toting wandering gunman.
endless indigenisation, appropriation and mixing all over the world. Also suppressed in hybridism discourse is the undeniable fact that Japanese culture itself, arguably the fruit of skillful hybridisation, is in turn destined to be contradictorily consumed, appropriated and indigenised in the process of transnational consumption. This explains why Tsunoyama’s argument does not address the question of whether and how distinctive Japaneseness, other than the act of cultural indigenisation and mixing, is embodied in mukokuseki popular culture or perceived by audiences/consumers in other parts of Asia. If Japanese popular culture is well-received in Asian regions, because it lacks perceptible ‘Japaneseess’, as Tsunoyama argues, how could ‘Japan’ become the object of yearning?

This question might not have concerned civilisation theorists who refer to the spread of popular culture as a convenient example of Japan’s genius for cross-fertilisation. However, when we closely look at the Japanese discourse on the spread of Japanese consumer and popular culture in the world, as I will do in the next chapter, the difficulty in articulating ‘Japaneseess’ in mukokuseki popular culture and the ambivalence generated by Japanese efforts to claim its central positioning in the endless transnational indigenisation process of West-dominated cultural flows becomes apparent. The same holds true with Asian audiences’ reception of Japanese popular culture. There are some grounds for the view that the appeal of Japanese popular culture for other Asian audiences, if partly, lies in its embodiment of successful indigenisation of Western modernity. As I will discuss in chapter 5, however, audience identification of cultural similarity through the consumption of Japanese popular culture in other parts of Asia is a more complex and dynamic process which does not directly generate a sense of Japanese superiority among Asian audiences.

Thus, the re-evaluation of Japanese culture/civilisation in a chaotic world, the discussion about Japan’s leading role in Asia in terms of hybridising West and East, and the articulation of Japan’s cultural power through the assertion of a commonality with Asia are not only discerned in Japanese academic discourse on Japanese
civilisation. We can see how all of these themes are overtly or covertly intermingled with each other in Japanese discourses on the export of Japanese popular culture, the strategies adopted by Japanese media and cultural industries for entering Asian markets and the intra-regional circulation and consumption of popular cultural forms in East Asia. It is the way in which these practices illuminate the ambivalence and contradiction embraced in the Japanese discursive articulation of its superiority to and commonality with other parts of East and Southeast Asia that I will analyse in the following chapters.
Japanese popular culture goes global:  
‘Soft’ nationalism and narcissism

In Chapter 2, I argued that Japan’s cultural orientation, after a long, postwar period of introversion, has turned extroverted again in the 1990s. Here I explore this shift more concretely through an analysis of the rise of Japanese cultural export of audiovisual products. Drawing on a wide range of popular and academic texts published in Japan which reflect on Japanese popular culture in the global context, I will argue that the rise of Japan in the global audiovisual markets has caused the emergence of a ‘soft’ nationalism — that is, a discourse which celebrates the transnational dissemination of Japanese popular cultural ‘software’ in the name of the national interest.

Looking at the development of Japanese cultural exports, I will show that there is a discrepancy between actual Japanese cultural influence and its perceived presence in the world. The major Japanese audiovisual export products are ‘culturally colourless’, that is, products which do not evoke an image of the producing country. In spite of the global circulation of made-in-Japan audiovisual products, these items have tended to be perceived as products from ‘nowhere’, and not particularly as items of ‘Japanese’ cultural origin. Since the late 1980s, however, the prevalence of Japanese cultural export throughout the world has become a prominent theme of discussion both within Japan and internationally. Initially it was the cultural influence of made-in-Japan hardware (technological products) such as the Walkman that drew international media and academic attention. Subsequently, it was Japanese manufacturers’ inroads into the software business, exemplified by their buy-out of Hollywood studios in the late 1980s, which gave them access to the huge archives of Hollywood-produced films and other ‘content’ products.

Then, in the early 1990s, the Japanese focus of attention shifted to Japanese software itself. There are two distinct genres of audiovisual software that are exported
to the different international markets which Japanese cultural industries try to influence: animation and computer games for the global (including the Western) marketplace and TV programmes for regional Asian markets. Japanese commentators on the global spread of Japanese animation and computer games often take a self-satisfied pleasure in observing how these cultural commodities are appropriated and consumed in the world. The spread of Japanese animation and computer games in international markets confers on Japan a global power status, something which renders the issue of lack of Japanese ‘cultural odour’ no longer relevant. However, I will argue, this chauvinistic nationalist discourse contains a transnationalist ambivalence: an ambivalence associated with the difficulty of apprehending precisely what is ‘Japanese’ about Japanese popular culture. The rise of Japanese cultural status in the world is confirmed only by disregarding the contradictory and disjunctive nature of transnational cultural flows.

Such an apolitical, celebratory tone, however, disappears in relation to Japan’s cultural export to Asia, which is overdetermined by Japan’s imperialist history and its lingering asymmetrical power relation with other Asian countries. Here, the disregard for the complexity inherent in transnational cultural flows and consumption is manifest in the simplistic view that the spread of Japanese popular culture would facilitate cultural dialogue with Asia. The increasing export of TV programmes to Asian markets arguably serves Japan’s national interest as it presents, from a Japanese perspective, an opportunity for enhancing Asia’s understanding of postwar liberated Japan. However, I will argue, through the analysis of a Japanese film on the ‘Japanisation’ of Asia, that such a view of cultural dialogue is not simply illusionary. The spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia also reinvokes the ambivalence produced by the borrowed nature of Japan’s cultural power. Asian imitation of Japan reminds Japanese observers of Japan’s own grotesque mimicking of American popular culture and the tenuous nature of its cultural power.
Culturally ‘odourless’ commodities

No one would deny the fact of Japanese economic power. Although its power has been undermined by a prolonged economic and financial slump in the 1990s, this only serves to highlight the fact that Japan — as the second biggest economy in the world — has tremendous global influence, particularly in Asia. However, the cultural dimensions of this global influence have not been widely discussed until recently. This does not mean that Japan does not have any cultural impact. Rather, the assumption of Japan’s lack of cultural impact testifies to a discrepancy between actual cultural influence and perceived cultural presence. The cultural impact of a particular commodity is not necessarily experienced in terms of the cultural image of the exporting nation. For example, in the realm of audiovisual commodities, there is no doubt that Japan has been a dominant exporter of consumer technologies as well as animation and computer games. From VCRs, computer games, karaoke, the Walkman and video cameras to, more recently, digital TV and High Definition TV, the prevalence of Japanese consumer electronics in the global marketplace is overwhelming. Freed from the obligation to devote its research and development energy to military purposes after the Second World War and with the help of the Japanese government, the Japanese electronics industry has successfully inverted the idea of ‘scientific or military research first’. Instead, technological development has come to be pushed by consumer electronics (Forester 1993: 4). This development has been based upon the adage, ‘First for consumers’, expressed by Ibuka Masaru, founder of Sony (quoted in Lardner 1987: 38).

Japanese consumer technologies certainly have had a tremendous impact on our everyday life, which is, in a sense, more profound than that of Hollywood films. To use Jody Berland’s (1992) term, they are ‘cultural technologies’ which mediate between texts, spaces, and audiences. New cultural technologies open new possibilities for the consumption of media texts by audiences. In turn, by promoting the market-driven privatisation of consumer needs and desires, new cultural technologies open up new
ways for capital to accommodate itself to the emergent communication space for the sake of the sovereignty of the individual consumer. For example, VCRs have facilitated the transnational flow of VTR recorded programmes through both legal channels and illegal piracy. This gave consumers, especially those in the developing countries whose appetites for information and entertainment have not been satisfied, access to diverse programmes which have been officially banned. In response, governments have changed their policies from rigid restriction of the flow of information and entertainment to more open market-oriented control of the flow through, for example, the privatisation of TV channels (Garley & Ganley 1987; Boyd et al. 1989; O'Regan 1991). On the whole, this development has encouraged the global centralisation of distribution and production of software, and facilitated the further spread of American software. Despite the fear of profits being creamed off by piracy, VCRs have helped Hollywood to open up new markets and find ways of exploiting new technologies through video rental and export of TV programmes to newly privatised channels (see O'Regan 1992; Gomery 1988).

On the level of consumer experience, Japanese electronic technologies have promoted strongly what Raymond Williams (1990: 26) has called 'mobile privatisation'. These consumer technologies give people greater choice and mobility in their media consumption activities in domestic, private spaces. For example, the VCRs allowed people to 'time shift': to record TV programmes and watch them at a later more suitable time. It is an interesting question why such individualistic, private technologies have been developed and have flourished in an apparently group-oriented society such as Japan. Kogawa (1984, 1988) coined the term 'electronic individualism' to characterise Japanese social relations, arguing that Japanese collectivity is increasingly based upon electronic communication and therefore becoming more precarious. Although Kogawa views the contemporary Japanese situation somewhat pessimistically, he points out that it offers dual possibilities of the emancipation of individuals via technologies and, alternatively, the sophisticated control of individuals.
Indeed, as Chambers (1990: 2) argues, one of the most successful Japanese cultural technologies of the past decades — the Sony Walkman — is an ambivalent ‘cultural activity’ swaying between ‘autonomy and autism’. Such an activity can be seen as a form of escapism which makes individuals feel a sense of atomised freedom from the constraints of a rigidly controlled society. It also has the possibility of substituting a privatised ‘micro-narrative’ for collective ‘grand-narratives’ (Chambers 1990: 3).

Speaking of the Chinese context, Chow (1993: 398) argues that listening to a Walkman is ‘a “silent” sabotage of the technology of collectivisation’ (for a more thorough analysis of the Walkman, see du Gay et al. 1997).

Despite the profound influence of Japanese consumer technologies on the cultural activities of our everyday life, they have tended not to be talked about in terms of Japanese cultural presence. Hoskins and Mirus (1988: 503) argue that, in comparison with the American dominance of world film markets, Japan is successful in its routine export of consumer technologies because these are ‘culturally neutral’ commodities, whose country of origina has nothing to do with ‘the way [that they work] and the satisfaction [that a consumer] obtains from usage’. Their associated arguments concerning ‘cultural discount’ turn our attention to the relative unexportability of Japanese films, TV programmes or music with the notable exception of animation. Even though certain Japanese films and literature have had a Western following, the transnational outflow of Japanese popular cultural products has been disproportionately small. Hoskins and Mirus (1988: 500) describe ‘cultural discount’ as occurring when:

A particular programme rooted in one culture and thus attractive in that environment will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question. Included in cultural discount are reductions in appreciation due to dubbing or subtitling.

Cultural prestige, Western hegemony, the universal appeal of American popular culture, and the prevalence of the English language are no doubt advantageous to Hollywood. By contrast, Japanese is not widely spoken outside Japan, and Japan is
supposedly obsessed with its own cultural uniqueness (see Iwabuchi 1994).1

Notwithstanding the argument outlined above, the term 'culturally neutral' seems to me misleading. The influence of cultural products on everyday life, as we have seen, cannot be culturally neutral. Any product has the cultural imprint of the producing country, even if not recognised as such. I would argue that the major audiovisual products Japan exports may be characterised as the ‘culturally odourless’ three Cs: consumer technologies (such as VCRs, karaoke and the Walkman); comics and cartoons (animation); and computer/video games. I use the term ‘cultural odour’ to focus on the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, often stereotyped, way of life are associated positively with a particular product in the consumption process. Any product may have various kinds of cultural association with the country of its invention. I am rather interested in the moment when the image of the lifestyle of the country of origin is strongly evoked as the appeal of the product, when the ‘cultural odour’ of cultural commodities is evoked. The way in which the cultural odour of a particular product becomes ‘fragrance’ — a socially and culturally acceptable smell — is not determined simply by the consumer’s perception that something is ‘made in Japan’. Neither is it necessarily related to material influence or quality of the product. It has more to do with widely disseminated symbolic images of the country of origin. The influence of McDonald’s throughout the world, for example, can be discerned in terms of the bureaucratisation and standardisation of food; the principles governing the operation of McDonald’s can also be extended to other everyday life activities such as education and shopping (Ritzer 1993). However, no less important to McDonald’s’ international success is its

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1 'The notion of ‘cultural discount’ cannot not entirely explain a consumer’s cultural preference’. Foreign programmes, for example, can be seen as more attractive because they are “exotic”, “different” or less “boring”. The cultural difference embodied in foreign products can also be less of a threat to local ways precisely because the imported products are conceived as “foreign”, while those originating from culturally proximate countries are perceived as more threatening (O’Regan 1992). The legacy of Japanese imperialism in Asia is a case in point. It is also an open question as to what extent other Asians consider Japanese cultural products ‘culturally discounted’ or ‘culturally proximate’ (Straubhaar 1991) and this point will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5.
association with an attractive image of ‘the American way of life’ (e.g., Featherstone 1996: 8; Frith 1981: 46). McDonald’s, of course, does not inherently represent ‘America’. It is a discursive construction of the latter that confers on McDonald’s its powerful association with ‘Americanness’.

Sony’s Walkman is an important cultural commodity which has influences on our everyday life in various ways. For this reason, Du Gay et al. (1997) chose it as the cultural artefact most appropriate for a case study in the multi-layered analyses of cultural studies. Sony’s Walkman, they argue, may signify ‘Japanese-ness’ in terms of miniaturisation, technical sophistication and high quality. Such signs of ‘Japanese-ness’ are analytically important but not especially relevant to the Walkman’s appeal at a consumer level. The use of the Walkman does not evoke images or ideas of a Japanese lifestyle, even if consumers know it is made in Japan and many appreciate ‘Japanese-ness’ in terms of its sophisticated technology. Unlike American commodities, as Featherstone (1996: 9) points out, ‘Japanese consumer goods do not seek to sell on the back of a Japanese way of life’ and they lack any influential ‘idea of Japan’ (Wee 1997).

The cultural odour of a product is also closely associated with racial and bodily images of a country of origin. The three Cs I mentioned earlier are cultural artefacts in which the bodily, racial and ethnic characteristics are erased or softened. This is particularly evident in Japanese animation where the characters, for the most part, do not look ‘Japanese’. As I discussed in the previous chapter, such non-Japanese-ness is called mukokuseki, which literally means something or someone lacking any nationality, but also implies the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features. Internationally acclaimed Japanese animation director, Oshii Mamoru, suggests that Japanese animators and cartoonists unconsciously choose not to draw ‘realistic’ Japanese characters if they wish to draw attractive characters (Oshii et al. 1996). In his case the characters tend to be modelled on Caucasian types. Consumers of and audiences for Japanese animation
and games may be aware of the Japanese origin of these commodities, but they perceive little ‘Japanese bodily odour’.

**Japan goes global: Sony and animation**

While the propensity of Japanese animators to make their products non-Japanese points to how a Western-dominated cultural hierarchy governs transnational cultural flows in the world, what has become conspicuous since the late 1980s is that Japan’s hitherto odourless cultural presence has become recognised as very ‘Japanese’ in a positive and affirmative sense. On the one hand, Japan has become one of the main players in media globalisation by consumer technologies manufacturers extending its reach into the software production business in the 1990s. It was Sony’s purchase of Columbia in 1989, and Matsushita’s purchase of MCA (Universal) in 1990, which dramatised the ascent of Japanese global media conglomerates through the merger of hardware and software. There was considerable reaction from within the United States against these buy-outs, claiming that the Japanese are ‘buying into America’s soul’ (Morley & Robins 1995: 150). In the film, *Black Rain*, Japanese co-star Takakura Ken replied to Michael Douglas’ antagonistic remark about Japanese economic expansion into the United States that ‘Music and movies are all your culture is good for . . . We make the machines’ (quoted in Morley & Robins 1995: 159). This comment is perhaps an expression of the American *fantasy* of the creative supremacy of American popular culture. There is a generalised disdain for the Japanese fascination with technology; creative software production should not be controlled by mindless hardware manufacturers.

However, the significance of Japanese inroads into Hollywood has to be considered in the broader perspective of media globalisation. The rise of Japanese media industries thus articulates a new phase of global cultural flow dominated by a small number of

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2 As Classen *et al.* (1994) show, while ‘odor’ or ‘smell’ seems to be a natural phenomenon, the perceived attraction of any particular odor is, in fact, closely associated with the historical and social construction of various kinds of hierarchies such as class, ethnicity and gender.
transnational corporations (Aksoy & Robins 1992). These moves testify to the increasing trend of global media mergers which aim to offer a 'total cultural package' of various media products under a single media conglomerate (Schiller 1991). After all, the reason Sony and Matsushita bought into Hollywood was not to dominate American minds. It was rather a logical extension of the centralisation of product distribution. The purpose was to construct a total entertainment conglomerate through the acquisition of control over both audio-visual hardware and software. It was based upon the sober economic judgement that 'it is cultural distribution, not cultural production, that is the key locus of power and profit' (Garnham 1990: 161-2, emphasis in original). The incursion can be seen as a confirmation of the supremacy of American software creativity and therefore of Japan's second-rate ability as a software producer. Japanese trading companies such as Sumitomo and Itochu also invested in American media giants (e.g., Sumitomo-TCI; Itochu-Time Warner). This suggests that Japanese cultural influence and presence in the world is still put in the shade by its economic power. As Herman and McChesney (1998: 104) argue: 'Japan is supplying capital and markets to the global media system, but little else'. Seen this way, the purpose of the Japanese takeover was not to kill the American soul but, on the contrary, to make Hollywood omnipresent. Japanese ingenuity in hardware production and American genius in software go hand in hand, because (Japanese) consumer technologies work as 'distribution systems' for (American) entertainment products (Berland 1992: 46).

These Japanese companies strengthen American cultural hegemony by investing in the production of Hollywood films and by facilitating their distribution all over the globe. Matsushita has since retreated from Hollywood and Sony has struggled to make a profit (see Negus 1998). However, apart from the takeover of Hollywood by Japanese companies, as well as by European companies, there is good evidence to confirm the end of the era in which 'the media are American' (Tunstall 1977).

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1 However, Sony Pictures Entertainment finally achieved a new box-office sales record in 1997 (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 14 November 1997).
Japanese consumer technologies have become so sophisticated that we can talk about a ‘technoculture’ in which ‘cultural information and the technical artifact seem to merge’ (Wark 1991: 45). More significantly, Japan is not only increasing its capital and market share in the audiovisual global markets but also its cultural presence on the global scene through the export of culturally odourless products other than consumer technologies. Japanese animation and computer games have attained a certain degree of popularity in Western countries as well as in non-Western countries. They embody a new aesthetic, emanating in large part from Japanese cultural inventiveness, and capture the new popular imagination (Wark 1994).

Since Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s hugely popular animation film, Akira (1988), the quality and attraction of ‘Japanimation’ has been acknowledged by the American market. In November 1995, the animated film, The *Ghost in the Shell*, was shown simultaneously in Japan, America and Britain. Its video sales, according to *Billboard* (24 August 1996), made it to No. 1 on the video charts in the United States. The value of export of Japanese animation and comics to the American market amounted to US $75 million in 1996 (*Sankei Shimbun* 14 December 1996). Furthermore, computer games are dominated by three Japanese manufacturers, Nintendo, Sega and Sony. The popularity of Japanese game software is exemplified by *Super Mario Brothers* and *Sonic*. According to a survey, as a director of Nintendo pointed out, Mario was a better known character among American children than Mickey Mouse (*Akurosū Henshūshitsu* 1995: 41-42).

However, it is important to place the international popularity of Japanese animation and computer games within a wider picture of transnational media industries and market interconnection as well. Media globalisation does not simply promote the global reach of Western media industries and commodities. It also facilitates ‘the de-centring of capitalism from the West’ (Tomlinson 1997:140-143) through increasing integration, networking and cooperation among world-wide transnational cultural industries, including non-Western ones. For transnational corporations to enter
simultaneously those various markets such as global, supra-national regional, national and local, the imperatives are the establishment of a business tie-up with others at each level — whether in the form of buy-out or collaboration — and the global selection of new cultural products with an international appeal.

Finding a local partner is particularly important in facilitating the entry of non-Western cultural industries and products into Western markets. Morley and Robins (1995: 13) point out three strategic patterns of activities for global media corporations: producing cultural products; distributing products; and owning hardware which delivers products. Penetration of transnational cultural industries into multiple markets needs the combination of at least two of the above three, particularly production and distribution, both of which are dominated by American industries. If Sony’s encroachment on Hollywood articulates Japanese exploitation of American software products in order to become a global media player, media globalisation also promotes the incorporation of Japanese, and other non-Western, media products into the Western-dominated global distribution network. Japanese cultural industries and Japanese media products cannot successfully become transnational players without partners. The serious shortcoming of Japanese cultural industries, despite mature production capabilities and techniques, is the lack of international distribution channels. It is therefore actually Western (American) global distribution power that makes Japanese animation a part of global popular culture. The process can be called an ‘Americanisation of Japanisation’. For example, it was the investment and the distribution channels of a British and American company, Manga Entertainment — established in 1994, part of the Polygram conglomerate — that made The Ghost in the Shell a hit in Western countries. Similarly, in 1995, Disney decided to globally distribute Miyazaki Hayao’s animated films. Miyazaki gained prestige from Disney’s decision, which helped turn his latest animation, Mononokehime, to become a phenomenal hit in Japan in 1997. Its Japanese box office revenue exceeded 10 billion yen, surpassing for the first time the until then record figure achieved by E.T. (Nikkei Entertainment January 1998)."
The production cost was 2.3 billion yen and more than 2 billion yen were spent on publicity in Japan (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 9 June 1997). As the producer of the film acknowledged, the fact that Miyazaki’s animations are highly appreciated by the global animation giant, Disney, worked well as the publicity for giving the film an international prominence (Nikkei Entertainment January 1998). Japanese animation’s inroads into the global market articulate the ever-growing global integration of markets and media industries. The examples discussed clearly show that the Japanese animation industry is becoming a global player only by exploiting the power of Western media industries.  

In this regard, Japanese animation is often compared by the Japanese media to the Ukiyo-e — the premorden Japanese colour prints depicting ordinary people’s everyday life, whose beauty and values were appreciated as Japanese by the West and which had a significant impact on Western artists. It is often suggested that animation faces the same dilemma as Ukiyo-e, many of which have been taken out of Japan and exhibited in Western art galleries from the mid-nineteenth century onward. The West (America) may again deprive Japan of animation while Japan itself fails to recognise their (commercial) value (e.g., Dime 6 October 1994; Bart 22 January 1996; Nikkei Trendy October 1996). Precisely because they have come to be universally consumed, they are destined to be copied, studied and indigenised outside Japan. Thus, Hollywood is trying to develop a new global genre by making use of Japanese animation. American film producers and directors are recruiting Japanese animators to develop American animation and computer graphics (Aera 29 July 1996; Nihon Keizai Shimbun 5 January 1997; 9 June 1997). American production companies, with the help of

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4 This record was, however, easily broken by Titanic in June 1998.

5 The director of Ghost in the Shell, while producing a new animation film, plainly stated in 1998 that he takes Western markets into consideration (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 16 January 1998). The budget of the current film is 2.3 billion yen, substantial for a Japanese animated film. The director of Akira — a film which attracted the attention of Western audiences in the late 1980s — is also producing a new film with a budget of 1.6 billion yen. As is the case in Hollywood, Japanese animation has become a big, though risky, business by means of taking global distribution into consideration at the production stage.
Japanese animators, began producing Japanimation in the United States (Ohata 1996; Nikkei Trendy October 1996). Also, the South Korean government has decided to support the promotion of the local animation industry for the sake of the future development of the national economy. A Korean conglomerate has entered the animation business by investing in domestic as well as Japanese animation industries (Nihon Keizai Shinbun 3 September 1996; Aera 29 July 1996).

In relation to these moves by international competitors, there have emerged in Japan arguments for the encouragement and protection of the Japanese animation and computer game industries. Domestically, the most important factor in the 1990s stimulating Japan to examine these industries was the recession. After the collapse of the so-called 'bubble' economic expansion in the late 1980s, the Japanese economy suffered a long slump. The popularity of Japanimation and computer games in the world brightly contrasted with the dark prospect for Japan's economic future. Clearly, animation and computer game characters play a significant role in the multimedia business. The comics characters are intertextual and can be used in a variety of media such as computer games, movies, TV series, CD-ROMs and toys. Kinder (1991) describes the multiple possibilities of transmedia intertextuality as representing a 'supersystem of entertainment' which has come to be a dominant force in the global entertainment business (see especially ch 4). Japanese comics and animation would be the main features of such a supersystem. The realisation of the limits of the Japanese manufacturing-oriented economy since the recent recession has turned Japanese towards the emerging business opportunities presented by animated and digitalised multi-media products, as reflected in Sony's 1996 new corporate image slogan, 'Digital Dream Kids' (e.g., Takemura 1996; Dime 7 February 1991; Nihon Keizai Shinbun 25 February 1996; Nikkei Trendy December 1998).

Although the economic potential of the animation industry has been recognised, it has not yet led to encouragement of, and investment in, the industry in Japan (Takemura 1996: 72-105). The Japanese government is a target of criticism for its failure to
promote Japan’s most lucrative cultural software industry in the digitalised world (\textit{Dime} 3 June 1997). Oshii Mamoru, the director of \textit{The Ghost in the Shell}, lamented the lack of support for development of the animation industry in Japan, and predicted the decay of the industry in the near future (\textit{Nikkei Entertainment} May 1997). Responding to criticism, the Agency for Cultural Affairs belatedly decided to support multimedia software content in 1997 and held a Media Arts Festival in Tokyo in February 1998. Its purpose was to encourage the domestic production of animation, comics, computer graphics and computer game software. The Agency for Cultural Affairs also decided to set about eradicating piracy of Japanese software in Asia (\textit{Asahi Shimbun} 22 January 1998). Animation and digitalised software have thus become an officially recognised Japanese culture.

\textbf{Techno-Orientalism vs. techno-nationalism}

These developments in Japanese audiovisual cultural products in international markets have been accompanied by a surge of interest within Japan in its global cultural influence. Particularly since the late 1980s, Japanese cultural power, articulated by the global consumption of ‘culturally odourless’ Japanese audiovisual products, has become an important element in the discursive construction of Japanese national identity.

It was the global predominance of Japanese consumer technologies that first evoked Japanese cultural nationalist sentiment. Through an analysis of the domestic advertising strategies of Sony and Matsushita, Yoshimi (1999) explores what is called Japan’s ‘techno-nationalism’, that is, how the export of Japanese consumer technologies has played a significant role in sparking off Japanese national pride in the postwar era. His analysis shows an interesting temporal lag between the moment when the advertising strategies of Sony and Matsushita stressed the international recognition of Japanese technological excellence and the moment when such recognition became an unambiguous reality. As Yoshimi (1999) points out, in the 1950s and 1960s Japanese
manufacturers such as Matsushita and Sony emphasised the international presence of their products in domestic advertising. Given that Japanese consumer technologies were at that time still regarded in the West as cheap but of bad quality, stress on the fact that made-in-Japan products were exported to Western markets suggests the importance for Japanese manufacturers of promoting a prestigious image for themselves in Japan. Appeal to cultural nationalist sentiment was necessary precisely because of Japan’s low profile in the global consumer markets.  

However, in the late 1980s, when Japanese economic power became unequivocal, made-in-Japan consumer technologies became more conspicuously articulated in the Japanese media as a source of Japanese national pride. This time, the fact of Japan’s global export of commodities was not the only thing emphasised. The global reach of Japanese consumer technologies is now attributed to Japan’s ‘creative and original refinement’, if not ‘pure originality’, rather than to its cunning ability in copying or imitating ‘the West’ (Forester 1993; Lardner 1987). For example, VCRs were originally invented by an American company, but it was Sony, Matsushita and JVC which, with many original ideas, refined them and made them suitable for the consumer market (Lardner 1987). Morita Akio (1987) — a former chairman of Sony — published a book, Made in Japan, in which he tried to explain why Sony, as a Japanese company, succeeded on a world scale. In 1991, NHK (Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai), the national TV network, broadcast a six-episode series entitled ‘Japan the electronic nation: An autobiography’. The series documented the historical development of Japanese semi-conductor technologies in the postwar era and sought a Japanese national character which was responsible for such developments. As Yoshimi (1999) points out, a basic assumption underlying the series was Japanese ingenuity in innovative imitation. Japanese technological superiority in global contexts was clearly attributed  

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6 Once those manufacturers had secured firm international recognition for the high quality of their products, there was no longer a need to assert technological excellence. Straightforward nationalist claims, as Yoshimi (1999) argues, were replaced by comical depictions of the encounter between Japan and the West in the 1970s and 1980s when the superior quality of Japanese consumer technologies had become highly appreciated in the world.
to Japan's adaptable ingenuity and indigenising capacity.

Against this rise of Japanese economic and techno-cultural power, a condescending discourse emerged in the West, what Morley and Robins (1995) call 'techno-Orientalism'. Morley and Robins (1995: 147-173) analysed how media and cultural globalisation has had an impact on the re-construction of a European collective identity and the way in which the Orientalist representation of the Other is recast in the process. In their argument, Japan has become an emergent Other of the late twentieth century against which the West can project its own superiority. Unlike the premodern Other, however, Japan has achieved a high degree of modernisation and acquired technological sophistication. 'Japan has come to exist within the Western political and cultural unconscious as a figure of danger, and it has done so because it has destabilised the neat correlation between West/East and modern/premodern' (Morley & Robins 1995: 160). The West cannot maintain its presumption of technological and material superiority against this hi-tech Orient, as 'Japan can no longer be handled simply as an imitator or mimic of Western modernity' (Morley & Robins 1995: 173).

In the discourse of 'techno-Orientalism', the West maintains its cultural and moral excellence by depicting a de-humanised picture of a technology-soaked Japanese society: 'Within the political and cultural unconscious of the West, Japan has come to exist as the figure of empty and dehumanised technological power. It represents the alienated and dystopian image of capitalist progress' (Morley & Robins 1995: 170). However, the other side of the Western image of Japanese people as 'unfeeling aliens' who are 'cyborgs and replicants' is Western envy that 'these Japanese mutants are now better adapted to survive in the future' (Morley & Robins 1995: 170). Western ambivalence, feelings of 'resentment and envy' towards Japanese techno-power make the rise of Japan a real threat to Western identity.

Morley and Robins' purpose is to criticise the lingering Orientalisation of the non-Western Other inherent to the construction of a superior modern Western identity.
at a time when the legitimacy of the latter is being undermined by the rise of Japan as an economic super-power. Japan's economic power made Japanese self-asserted cultural uniqueness a matter for the construction of Western identity, in a context in which the rivalry between Japan and the United States in terms of trade surplus and technological excellence became a serious issue (e.g., Miyoshi 1991; Robertson 1991).

From a Japanese point of view, Japan's increasing confidence in its dominant position in the world economy generated an aggressive assertion of Japanese cultural power in the world through technological excellence. One prominent example was Morita Akio and Ishihara Shintarô's *Japan that Can Say 'No'!* in 1989 (English version 1991), in which Japanese technological superiority was proudly associated with Japan's ascendency and America's relative decline in the world. As I have discussed elsewhere (Iwabuchi 1994), the Japanese discourse on national identity has been deeply complicit with Western discourses in essentialising Japaneseness. The Western Orientalist gaze on Japan has been indispensable to the Japanese self-Orientalising construction of unique national identity. Here again, there is a complicit mutual othering of Japan. Western techno-orientalism and Japanese techno-nationalism are both stressing the essential difference between Japan and the West (Iwabuchi 1994: 60-63).

"Grotesque Japan": a narcissistic view of Japan's global cultural presence

However, even if the relationship between Japan and the West was no longer conceived in terms of a straightforward Orientalist dichotomy, Japan's self-Orientalising strategy still takes a self-ironical stance. In her analysis of the 1970s and 1980s Japanese domestic tourism campaigns of Japan National Railway, Ivy (1995: 29-65) points out that while the somewhat anguished, nostalgic self-representation of a 'lost Japan' prevailed in the 1970s 'Discover Japan' campaign, the 1980s 'Exotic Japan' campaign exhibited a cheerful appropriation of Western Orientalist images of Japan. Here Western Orientalist images of Japan, such as Buddhist temples, geisha and Mt. Fuji
were playfully and stylishly featured to promote among Japanese urban dwellers the domestic consumption of the exoticism of Japanese traditional culture. As the campaign playfully renders ‘Japan’ its own exotic ‘foreign’ object, we can see an intriguing interplay between ‘the non-Japanese seen through Japanese eyes’ and ‘Japan seen through westerners’ (Ivy 1995: 50). Kondo (1998: 84) further argues that this shift testifies to the:

incorporation of Western elements and a Western gaze that beats the West at its own game, and subverts, as it reinscribes, Orientalist tropes. It marks a moment in historical, geopolitical relations, where autoexoticism and the appropriation of the West in a refigured, essential Japan indexes Japan’s accession to the position of powerful nation-states.

The Japanese exploitation of Western Orientalist representations of Japanese culture for self-representation is supported by the strong Japanese economy and the relative decline of American power in the world. Nevertheless, such a strategy is something akin to what John Caughie (1990), in an analysis of American media domination of the world, calls the process of the subordinated’s double identification with see-er and seen: ‘playing at being American’. The subordinated empowers himself/herself by objectifying the centre and rendering it as its own other; these are ‘the permitted games of subordination’ (Caughie 1990: 44). In the game of television viewing, the subordinated adopts a tactical ‘ironic knowingness’ ‘which may escape the obedience of interpellation or cultural colonialism and may offer a way of thinking subjectivity free of subjection’ (Caughie 1990: 54). In Japanese self-Orientalism, however, what occurs is less ‘playing at being American’ than ‘playing at being (America’s) “Japan”’, as the game is played through the objectification of the Western colonising gaze. In this objectification, ‘Japan’ as the object of Western cultural domination is suspended by setting up the subject position of ‘Japan’ outside the ground of domination. It is not a double identification with subject and object but a substitution of the unstable doubleness articulated in the relationship between games and tactics by a pleasurable game overlooked by otherwise subordinated Japanese spectators. By suspending Japan’s position as the object of domination, ‘Japan’ is kept out of reach of the
coloniser; the game attempts to claim that there is no ‘Japan’ that can be the dominated object of the Western Orientalising gaze.

Similarly, looking at the Japanese response to Western techno-Orientalism in the 1990s, we realise that, apart from denouncing it as humiliating (Sapiq 14 July 1994), a remarkable Japanese reaction in tackling Western techno-Orientalism is to mock the lingering Western fascination with de-humanised representations of Japan. For example, recent Western representations of bizarre Japanese cultural phenomena such as techno-culture and weird sexual practices was reported in a weekly magazine article, ‘Such a pleasantly distorted image of Japanese’ (Kono tanoshiku yugandâ Nihonjinzō) (Yamagata 1993: 130-132). Referring to several articles on Japanese techno-culture in Wired or Mediamatic — English-language information technology magazines — as well as some science-fiction novels by William Gibson, in which the image of Japan is predominantly associated with technology-soaked otaku, the author suggested that the reader should not get angry with the distorted images of Japan: ‘Whether you like the image or not, we cannot deny the fact that such a distorted image of Japan is disseminated in the world. All we can do is enjoy the way Japan is distorted’ (Yamagata 1993: 132). The same defensive tactic can be seen in the response of Japanese audiences to the American film, Rising Sun (1993). In the United States, the original novel was severely criticised for its racist representation of Japan. Many Japanese-Americans protested against the film (see Kondo 1997: 240-251). However, Japanese people and media in Japan did not react vehemently to it (Saitô 1993; Monma 1998: 167). The overall response from viewers in Japan was not anger but cool mockery; ‘they still misunderstand us in such a bizarre manner’ (e.g., Enokido 1994; Okano 1994). A film critic, Okano (1994: 25), contends that labelling the film

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7 Otaku is a Japanese term which literally constitutes a second person noun. Otaku has been negatively associated with a maniac whose obsession with horror films blurs the boundary between the real and the imaginary. It came into use to describe such a person when a Japanese man killed several children in brutal ways, all of which had been depicted in films. A prominent French film director, Jean-Jacques Beineix, produced a documentary on otaku’s queer hobbies in 1994. However, in the United States, otaku is more associated with those who love to consume Japanese animations and cartoons. See Schult (1996: 43-49).
‘Japan-bashing’ does not capture the essence of *Rising Sun*. Rather, the film produces an ironic appreciation among Japanese audiences. It represents a ‘smile-provoking misunderstanding’ of Japan performed by Sean Connery and other Americans for amused Japanese consumption.

Apparently, pleasurable Japanese consumption of Western images of distorted Japan is not based upon Japan’s dominant position vis-à-vis the West, but nevertheless is one of a few tactics available to the dominated. However, Japan’s pleasurable reading of Western distorted images of Japan takes a defensive self-Orientalism one step further, when the concern with the international consumption of Japanese culture is championed by Japan’s increasing international cultural export and influence. Inoue Shōichi’s *Gurotesuku Japan* (‘Grotesque Japan’) (1996) is a case in point. As a researcher of the International Research Centre for Japanese Culture, which was established in 1986 by then prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro for researching on Japanese unique, traditional culture, Inoue attempts in the book to reconsider the essence of Japanese culture through the exploration of distorted international consumption of Japanese culture. Inoue (1996: 215-218) claims that he is no longer surprised at the spread of made-in-Japan commodities in the world, nor interested in the Western Orientalist image of Japanese exoticism. Rather, he is fascinated to find things of Japanese ‘origin’ grotesquely localised and indigenised in different parts of the world — for example, the transformation of the rules and rituals of Jūdō and the decontextualised use of ‘zen’ for the name of department stores. Inoue (1996: 216) states:

> What attracts me is how Japanese culture is distorted at others’ convenience. If the method of distortion follows the classic, Orientalist, exotic image of Japan, however, it does not capture my attention. There is no fresh surprise to me in seeing the conventional stereotypical image of Japan which I know too well. My curiosity is aroused by a grotesquely distorted Japanese culture which betrays my expectation.

Inoue (1996: 217-218) distinguishes himself from hard-liner nationalists who become angry at seeing Japan misunderstood or distorted in the world and insist on
the importance of exporting a correct image of Japan. His intention in writing the essays is not to deplore, but to enjoy, the ridiculously distorted image of Japan and the foreign (mainly Western) misappropriation of a Japanese exotic image. Inoue’s fascination with a distorted ‘Japan’ is a different kind of nationalist strategy which claims Japanese transnational cultural power, a power which simultaneously allows for the preservation of a ‘pure Japan’ in a hermetically sealed space. Inoue (1996: 23-29; 54-60) wrote that some commodities, such as tatami mats or tanuki dolls (folk culture figures of well-endowed badgers which are said to bring fortune and wealth), might embody essential ‘Japeneseness’, precisely because of the fact that they are not exportable. The impossibility of any foreign appreciation of ‘authentic’ Japanese culture ensures that Japanese cultural uniqueness remains inviolate and intact, safe in its transculturation encounter with others.

More significantly, Inoue’s indifference to the conventional exoticism of Japanese culture displays, I would argue, a strong desire for taking the initiative over (Western) others in cultural representations of ‘Japan’. This is shown when Inoue (1996: 187-188) laments the self-exoticisation displayed by Japanese composers who try to exploit traditional images of Japan in order to sell their music in international markets: ‘To be honest, I tend to feel disheartened by such musical compositions, as it seems that after all only “exotic Japan” satisfies foreigners. It appears to be the only way for Japanese to make inroads into the international arena’ (Inoue 1996: 188). Inoue is clearly aware that Japan’s self-Orientalism is in the final instance controlled by Western Orientalism. In contrast, the ‘Grotesque Japan’ that Inoue found outside Japan subtly escapes a defensive Japan’s self-Orientalism, even while showing the growing Japanese cultural influence in the world. Inoue (1996: 217) somehow admits this himself: ‘it cannot be denied that I am taking a positive view of “Japan spotlighted in the global arena”, even while poking fun at it. I may be a so-so nationalist’ (‘hodohodo ni nashonarirusuto’). Japan has only to observe narcissistically Western (and global) distortions and misappropriations of globally circulated Japanese culture.
in order to affirm its symbolic power status.

**Soft nationalism: Japanese discourse on globalised otaku culture**

The narcissism which articulates Japanese global cultural power through the observation of international (mainly Western) (mis)appropriation of Japanese culture, is displayed in a more self-praising manner when we turn to Japanese nationalist discourse focusing on the export of ‘software’ cultural products such as animation and computer games. Techno-orientalism as discussed by Morley and Robins (1995) articulates a Western fear of cultural invasion and decadence caused by the global circulation of Japanese high-tech cultural artefacts. Japanese techno-culture evokes here a machine-like image of *otaku* kids who avoid physical and personal contact and are “lost to everyday life” by their immersion in computer reality’ (Morley & Robins 1995: 169). Morley and Robins (1995) did not differentiate hardware (consumer technologies and computer game apparatuses) from software (e.g., animation and game characters). From a Japanese perspective, however, the source of Japanese cultural power is not just to be found in technological excellence but, more importantly, in the global dissemination of its ‘software’ products as well as various cultural commodities. The focus of Japanese interest in its global cultural power has gradually shifted from an emphasis on the sophistication of its technologies to the appeal of its original cultural products: a shift from techno-nationalism to software-oriented, ‘soft’ nationalism.

In the 1990s, we have observed an increasing Japanese interest in articulating the distinctive ‘Japaneseness’ of culturally odourless products. In 1992, a popular monthly magazine, *Denim* (September 1992: 143), had a feature article on made-in-Japan global commodities which began: ‘Who said that Japan only imports superior foreign culture and commodities and has nothing originally Japanese which has a universal appeal? Now Japanese customs, products and systems are conquering the world!’ In this article, global Japanese exports included food, fashion, service industries, animation and computer games (see also Noda 1990). The concern was further advanced in a
book on Japanese global commodities, Sekai Shōhin no Tsukurikata: Nihon media ga sekai wo seishita hi ('The making of global commodities: The day Japanese media conquered the world') (Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1995). The main purpose of the book is to reconsider Japanese culture in terms of its influence in the world:

It is a historical rule that an economically powerful nation produces in its heyday global popular culture whose influences match its economic power. Such was the case with the British Empire, Imperial France, Weimar Germany and the United States of the 1950s and 1960s. What, then, has Japan of the 1980s produced for the world? Has Japan produced anything which is consumed globally and influences the lifestyle of world consumers? (Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1995: 6)

Consumer technologies, particularly the Walkman, have long been the representative of Japanese global cultural commodities. The editor of a monthly magazine on cultural trends in Japan, Ryūkō Tsūshin, defines the term, ‘global commodities’ (sekai shōhin) as things of universal or transcultural appeal which bear the creative imprint of the originality of a producing nation. The editor of the above volume (1995: 6-8) remarks that the term was coined in 1988 in order to articulate the phenomenal global popularity of the Walkman; however, there has been a proliferation of Japanese global commodities since then. Made-in-Japan global commodities discussed in the book include not only Japanese hardware commodities such as the Walkman, instant cameras or VCRs, but also ‘soft’ cultural products such as animation, computer games and even the system of producing pop idols, a process predominantly exported to Asia. In the book, such a shift in Japanese cultural export towards software is addressed, symbolically, by the designer of the Walkman, Kuroki Yasuo. Kuroki (1995) stresses the necessity for Japanese manufacturers to change their corporate culture in order to support the development of the creativity of Japanese designers. He lamented Japan’s inability to produce the software that people consume with the Walkman, but

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* As Takeda (1995) argues, if we apply the definition strictly, the Walkman is the first and the only Japanese global commodity to date. Takeda was urged to write the book by nostalgia about excellent made-in-Japan commodities that had excited him as a consumer, but were terminated by the collapse of the bubble economy in the early 1990s. Takeda explored the history of made-in-Japan global commodities in order to assess what went wrong with the imaginative and creative power of Japanese manufacturers.
he saw a hope, in animation and computer games, that Japan is shifting from being a hardware superpower to a software superpower (Kuroki 1995: 14).9

This comment signals an aforementioned gradual shift in the structure of Japanese cultural industries towards the multi-media business in the 1990s. The promising global market value of Japanese animation and computer games tickles Japanese national pride. However, just as American distribution power is indispensable for the globalisation of Japanese animation, Japanese indulgence in soft nationalism still needs the gaze of the dominant Western other. Most important for the Japanese media's articulation of Japanese animation and computer games as a new representative of Japanese global cultural power is the fact that they are appreciated by the West. Japanese animation and comics have been more popular in Asia than in the West (see Ono 1998), but their popularity in Asia has not been enough to affirm the emerging hegemony of Japanese animation or comics. As late as 1990, there was an article in a weekly magazine, *Aera* (12 June 1990), published by the influential newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun*, entitled, 'The pleasure and excitement of Japanese comics cannot be appreciated in the West'. The article discussed the reasons why Japanese comics are not accepted in the West while also mentioning their popularity in Asia to a lesser extent. Given that the article is an examination of the uniqueness of Japanese culture, it is not surprising that the reason for this was sought in the cultural difference between Japan and the West; according to the magazine, the storylines of Japanese comics are too emotional and the pictures are drawn in monotonous and flat ways unappealing to Western audiences.

However six years later, the same magazine featured an article, 'Nihon Anime ni sekai ga netsushisen' ('The world's eyes glued to Japanese animation') (*Aera*, 29

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9 In 1995 and 1996, NHK broadcast a subsequent series of programmes on Japanese electronic industries. This time, the main topic was computer software. The fourth episode of the series explored the history of video/computer games. The series was similar to an earlier one on semi-conductor technologies in that the United States was, in both cases, the pioneer innovator of new technologies which Japan copied and enhanced in accordance with consumer tastes. In the later series, the emphasis is more on the question of why the computer game industry survived the collapse of the bubble economy and succeeded not only in Japan but also in the American market (Aida 1997).
July 1996). The article dealt with the popularity of Japanese animation and comics in Western countries such as the United States, France and Italy in the 1990s. Concern with Japanese cultural uniqueness had been replaced by a preoccupation with the global reach of Japanese animation. The popularity of Japanimation and computer games in the West apparently endorses a new Japanese global power. Countless articles appeared in popular Japanese magazines, academic journals and daily newspapers dealing with the global popularity of animation and computer games. Even the conservative bi-weekly magazine, *Sapio* (5 February 1997; 11 June 1997), declared that animation and computer games have become two of the several things about which Japan can show pride to the world (see also Hamano 1999).

In this sense, it can be argued that Japanese soft nationalism is still deeply collusive with Western techno-Orientalism. Japanese hyperreal culture, in which comics, animations and computer games feature, has replaced Western Orientalist icons such as geisha or samurai in the implicit exoticisation of Japan (Ueno 1996a; Møri 1996). Nevertheless, the tone of Japanese discourse is no longer self-ironical but rather, self-congratulatory. Euphoria concerning the global dissemination of animation and computer games prompted Japanese commentators to confer a specific Japanese ‘fragrance’ on these culturally odourless products. A leading Japanese scholar of media art and aesthetics, Takemura Mitsuhiro (1996) coined the term ‘digital Japanesque’ to propose a drastic restructuring of Japanese cultural and aesthetic capital in order to create a new Japanese national identity in the age of digitalised globalisation. As the development of entertainment businesses is the key to Japan’s survival as a global power, Takemura (1996:197-198) argued, it is no longer enough

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80 For example, Spot! ‘Nippon hatusu otaku bunka ga sekai e ryūshutsusō’ (Made-in-Japan otaku culture spreading across the world), (25 March 1992); ‘Sekai wo sekai suru kokusai anime’ (‘Japanese animation conquers the world’) (Hōsō Bunka October 1994); ‘Nihon no manga ga sekai wo seiatsu!’ (‘Japanese manga conquering the world!’) (Elle Japan April 1996); ‘Nihon anime no sekai seisakusho’ (‘Japanese animation conquers the world!’) (Barr 22 January 1996); ‘Manga wa sekai ni kyōtsui’ (‘Manga has become a global language’) (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 25 May 1996). All these articles boast of the ascent of Japanese animation and computer games in the West and of Japanese kids’ culture conquering the world (Barr 23 June 1997).
for Japan to produce faceless commodities in order to produce global commodities: ‘Unless Japanese products embody a clearly articulated Japanese identity and sensitivity, they will not reach a global standard’. Japan, according to Takekura (1996: 210-225), must re-search for its ‘cultural gene’ and make it ubiquitous through global digitalised commodities. This, in his view, would rescue the Japanese traditional cultural sensitivity and aesthetic from its status as a cheap copy of Western Japonesque and re-evaluate and appropriate it for the production of digitalised commodities by Japanese people themselves.

The most eloquent spokesperson for the global popularity of Japanese animation and computer games is Okada Toshiro. As a manga and animation critic, he is frequently asked for his comments on the popularity of Japanese animation in the world and has published several works on this topic (e.g., Okada 1995; 1996; 1997). The most prestigious and authoritative university in Japan, the University of Tokyo, has employed him as a lecturer in a course on the cultural significance of Japanese otaku (maniac or nerd obsessed with comic, animation and computer games) since 1996. In contrast to the hitherto negative connotations of the term otaku found in Japanese media representations and Western techno-Orientalist discourse, Okada gives a positive meaning to the term, arguing that the subtle combination of comics, animation and computer games gives birth to Japanese otaku culture, which he proudly considers to be sweeping the world. Okada (1996; 1997) argues that cultural forms such as film, music, fashion or painting are all dominated by the West. No matter how Japan imitates and sophisticatedly ‘Japanises’ these Western originals, according to Okada, Japan cannot play a central role in these cultural forms. Although admitting the American influence on the origin of Japanese comics and animation:

Literature, music, art, are not a kind of Japanese culture on which we can pride ourselves. Even if Japan ceased to exist in the world now, there would be no impact on the world cultural scene . . . Japan is not the home of any sort of [Western] culture. The only exception is otaku culture, which makes Japan the mecca of the world (Okada 1997: 6-8).
The ground on which Okada bases his praise of *otaku* culture is the passionate Western consumption of Japanese *otaku* culture. Often stressed in Japanese media is the emergence of Western *otaku*, obsessively devoted fans of Japanese animation in Western countries whose craze for Japanese animation makes them wish they were born in Japan. Many images of Western fans playing at being would-be-Japanese animation characters, wearing the same costumes and make-up, have been presented in popular Japanese magazines as evidence of the ‘Japanisation’ of the West (e.g., *Shūkan Shincho* 24 July 1996; *Shūkan Bunshun* 5 September 1996; *Asahi Shinbun* 23 October 1997; *Newsweek Japan* 30 July 1997). Okada (1996: 52-56; *Shūkan Yomiuri* 2 June 1996: 30-31) argues that ‘the term “otaku” connotes something stunning and attractive [in the United States]’, so much so that Japanese animated culture and imagery evoke, to a certain degree, a sense of Western yearning for ‘Japan’:

For example, in a love-story animation, *Kimagure Orenjirōdo*, the hero and heroine never confess their love for each other and their relationship is full of misunderstanding to the end. This might look ridiculous in the United States where everyone is supposed to express everything s/he thinks and feels. However, I met many American fans who said to me that they want to experience that kind of love affair. These Americans long for Japanese ways of interpersonal communication. (*Shūkan Yomiuri* 2 June 1996: 30-31)

Okada reported in a jingoistic tone on several occasions that many American fans of Japanese animation express their dream of visiting Japan; seeing and walking the scene of their favourite animation, they wish that they had been born in Japan or could become Japanese (e.g., Okada 1995; 1996b: 31). Comparing this passionate Western consumption of Japanese animation to Japan’s and his own experience of yearning, via the consumption of American popular culture, for ‘America’, the nation of freedom, science and democracy, Okada (1995: 43) proudly argues that to those Western *otaku*, Japan ‘looks a more cool country’ than the United States.
Disjunctive transnational cultural flows suppressed

It should be noted that these chauvinistic views of Japan’s cultural export are not shared by all Japanese media critics and academics (e.g., Ōtsuka 1994; Ueno 1996b; Mōri 1996). Others have cautioned against proclaiming ‘Japaneseness’ in animation and computer games not only because such a discourse risks articulating Japanese culture in nationalist terms but also because the view of global ‘Japanisation’ is groundless: the number of Western fans of Japanese comics and animation is actually rather tiny (see e.g., Nikkei Entertainment May 1997: 48; Newsweek Japan 30 July 1997; Ono 1998).

More importantly, there is the difficulty of articulating distinctive ‘Japaneseness’ in culturally odourless products and in the contradictory process of transnational cultural consumption itself. This is not to say that Japanese animation does not embody any specific cultural characteristics which originate in what we call ‘Japanese culture’. Those American fans who find the appeal of Japanese animation in the narratives of romance are inescapably ‘dependent upon Japanese culture itself’ (Newitz 1995: 12). Rather, the issue at stake here is that Okada’s celebratory view of Western ‘Japanisation’ exposes the ambivalence entrenched in the international spread of mukokuseki popular culture; it at once articulates the universal appeal of Japanese cultural products and the disappearance of any perceptible ‘Japaneseness’. A cultural critic, Ōtsuka Eiji (1994), for example, warns against euphoria around the global popularity of Japanese animation, arguing that it is simply the mukokuseki (expressing racially, ethnically and culturally unembedded), the ‘odourless’ nature of animation that is responsible for its popularity in the world. Likewise, Ueno (1996b: 186) argues that ‘the “Japaneseness” of Jpanimation can only be recognised in its being actively a mukokuseki visual culture’. If the Japaneseness of Japanese animation is consciously or unconsciously derived from its active erasure of physical signs of Japaneseness from the visual imagery, do not Western audiences appreciate a Japanese way of life which is embodied in the mukokuseki imagery of animation? Is the object
of yearning not an animated virtual ‘Japan’? In this sense, the *mukokuseki* nature of Japanese animation and computer games highlights the fact that the yearning for a particular culture, evoked through the consumption of cultural commodities, is inevitably a monological illusion. Okada’s fallacious view of a reverse ‘Americanisation’ is little concerned with and cannot apprehend the complexity of the modern cultural formations domestic to any foreign society in which popular cultural artifacts are produced.

Neither is this to say that Okada’s hypothesis on the Japanisation of America is totally groundless. In relation to the above-mentioned Japanese romantic comedy animations *Kimagure Orenjirōdo*, the American researcher Newitz (1995) also observed the American fans’ fascination with the Japanese mode of romance represented in it — ‘a form of heterosexual masculinity which is not rooted in sexual prowess, but romantic feelings’ (Newitz 1995: 6). Nevertheless, Newitz’s (1995: 13) analysis shows that this ardent American consumption is articulated in the form of a nostalgia for ‘gender roles Americans associate with the 1950s and 60s’. It can be argued that this nostalgic longing displays an American denial of acknowledging their inhabiting the same temporality as Japan (see Fabian 1983). Here, like the Japanese consumption of Asian popular culture which I will discuss in Chapter 6, it might be the case that Japan is marked by temporal lag and consumed in terms of a sense of loss, hence America’s dominant position being articulated. The perception of temporal distance in the American consumption of Japanese animation does not concern Okada at all.

Okada disregards such a contradictory facet embedded with transnational cultural flows in articulating Japanese global cultural power.

A similar tendency can be discerned in Shirahata Yōzaburō’s (1996) *Karaoke, Anime ga Sekai wo Meguru* (‘Karaoke and animation spanning the globe’). While the International Research Centre for Japanese Culture has been often criticised for being too much engaged with the international dissemination of the particularistic image of Japanese culture to examine the international spread of Japanese popular and consumer
culture (see Noda 1990: 56). Inoue’s colleague at the Centre, Shirahata (1996), discusses Japanese cultural influence in the world mainly in terms of karaoke, comics/animation and computer games, though he also deals with food, bathing, gardening, bonsai, haiku and martial arts. The book is a display, like Inoue’s (1996), of appreciation of and indulgence in the global success of Japanese cultural products through the observation of their international consumption and localisation.

Referring to the local appropriation of Japanese cultural products such as karaoke and to the mukokaseki nature of animation and computer games, Shirahata (1996: 240) argues that unlike traditional Japanese high culture, the internationally consumed Japanese cultural products are not self-assertive about their ‘authentic Japanese-ness’. Rather, they leave their use-value to consumer tastes and cultural traditions outside Japan:

“Rigid” (‘kingen’) Japanese [traditional] culture whose original features tend to persist even at the level of transcultural consumption has not been well received outside Japan. In contrast, “flexible” (‘junan’) culture which is open to local processing spreads even to places least expected. (Shirahata 1996: 240)

Shirahata (1996: 231-243) thus acknowledges the culturally odourless nature of globalised Japanese life cultures. The universal appeal of Japanese cultural products, in this instance, is demonstrated by their openness for local appropriation in other parts of the world.

This approach to Japanese cultural presence in the world is reminiscent of Pico Iyer’s (1988) Video Nights in Kathmandu, which deals with the creative indigenisation and appropriation of dominant American popular cultures in Asia. Iyer (1988), in analysing the process of negotiating American cultural hegemony in Asia, elucidates modes of ‘postmodern boundary violating and syncretistic cultural intersections’ (Buell 1994: 5) which produce ‘a carnivalesque profusion of hybrid forms’ (Buell 1994: 11). As Appadurai (1995: 29) argues, Iyer shows that ‘if a global cultural system is emerging, it is filled with ironies and resistances, sometimes camouflaged as passivity and a bottomless appetite in the Asian world for things Western’.
However, such contradictory scenarios are absent in Shirahata’s (1996) discussion of the non-self-assertiveness of Japanese cultural exports. Rather, Shirahata’s (sketchy) observation of the decontextualised international consumption of Japanese cultural products is, like Inoue’s (1996), disturbed by a narcissistic impulse as shown by frequent notions of his impression of the Japanese animation and computer game ‘occupying’ or ‘conquering’ the world cultural scene. While Iyer writes about the decline of American cultural hegemony through the depiction of the vivacity of local consumption, Shirahata claims the rise of Japanese global cultural power through a reference to the elasticity of Japanese cultural products for local consumption. Shirahata (1996: 1-3; 242-243) compares Japanese cultural export to kaitenzushi (fast food sushi rotating on a conveyor belt) where customers choose anything at their will:

All those Westerners who seek sashimi and tofu for health reasons, Asian children who passionately read Doraemon comic books, and boys and girls around the world who watch Japanese animation with a gleam of interest remind me of my own childhood. At that time, kaitenzushi plates were full of American culture... Japan, which was a poor but ardent customer of American culture, has become a shop owner and a powerful purveyor of culture into the world.

With the kaitenzushi metaphor, Shirahata does not simply stress the capacity of Japanese culture and cultural products to be appropriated in each locale. The global consumption of Japanese mukokuseki culture reminds Shirahata (1996: 242-3) of his own past when Japan eagerly pursued American cultures and commodities — hence he suggests that Japan’s global power status today is analogous to its American counterpart in the past.

In the previous chapter, I discussed that the discourse of hybridism confers a global cultural power status on Japan in terms of its own capacity for cultural hybridisation and indigenisation by denying the occurrence of other modes of cross-fertilisation elsewhere. Likewise, the narcissistic discourse on Japanese cultural export, as exemplified by Shirahata (1996), and Okada (1995; 1996; 1997), endeavors to elevate the mukokuseki, that is, non-self-assertive, nature of Japanese cultural products to Japan’s distinctive, universally appreciated cultural traits by discounting the
disjunctiveness of global cultural flows. Put differently, I suggest, it can be seen symptomatically as the articulation of the difficulty in claiming Japanese cultural power in the face of the contradictory and unforeseeable consumption and indigenisation process in every corner of the world. Narcissistic appreciation of an appropriated-Japan-in-the-world resolves, though temporarily, the ambivalence pertaining to the fact that the international circulation of Japanese culture and cultural products has become conspicuous in a time when the dynamics of local cultural indigenisation tend to downplay the straightforward cultural power of any country of origin (see e.g., Miller 1995; Appadurai 1995).

In sum, there is an inherent transnationalist contradiction in Japan’s soft nationalism, the project of articulating a distinct Japanese cultural influence in the international consumption of its culturally odourless products. The contradiction is differently but more clearly elucidated when we look at the spread of Japanese popular culture in other Asian countries. As I will discuss later, the latter not only displays the feeble nature of Japanese mimetic cultural power in West-dominated cultural flows, it also reveals that the capacity to indigenise foreign (dominant) culture is not uniquely Japanese but rather is a common feature in the formation of Asian modernities.

The return of the ‘Black Ships’: Opening the country for Asian media wars

Another sign of the international ascendancy of Japanese popular culture is the increase in the export of Japanese TV programmes to Asian regions. While the financial crisis in Asia in the late 1990s might have had a temporary negative effect, the booming Asian markets have become the hottest battlefield for transnational media corporations in the 1990s. The development of communication technologies such as VCRs, cable TV and satellite TV, and the concurrent emergence of global media corporations in the late twentieth century, have brought about an unprecedented abundance of audiovisual space all over the globe. About 3 billion people live in a region which has achieved a high economic growth and where the states are increasingly
privatising the media and communication industries. The huge potential of the Asian markets has attracted many transnational media corporations in the 1990s (e.g., Shoesmith 1994; Lee & Wang 1995; Asiaweek 14 October 1994). The pioneer was STAR TV which started its operations in 1991. Fascinated with the size of the potential audience in the region, Western global players such as News Corp., CNN, BBC, MTV, ESPN, HBO and Disney followed the idea of pan-Asian mega-broadcasting.

The emergence and proliferation of global media conglomerates prompted several Asian governments to react against the foreign (mostly American) invasion from the sky. For example, Malaysia, Singapore and China have advocated the protection of 'Asian' values from decadent Western morals transmitted through the media. In those countries, the globalisation of the media tends to be talked about in terms of defending a national cultural identity against Western cultural imperialism (concerning Asian governments' various responses to STAR TV, see Chan 1994). The increasing transnational flow of media has also had repercussions on Japanese broadcasting policy and media industries, but in a different way. As Japan is the second largest TV market in the world, media globalisation has not been talked about in the same way in Japan as in other Asian countries. In the Japanese context, it offers an opportunity of extroverting a hitherto completely domestic-oriented media production system.

STAR TV was the first to have a significant impact on Japanese policies of transnational broadcasting. When STAR TV broadcasts first reached Japan in 1992, the Japanese government had banned the commercial distribution of intercepted transnational broadcasts within Japanese territories, although it did not prohibit private viewing for people with their own satellite dishes. Immediately afterward the Japanese government concluded in 1992 that the STAR TV broadcasts were not deliberate,

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11 European countries have also denounced American cultural influence. However, their critique is different from the Asian reaction in that it is based upon a strong conviction of Europe's cultural superiority to America and centrality in the world rather than upon a sense of the threat posed by the culturally dominant centre (Ang 1998).
rather, they were due to the unintentional spillover of its air waves across Japanese territorial boundaries. Nevertheless, the STAR TV incident prompted the Japanese government and Japanese media industries to face the age of global communications seriously.

Further impact on Japan by transnational satellite TV came from global player Rupert Murdoch. In June 1996, Murdoch announced his plan to launch JSkyB, stating that Japan was the last unexcavated gold mine in the world of satellite broadcasting. Just ten days later, his company, News Corp. — together with a Japanese computer software company, Softbank — bought some 20% of the shares in TV Asahi, one of the five key commercial TV stations in Japan. The threat posed by Murdoch to Japan was not that of transnational broadcasting, as with STAR TV, but rather the possibility that control of the Japanese media industry could be assumed by foreign capital.\(^\text{12}\)

Japanese mass media have often compared the impact of transnational satellite broadcasting to the mid-nineteenth century arrival of American Commodore Perry with his fleet of ‘black ships’ which forced Japan to open up to the outside world after a two-century-long seclusion. Academics, media industry figures and journalists (e.g., Kumamoto 1993a; Funuki & Higuchi 1996; Okamura 1996; Ryû 1996) frequently make the comparison, referring to kurofune shûrai (‘the invasion of black ships’), kaikoku (‘opening the country’) and sakoku (‘closed country’). The implication is that Japan can no longer enjoy a self-contained domestic market but is now under threat of being forced to open its doors to the world.

Media industries’ willingness to ‘open the country’ has dual implications for Japan: the influx of transnational media products and industries into the Japanese market and the expansion of Japanese media industries into global media markets.

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\(^{12}\) It soon became clear when he suddenly decided in March 1997 to sell the shares of TV Asahi to its parent company, Asahi Shinbun, that Murdoch’s intention was not to control a free-to-air TV station in Japan. Murdoch had concluded that the acquisition of shares in a particular Japanese TV station would deter other stations from cooperating with JSkyB and thus would do more harm than good in securing good Japanese programmes. Two months after Murdoch sold his TV Asahi shares in 1997, Fuji TV, which is a more popular TV station, and Sony, which owns Columbia, decided to join JSkyB.
The inpouring of foreign satellite TV, such as STAR TV, and the launch of JSkyB and other digital satellite services, such as Perfect TV and DirecTV, have brought about the proliferation of satellite TV channels in Japan, which has inevitably increased the import of foreign TV programmes. However, the influx of foreign media products does not seem to be posing a real threat to Japanese national identity. Japan has kept its doors open to foreign cultural goods such as TV programmes, films and popular music since World War II. It imports many films, particularly from the United States. In 1996, foreign films occupied 64% of total box office sales figures (Yomiuri Shinbun 31 August 1997). As for the TV market, Japan is one of the few countries which has no quota on importing programmes. Nevertheless, the Japanese TV market shifted from a high dependence on American programmes in the 1960s to a high level of self-sufficiency in the 1970s (Kawatake & Hara 1994). The relative absence of a defensive discussion about the protection of national culture in Japan, in contrast with many other developed countries (e.g., France and Australia), is a testimony to the confidence of the Japanese government as well as media industries that the influx of foreign programmes would not have a great impact on audience preference for domestic programmes (see Nikkei Entertainment 28 April/ 5 May 1993).

This time, unlike in the mid-nineteenth century, what is at stake seems less a foreign invasion of Japan than a Japanese advance into global media markets. Thus, the main issue of de-regulation raised by the emergence of STAR TV was not the reception of transnational broadcasts but rather the dispatch of Japanese broadcasts to the world (Shimizu 1993; Shionohara 1994). The government set about amending a transnational broadcast policy, previously based upon the self-contained domestic broadcast system, and decided in April 1993 to de-regulate the transnational satellite broadcasting service which enabled Japan to receive as well as to embark on transnational broadcast business (Shimizu 1993).

Likewise, responses from the Japanese media included some hysterical suggestions that Murdoch was trying to control a TV network in Japan, as he did with FOX in the
United States, but the overall reaction was marked by a sober recognition that the
time had come to restructure the highly domestic-oriented Japanese TV industry in
the global satellite age. The then Prime Minister, Hashimoto Ryūtarō, commented
that the current move towards liberalisation of the Japanese industry made the influx
of foreign capital inevitable and that the consequences of this depended on how the
Japanese media industry responded to such challenges from overseas (Nihon Keizai
Shinbun 24 June 1996). Behind this sober response lay a recognition that the Japanese
media industry has inevitably been co-opted into global media wars. The STAR TV
incident and the ‘Murdoch shock’ urged the Japanese government and media industries
to realise that in the age of global communications, Japanese cultural industries have
to compete with various kinds of foreign software not only in the domestic market
but also in international, particularly Asian, markets (Furuki & Higuchi 1996; Ryū
1996).13

Although there has been pessimism about the competitiveness of Japanese TV
programmes14 and the relatively passive attitude of the Japanese TV industries to
entering Asian markets in the early 1990s, as I will elaborate in the next two chapters,
export of Japanese TV programmes has been gradually increasing during the 1990s.
The proliferation of media space in Asia has dramatically increased the demand for
Japanese programmes. STAR TV has, from the beginning, constantly broadcast
Japanese TV programmes, particularly dramas, during prime time. The total export
hours of Japanese TV programmes increased from 2,200 in 1971 to 4,585 in 1980 to
19,546 in 1992 (Kawatake 1994). Since mid-1990s, Japanese mass media have turned
their attention to the popularity of Japanese TV programmes in Asian markets (e.g.,

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13 It is even speculated that the real intention of Murdoch’s entry into the Japanese market was to
secure attractive programmes for Asian markets (Ryū 1996; Inoue 1996).

14 Since the emergence of STAR TV in 1991, some journalists, industry people and academics (e.g.,
Shima 1994; Nihon Keizai Shinbun 26 November 1994) lamented that it is apparently too late for the
highly domestic-oriented Japanese TV industries to enter Asian markets; Asian markets have already
been dominated by American and local industries and there is no space for the Japanese TV industries
to market their products.
Cultural diplomacy: Japan’s mission in exporting popular culture to Asia

If, as I have shown, the world-wide consumption of consumer commodities, animation and computer games has brought about a Japanese celebratory discourse on global cultural power, a form of soft nationalism has manifested itself quite differently with regard to Japanese cultural export to Asia. Put bluntly, Japanese cultural export to Asian countries cannot be regarded as ‘odourless’. There are two reasons for this. First, in the nationalist Japanese discourse which pompously extols the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asian markets, Japanese cultural presence in Asia is conveniently converted into evidence of cultural similarity and commonality between Japan and other Asian nations. As discussed in the previous chapter, with the increasing circulation of Japanese popular culture, such as TV programmes and popular songs in East and Southeast Asia, we have observed the emergence of straightforward nationalist views of the ‘Japanisation’ of Asia, proclaimed in association with Japan’s civilisational significance. The view is exemplified by Ishihara Shintarō, who claims Japanese cultural superiority as evidenced by the spread of Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asian countries.

However, Japanese discourse on the spread of Japan’s popular culture in East and Southeast Asia is not monolithic. The condescension of the ‘Japanisation of Asia’ view is not shared by all Japanese intellectuals and journalists. Objections and hesitations to assert the ‘Japanisation of Asia’ thesis are, again, partly related to the
difficulty of demonstrating Japanese cultural influence, separately from Japan’s economic power. A critical Japanese scholar of Asian Studies, Murai Yoshinori (1993), is unequivocal in dismissing the spread of Japanese consumer culture as a mere extension of the Japanese economy. In his short article on the spread of Japanese popular and consumer culture to other Asian countries, Murai (1993: 26) argued that ‘Japanese culture is not received in other Asian countries with the same sense of respect and yearning as American culture was received in postwar Japan’. Though the Asian popularity of Japanese animation, such as *Doraemon*, according to Murai, symbolises a convenient and enjoyable Japanese consumer culture, Japanese cultural power is nevertheless much weaker than Japanese economic power. ↑ Similarly, in an introduction of an edited volume on the Japanisation of Asia,↑ the editor, Igarashi Akio (1997: 15), after giving a concise overview of the ‘Japanisation’ phenomenon, wonders whether the Japanese attention to the spread of Japan’s popular culture in Asia shows merely ‘a simplistic nationalism among the Japanese, a surplus of self-consciousness’, as there might actually be no distinctive Japanese cultural influence to be found in the ‘Japanisation’ phenomenon. While the notion of ‘Americanisation’ includes broad cultural and ideological influences, such as ideas of American democracy and the American way of life based upon affluent middle-class material cultures, Igarashi (1997: 6) argues that ‘Japanisation’ only embodies consumer culture and thus represents ‘more materialistic cultural dissemination’.

Although this materialist interpretation of the spread of Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia tends to underestimate its symbolic appeal for the latter (which I will analyse in chapter 5), Igarashi's (1997: 14-15) caution against a Japanese ‘simplistic nationalism’ has merit, as it is associated with the second reason why

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↑ It can be argued that this view shares an assumption with the nationalist view that a sense of yearning is the key to understanding asymmetrical transnational cultural flow. As I will discuss in chapter 5, this idea does not provide productive insights into intra-regional cultural flows in East Asia.

↑ This work constitutes the proceedings of an international symposium on the ‘Japanisation of Asia’ which was held in Tokyo in 1995. An extended Japanese version was published in 1998 (Igarashi 1998).
Japanese cultural export to Asia cannot be odourless: Japan’s historically constituted asymmetrical relation with other Asian countries. No matter how difficult it might be to place Japanese cultural influence in Asian countries on a par with America’s, the spread of Japanese cultural export to other Asian countries nevertheless articulates the indelibility of Japan’s imperial history, unresolved issues of Japanese war responsibility and its lingering economic exploitation of the region.

Japan’s dominant economic and cultural presence in Southeast Asia was well documented in Yoshioka Hiroshi’s acclaimed non-fiction story about a 14-year-old Thai female who deceived people by pretending to be Japanese in the mid-1980s. Yoshioka (1993) focussed on the unambiguous economic inequality between Japan and Thailand, symbolised by the influx of Japanese consumer goods into Thailand. He was unable simply to enjoy the spectacle of the cheerful consumption and imitation of Japanese consumer and popular culture in Thailand, as it evoked in him unease about the unequal relationship between Japan and other Asian countries. The history of Japan’s invasion and exploitation of other Asian countries is not only inscribed in the Japanese discourse on Japan’s cultural export to the region. The threat of cultural Japanisation is still felt among Asian people who have not forgotten the brutal legacy of Japanese imperialism. An Indonesian journalist, for example, called Japan the ‘America of Asia’ in that ‘with its growing influences, Japan has become increasingly condescending towards others’ again (quoted in Choi 1994: 148).

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17 It should be pointed out that the view that ‘we are hated by Asians’ is often stressed in the Japanese mass media. They repeatedly report that Japan is not trusted and liked by other Asians, particularly Chinese and Koreans who experienced violent Japanese imperial invasion (e.g., Asahi Shimbun 22 September 1997; 9 June 1997; 9 November 1996; 13 August 1995; 29 July 1995). In 1993, a popular bi-weekly magazine, Viewx, featured ‘A report from 12 Japanised Asian countries’ (10 March 1993), which dealt with the spread of Japanese department stores, fashion magazines, food, TV programmes, animation, and karaoke in Asia. The subtitle of the article, ‘They hate Japan but want to copy us’, well represented the ambivalence observed in Japanese interpretations of the spread of Japanese consumer culture in Asia.

18 People in South Korea have the strongest resistance to the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia. According to a survey conducted by Asahi Shimbun (29 July 1995), almost half of the respondents objected to the abolition of the restriction on importing Japanese popular culture and more than half of the respondents had a strong aversion to watching Japanese films and two-thirds felt this way about singing Japanese popular songs.
Accordingly, Japanese journalists, academics and government officials have regarded the export of popular culture to other parts of Asia as serving the national interest, but in a different way compared to animation and computer games in global markets. A straightforward nationalist view of the spread of Japanese popular culture is translated into the search for a way for Japanese popular culture to contribute to improving Japan's reputation, and overcoming, even suppressing, the history of Japanese imperialism in East and Southeast Asia. The increase in the export of Japanese TV programmes to Asian markets has demonstrated that Japan's colonial past does not prevent Japanese TV programmes and pop idols from being accepted in East and Southeast Asia; therefore, a strong interest has emerged within Japan in the potential for Japanese popular culture to soothe the bitter memory of the Japanese invasion of Asia through the dissemination of a humane Japanese contemporary culture throughout Asian countries, particularly among younger people who did not experience Japanese imperialism in the first half of this century. In other words, the spread of Japanese popular culture in East and Southeast Asia excited Japanese journalists, industry people, government officials and academics, as they found Japanese popular culture useful in the mission to enhance Japan's cultural diplomacy.

In this context, the Japanese government has been interested in promoting the export of TV programmes and popular culture in order to improve international understanding of Japan, particularly in Asian countries.\textsuperscript{19} The Japanese soap opera, \textit{Oshin}, is a case in point. First exported to Singapore in 1984, \textit{Oshin} has been well received in forty-six countries throughout the world. Its ratings in many non-Western countries were much better than those of American TV dramas such as \textit{Dallas} or \textit{Dynasty} (Singhal & Udornpim 1997; Lull 1991). The main recipient countries are those of East, Southeast and South Asia, the Middle East and South America, where

\textsuperscript{19} In 1988, the then Takeshita government for the first time established a discussion panel on international cultural exchange with the aim to examine the possibility of exporting TV programmes to Asian countries. In 1991, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications jointly established JAMCO (Japan Media Communication Centre) to subsidise the import of Japanese TV programmes into developing countries.
the series has been in most cases distributed for free under the cultural exchange programme of the Japan Foundation, an extra-departmental organisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Japan Foundation's monthly journal, *Kokusai Köryū* ('International Exchange') (volume 64 1994), explored the possibility of Japanese cultural interchange with Asia through electronic media programmes, in which *Oshin* is the main focus. The international popularity of *Oshin* also encouraged the distributor of the programme, NHK International, to organise an international conference on *Oshin* in Japan and subsequently publish its proceedings in 1991. The main purpose of the publication and the conference was to discuss the transnational appeal of *Oshin* and Japanese TV programmes in general, and to explore the further possibility of exporting Japanese TV dramas with the aim of disseminating a 'human' image of Japan in the world.

If, as pointed out above, Japanese cultural export to Asia cannot be construed entirely in terms of the disappearance of visible Japanese cultural presence,\(^20\) it is also because the products exported to Asia include non-animated TV programmes and popular music whose textual appeal is embodied in actual Japanese actors and musicians. Some commentators thus stressed that the popularity of *Oshin* in other Asian countries is important, because those people who had so far known Japan only through cars and consumer goods have come to see the 'real' lives of Japanese people (e.g., NHK International 1991; Kobayashi 1994). As a media scholar participating in the symposium, Itô Yōichi (NHK International 1991: 99), argues:

As animation is mostly *mukokuseki* and therefore have little to do with Japanese ethnicity ('*minzokusei*'), the increase in the export of animation does not mean that Japan exports its culture. However, popular songs and *Oshin* embody Japanese culture and this is why the export of these products is unique and deserves serious analysis.

For those who see the possibility of enhancing the image of Japan through the export of TV programmes, animation and computer games are simply not effective in

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\(^20\) However, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the prevalent strategy of Japanese cultural industries tended not to sell 'Japanese-ness' but market 'locality' in East and Southeast Asian markets.
conveying the state of contemporary Japanese society and culture, because they do not represent any realistic image of Japan.

Needless to say, what is the ‘real’ Japan and whether it is possible to represent Japanese ‘real’ faces, how images of Japan are (in contradictory ways) consumed and received by audiences are highly contested questions. These questions are not taken seriously by those who stress the importance of exporting Japanese TV programmes. What concerns them is the belief and the fact that a Japanese TV programme, Oshin, has improved the image of Japan in other Asian countries. The usefulness of the TV programme in this respect conversely determines what are the real and humane faces of Japan in the eyes of those observers.

Particularly considered significant in this respect is that Oshin cultivates among Asian viewers a sense of commonality between Japan and other Asian nations. It is argued that the representation of common values such as perseverance, diligence and familialism in Oshin is responsible for the popularity of Oshin in other Asian countries and has engendered a positive change in the image of Japan in Asian countries (e.g., in Indonesia see Takahashi 1991: 68; 1994, on China, see Kumamoto 1993a). No less significant is the sense of a common ‘non-Westernness’ — the common harsh experience of non-Western modernisation. As script writer Imamura Yoichi (1995: 15) argues:

Japan should show itself more clearly to others, particularly to Asians who are now facing similar social problems to those Japan once experienced. The popularity of Oshin lies in its successful representation of the social contradictions produced in the process of modernisation and democratisation, the interaction between tradition and modernity.

In order to wipe out the distrust of Japan held by other Asian countries, Imamura (1995) argues that Japan should present the fact that it shares with other Asian countries the experience of agony and suffering inherent in the course of modernisation. What should be noted here is that Oshin narrates the modern Japanese history from a woman’s perspective. Japan’s past is represented mostly in terms of a pacifist woman’s experience of overcoming suffering caused by the war (Morris-Suzuki 1998: 134-135,
see also Harvey 1995). The representation of Japan's gendered past proves to be useful for the purpose of rendering more troublesome aspects of Japanese modern history irrelevant.

Beneficial facets of Japanese popular culture in Japan's reconciliation with its neighbouring countries are not simply found in the common historical experience of the non-West and in traditional values. Japanese popular culture to be exported to Asian markets is not restricted to historical dramas like *Oshin*. Other TV dramas which feature contemporary urban life in Japan and popular music are also thought to present a new possibility of promoting cultural dialogue between young Japanese and other Asians. *Gaiko Forum*, a monthly journal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has featured articles about the spread of Japanese popular culture among Asian youth, one from a Japanese perspective and three responses to that perspective from Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong (September 1994; November 1994). The Japanese article (Honda 1994a, English translation 1994b), while mentioning the importance of bilateral cultural flow and increasing personal, face-to-face, contacts between people in Japan and other Asian nations, emphasised that the transnational attraction of Japanese popular culture in Asia offered a new possibility of Japanese cultural exchange with other Asian countries.

According to Honda (1994b), there are two related points in testifying the potential of Japanese popular culture facilitating Asian dialogue. First is the fact that Japan has had 'no hand' in the dissemination of Japanese popular culture in Asia; the spread of Japanese popular culture 'has occurred with virtually no effort on the Japanese side: the East Asian middle class took note of Japanese popular culture and chose to embrace it of its own accord' (Honda 1994b: 78). This emphasis on the 'spontaneous' reception by Asian audiences is important if Japanese cultural export to Asia is to overcome the historical legacy of Japanese imperialism.  

Here, like Shirahata (1996), Honda stresses the non-self-assertive *mukokuseki* nature of Japanese popular culture as evidence of its universal appeal — but *mukokuseki*,
in the same sense as Tsanoyama’s (1995) usage mentioned in previous chapter, that is, ‘a country-neutral quality’ due to massive influence of the American original (Honda 1994b: 76). Such mukokuseki Japanese popular culture, Honda (1994b: 78) argues, unlike traditional images of Japanese uniqueness, have a cosmopolitan appeal which articulates ‘a sharp break from the traditional, prewar image’ and would lead to ‘[erasing] the old, oppressive image of the country — especially among the younger generation’. Referring to the rise of middle classes who are the main audiences for Japanese popular culture which represents urban lifestyles, Honda (1994b: 77) argued that ‘[t]he link that Japanese popular culture now provides for ordinary young people from Tokyo to Singapore could foster dialogue on a scale and closeness never before achieved’. It is because ‘Japanese comics, dramas and pop music not only provide a common topic for discussion among East Asians but also portray Japan’s modern, liberated face’ (Honda 1994b: 78).

Honda does not refer to the mukokuseki-ness of Japanese popular culture in order to illustrate Japan’s civilisational excellence of cultural indigenisation. Nevertheless, the crucial question left unanswered in Honda’s hopeful view is, again, what sort of dialogue transnational mass-mediated consumption of popular culture could facilitate. How is the dialogue shaped by continuing unequal power relations between Japan and the rest of Asia? What sorts of images of ‘Asia’ are being imagined and where is ‘Japan’ positioned in them? All of these issues are not given due attention, as the mukokuseki-ness of Japanese popular culture is apprehended predominantly as something useful for the Japanese national interest.

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21 A prominent cartoonist in Japan, Satonaka Machiko, similarly argues that Japan should be proud of its cartoons and animations, because they are ‘the first Japanese cultural products spontaneously received by those [Asian] countries without Japan’s cultural, militaristic, and economic impositions’ (quoted in Kuwahara 1997: 44).

22 Honda’s argument is supported by the dramatic rise of the market share of Japanese comics in Hong Kong from 20% in 1992 to about 60% in 1995. According to a Reuters report (13 September 1995), Japanese comics keep up with the changes of life-style in Hong Kong and attract new middle-class and more educated readers who have not read them before.
Ambivalence articulated in the ‘Japanisation’ of Asia

In this and previous chapters, I have shown several ways in which the complexities and contradictions imbricated in disjunctive transnational flows of culture are discounted in Japanese nationalist discourses on its export of popular culture. In the following chapters, I will try to disentangle, through empirical analysis, how these contradictions are articulated in the production and consumption of Japanese popular culture in Asian markets and the Japanese consumption of Asian popular culture.

Before proceeding to the empirical study, I would like to end this chapter by suggesting that the consumption of Japanese popular culture in other parts of Asia articulates the contradiction and ambivalence generated by transnational cultural flows through a consideration of the film, Sotsugyō Ryokô: Nihon kara Kimashita (‘My graduation trip: I am from Japan’) (1993).

The film tells the story of a male Japanese university student who, whilst visiting, becomes a pop star in a fictional Southeast Asian country. The country is in the midst of a phenomenal ‘Japan boom’ and he is recruited by a Japanese agent, wins a star search audition and quickly becomes a national media star. Sotsugyō Ryokô seems to claims that, just as Japan has admired Western culture, other Asian countries now worship Japan.21 The film, like Inoue’s ‘grotesque Japan’, cheerfully depicts, through food, popular music and Japanese words, how Japanese culture is consumed and appropriated in distortion by other Asian people. However, the predominant issue of the film is how a Japanese protagonist himself plays at being Asia’s Japan, how Japan distordedly presents itself, according to the assumed expectation of Asian audiences. In this sense, like the strategy of playing at the West’s Japan, Japan still identifies itself with the spectator subject who enjoys the game of objectifying ‘Japan’, while understanding that it is ultimately impossible. It is less the putatively imitating subject, ‘Asia’, than the object of imitation and yearning, ‘Japan’, that is the actual

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21 The film was described as a ‘quite likely’ story in the Japanese media (Shūkan Posuto 1993 July 30: 26).
subject of the film. Japan’s doubleness, which is at once the subject and object of imitation, is represented at the cost of the recognition of people in Asia as the subjects who consume ‘Japan’.

It can be argued, however, that the film shows the producer’s refusal to offer an easy and idealised pattern of cultural exchange and dialogue between Japan and Asia, such as that which, as discussed before, is proclaimed by Japanese intellectuals and journalists. The precariousness and fallaciousness of cultural diplomacy and dialogue through asymmetrical cultural flows is comically represented in the film. The main theme of the film is Asian cultural misunderstanding of Japan acquired via the consumption of Japanese commodities and images. Compared to other Japanese who claim that Japan has become the object of yearning for the foreign consumer of Japanese popular culture, those who see a possibility of a cultural dialogue between Japan and Asia through popular cultural flows, Japanese film producers seem to observe the Asian consumption of Japan in a more detached and skeptical manner.

Isshiki Nobuyuki, a screen writer for Sotsugyō Ryokō, remarked in a Japanese newspaper interview (Asahi Shinbun 22 September 1993) that he wanted to write a comedy dealing with the gap between Japanese reality and the image Asian people have of affluent Japan. When he travelled to other Asian countries such as Thailand and Hong Kong, Isshiki found the distorted images of Japan held by Asians quite embarrassing, since they reminded him of a similar illusionary yearning for the United States he had experienced in the early 1980s, the illusion that everyone in California must be a stylish surfer! Apart from the arrogance and self-confidence displayed in his remarks, Isshiki seems to suggest that there exists an irreducible discrepancy between the ‘real Japan’ and the ‘yearned-for Japan’. Here, unlike the material domination of Japan over Thailand, described in Yoshioka’s (1993) uneasy observations mentioned above, cultural domination of Japan over other Asian countries is illustrated as implausible.

Moreover, in Isshiki’s statement, there seems to be a sober realisation of the
tenuousness of Japanese cultural hegemony in Asia and evidence of Japanese self-mockery of its own past imitation of America. The interesting issues dealt with in Sotsugyō Ryokō are the status of American popular culture and the circulation of ‘Japanised’ Western popular culture in other parts of Asia. The film begins with a scene in Japan in 1979 in which the hero as a child is earnestly watching a Japanese star singing a Japanised version of the song ‘YMCA’ by the American pop group, Village People. The Japanese version, unlike the original song, has no gay culture subtext. Instead, it features an ‘original’ dance. Like the discussion of the mukokaseki nature of Japanese popular culture (Tsunoyama 1995; Honda 1994b), the film suggests that the object of Asian consumption might not be Japanese culture per se, which is the product of a Japanese capacity for indigenising and ‘Asianising’ Western things, but rather the Japanese experience of imitating the West. As discussed in the previous chapter, the act of indigenising the West is interpreted as the source of Japanese cultural and civilisational power. However, once materialised into actual products, a crucial question comes to the surface: if imitation of ‘the West’ is a significant determinant of contemporary ‘Japanese culture’ itself, is there any authentic ‘Japaneseness’ left to be appreciated by other Asian people? The apparent phenomenon of ‘Japanisation of Asia’ does not necessarily articulate Japanese cultural power. On the contrary, it eventually arouses the ambivalence Japanese cultural producers feel towards Japanese cultural power, an ambivalence caused by the mimetic origin of Japanese cultural formation.

This point becomes sharper when we look at the fact, which is suppressed in the film, that Japanese popular culture is not simply consumed or distortedly appropriated but directly copied in some East and Southeast Asian countries. The style of the pop singer is a case in point. It is widely observed that the song, dance, hairstyle, fashion and even names of Japanese pop idols were imitated in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand and South Korea in the 1980s (e.g., Morieda 1988; Shinozaki 1988; Ching 1994). Unlike Bhabha’s (1991) concept of ‘mimicry’, by which he tries to illuminate the
scandalous subversion of the coloniser's cultural hegemony through a grotesque appropriation of the original by the colonised, it is a straightforward copying of Japan by fellow non-white Asians, I argue, that destabilises Japanese cultural domination by revealing that there is no such thing as a cultural hegemony which originates in Japan. A cheerful Asian second-order mimicking of Japanese imitation of American popular culture sets up the Japanese unease, uneasiness derived from a realisation that Japan's mimetic modern experience underpins the formation of Japanese popular culture. That is, Asian mimesis of Japan forces Japanese to realise that Japan after all embarrassingly performs 'grotesque America' among other Asian nations (e.g., Shinozaki 1990a; Kôkami & Chikushi 1992). The Japanese observation of the 'Japanisation of Asia' leads not simply to the problematisation of Japan's authority and originality through secondary Asian imitation. It also articulates a moment when Japan encounters the impossibility of retaining a master position in transnational cultural flows.

At the same time, Asian mimesis of Japan does not merely prompt Japan to realise how bizarre is its own imitation of Western popular culture. It also highlights the vivacity of local consumption which is suppressed in the observation of 'grotesque Japan' (see e.g., Spur! 1 September 1993). Here, Asian imitation of Japanese popular culture offers Japan a common ground with Asia in terms of the ongoing process of cultural hybridisation/indigenisation. For example, while documenting Japanese economic and cultural dominance in Thailand, Yoshioka (1993: 246) nevertheless realised that there is nothing different between the way that Thai companies copied Japanese clothes and the way that Japan copied Western consumer technologies: 'I suddenly felt Thailand was very intimate. I can clearly see ourselves in Thais’ keenness to copy Japan, the past which we forgot after Japan became an affluent economic superpower'. Here, awareness of the way in which Japanese popular culture is multifariously simulated and copied by other Asians destabilises the Japanese belief that while any country can Westernise, others cannot successfully indigenise the
West like ‘us’ (i.e., Japanese). Asian imitation of Japan displaces Japan’s hybridism in its construction of an essential national identity by exposing the fact that strategies of hybridisation are not unique to Japan. Rather, they are quite common to all the subordinated (see e.g., Appadurai 1990; Hannerz 1991).

Nevertheless, the common experience of cultural hybridisation can also be the source of a Japanese condescending view toward a ‘behind-the-time’ Asia, as hinted by Yoshioka’s comment quoted above. As I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, the analysis of the two-way flows of popular culture between East Asian nations and Japan displays the unevenness in terms of the perception of temporality that Asian neighbours inhabit. ‘Japanisation’ of Asia may not signify a straightforward economic or cultural domination of Asia by Japan, but this does not mean that there is no power asymmetry between Japan and other Asian nations. It consistently overshadows any optimism about a dialogue on equal terms. Before exploring this asymmetry, however, the exploration of how the contradiction and ambivalence articulated in Japan’s transnationalist discourses are reflected in the corporate strategies and practices of Japanese cultural industries as they try to enter Asian markets is in order.
Localising ‘Japan’ in the booming Asian markets

In the previous two chapters, I discussed Japanese nationalistic discourse on its cultural export. In this chapter I am turning to the empirical study of the strategies used by Japanese music and TV industries for entry into the booming Asian audiovisual markets in the 1990s. The economic power of Asian countries and the proliferation of media space in the region have increased the export opportunity for Japanese popular culture. Accordingly, Japanese cultural industries are keen to promote the circulation of Japanese popular music and TV programmes to East and Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, many Japanese cultural industries have been less concerned with direct export of Japanese cultural products than with ridding cultural products of any ‘Japanese odour’ and making ‘local’ products in Asian markets.

This practice is based upon the strategic necessity of what Sony calls ‘global localisation’, which means that global companies should be sensitive to local preferences when spreading standardised commodities all over the globe (Aksoy & Robins 1992). This strategy indicates an assumption widely held by Japanese cultural industries that, no matter the way Japanese TV programmes become popular in Asia, other Asian countries will sooner or later follow the Japanese experience of absorbing and localising American media influence. Localisation strategies deployed by Japanese cultural industries include selling their ‘know-how’ for indigenising foreign (Western) popular culture. Japanese music industries have been most active in this respect. Lured by the potential of the booming Asian audiovisual markets in the 1990s, Japanese recording companies and talent agencies have held auditions in various Asian markets to find local and pan-Asian pop stars.

Behind the global localisation strategies exists the same assumption of Japanese excellence and superiority in handling transnational cultural flows as articulated in the discourse on hybridism, discussed in chapter 2. Such an assumption reveals its
operational limitations when put into practice. The localisation of Japanese ‘know-how’ in cultural production has been inconsistent and only partly successful. By contrast, the direct spread of Japanese popular music and TV programmes in Asian markets has become conspicuous thanks to another localisation strategy deployed by local industries in East Asia. The meaning of ‘localisation’ is shifting from the export of Japanese know-how to the local promotion of Japanese cultural products which synchronises with trends in the domestic Japanese market. This testifies to increasing affiliation and integration between Japanese and other East Asian cultural industries and markets, which have resulted in spotlighting the transnational appeal of Japanese popular culture.

The difficulty of committing to Asian media wars

Although, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the export of Japanese TV programmes and popular music has drastically increased in the 1990s with the expansion of Asian audiovisual markets, the passage of the development has not been smooth or straightforward. While there have been certain efforts to export Japanese TV programmes and popular music to Asian markets,1 Japanese TV and music industries have overall not been as active as other Asian and Western cultural industries in exporting cultural products to Asian audiovisual markets and there has been some discussion on how Japan had fallen behind Asian countries, not to mention the West, in the development of transnational broadcasting (e.g., Shima 1994; Nihon Keizai Shinbun 26 November 1994; Asahi Shinbun 14 November 1997). Behind such passivity, there are several factors which discourage Japanese cultural industries and make halfhearted their efforts to export their products to other Asian countries. First of all,

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1 The film industry, for example, has begun to seriously explore the export potential of Japanese audiovisual software. In 1992, an annual Tokyo film market was set up to promote the sale of Japanese programmes (though this was replaced by MIP-Asia, held for the first time in December 1994 in Hong Kong, which is the Asian version of an annual international TV programme trade fair in France, MIP). Sony Music Entertainment also started a TV programme, Big Gig Japan, on STAR TV’s Channel V in 1994 and a radio programme, Postcard from Tokyo, broadcast in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Thailand in 1995 which promotes Japanese pop music in Asia.
at the outset of the Enter-Asian-markets boom in Japan, the reluctance of the Japanese TV industries to enter Asian markets was partly due to the obstacle posed by the historical legacy of Japanese imperialism and the existence of a profitable and wealthy domestic market in Japan. In the former colonies, Taiwan and Korea, Japanese films and music had been banned until recently (Taiwan overturned this policy at the end of 1993 and the South Korean government partly abolished its restrictive policies in late 1998). The legacy of Japanese imperialism has prevented Japan from actively exporting its ‘culture’ to Asian countries. As Appadurai (1990: 5) suggested, the South Korean government might have preferred American to Japanese products, because they are thought to be less culturally damaging and dangerous to South Korea than the products of ‘the Japanese Empire’. Accordingly, Japanese companies operating in Asian markets themselves had come to think that the suppression of Japanese cultural visibility was a desirable strategy for enabling Japanese economic expansion into Asia. Kawatake (1995) found that many Japanese companies wanted to remove signs of ‘Japaneseness’ from their international advertising material. Likewise, when the Japanese government amended its policy on transnational satellite broadcasting in 1994, NHK quickly announced the launch of a satellite service to Europe, but a fear of being accused of cultural imperialism caused NHK to hesitate in broadcasting to Asian regions (Nihon Keizai Shinbun 14 July 1994; Asahi Shinbun 7 September 1994).

An ABU (The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union) meeting, held in Kyoto in November 1994, dispelled this anxiety and finally convinced NHK to launch its service in Asian regions. Japanese media industries realised with surprise during the meeting that a sudden shift in other Asian countries’ policies from protection to promotion of local and regional industries was aimed at countering a Western ‘cultural invasion’ (Nihon Keizai Shinbun 26 November 1994). As Wang (1996: 14) has observed, in the policies of Asian governments, this matches an overall trend in the 1990s: ‘What we see in the mid-1990s, is a change in the role of communication
policy, especially in third world nations, from that of a protective guardian against "harmful, alien information" to one of a supportive sponsor for cultural production. This policy shift was based upon a realisation by Asian governments that the best way to counter U.S.-driven media globalisation is less to persist in the (impossible) guarding of national borders from transnational satellite broadcasts than to promote local entertainment industries which produce products more attractive to local audiences than those from America. This shift ironically displays that, no matter how vehemently some Asian governments denounce the inpour of Western decadent consumerism through media products, ‘Asian’ cultural values can only be protected by the development of the capitalist mode of cultural production (see Dirlik 1994). The threat of cultural imperialism has been dispelled by the advent of global capitalism.

Apart from the issue of Japanese imperial history, which has been partly ameliorated, there are two additional structural and financial impediments for Japanese TV industries in seriously entering Asian media markets (Tsuda 1996; Odagiri 1996). One is the difficulty of making profits in Asian markets. American industries entered Asian markets quickly as an extension of their existing global business. Almost all the satellite and cable channel suppliers including STAR TV have failed to make profits in Asia, but the deficit can be compensated by profits in affluent Western markets. However, Japan, with no presence in the Western markets, would not be able to make profits in Asia until the price of TV programmes became as high as those paid by Western markets. As a Japanese TV international sales division manager expressed it, ‘[W]e are not actively selling our programmes in Asian markets, as there would be no profit no matter how earnest we become’ (quoted in Tsuda 1996: 53). According to a survey by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, 6,800 hours of programmes were imported during 1992, worth 481.2 billion yen. As for exports, 16,471 hours were sold, valued just at 2.1 billion yen (Nakazora 1994). Japan exported about 2.5 times as much as it imports but earned no more than a twenty-third of the amount paid for importing foreign (mainly American) programmes. This means that as for
the unit price of programmes per hour, the import price was 7 million yen but export value was just 127 thousand yen, almost 55 times less than import value. The average budget of a one-hour drama production in Japan was about 25 - 45 million yen in the mid-1990s, but the same drama could be sold for only 200,000 - 300,000 yen in Asia (Nishi 1997: 187).

Another reason for the low export of Japanese products to Asia concerns copyright and royalties. In Japan, the production of TV programmes has been for the domestic market and there have been no incentives to develop copyright contracts for second and third broadcasts in the international market. Since the early 1990s, as Japanese TV programmes are increasingly exported to Asia, Japanese TV stations have come to realise that copyright issues are an obstacle to selling their programmes overseas. To sell a drama overseas, for example, Japanese TV stations have to get permission from the cast and music composers for each series. It takes at least six months to clarify all the copyright issues for the second broadcast. Some talent management offices demand fees, which are more expensive than the TV stations can afford (Tsuda 1996: 53-4; Odagiri 1996: 18-19). For this reason, an international sales division manager of Fuji TV told me in an interview that the company could not sell even one third of the twelve drama series it produces annually.

According to my interviews with Japanese TV industry managers in 1997, the wholesale figure for programmes in Asian markets is three times higher than during the early 1990s, but it still constitutes less than 1% of the total sales figures of Japanese TV stations. Given the low price of the programmes, the cost of copying and packaging, and the extremely small proportion in the total profits, it is no surprise that Japanese TV stations have not been active in exporting their programmes to Asian markets.

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2 For example, the business earnings of Nippon Television Network in the 1997 financial year were 283 billion yen. However, according to my interview with the station, the international sales earning was less than 1 billion yen.
Localisation wars in Asian audiovisual markets

Furthermore, in the mid-1990s, such historical and structural obstacles against exporting Japanese popular culture were combined with a realisation by transnational media industries concerning the necessity of localising strategies in Asian markets. The development of Asian audio-visual markets has made transnational media industries become aware of the need for producing and distributing cultural products that are more sensitive to the diversity and tastes of local markets rather than distributing seemingly almighty American TV programmes all over the world. In this respect, a joke told by a Japanese TV news reporter covering an ASEAN meeting in Kuala Lumpur in July 1997 is suggestive of the increasing significance of articulating locality with the global spread of capitalist modernities. The reporter joked that there were three requirements for becoming a member of ASEAN. First, one must play golf; second, one must love karaoke. Compared to these cultural practices which are not particularly Southeast Asian but are common among male-dominated business circles and the middle-class in many parts of Asia, the last requirement is very much Southeast Asian. The reporter said, with a faint smile, that last but not the least, one must be fond of durian, the delicious but pungent fruit of Southeast Asia. This joke suggests the rise of economic power and the emergence of a transnational middle-class in Southeast Asian countries, but the punch line of the joke reminds us that the common signifiers of middle-class capitalist modernity in the region such as karaoke and golf are not enough to articulate distinct local identities. No matter how much karaoke and golf connotate business practices and preferred leisure activities of an emerging affluent middle-class in the region, it is not these internationally-spread cultural activities but the fruit with an insuppressible local odour that ultimately confers the Southeast-Asianness of ASEAN.

The emphasis on local specificity has become the key to global marketing developed by manufacturers of consumer goods in the last decade. In a book on global marketing and advertising strategies, Mooij (1998) argues the inappropriateness of the slogan
‘think globally, act locally’, because any ‘global’ thinking is coloured by one’s cultural background. According to her, the imperative for transnational companies is ‘think locally, act globally’, that is, distributing products globally and marketing them locally. What is increasingly apparent is that Theodore Levitt’s formula of ‘global standardisation’ (1983) advocated in the 1980s is actually the ‘mythology of globalisation’ (Ferguson 1992) promoted by global company executives, as Mooij (1998: 39) argues:

In reality, few successful global brands are fully standardised. The wish for global brands is in the mind of the producer, not in the mind of the consumer. Consumers don’t care if the brand is global, and they increasingly prefer local brands or what they perceive as local brands.

More attention to local differences is called for, because global corporations ‘only thrive on respect for and exploitation of local cultural values’ (Mooij 1998: 299).

The strategy of ‘global localisation’ or ‘glocalisation’ (Robertson 1995) most eloquently tells the significance of the exploitation of the locality by transnational corporations. This is a strategy for penetrating many different local markets at once. Global companies try to ‘transcend vestigial national differences and to create standardised global markets, whilst remaining sensitive to the peculiarities of local markets and differentiated consumer segments’ (Aksoy & Robins 1992:18). As transnational corporations such as Sony, Coca Cola and McDonald’s stated that ‘we are not a multi-national, we are a multi-local’ (du Gay et al. 1997; Watson 1997), the strategy of global localisation aims to make the distinction between the foreign and the local blurred and irrelevant: featuring local staff, decision-making and items, in order to handle the tension between ‘economic imperatives (achieving economies of scale) and cultural imperatives (responding to diverse consumer preferences)” (Robins 1997: 36).

Realisation of the significance of locality is also the main problem faced by transnational cultural industries which are lured by the potential of huge Asian markets. Apart from protectionist government regulation policies (e.g., Atkins 1995; Lee &
Wang 1995), one of the difficulties in entering Asian markets is the considerable
diversity of culture, religion, language, race and ethnicity in the region. Moreover,
there is a tendency for audiences to prefer local and regional programmes to foreign
(mostly American) counterparts, even though they may entirely imitate products of
foreign origin (e.g., Straubhaar 1991; Sinclair et al. 1996). It is precisely the irreducible
cultural difference and preference for 'local' programmes, with which Western
transnational media corporations have been struggling and which has validated, at
least in part, the above-mentioned policy shift from rigid protectionism to encouraging
domestic cultural production.

It is in this sense that local cultural industries in some Asian countries, such as
Hong Kong — which has long-established powerful cultural industries whose products
have won the hearts of their people — more subtly exploit local specificities in
expanding its reach to other parts of Asia: 'Local TV takes on the satellite giants'
(Asiaweek 8 November 1996). In the early 1990s, Hong Kong's leading television
station, TVB, began actively entering Asian markets with its capacity for five thousand
hours of programming a year (Far Eastern Economic Review 27 January 1994). TVB
not only exported its programmes and launched TVBI, its satellite channel service,
mainly to Taiwan in 1995, but also started to co-produce locally tailor-made
programmes. Apart from production ability, the strength of TVB lies in its presumed
cultural 'Chineseness', which may be more or less shared by a vast number of ethnic
Chinese people in the Asian region. This co-production strategy enabled TVB to
penetrate the Mandarin language market of China and Taiwan, and was extended to
the Malay-language market with a Chinese-Indonesian partner (Mainichi Shimbun 21
April 1994).

Likewise, transnational cultural industries in Asian markets have strived to make
programming 'localised', as expressed in a cover story of Asian Business (October
1996): 'The battle for a share of Asia's huge television audience is in full swing, with
international broadcasters pouring in vast amounts of cash. But it's the players who
provide local programming content that look likely to succeed’. The shift in STAR TV’s programming strategy is a case in point. By assuming the omnipotence of American cultural products, STAR TV conflated the centralisation of distribution with that of transmission and neglected the existence of multiple local cultures at the point of consumption. The lesson STAR TV has learned is that exporting English-language programmes produced in Hollywood is no longer enough. As Rupert Murdoch remarked, ‘we’ve committed ourselves to learning the nuance of the region’s diverse cultures’ (Asian Business Review May 1994). Rather than pursuing the old-fashioned ‘communication as transmission view’ of broadcasting pan-Asian programmes in one language, the strategy of STAR TV has changed into assuring local programmes by finding local partners (Far Eastern Economic Review 27 January 1994; Asiaweek 19 October 1994). Driven also by highly political reasons, STAR TV replaced BBC World News and the American MTV with drama and music programmes that were more Chinese-sensitive (The Australian 11 May 1994). And MTV Asia has struck back with much more localised programming in various local languages such as Mandarin and Hindi.

The localisation strategies of transnational cultural industries are reminiscent of the academic critique of the ‘cultural imperialism thesis’. The cultural imperialism thesis has been criticised for its implication of a ‘more or less straightforward and deliberate imposition of dominant culture and ideology’ and is therefore firmly based upon ‘the transmission view of communication’ (Ang, 1994: 196). Others have criticised its reliance on the ‘center-periphery model’ (see e.g., Sinclair 1991; Tomlinson 1991), thus connoting a one-way flow of cultural products and meanings from the producer to the consumer. However, in the ‘real’ world, foreign products are often locally domesticated in terms of their meanings as well as their forms and contents (Appadurai 1990). Moreover, non-Western regional centres such as Brazil, Hong Kong and India export significant volumes of cultural product to the regional and global markets and in many cases overwhelm American products in terms of popularity (Straubhaar
with cultural studies professors, marketers share an interest in the popular rejection and playful re-interpretations of the transnational message. Transnational cultural industries are quick to incorporate the de-centered media flows into their own strategy: as a manager of STAR TV commented, ‘there is no money to be made in cultural imperialism’ (Gautier, quoted in Sinclair 1997: 144). While capital still operates on the instrumentalist logic of transmission and dissemination of messages, global cultural industries exploit such logic by emphasising the sharing of symbols and aesthetic experiences among consumers in a particular niche market by ‘absorbing local differences of value and taste into the global sales effort’ (Maxwell 1997: 193).

**The way we were: marketing the Japanese experience of cultural indigenisation**

In the 1990s, Japanese cultural industries have also clearly recognised the significance of deploying localisation strategies in Asian markets. In 1994, Dentsū, the largest advertising agency in Japan, organised a committee to promote the export of Japanese audiovisual products and submitted a report to the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Dentsū & Dentsū Sōken 1994). The report clearly saw the great possibility of Japanese products being further accepted in Asian markets and suggested the necessity of developing more export-oriented production systems, including market research and language dubbing of TV programmes and films. At the same time, however, many members of the committee were not optimistic about the future of Japanese cultural exports to Asia. Interestingly, they pointed to the strong likelihood that Japanese cultural products would soon be superseded by local ones. This view corresponds with my own research. In November 1994 and February 1996, I interviewed more than twenty cultural producers in Japan concerning the popularity of Japanese products in Asia. Almost every producer thought that Japanese products would not be well received in Asian markets for long. The programme sales director of a Japanese TV station, whose TV dramas had been well received in many Asian
countries, clearly stated in an interview with me that the popularity of these dramas would not last to the end of this century. As a long-term strategy, Japanese cultural industries are not as keen to export Japanese products as to be somehow involved in the (co)production of ‘local’ products in various Asian markets.

The stress on involvement in local production indicates that in entering the booming Asian arena, Japanese cultural industries are trying to engage with global-local dynamics differently from Western and other Asian local cultural industries, which usually attempt to buy and distribute ‘local’ products and/or exploit presupposed ‘localness’ in the export and the production of media products. Apparently, this posture displays the pessimism held by some Japanese cultural industries concerning the transnational appeal of visible ‘Japaneseness’ embodied in cultural products in a global context. In the previous chapter, I argued that the major cultural products which Japan exports are characterised as ‘culturally odourless’. The above-quoted joke about ASEAN also suggests that the Japanese cultural presence has a perceived odourlessness. That playing golf for business and enjoying karaoke are even jokingly considered requirements for membership of ASEAN points to the Japanese cultural influence in Southeast Asia and, no doubt, elsewhere in East Asia. Unlike karaoke, golf did not originate in Japan but its predominant incorporation into business and corporate culture can be regarded as very ‘Japanese’. Nevertheless, these activities do not invoke images of ‘Japan’ and thus of a Japanese cultural presence, as they have been fully localised and incorporated as integral parts of business culture and the everyday life of the middle-classes in the region, to the extent that they represent consumer modernity in Southeast Asia.

The difference between the presence and the influence of foreign cultures and the significance of locality is, as suggested above, a key to an understanding of global cultural flows in general, reflected in the ‘global marketing’ of the 1990s. It is still no accident that Japan has become a major exporter of culturally odourless products. Even if Japanese animators do not consciously draw menkoyuki characters in order
to export their animation (Chapter 3). Japanese animation industries always have the global market in mind and are aware that the non-Japaneseness of characters works to their advantage in the export market (Akuusu Henshusitsu 1995: 36-97). Since Tezuka Osamu’s Astro Boy in the early 1960s, Japanese animation has long been consumed internationally. Japan routinely exports animated films which made up 56% of TV exports from Japan in 1980-1981 (Stronach 1989) and 58% in 1992-1993 (Kawatake & Hara 1994). While other film genres are mostly exported in Japanese, only 1% of animated films are in Japanese. This implies that animation is routinely intended for export (Stronach 1989: 144). The producers and creators of game software intentionally make computer game characters look non-Japanese because they are clearly conscious that the market is global (Akuusu Henshusitsu 1995). Mario, the principal character of the popular computer game, Super Mario Brothers, for example, does not invoke the image of Japan. Both his name and appearance are designed to be ‘Italian’.

Sony, from the outset, has had a strong policy of becoming a global company. The name of the company and its products, such as Walkman, are in English, the global language. Sony is recognised as a significant global company because it invented the marketing strategy of ‘global localisation’. Global localisation today is not exclusively a Sony practice, but a marketing buzzword of the global business world. Nevertheless, as Robertson (1995) points out, The Oxford Dictionary of New Words (1991: 134) clearly acknowledges that ‘global localisation’ and the new word ‘glocal’ originate in Japan and that the global marketing strategy is another of Japan’s significant contributions to consumer society:

In business jargon: simultaneously global and local; taking a global view of the market, but adjusted to local considerations. . . Formed by telescoping global and local to make a blend; the idea is modelled on Japanese dochakuka (derived from dochaku ‘living on one’s own land’), originally the agricultural principle of adapting one’s farming techniques to local conditions, but also adopted in Japanese business for global localisation, a global outlook adapted to local conditions.

It is indeed an intriguing question why the term, ‘glocal’ was originally used by
Japanese companies, but we should not regard the act of *dochakuka* (indigenisation) as uniquely Japanese. As I discussed in chapter 2, cultural borrowing, appropriation, hybridisation and indigenisation are common practices in the global cultural flow. A more relevant question to be addressed regarding any distinct Japanese engagement with glocalisation is how Japanese companies are imagining Japan’s position in the global cultural flow when they develop strategies of glocalisation.

Behind such developments, as I have shown, there is the assumption of Japanese companies that the suppression of Japanese cultural odour is imperative for Japanese cultural industries to make inroads into international markets. As the negative picture of this, it was speculated by Japanese TV industries in the early 1990s that Japanese TV programmes, other than animation, would not attract Asian audiences, due to Japanese cultural and language differences (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun* 26 November 1994). Japanese TV industries themselves seem to believe that their products would suffer a high ‘cultural discount’ (Hoskins & Mirus 1988) in international markets, since, while ‘culturally odourless’ products consciously or unconsciously lack Japanese bodily images, the imagery of TV programmes and popular music is inescapably represented through living Japanese bodies.

More importantly, the Japanese invention of glocalisation, I would argue, points to the way in which the localisation strategies of Japanese cultural industries in Asian markets is informed by their reflection on Japan’s own experience of indigenisation of American popular cultural influence. Japanese cultural producers have a belief from their experiences that ‘foreign popular culture such as TV programmes and popular music will sooner or later be superseded by domestically produced ones, particularly as local cultural industries absorb foreign influence’, as the organiser of the above-mentioned Dentsū committee told me in an interview. Japanese cultural export to Asia is no exception to this rule of transnational cultural flows.

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3 It is interesting to note that McDonald’s derived a firm conviction in the effectiveness of the multilocal strategy from its local-owner operation in Japan (Watson 1997: 13).
Since World War II, Japanese popular culture has been deeply influenced by American media. Japan quickly localised these influences by imitating and partly appropriating the original, rather than being dominated by American products and ‘colonised’ by America. From the inception of Japanese TV history in 1953, Japanese TV programming relied enormously upon imports from Hollywood in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, the imbalance has drastically diminished since the mid-1960s. As early as 1980, Japan imported only 5% of all programmes and this trend has continued (Kawatake & Hara 1994). There were several reasons for this rapid transformation. First, two national events around 1960 contributed to the ascendancy of TV’s popularity. One was the crown prince’s wedding in 1959, and the other was the Tokyo Olympics in 1964. These two events created a nationwide boom in television sales. Second, the maturity of feature film production lent itself to the quick ascendancy of the TV industry, at the cost of its own decline. The popularity of TV decreased Japanese movie attendance, which declined drastically from 1.1 billion in 1958 to 373 million in 1965 (Stronach 1989: 136). Accordingly, capable film makers turned to television and this led to the maturity of the TV industry. The number of feature films produced fell from more than 500 in 1960 to 58 in 1990 (Buck 1992: 126). Finally, Japan’s economic miracle and the large size of the domestic market made this rapid development possible. The Japanese population of more than 120 million people and its economic wealth make the Japanese audiovisual market, along with that of the United States, one of the only two self-sufficient markets in the world.

This is not to say that foreign popular culture is no longer consumed in Japan. In fact, American popular culture has continued to strongly influence Japan. People in Japan have been saturated with American popular culture. Japan is one of the most important buyers of Hollywood movies (O’Regan 1992: 330). Many TV formats and concepts are also deeply influenced by and borrowed from American programmes, and information about the American way of life appears in the mass media frequently. However, directly imported TV programmes have not been truly popular, particularly
since the 1980s with occasional exceptions such as *The X Files* which became popular in 1997. In Japan, people can watch many popular American TV series such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, or *The Simpsons*, but these programmes have never received high ratings (concerning the failure of *Dallas* in Japan, see Liebes & Katz 1991). Popularity does not depend upon whether the product is originally Japanese or not, but how Japan localises the original. Who knows and cares, for example, whether the Japanese version of *The Price is Right* is of American origin or not? What the Japanese audience cares about is whether the programme contains a ‘Japanese odour’ through localisation.

Japanese cultural industries are aware from their experiences that Japanese cultural commodities are destined to be indigenised or appropriated in each locale in Asia. At the same time, their experiences convince them that other Asian countries will take the same path as Japan in terms of the rapid indigenisation of foreign (American) popular culture. While Japanese cultural industries are unsure of the exportability of Japanese audiovisual products other than animation, as I show below, Japanese cultural industries seem to believe that if there is anything about Japan which attracts Asian people, it would be the hyperactive indigenisation and domestication of ‘the West’, which is believed to make Japanese cultural formations scandalous to and subversive of Western cultural power (Chapter 2). To put it differently, behind the localising strategies of Japanese cultural industries in Asian markets there is a firm conviction that the localness to be exploited in Asian markets is the *process* of indigenisation rather than the product *per se*.

Japanese localisation strategies attempt to create local zones by gauging the practices of local media centres and their dynamic indigenisation processes. These are strategies which incorporate the viewpoint of the dominated who have long learnt to negotiate Western culture in their consumption of media products imported from the West. ‘What was marked as foreign and exotic yesterday can become familiar today and traditionally Japanese tomorrow’ (Tobin 1992: 26). This dynamic is exactly what
Japanese cultural industries have tried to produce in Asian markets and what they believe is the commonality between other Asian nations and Japan. Here, we can nevertheless see how Japanese localisation in Asian markets is imbued with a condescending posture toward other Asian nations. It is an unambiguous presupposition that as in Japanese civilisation theories discussed in Chapter 2, Japan’s successful indigenisation of foreign (Western) cultural influence presents a developmental model for other Asian countries to follow. A newly articulated ‘Asia’ embedded in the localising strategies of the Japanese music industries thus illuminates the asymmetrical relationships between Japan and other Asian nations in the context of globalised capitalism.

**Finding local pop stars: Japanese music industries in Asian markets**

One of the popular localising strategies of the Japanese TV industry entering Asian markets in the early 1990s was ‘concept trade’ (*Asahi Shinbun* 10 September 1993; *Nikkei Trendy* March 1995). Japan sells programme concepts rather than the programmes themselves to other countries, and thus includes the sale of video materials which contain hardly any ‘Japanese odour’. Concept trade is a widely practised business in the world. Japanese exports are not restricted to Asian markets. For example, NTV, a Japanese commercial TV station, sold the format and visual material of the quiz show, *Show-by Show-by*, to Spain, Italy, Thailand and Hong Kong. The original of *America’s Funniest Home Video Show* can be found in TBS’s variety show.

In the early 1990s, ‘concept trade’ in Asia was promoted by the largest advertising company in Japan, Dentsū. Dentsū’s main purpose is to promote ‘syndication’ so that it can sell the commercial time for Japanese sponsors in several Asian countries as well as selling the programme concepts. The syndication sales compensate for the low trading price of TV programmes in Asian markets (*Nikkei Trendy* March 1995: 32-33). Like Hong Kong’s TVB, Dentsū sells the programme concepts of chat
shows and game shows which have been well-accepted in Japan, together with the video material, the supervision of production and Japanese programme sponsors to Asian TV stations (Far Eastern Economic Review 16 June 1994). All local TV stations have to do is to provide local celebrities and audiences, and to learn the know-how of TV production from Japanese producers.

However, the most active exploitation of localisation has been forged by the music industry. Although some Japanese pop idols and singers such as Sakai Noriko and Chage & Aska have been popular in Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (e.g., Box March 1990; Mainichi Guraiji 29 November 1992; Views February 1996), in the early 1990s, the Japanese music industries aimed less to promote those Japanese musicians in East and Southeast Asian markets than to seek out ‘indigenous’ pop stars who can be sold across pan-Asian markets with Japanese pop production know-how (see Nikkei Entertainment 9 September 1992). The Japanese project of finding pan-Asian pop singers is thus motivated by a chimera of producing trans-Asian popular music through cross-fertilisation of a Japanese initiative.

I argued in the previous chapter that a 1993 Japanese film about the Japanisation of Asia is suggestive of how Japanese film producers imagine the global cultural flow. The premise is that the basic model of Japanese popular culture is American, and that Japan can provide a model for localising moves. What the film does not show is the endless simulation of American pop in Asia through the second generation simulation of ‘home grown’ Japanese pop music which unexplainably owes a debt to American trends. A Japanese version of ‘YMCA’ was covered in Canto pop which became popular in Hong Kong and Singapore. Another popular song, ‘Rouge’, was

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4 In 1997, NTV, a popular commercial TV station in Japan, also started co-producing a programme to promote the syndication business in Asian markets. This was Chō Ajiaryū (‘Super Asians’), produced with Hong Kong (TVB), Taiwan (CTV), South Korea (SBS), Thailand (ITV) and Singapore (TCS8). Each week, programme content consists of a main topic, such as fashion, idols or karaoke, and each station covers the topic in the local cultural scene. What is interesting, however, is that each of the TV stations uses the footage differently. Only CTV broadcasts the same programme as NTV with subtitles. SBS, ITV and TCS8 incorporate some film coverage in local information programmes so as to make the programmes look like they were produced by themselves. 5
covered at least in Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam and Turkey (Hara 1996: 144-151). Japanese popular music, much of which is deeply influenced by American popular music, has been well-received in East and Southeast Asia but there is little local awareness of this because most of the songs are sung by local singers in local languages (Hara 1996:144-157). For example, Chinese audiences listening to Hong Kong pop are unaware when it is actually a cover version of a Japanese song because they do not know the Japanese original (cover songs might well constitute, besides consumer technologies, computer games and comics/animation, a fourth 'C' of Japanese culturally odourless products!). In 1994, TBS's (a commercial national TV network in Japan) news programme reported on the activities of Japanese cultural industries in Shanghai (NEWS 23 October 1994). In the report, both the owner of a record shop and a customer said to the camera that the local people knew very few Japanese songs. They also said Japanese songs were not popular in China and that Japanese record companies should develop more subtle marketing strategies. But this was followed by a Japanese narration observing that people listen to many Japanese songs in China without realising their origin, because the songs have come to Shanghai via Hong Kong or Taiwan.

These examples suggest the way in which Japanese popular music is influential as a mediating element in the chain transnationalisation of America-dominated popular culture: Japanese popular music, which is arguably the product of Japanese indigenisation of American and other, mostly Western, popular music, tends to be further localised and differently appropriated in other Asian markets. It is through this cultural role which Japan plays in the dynamics of global cultural flow in East and Southeast Asia that Japanese music industries try to expand their inroads into the music business in the region (see e.g., Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1995: 98-131; Ichikawa 1994). As the director of Epic Sony told me in an interview:

The Japaneseess of Japanese popular music production can be found in

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5 This information is according to my interview in 1994 with Japanese journalist, Shinozaki Hiroshi.
its capacity for cultural mixing which makes the original source irrelevant. I think we are good at appropriating quality aspects from American popular music and reconstructing our own music... In the same vein, if we produce something stunning, trendy and newly stylish in local languages by local singers, I am sure that it can sell in Asian markets. The base [of the stunning style] is American popular culture.

In this venture of boosting cultural indigenisation of American popular culture in Asian markets through a Japanese filter, Japanese cultural industries, at least from a marketing perspective, seem to realise that Japan is not the final stop of transnational cultural flows in Asian regions. However, the localisation strategy of Japanese music industries in Asian markets posits an evolutionary temporal lag between Japan and other Asian nations. Japan’s past is found in the present of other East and Southeast Asian countries, as the director of a popular Japanese music ranking magazine commented, 'the Japanese know-how of producing pop idols is applicable to other Asian countries, as the present situation in Asia looks like that of Japan about sixteen or seventeen years ago' (Mainichi Shinbun, 9 November 1994). That is to say, there is a certain degree of economic growth which enables (particularly younger) people to consume cultural products such as cassette tapes, CDs, concert tickets and magazines; there is also the development of commercial TV industries which are the major vehicle for promoting popular songs and idols (Inamasu 1993; Ogawa 1988). The rise of economic power in East and Southeast Asia and the rapid growth of commercialised TV markets in the region has not only reminded Japanese music industries of the high times of the Japanese idol boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but has also urged them to apply worn-out techniques of manufacturing pop idols in other Asian markets.

The value of idols does not necessarily lie in any distinct singing ability. The main feature of what is called the Japanese *aidoru* ('idol') system is the production of an intimate proximity between stars and audiences and the blurring of the distance between professionals and amateurs, distinctive from the Hollywood Star System (see Inamasu 1993; Ogawa 1988; Ching 1994). This explains why, while the medium
for the latter is film, TV is the channel of producing intimate pop idols. The frequent exposure of idols in commercial films and other TV programmes makes them seem to be someone living next door or studying in the same classroom. The film *Sotsugyô Ryôkô* again illustrates this method of finding a pop star. The protagonist achieves fame through an audition and the subsequent frequent appearances on TV programmes and commercials, giving audiences the feeling that anyone in Asia can be tomorrow’s star. A televised star search audition was the basis for the development of the Japanese pop idol system — the processes by which media industries manufacture pop idols — in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the early 1990s, Japanese cultural industries deployed the same strategy, holding auditions in the booming East and Southeast Asian markets. A Japanese TV station, Fuji television, has been jointly producing a talent quest programme since 1992 with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and South Korea. The title of the programme, *Asia Bagus!* means ‘Asia is terrific!’ in Malay/Indonesian. The programme has three presenters, a Japanese woman and two Singaporean men. All presenters speak English and in addition each speaks, respectively, Japanese, Malay/Indonesian and Mandarin Chinese. This programme has been broadcast in five countries since April 1992: in Singapore, on TCS 5, in Malaysia, on TV3 (since 1997 NTV9), in Indonesia, on TVRI (TVRI quit the programme in 1995 because the Indonesian Government did not like to broadcast Mandarin. But in 1996, a private TV station, RCTI, aired the programme), and since 1994 in Taiwan, on TTV (since 1996 TVBS). While it is scheduled at midnight in Japan, most of the other countries broadcast *Asia Bagus!* in prime time — in Singapore and Malaysia, for example, it is broadcast at 7:30 on Sunday night, which is a significant time for TV programming — and it constantly gets high ratings in those countries (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 27 October 1994): the rating in

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6 Taiwan joined the programme in 1994 after the Taiwanese government abolished its policy of banning the broadcasting of Japanese language programmes in the end of 1993. South Korea joined the programmes in 1997, but could not broadcast it in South Korea due to the government policies regulating the broadcasting of Japanese language on TV.
Malaysia was as high as 70% (Mainichi Shinbun 8 December 1994). Although Asia Bagus! is directed and produced mainly by Japanese staff, the programme is produced in close cooperation with the local TV industries. It is filmed in Singapore, in order to make the programme ‘Asian’. My field research in Singapore suggests that about half of the studio audiences did not associate Asia Bagus! with Japanese production. Most responded that the attractiveness of the programme has much to do with its ‘Asian’ flavour, which cannot be limited to the influence of a single country (see Appendix B).

The programme has obviously borrowed its concept from a Japanese popular star search programme from the 1970s, Sutâ Tanjô (‘A Star is Born’). The distinctive feature of this programme lay in the fact that it was not merely an amateur singing contest. Recording companies and talent agencies were closely involved in the programme. The same is true with Asia Bagus! Each week, four amateur singers from five countries compete with one another and the winner is guaranteed to make his/her/their debut as a professional act with the recording company, Pony Canyon, which belongs to the same media conglomerate group as Fuji TV, the producer of Asia Bagus!. Pony Canyon have established branches in Hong Kong, Taipei, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur. Unlike the global corporation Sony, Pony Canyon set out to become an Asian industry operator which would activate intra-regional flows in Asia (Nikkei Entertainment 9 September 1992). Pony Canyon’s Asian market strategy has benefited from the popularity of Asia Bagus!. The programme introduced a trans-Asian audition system in East and Southeast Asian countries where there so far had been no established system of giving an opportunity for young people who dream of becoming a pop singer (Kanemitsu 1993).

Likewise, Japanese recording companies and talent agencies have actively invested in the potential of Asian markets by avidly seeking pan-Asian pop stars through organising auditions in the early 1990s. Sony and Sony Music Entertainment began music auditions called ‘Voice of Asia’ in eight Southeast Asian countries, in hopes
of finding a pan-Asian pop star in 1991. About 4000 groups and singers competed against one another and the winner was a female Filipino singer, Maribeth (Asahi Shimbun 11 February 1994). The huge size of the Chinese population in Asia enticed Japanese cultural industries most in their search for pan-Asian pop idols. A Japanese producer stressed in my interview in 1994 that ‘while the Japanese market consists of a Japanese-language tribe of merely 120 million people, we can sell Chinese popular songs to the 1.5 billion global Chinese population’ (see also Nikkei Trendy March 1995; Shukan Asahi 10 December 1993; Saudê Mainichi 13 November 1994). Lured by the potential of the Chinese cultural market, Sony Music Entertainment and Yoshimoto Entertainment, the biggest comedy agency in Japan, also held an audition in Shanghai, with the aim to produce Shanghai Performance Doll in 1994 (Dime 20 October 1994). This is named after Tokyo Performance Doll, a popular female group in Japan. According to my interview with the director of Epic Sony, Sony wanted to export the system of pop-star-making with Tokyo Performance Doll’s up-tempo dance music to China and other Asian countries, while Yoshimoto aimed to produce a variety TV show featuring Shanghai Performance Doll (Asahi Shimbun 30 July 1994; 25 September 1995). The talent agencies have also actively tried to find Chinese pop stars. One of the biggest agencies in Japan, HoriPro Entertainment Group, established branches in Hong Kong and Beijing in 1993. Although also organising an audition in Vietnam in August 1995, HoriPro Entertainment Group’s main target is the Mandarin-speaking market. In 1993, HoriPro Entertainment Group held auditions all over China to find Chinese pop stars and the final competition was broadcast by STAR TV. Five winners were selected from more than 400,000 contestants and made their debuts in 1994. Another big talent agency, Amuse, held auditions in Shanghai in 1993. Their purpose is, as it is for HoriPro Entertainment Group, to produce a Chinese pop star who can be sold in the potentially huge Chinese market in Asia, using Japanese capital, management know-how and marketing strategies (see Akurosu Henshûshitsu 1995: 100-1119; Aera 14 September 1993).
Music is attractive to the Japanese industries, not only because of its low cultural
discount, but also because of the sale of associated consumer commodities such as
CDs and CD players. The target market covers those countries in East and Southeast
Asia whose economic growth has enabled their populations to enjoy the consumption
of cultural products, hardware and software. These include China, South Korea,
Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.
Moreover, in order to participate in auditions, people practise by themselves, sing
together and listen to their own favourite songs to be a (three-minute) star, as well as
being a fan and a consumer. Here consumer technologies such as karaoke, the Walkman
and CDs find new ways of obtaining revenue. Pioneer, a Japanese producer of
audiovisual appliances, has been holding amateur karaoke contests in seven Asian
countries since 1991, in order to promote sales for laser-disc players and discs. In
1993, more than 10,000 people joined the contest and Pioneer shipped 600,000
laserdisc players to the East and Southeast Asian region, more than double the

Japanese cultural industries assume the willingness of Asian audiences to be
consumers, just as Japanese people have been since the late 1950s. With the development
and diffusion of TV in Japan, the American middle-class way of life represented in
some American drama serials had tremendous influence upon Japanese people. It
was a life abundant with electrical appliances. The Japanese electronics industry
subtly exploited the desires of the people by using the catchphrase of the ‘three
treasures’, which associated the acquisition of electrical appliances with happy middle-
class life (see e.g., Kelly 1993; Ivy 1993). The three treasures were the three S’s in
the late 1950s, *senpūki, sentakuki, suihanki* (‘electric fan, washing machine, electric
rice cooker’); in the 1960s, the three C’s were car, cooler (*air conditioner*), color
television. The strategy of the audition-based star system, combined with consumer
technologies, was also the vehicle for promoting consumerism in Japan, especially in
the 1970s and early 1980s. In the 1990s, the same strategy has been deployed in the
Asian market. The industry tries to exploit and produce desire among the people to be members of the middle-class in a modern capitalist society.

Thus, Japanese capital and transnational manufacturing companies, like the syndication business trying to sell consumer commodities in Asian markets, have supported the move of Japanese cultural industries into Asia. According to a 1995 survey of the most well-known companies and product names in China, Japanese companies occupy 6 out of the top 10 positions: 10. Honda 9. Suzuki 8. Marlboro 7. Mickey Mouse 6. Toyota 5. Tchingtao 4. Toshiba 3. Panasonic 2. Coca Cola 1. Hitachi (Nikkei Shimbun 17 February 1995). These companies are looking for an ‘image character’ for the local markets in Asia. Thus, Sony pushed Asian singers in those markets in order to promote sales not only of CDs but also CD players. The Filipina singer, Maribeth, is a case in point. Maribeth’s first album sold more than 350,000 CDs and cassette tapes in Indonesia in just four months, which is close to Michael Jackson’s best-selling figure, 400,000 (Asahi Shimbun 11 February 1994). The main reason for the Filipina singer’s success in Indonesia was the use of her hit song in a TV advertisement for Sony CD players. Maribeth’s single was titled ‘Denpasar Moon’. Sony made an advertisement for a CD player featuring Maribeth singing the song in Bali, which contributed to selling both the CD players and CDs (Ichikawa 1996: 336). According to my interview with a director of Sony Music Japan in 1994, the next song by Maribeth would be a duet, as Sony planned to promote karaoke machines with duetting facility. This is a common strategy called ‘tie-up’ in Japan, and this Japanese system has obviously worked well in other parts of Asia. Likewise, Panasonic changed their ‘image girl’ for the Asian market from a Japanese idol who is quite popular in Taiwan and China to a Chinese singer, a winner of the audition held by HoriPro Entertainment Group in Beijing in 1995 (Nikkei Trendy March 1995). Yaohan, a big retail chain store in Asia, also used Shanghai Performance Doll to disseminate Yaohan’s good image when starting their business in Shanghai (Asahi Shimbun 30 July 1994). Indeed, the export of Japanese popular culture to other parts
of Asia is interlinked with consumer commodities and department stores (Igarashi et al., 1995).

It is in this Japanese capitalist exploitation of ‘the new rich’ in Asia (Robinson & Goodman 1996) that featuring local pop stars for diverse local markets was supposed to work better than the direct export of Japanese musicians. In order for Japanese music industries to make profits from multi-media strategies, these pop icons are not necessarily ‘indigenous’, strictly speaking. The Filipino singer Maribeth, for example, is popular in Indonesia, but she could still evoke common experiences and dreams in the Indonesian locale, dreams of affluent, commodity-saturated life styles. Highly ‘Westernised’ Asian celebrities’ fashions, hair styles, and attitudes are much more stimulating to Asian viewers than American stars. It is much easier and more ‘realistic’ for them to identify themselves with Asian stars. One producer of Asia Bagus told me that one of the most important things Japan has to do in producing the programme is to use a first-rate Japanese make-up artist and fashion stylist to make an ordinary person into a star on the TV screen.

It can be argued that the Japanese cultural industries do not try to offer, much less to impose, anything ‘authentically Japanese’ through TV concepts or pop stars. Likewise, Asian pop stars (including Japanese) are not presenting a ‘traditional national culture’ nor an ‘authentic Asianness’, but various ‘Asiannesses’ which intensely indigenise ‘Westernness’ or ‘Americanness’. Japanese music industries attempt to produce Asian pop idols who are skilful at ‘domesticating the West’ in Asia. Each singer from different locales appropriates Western culture in his/her own way to the extent that hierarchical relationships cannot be discerned between the original and its imitation, at least for Asian audiences. What Asian pop idols embody is neither

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7 Another commercial film shows a Sony karaoke machine that features Maribeth’s song, ‘Born to Sing’. Maribeth is scouted by a Sony Music manager when she sings for a night bar. The Sony person is not Japanese but Caucasian (possibly American). This articulates the propensity of Japanese cultural industries to suppress Japanese visible presence.

8 The producer of Asia Bagus told me in an interview that they often urge the contestants to choose one of the latest hit songs or a song from a trendy genre such as rap and dance music.
‘American’ nor ‘traditional Asian’, but something new and hybrid. People are no longer consuming ‘the West’ or a ‘Westernised Asia’ but an ‘indigenised (Asianised) West’; they are fascinated neither with ‘originality’ nor with ‘tradition’, but are actively constructing their own images and meanings at the receiving end. The specificities or ‘authenticity’, if you like, of local cultures are to be found ‘a posteriori not a priori, according to local consequences not local origins’ (Miller 1992: 181).

Yet the active construction of meanings takes place under the system of global capitalism in which Japan has a major role. The flow of cultural products and of profits is unquestionably one-sided and asymmetrical. People’s freedom of negotiation at the receiving end of the global cultural flow coexists with the unambiguously centralised control of the production and distribution system. No matter how production processes are localised, they are financially at the mercy of giant corporations. It is this contradiction between the privatised negotiation of meanings and the centralisation of production and distribution which not only characterises but also reinforces the strategy of ‘global localisation’. In other words, the strength of ‘global localisation’ lies in the simultaneous mustering of ‘local consequences’ and global structural constraint, which are closely interconnected and interpenetrated. While most people do not personally feel the global forces that structure their everyday lives, these forces are nonetheless structurally and analytically real.

It is also naive to generalise about urban middle-class culture in Asia, as the term still excludes too many peoples and regions across Asia. This point has been highlighted particularly as the recent economic crisis in Asia has deprived many people of the material base for middle-class status. The danger, as Sreberny-Mohammadi (1991) argues, is that ‘global players’ are still confined to ‘the affluent few’ and the local tends to be equated with the national, neglecting various unprofitable ‘locals’ based upon class, gender and ethnic inequalities within each nation. Perhaps consumer culture reflects more how Japanese cultural industries imagine Asian audiences without considering any sublocal specificities than how actual people live their everyday
lives in their locales. This is not to say that Japanese cultural industries fail to recognise the existence of multiple social and cultural differences across the region. *Asia Bagus!* has encountered many troubles caused by irreducible cultural differences among participating nations in the production process, such as fashion, religion and language and frequent change of broadcasters and participating countries. The Japanese producer of *Asia Bagus!* clearly recognised the irreducible diversity of Asian cultural markets (Kanemitsu 1993; Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1995: 120-131). The point is, however, that while the localisation strategy is meant to be attentive, from a marketing point of view, to regional and national differences in East and Southeast Asia, ‘Asia’ is re-constructed by Japanese cultural industries, which are enchanted with the idea of Japanese orchestration of a pan-Asian entertainment project, as a bounded capitalist space of ardent consumer aspiration for indigenising Western modern culture. In this space, Japan does not simply share the latter with other Asian nations but is also qualified to guide them in how to develop local forms of vernacular consumer and popular culture.

**The limits of globalisation**

However, Japanese ventures for cultivating pan-Asian pop idols have only been at best, partially successful because of economic difficulties encountered by Japanese cultural industries. In entering Asian markets with these localising strategies, Japanese recording companies and talent agencies did not expect immediate returns on their investment in Asian entertainment business, but they gambled on the potential of flourishing Asian, particularly Chinese, markets (*Nikkei Trendy* March 1995; *Forbes* December 1994; *Denim* 20 October 1994). In spite of their original intentions, many Japanese music companies could not continue to bear the accumulating loss and retreated from their projects to find local pop idols in Asia. When I returned to

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9 The most dramatic demonstration is that Taiwan left the programme in 1997 due to its strong Southeast Asian flavour.
Tokyo in January 1997, to meet cultural industry people whom I had interviewed in October 1994, their earlier passion and optimism for localising projects in Asian markets had been replaced by sober and exhausted voices. The prolonged economic recession in Japan and other Asian countries had made it difficult for Japanese cultural industries to bear low profits in Asian markets in comparison with the rich domestic market. A manager at Dentsū who promoted the concept trade of Japanese TV variety shows had been transferred to a different section. He told me that he still saw possibilities in the business of concept trade, but Dentsū could not currently sustain his endeavour. The recent economic crisis in Japan and Asia has also cast a dark shadow on the activities of Japanese cultural industries. Pony Canyon actually retreated from Asian markets in late 1997. Most of its offices in Asian cities, except Malaysia and Hong Kong, were closed and liquidated when its associated radio station listed on the Japanese stock market. Yaohan, which had attempted to use Shanghai Performance Doll for its marketing campaign, also went bankrupt in 1996.

The despondency in the cultural industries also has much to do with some more general limitations of localisation strategies that have come to light through actual operations in Asian markets. A music producer for HoriPro Entertainment Group told me that he realised the gap between ideal and reality. In many cases the different media system in China and the strict control by the Chinese government over the media were hard obstacles for Japanese cultural industries. He pointed out for example that in China, unlike Japan, being a theme song of TV commercial films and TV programmes does not lead to the popularity of a song. The most powerful medium for the promotion of popular music in China is FM radio and the way in which DJs broadcast a song is a key to its success. However, the Chinese government has imposed a cultural policy which gives priority to Chinese songs, composed and

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It should be noted that Asia Bagus! is programmed for midnight in Japan. This means that Fuji TV cannot make a profit by producing the programme, as the programme is not for Japanese consumption. On the contrary, Fuji TV is responsible for covering most of the production cost. The main reason for co-production is to establish a corporate tie with other Asian industries and make a trial run of searching for pan-Asian pop singers (Kanemitsu 1993; Asahi Shimbun 13 January 1996).
performed by Chinese. The second priority is given to Hong Kong and Taiwanese songs. Other, internationally ‘corrupted’ songs, either composed or performed by non-Chinese, face difficulties in reaching an audience. The situation is much worse in Vietnam where HoriPro Entertainment Group also organised an audition in 1995. The Vietnamese government allows foreign capital to establish joint companies in Vietnam, however, the government is quite nervous of developing a Western style entertainment industry which would have ‘bad’ cultural influences on the populace. HoriPro Entertainment Group could not obtain a permission from the Vietnamese government to establish an entertainment company. Without a local office, HoriPro Entertainment Group could not promote their music in Vietnam. As a Chinese staff member of the International Department of HoriPro Entertainment Group told me in January 1997:

I think the Asia boom (going for Asian markets) is cooling down. Each new album accumulates not profit but deficit. Maybe we are moving from ‘Let’s do something in Asia’ to a sober confrontation with the reality.

A director of Epic Sony also lamented the difficulties with the media system in China. Shanghai Performance Doll made their debut in 1996 both in China and in Japan. 80,000 copies of cassette tape recordings were published and quickly sold in China. But the Chinese recording publisher did not re-press additional copies. No matter how much Sony pushed the Chinese publisher to re-press the album, according to a director of Sony, they were reluctant to follow the advice, insisting that this was the Chinese way of business. In 1994 he told me passionately that he wanted to produce many versions of Performance Doll in various Asian countries, but two years later he seemed to have recognised difficulties in doing business in China, so much so that he lost his interest in exporting the Japanese system to other Asian countries. Instead he stressed to me in February 1997 that ‘Japanese music industries should not impose a Japanese way on other Asian markets’ and ‘we should not attempt to forcibly develop local music industries’. These comments might sound
ethical, but were derived from his own unsuccessful trial of Asian dreams.

Another related issue is the way the Japanese cultural industries do business in foreign countries. In my research, I often heard that Japanese companies imposed their own way of doing business without considering local differences in terms of business culture and market structures. The Chinese staff who worked for HoriPro Entertainment Group confessed in an interview with me that the frequent conflict between the Japanese and the local (Chinese) staff over promotional strategies and the selection of songs for CDs were always solved by Japanese headquarters and this led to the local Chinese distrust of Japanese headquarters. A Singaporean music producer also complained that Japanese music companies imposed Japanese thinking to too great an extent, leaving little to local staff, even though the Japanese did not fully understand the local market. This sounds like a contradiction when one considers the way that Japanese companies are celebrated for their localisation strategies. Japanese cultural industries tend to stress that they hire local staff and leave everything to them (see Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1995: 100-119), but there is a significant gap between what they say and think, and what they do. The structure is still highly centralised and the final decision tends to be made in Tokyo. The then managing director of the Taiwan office of a Japanese recording company explained in an interview with me in 1997 the difficulty he had in convincing the Tokyo head office of the necessity of spending money on publicity to sell CDs in the Taiwanese market:

Japanese companies naively assume that Japanese know-how is completely transferable to other Asian markets, but they do not understand how media environments vary and systems work differently. In Taiwan, TV is a medium that just sells spot commercial time, and recording companies have to pay for using it, even when the record is the theme song from a TV drama. This is common practice throughout the world, as far as I know, but [the head office] does not realise this.

These comments show some of the difficulties Japanese music industries face in exporting Japanese know-how to Asian markets.11 Japanese cultural industries naively

11 This is not exclusive to cultural production industries. The same problem and contradictions in the strategy of global localisation is often observed among manufacturing companies such as Sony (e.g., Enninott 1992: ch.7; du Gay et al. 1997: 80).
assume that they can localise Japanese experiences by themselves, but in fact they either know too little about the specificity of the local market or leave the local business decisions totally to Japanese management staff.

Japanese cultural industries have attempted to become translators of 'the West' for 'Asia'. A Japanese cultural producer stressed in an interview with me in 1996 that the strength of Japanese cultural industries vis-à-vis other Asian ones is their fifty years of experience and accumulated know-how of 'American education', a view which is widely shared by other cultural producers, as discussed earlier. He, like other Japanese producers, seemed to believe that Japan can perform cultural translation for other Asian nations, because it is the most successfully Westernised non-Western country in the world. The confidence of Japanese cultural industries in believing in the superiority of the Japanese way of indigenising the West is, as a Chinese staff member of a Japanese talent agency told me in an interview, not only perceived as arrogance by local staff but also often deters Japanese cultural industries from appreciating different ways of negotiating Western cultural influences in other parts of Asia.

This attitude was well discerned by a Japanese director of an advertising company in Singapore. In my interview with him, he deplored that Singapore did not have a sophisticated advertising culture, that advertising in Singapore too straight-forwardly promoted commodities in terms of competitive price and quality, to effectively foster a Japanese-style consumer culture ('mono bunka'). This perception of the cultural role of advertising companies is based upon his own experiences in Japan. For example, he was involved in promoting an advertisement for a Japanese department store in the 1980s. The advertisement featured an image of Woody Allen with a depressed expression, over which is superimposed the Japanese phrase 'Oishii seikatsu' (literally meaning 'Delicious life'). This ironical and paradoxical appropriation of an American cultural icon for the Japanese cultural scene was more than a straightforward advertising message (Wark 1991). What the Japanese advertising manager wanted to
export to Singapore was a kind of advertising culture which he believed is highly image-oriented and more culturally significant:

Singapore so easily and directly imports things from outside. They never try to indigenise it in a Singaporean way. This is because there are no cultural producers who can work as cultural filters that indigenise the foreign to the local.

He wanted to be such a cultural filter for Singapore, but in vain. As a result, he tended to look down on Singapore consumer culture as backward compared with Japan and Western countries. The alleged incapacity of Singapore for absorbing foreign influences through ‘local’ filters is not at stake here, but rather a Japanese inability to recognise a different mode of negotiating Western cultural influences. The specificity of the Singaporean situation is elucidated by Wee (1997: 44), who argues concerning the spread of Japanese popular and consumer culture in Singapore that:

it would appear that people seem to feel that there is no need for a Japanese mediation between them and the images/representations of the West... With regard to Japanese products, why consume what could be construed as a second-hand modernity?

For many Singaporeans, the direct consumption of Western popular culture might be experienced as much more exciting and desirable.

These cases propel us to reconsider the emphasis placed by Japanese cultural industries on their sophisticated capacity for indigenising ‘America’ as symptomatic of a growing disquiet generated by the globalisation of indigenised modernities. Behind the confidence of Japanese music industries in their know-how concerning indigenising the West, I argue, there is an anxiety that ‘the Japanese system is too self-contained to extend its power overseas’, as the Japanese manager of the Taipei office of a recording company put it in an interview with me. As transnational cultural flows and cultural indigenisation are ever more intensifying and accelerating in the world, the Japanese claim of an unmatched Japanese experience in the formation of non-Western indigenised modernity has not simply been dismantled. What is more disturbing is the fact that other Asian, particularly Chinese, countries are now by-passing
Japan and are indigenising the West directly and possibly more subtly.

Some Japanese cultural industries clearly recognise this dark picture and share with other economic sectors a pessimistic view of the country’s standing with the rise of other Asian economic powers, as the world shifts from Japan-bashing, which loomed in the trade friction vis-à-vis the United States in the late 1980s, to Japan-passing and now to Japan-nothing (Saitō 1997; McCormack 1998). The Japanese director of an advertising company in Singapore saw Singapore’s direct import of the West as somewhat unsophisticated, but some cultural producers have increasingly come to realise that other Asian countries are more eagerly and creatively indigenising Western popular culture in the 1990s than Japan. The producer of Asia Bagus! emphasised this point in an interview with me when he suggested that the direct consumption of popular cultures all over the world, particularly those of the West, makes the pop culture scene in other Asian countries more creative and exciting than in Japan. Another cultural producer elaborated on this point in an interview:

Japanese cultural industries have a misconception that Japan is more advanced than any other Asian country in terms of popular cultural production, but what is happening is that other Asian countries are also rapidly absorbing American culture in their own ways. I think an Americanisation of Asia cannot be avoided. Japan has to be involved in this process in order not to be left out of the prosperous Asian markets. I would propose the acronym ‘USA’ to stand for the United States of Asia. Like the United States of America where many different cultures are fused, our USA should fuse different cultures so something new emerges in Asia.

What he was stressing is that Japan must be fused with other parts of Asia, particularly the Greater China cultural bloc. His production house, Amuse, has most actively promoted the co-production of films in East Asia. It co-produced with Shanghai TV a drama series (25 episodes of one-hour duration), Shanghai people in Tokyo, in 1995. The drama concerns the lives of overseas students from Shanghai in Tokyo.\footnote{Even Japanese consumer and household electrical appliances are increasingly overwhelmed by domestically produced products in China (Mo 1999).}

\footnote{The programme was finally broadcast in China in 1995 and 1996 and scored high ratings (Asahi Shinbun evening edition 24 February 1996).}
Amuse is also very active in co-producing films with Hong Kong production houses. Since 1994, it has co-produced three films, *Nankin no Kirisuto, Hong Kong Daiya-sōkai* and *Kitchen* (*Aera* 1 December 1997). In 1997 Amuse finally established a joint production house with Golden Harvest Hong Kong to produce a string of love stories (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 11 December 1997).

If Amuse sustains an accumulating loss in its venture in Asian markets, it is because, as the manager of Amuse suspects, this is the only way for Japan not to be left out of the transnational popular culture in the Chinese cultural bloc (see also Mizukoshi & Baeg 1993). It is struggling with how to be involved in the rise of cultural markets in the Chinese cultural sphere before it is too late, before the deconstructive forces of cultural globalisation not only render Japan's know-how of domestication of the foreign (the West) not simply irrelevant for and unappreciated by other Asian nations, but also result in the isolation of Japan from the increasingly Chinese-dominated formation of indigenised modernities in East and Southeast Asia.

'Real time' local promotion of Japanese popular culture

Another consideration in the analysis of Japanese localisation strategies in Asian markets to be borne in mind is that the strategy of localisation is deployed mainly in relatively immature markets such as China, not in mature markets like Taiwan and Hong Kong, where Japanese popular culture has long had an influence (see e.g., Morieda 1988; Shinozaki 1988; Ching 1994). The producer of *Asia Bagus!* clearly stated that Hong Kong had not been included in the programme because its market and industries were too mature to penetrate (Kanemitsu 1993). These countries have imitated and indigenised American popular culture as well as the Japanese idol

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14 The director and the protagonist are both Chinese, but Amuse provided the entire production budget of 4 hundred million yen (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* 12 January 1996). Amuse sold commercial time in *Shanghai People in Tokyo* for various sponsors, including South Korean and Chinese companies, but allegedly could not cover the production costs at all. According to my interview with the director of Amuse, the main purpose was to establish a relationship with the Chinese TV industries and to learn the Chinese production system and gain the know-how of selling programmes and advertising time in China.
system on their own accord and there is not much space for Japanese cultural industries to teach them techniques for cultural indigenisation in the 1990s.

Taiwanese music industries copied the Japanese idol system during the 1980s, particularly in terms of their appearance, fashion and music. It was a conscious imitation. It was an easy and safe way to promote pop idols for the then not-so-mature Taiwanese entertainment industry, who, themselves, thought that the success of the system in Japan gave them a kind of guarantee (see Ching 1994). However, that stage is over. Local idols had begun to create their own style in the early 1990s. The chief editor of a Taiwanese version of the Japanese idol magazine, Up To Boy, told me in an interview in 1997 that:

Taiwanese idols used to be quite conscious of which Japanese idols to copy, but this is no longer the case. They are now emphasising their own styles and are considering the international market as well. There is no time lag between Japan and Taiwan any longer.

The move toward local maturity is also seen in terms of composition. As mentioned before, Japanese popular songs have been extensively sung in local languages by Taiwanese and Hong Kong singers. Local composers have also brushed up their capabilities and the local industry has quite consciously striven to improve expertise. For example, Hong Kong’s influential radio station, Commercial Radio, banned broadcasting Japanese cover songs in 1994. This reflects an increasing confidence among Hong Kong music industries in their own production capacity and the maturity of the music market.

However, this is not to say that Japan no longer has cultural influence in these areas. On the contrary, it is precisely in such mature East Asian markets that Japanese popular music and TV programmes are still most keenly imported and consumed. An emerging trend since the mid-1990s is that while the export of the Japanese idol system has proved to be sporadic, the circulation of Japanese popular music in East Asia has become more constant and synchronous (Aera 20 January 1997; Bart 10 March 1997). According to my interviews with figures in the Taiwanese music
industry in 1997, Japanese popular music occupies only a 2% - 4% share of the Taiwanese market in terms of CDs sold (Chinese 75-80% and international 15-20%), though there are no reliable figures available. However, Japanese popular music has been gradually increasing its presence in Taiwan throughout the 1990s. In the week of 25-31 March 1997, five Japanese songs were in the top 10 of the single-CD sales figure, according to the International Federation of Phonogram and Videogram Producers (IFPI) Taiwan hit chart — two songs by Amuro Namie, one of which became number 1, two songs by Globe and one song by Dreams Come True. This is an extraordinary phenomenon, even though local Taiwanese and Hong Kong artists do not issue single CDs and thus the single-CD chart is almost entirely made up of international single CDs.

In a feature article in the monthly popular magazine, Bar! (10 March 1997), the 'real time' popularity of Japanese pop songs in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore is described as an 'unassuming stance' ('shizentai') to be distinguished from the gambling spirit of penetrating booming Asian markets and the cultural diplomacy of 'bridging Japan and Asia'. Referring to the increasing cooperation and co-production among Asian cultural producers and musicians, the article implies that the emerging trend toward regional synchronisation of popular culture in Asia, though brought about by the development of communication technologies, is seen as somehow an organic development among East Asian nations. Behind this development, however, there are massive promotional efforts and money invested by cultural industries. 'Real time' and similar expressions like 'simultaneity' or 'no time lag' are the terms which I frequently heard in my interviews with Japanese as well as Taiwanese and Hong Kong music producers. These terms are not simply the expression of increasing confidence in the Hong Kong and Taiwanese industries as mentioned above, but they are also uttered as a key marketing strategy for promoting Japanese popular music in East Asia. As the Japanese managing director of a recording company in Taiwan told me in 1997:
Taiwan used to be a place where Japanese idols on the wane could still sell, but nowadays they must be popular simultaneously in Japan in order to succeed in Taiwan because the information and images circulate in real time. The popularity of Japanese artists/idols in Taiwan is closely influenced by daily Taiwanese media coverage of how many records they have sold and how much fame they have attained in Japan.\textsuperscript{15}

What should be noted here is that in this synchronous circulation of Japanese popular music in Taiwan and Hong Kong, any ascent of Japanese popular music has not occurred due to successful promotion by Japanese cultural industries. Rather, it is local media and music industries that have been earnestly marketing Japanese products. As I will elaborate concerning Japanese TV programmes in the next chapter, along with political and economic liberalisation, the development of communication technologies and the expansion of the entertainment market in Taiwan has been important in facilitating the influx of Japanese popular culture in Taiwan since the late 1980s. This has exposed the audience in Taiwan to more information about Japanese pop icons, through newspapers, magazines and television, and given the local industries an incentive for exploiting the commercial value of Japanese popular music, encouraging them to invest a large amount of money in promoting it in Taiwan. The disappearance of time lag thus operates in a double sense — as the vanishing developmental lag in popular music production capacity and market development, and as the transnationalisation of fame facilitated by the instantaneous circulation of imagery and information. Both factors have been responsible for and generated the local promotion of Japanese popular music in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

During the time of my field research in Taipei in 1997, two local companies, Magic Stone and Sony Music Taiwan, were particularly keen to sell Japanese artists

\textsuperscript{15} In the early 1990s, Japanese music industries attempted to promote unknown Japanese artists in East Asian markets by showing their professional acts extensively in the local market. They tried to be local idols by singing songs in Mandarin and frequently appearing in the local media programmes and commercials (Nikkei Trendy June 1997). As a Taiwanese producer commented to a Japanese newspaper, this represents a Taiwanisation of Japanese culture. Unlike the Japanisation of Taiwan through colonial rule, Japan engages with Taiwan by adopting the local culture and language (Asahi Shimbun 15 November 1995). According to my interview with Japanese and Taiwanese music producers in Taiwan, the success of the Taiwanisation strategy, however, has not lasted long, because these idols do not have fame in Japan.
in Taiwan. Interestingly, neither is controlled by Japanese companies. Magic Stone distributes Japanese popular songs from Avex Japan, a company which has not established branches in Asian capitals but promotes its CDs by licensing. The manager of Avex Hong Kong who was in charge of exporting their CDs to Asian markets told me that licensing allows this small independent company to avoid the high cost of maintaining an office and employees. For Japanese popular musicians, Japan itself is no doubt the most important market and they cannot sacrifice it to visit other less profitable markets. Chage & Aska, who toured Asia twice, were exceptional in this regard and were also exceptional in becoming popular overseas. Japanese cultural industries and pop musicians do not want to risk investing huge sums of money in other Asian markets where profits may not seem very likely. Avex’s strategy of licensing suits the Taiwanese market. Japanese companies do not invest much of their own money and Japanese artists do not have to go on frequent tours to promote themselves. One disadvantage of the system is that the artists whom Avex wants to sell do not necessarily attract licensing partners and the amount of money spent on publicity is totally decided by the partner. Nevertheless, this licensing strategy has been successful in Taiwan. The promotional strategy taken by Magic Stone has helped the Japanese dance music of Komuro Tetsuya (the most popular and influential artist and producer in Japan) to become ‘cool’ in Taiwan. Taiwanese record companies usually spend a lot on publicity for the new albums of local artists, but relatively little for international artists. The managing director of Magic Stone boasted to me that now for the first time Magic Stone has invested the same amount of money in promoting Japanese artists in Taiwan as it does for local artists.

A similar arrangement can be seen in Sony Music Taiwan’s promotion of the trio, Dreams Come True. It was Sony Music Taiwan, not Sony Music Japan, which took the initiative in deciding which Japanese artists to sell in the Taiwanese market. Sony Music Taiwan had cautiously planned to promote Dreams Come True in Taiwan over a two year period and finally succeeded in inviting the group to Taiwan in 1996.
According to the vice president of Sony Music Taiwan, the company spent a
considerable amount of money on promotion in Taiwan, almost ten times the average
for international artists, resulting in sales there of over 200,000 copies of Dreams
Come True’s CD, a phenomenally successful figure for foreign artists.

The increasing popularity of Japanese popular music in Hong Kong has caused
the Hong Kong based STAR TV to more actively forge transnational alliances with
Japanese music industries (Focus 18 December 1996; Nihon Keizai Shinbun 10
January 1997). The Japanese music producer, Komuro Tetsuya’s inroad into Asian
markets by establishing a joint company with News Corp., TK NEWS, in 1996 is a
case in point. The purpose of the new company was not simply to promote Komuro’s
music in Hong Kong but also to popularise the Komuro Family in East Asia. The
strength of TK NEWS is that it is closely connected with STAR TV’s music channel,
Channel [V], on which Komuro and his family are appearing more and more frequently.
In January 1997, Amuro Namie was selected as Channel [V]’s ‘artist of the month’,
the first time for a Japanese artist. Her song went to number 1 in the channel’s Asian
Top 20.

When the family had two concerts in Taipei in May 1997, the Komuro Family’s
concert surprisingly attracted more media attention than global pop star Whitney
Houston, who happened to be giving a concert two days before the Komuro Family
and was staying at the same hotel. TK NEWS also produced a star search TV
program, TK Magic, to find Taiwanese artists, and a thirteen-year-old Taiwanese
female singer called Ring made her debut with them in April 1998. This sounds like
the familiar strategy of finding a local star, but the crucial difference is that Komuro
is not only an artist but also a capable producer. Komuro announced his willingness
to learn from News Corp. localising marketing strategies developed for Asia (Nihon
Keizai Shinbun 10 January 1997); however, for TK News what was important was
not localising Komuro’s sound — though localising lyrics — so much as his fame.
The selling point was that the local artist had been produced by the best producer in
Japan. As a result, Ring’s first single went to the top of the IFPI Taiwan single-CD chart immediately after its release in 1998.

Behind this promotion of Japanese popular music there is a strong conviction among industry people in Taiwan and Hong Kong concerning the unambiguous attractiveness of Japanese popular music for East Asian audiences. The director of Channel [V], Jeff Murray, who was also the intermediary between Komuro and News Corp., expressed the opinion in an interview with me that Japanese music production is definitely more sophisticated than its counterparts elsewhere in Asia in terms of the subtle absorption and indigenisation of the variety of Western pop styles, and that Japanese music, though a new taste for the Taiwanese audience, is more similar to Taiwanese pop and is easier to relate to than Western pops. The recognition of an ‘Asianness’ in Japanese popular music is significant for Channel [V]’s strategy of differentiating itself from MTV Asia. Murray stressed to me that the strength of Channel [V] is that its content is more local than that of MTV Asia: ‘If MTV can be compared to MacDonald’s, Channel [V] is dimsim’. When I asked whether Japanese popular culture and music are dimsim, he answered ‘yes’. However it is not simply one dimsim among others. As well as suggesting a primordial cultural commonality among Asian nations, he predicted that ‘being Japanese will be fashionable in the twenty first century’ (Aera 20 January 1997). This view was shared by the Taiwanese managing director of Magic Stone, who said to me in an interview: ‘Japan should be confident of its own popular culture... the 1990s are a turning point at which Japanese popular culture is taking over the symbolic role of American popular culture in Asia’. By this he meant that Japanese popular culture is becoming another object of desire for young people in Asia.

To what extent these scenarios which locate Japan at the centre of intra-Asian cultural flows and transnational regional modernity in Asia will eventuate remains to be seen. Since the predictions were made by people in managerial positions, they strongly reflect the desire and will of these managers to turn their predictions into
self-fulfilling prophecies. As the managing director of Magic Stone asserted in an interview with me, the promotion of Japanese popular music in Asian markets can only be done effectively in conjunction with the marketing strategies of local industries. In sum, the meaning of localisation for Japanese popular culture in Asian markets has gradually shifted emphasis from the export of Japanese know-how in localising Western popular culture to the synchronous promotion of Japanese popular culture by local industries in Taiwan and Hong Kong, which ardently attempt to turn the attention of audiences to the ‘fragrance’ of Japanese popular culture.

The sweet scent of Asian modernity?

It should be noted, however, that Japanese popular culture has not prevailed in Taiwan to the extent that the local odour no longer matters. The desire to become at once modern and different is one which globalisation processes generate (Hannerz 1996: 55). It is this desire that lets the durian articulate the ‘modern’ local identity of Southeast Asia; and the glocalisation strategy of transnational corporations, including Japanese ones, increasingly attempts to exploit this same desire by re-demarcating the boundaries of a larger cultural/civilisational formation such as the Chinese cultural bloc, which indiscriminately includes all people of Chinese descent in Asia. The Japanese market is not immune to the transnational cultural industries’ strategies of glocalisation. Yoshida Miwa, the female vocalist with the pop group Dreams Come True appeared on the cover page of the 14 October 1996 issue of Time Asia. The issue’s cover story was ‘the Divas of Pop’. Yoshida was one of these divas, along with Celine Dion, Gloria Estefan, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Alanis Morisette, Tina Arena and Faye Wong. In Japan this story was reported in major newspapers and the sales for the issue almost tripled (according to my phone interview with Time Japan). But Yoshida was only on the cover page of the Japanese version of Time Asia. In other Asian countries, including Taiwan, the cover page carried the picture of Faye Wong, a Beijing-born Hong Kong singer. No matter how well received it is
in other parts of Asia, it will not be easy for the sweet scent of Japanese popular culture to fully overpower the deodorant of transnational cultural industries, which are the main forces for organising cultural diversity and selling cultural odour to local markets.

On the other hand, as I have shown, there is an emerging trend for the synchronous interpenetration and interconnection of East Asian cultural markets by featuring Japanese cultural products seen as embodying a transnational regional modernity in East Asia. The rise of Japanese popular music in East Asian markets indicates that media globalisation is not only promoting global homogenisation and local heterogenisation but also (supra-national) regionalisation (e.g., Straubhaar 1997; Sinclair et al. 1996; Hawkins 1997). The development of communication technologies, the acceleration of information flow and the maturity of local audiovisual markets and industries in East Asia, all of these globalising forces have increased the cooperative contact between various local industries and intensified the real-time intra-regional cultural flow within Asia, in which Japanese popular music and TV programmes are becoming alluring commodities. As Hall (1991: 28) argues, transnational capital attempts to ‘rule through other local capitals, rule alongside and in partnership with other economic and political elites’. Hall’s argument is concerned with American global cultural power, but this logic is equally applicable to the transnationalisation of Japanese popular culture. While the global promotion of Japanese animation is carried out by American and British distribution companies such as Disney, as discussed in chapter 3, even intra-regional co-production in Asia cannot escape the shadow of the global corporations. Komuro Tetsuya’s inroads into transnational markets have been facilitated by the global media conglomerate, News Corp.¹⁶ and in concept trade, Oshin, a globally popular Japanese melodrama series, has been re-made in

¹⁶ Komuro Tetsuya also tried to launch several Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop singers in the American market. This movement from regional (Asia) to global (the West) is forged by his joint venture with News Corp., TK NEWS and Komuro established a new record label, ‘rojjan coin’, within Sony Music Entertainment, for the American market (Asahi Shimbun 16 January 1998).
Indonesia through the Australian production house, Beckers Group, which exports TV programmes internationally (Asahi Shimbun 7 July 1997). These examples clearly testify that the operation of Japanese cultural industries and the transnational marketing of Japanese media products in regional Asian markets cannot be conducted effectively without partners at each level.17

However, we cannot explain why Japanese popular music and TV programmes other than animation are well accepted in Asian countries solely in terms of the logic of capital and marketing strategies, no matter how effective and powerful they are. Apart from the self-congratulatory comments made by Taiwanese, Hong Kong and Japanese cultural industries representatives concerning the scent of Japanese popular culture, there is something culturally embedded in the spread of Japanese popular culture and hence the rise of Japanese transnational cultural power in East Asia. If the capitalist logic of transnationalisation finds a boundary — however porous and fluctuating — to the transnational reach of Japanese popular cultural appeal in East Asian regions, we should direct our attention to the textual and symbolic appeal embodied in Japanese popular culture without falling into the trap of assuming the omnipotence of the cultural industries’ manipulative techniques or some pre-existing cultural commonality at work in spreading Japanese popular culture in Asian markets.

While the imagining of Japan’s role as a translator of Western popular culture does not match the actual market situations throughout East and Southeast Asia, the increasing outflow of Japanese popular culture suggests that the ‘Japaneseness’ with which a modernised Asian nation finds resonance in Japanese popular culture might have more to do with a distinctively Japanese cultural modernity, something which is not simply a response to Western modernity. The textual appeal of that popular culture is closely associated with the life styles and social relationships of present-day Japan, embodied in living Japanese actors, not in animated or digitalised characters.

This 'Japaneseness' is also quite different from Japanese traditional culture, the beauty of which was discovered earlier by the West. Unlike traditional culture, in which the irreducible difference of one culture from others is shaped, modern popular culture, though highly commercialised, reminds Japan and Asia alike that they share a common temporality and a common experience of a certain regional (post)modernity which American popular culture cannot represent well. It is this transnational appeal of Japanese popular culture and the newly produced asymmetry of cultural flows in East Asia accompanied by it that I will analyse through the reception of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan in the next chapter.
Cultural proximity and cultural power: Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan

In the previous chapter, I discussed the shift in the course of Japanese inroads into Asian audiovisual markets. I noted that they have changed from global localisation strategies, deployed by Japanese cultural industries to the local promotion of Japanese popular culture. Throughout Asia, intra-regional cultural flows and industry connections are becoming more intensive and regular, particularly among East Asian nations whose popular cultural markets are relatively mature. These developments have helped increase the prominence of Japanese popular culture in the region. In this chapter and the next, I examine the sorts of cultural resonances that are experienced by audiences in the aforesaid context. I explore how cultural similarity and distance are favourably but differently perceived by audiences in East Asia in their consumption of media texts from neighbouring countries. This approach will elucidate how the asymmetrical cultural flows and power relations between Japan and other East Asian countries are articulated at the site of consumption.

This chapter discusses the reception of Japanese TV dramas (with a particular attention to that of a popular drama series, Tokyo Love Story) in Taiwan, based on informal interviews which I conducted with 18 viewers of Japanese dramas in Taipei in 1996 and 1997. In examining the consumption of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, I focus on Taiwan for two basic reasons. Firstly, Taiwan has become, at least quantitatively, the most receptive market for Japanese popular cultural products, particularly TV dramas which, unlike animation, are in most cases not exportable to Western countries and popular only in Asian markets. Secondly, the rapid commercialisation and promotion of Japanese TV programmes in Taiwan highlights the necessity to address the popularisation of Japanese TV programmes in that country in the wider, dynamic context of political liberalisation, economic development and
media globalisation. As a former colony of Japan, Taiwan has long had to deal with a Japanese cultural presence. However, it was after the Taiwanese government officially abandoned its ban on the broadcasting of Japanese language programs in late 1993 that Japanese products gained favour among a wide stratum of young people. As well, it should be noted that Japanese cultural exports to Taiwan dramatically increased in tandem with the rise of Taiwan’s cable TV industries. This development was the result of the country’s high economic growth and the forces of market liberalisation since the late 1980s, factors which had prompted the influx of foreign media products into Taiwan.

What the Taiwanese case study in this chapter illustrates is that by configuring the analysis of audience reception of Japanese TV drama in such wider contexts, we can best grasp the intertwined relation between cultural distance perceived by other Asian audiences in viewing Japanese TV dramas and the rise of Japanese transnational cultural power in the looming intra-regional cultural flow between East Asian nations in the 1990s. It is often observed that the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia owes much to the ‘cultural proximity’ (Straubhaar 1991) between Japan and other Asian nations. The notion of ‘cultural proximity’ tends to connote the seemingly natural — thus power neutral — recognition by audiences of primordial cultural similarities. Challenging an essentialist view of the existence of such similarities, this chapter addresses the questions of how and under what conditions the ‘cultural proximity’ of Japanese TV dramas is experienced and perceived by Taiwanese audiences. The emphasis is on how multi-layered forces and factors intersect with each other in the 1990s to articulate ‘cultural proximity’ through the popularity of Japanese TV dramas. Looking at ‘cultural proximity’ in a new light, as a dynamic process, I will argue that in the case of the Taiwanese consumption of Japanese TV dramas, such an apprehension is due in part to an emerging sense amongst Taiwanese of coevalness (Fabian 1983) with the Japanese, the feeling that they share a modern temporality with Japan (owing to their mounting affluence and the synchronised
circulation in the two countries of the same media products and information). And it is through the production of these understandings of ‘cultural proximity’ and coevalness, I suggest, that Japanese transnational cultural power manifests itself in Taiwan.

**Waning affection for ‘Japan’?**

In the 1990s, in spite of the pessimism held by Japanese cultural industries, the spread of Japanese popular culture among Asian audiences has become ever more conspicuous and arresting. *Asia week* (5 January 1996), for example, had a feature article entitled ‘Asia says Japan is top of the pops’. It reported how Japanese TV programmes, particularly animation, are more appealing than their American counterparts in Asia. Similarly, in a feature article entitled ‘Satellite TV sees gold in local content’, *Asian Business* reported the increasing Japanese export of TV programmes to Asian markets, stating that ‘Japan’s entertainment exports to Asia are on a roll’ (October 1996). This phenomenon was described dramatically by a Taiwanese-American scholar, Leo Ching (1996: 170), who, in his analysis of Japanese cultural influence in Taiwan, remarked that ‘throughout Asia, Japan is in vogue’.

The steady rise of Japanese TV programmes in Asian markets has finally encouraged normally cautious Japanese TV industries to invest in the transnational broadcast of such programmes. Those industries have been convinced by the reception recently accorded to Japanese popular culture in Taiwan and Hong Kong that Japanese—‘odoured’—popular culture does have the potential to sell in Asia. Hence their interest in exporting their programmes directly to Asian markets. The manager of Dentsu, a company which promotes Japanese quiz shows in Asia (Chapter 4), alluded to this new approach in a personal interview in October 1997: ‘What has been made clear is that Japanese TV programmes have gained a certain transnational appeal. The next step is to produce programmes which target international, particularly, Asian markets’. Japanese TV industries are now busy setting up a principle of royalties for the second and third use of programmes. In 1997, a further step was taken when Sumitomo Trading Co.
Ltd. launched the first transnational Japanese pay TV channel, JET (Japan Entertainment Television), with TBS, a commercial TV station whose profits from selling programmes overseas are the highest in Japan. Dubbing Japanese into three languages — English, Mandarin and Thai — JET supplies seven Asian countries (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines) with a channel devoted exclusively to Japanese programmes — dramas, cartoons and variety shows — which is broadcast by satellite link-up from Singapore. In its advertising, JET declares that:

People with an eye for trends have their eyes on Japan. On its fashions, celebrities, and hit products — anything that’s new and lit. Today, trend-conscious viewers throughout Asia can enjoy up-to-date programs from Japan 24 hours a day on JET TV.

The explicit emphasis on ‘Japaneseness’ in the attractiveness of Japanese popular culture has clearly become a key to the export strategies of Japanese TV industries in Asian markets.

This is not to say that the spread of Japanese popular culture in East Asia is an entirely new trend. On the contrary, comics and animation aside, as Ching (1994) suggests, Japanese popular culture has been influential in the region since at least the late 1970s or early 1980s. Japanese TV programme formats have been exported and massively copied (pirated). As several Taiwanese TV producers told me in an interview, in Taiwan it is not overstating the matter to say that most variety shows are at least partly copied from popular Japanese programmes. Japanese popular music has also been widely covered in Hong Kong and Taiwan and there have been frenzies for several Japanese TV dramas and idols since the 1970s. However, their recent popularity in Asia rests on a much broader consumer base than before. In the 1980s, when Japanese idols were famous in East Asia, their audiences were limited to a minority of Japanophiles. As a female in her mid-twenties told me in Taiwan, at the time those who liked such artists were somewhat marginal. In the 1990s, though, it has become common for young Taiwanese to chat about Japanese idols and TV dramas.

At the same time, as I discuss below, it is often observed that the widespread
interest in Japanese popular culture in Asia has paradoxically been accompanied by a waning of the region’s affection for ‘Japan’ in the 1990s. It is even claimed that the zenith of the craze for ‘Japan’ in Asia was in the early 1980s and that it is now in decline. In 1996, a Japanese-language magazine in Hong Kong (*Hong Kong Tsushin July* 1996) ran a feature on Hong Kong Japanophiles in the late 1970s and 1980s, when Hong Kong was importing more Japanese TV programmes and lacked its own popular singers. The article reports on such devotees; in their late 30s, they are still enjoying good old Japanese popular culture and idolising elder Japanese idols. In an interview, the magazine’s chief editor informed me that by the mid-1980s the boom in things Japanese was over. He remarked that although the audience for Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong is increasing, the engaged affinity with ‘Japan’ has drastically waned. Similar comments were aired in Singapore as well. When I travelled there in late 1996, the chief editor of a Singaporean TV weekly told me that he clearly remembered how passionately Japanese pop idols were received there in the early 1980s. However, he added that while Singapore’s import of Japanese popular culture such as TV programmes and pop music seems to have been increasing, the craze for Japan had faded away (replaced by one for Hong Kong in the late 1980s and by the local, Mandarin pop culture in the 1990s).

In Taiwan, which, as I discuss in detail shortly, most eagerly imports and promotes Japanese popular culture in the 1990s, the situation is more complicated because of the history of Japanese colonial rule. The recent surge of Japanese cultural influence is often discussed there in relation to that rule. A leading weekly news magazine in Taiwan had feature articles on Japanese popular culture in Taiwan titled ‘Watch out! Your kids are becoming Japanese’. The journal coined a new Taiwanese word⁷ to describe young people who adore things Japanese (*The Journalist* 13-19 April 1997). The spread of Japanese popular culture is easily associated with the colonial habit of

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⁷ It is named “哈日族” in Chinese characters. In my survey, the majority of Taiwanese young people who like to consume Japanese popular culture refused to be categorised in this way (see Appendix C).
mimicking, which has sedimented deeply in Taiwanese society (see also China Times 17 March 1997). The issue at stake here is, however, how the historical legacy of Japanese colonisation has overdetermined the recent influx of Japanese popular culture. From food and housing to language, examples can easily be found of a lingering Japanese cultural influence in Taiwan. Besides Korea, the number of people speaking Japanese is by far the largest in the world and many Japanese words and cultural meanings have become indigenised. Older people who were educated during the Japanese occupation still speak fluent Japanese and enjoy Japanese language books, songs and TV programmes. Many also regard their former colonisers in a relatively positive light, the bitter memories of their rule having diminished by contrast with the repressive and authoritarian rule of the KMT government which moved from mainland China to the island after World War II (see Liao 1996). These conditions surely make Japanese TV programmes much more accessible than in other parts of Asia.

However, those who were educated after World War II hold quite different views of Japan. This generational divide is elucidated in Wu Nianzhen’s film, Dosan: A Borrowed Life (1994), which deals with how the nostalgia of older Taiwanese for the Japanese period has been fuelled by their intense disappointment over the KMT’s repressiveness. In brief, the film is about a Taiwanese man who has long harboured a dream to visit Japan. His dream can be seen as a wish on his part to affirm an identity and history which were forged during the Japanese period but which he was later forced to deny or repress under a KMT-governed Taiwan. Wu (quoted in Views February 1996: 40-42) has recollected how, as a student who was taught negatively about the Japanese occupation at school, he hated his father’s longing for that period — a longing which was betrayed by the indifference Japan displayed to Taiwan after the War.²

This generational divide has been exacerbated by the emergence of a youth audience

² For a detailed analysis of the film, see Liao (1997).
for Japanese popular culture. In May 1997 I witnessed the occurrence of two incidents in Taiwan which, when juxtaposed, nicely illustrate that country’s complicated relationship with Japan. The first was an anti-Japanese demonstration over the issue of Japan’s possession of the Diaoyu Islands. The other was a rock concert by popular Japanese artists such as Globe and Amuro Namie which attracted much media attention as well as young audiences (see also The Journalist 1-7 June 1997). This juxtaposition of ‘anti-’ and ‘pro-’ Japanese sentiment articulates a new generational divide. The meaning ‘Japan’ possesses for young Taiwanese is undoubtedly different from that which it holds for their forebears. The former, most of whom do not understand Japanese, make up the main audience for Japanese TV dramas, which they enjoy through dubbing or subtitles. As Wu (quoted in Views February 1996: 42) comments on the recent popularity of Japanese culture among the younger generation in Taiwan:

My generation and my father’s generation have a deep love-and-hate feeling towards Japan, though in quite different ways. But the younger generation have no special affection for Japanese culture, as there is no difference between Japan, America and Europe for them. Japan is just one option among many. I think the relationship between Taiwan and Japan will be more superficial in terms of affective feelings while deepened materially.

Like other Asian nations, the symbolic meaning of ‘Japan’ articulated through Japanese popular culture in Taiwan is marked by a waning affection for Japan.

These observations of the shift in the Asian reception of Japanese popular culture, from an enthusiastic embrace to a more detached, superficial consumption, are reminiscent of a general feature of the postmodern consumption of global culture. Postmodern theories discuss the domination of the sign-value of commodities over the materiality of the object of consumption (e.g., Lash & Urry 1994; Featherstone 1991; Baudrillard 1981; 1983). As the production and circulation of signs and images proliferate, ‘[o]bjects are emptied out of both of meaning (and are postmodern) and of material content (and are thus post-industrial)’ (Lash & Urry 1994: 15). Of particular importance for Lash and Urry (1994) here is that the proliferation of signs and images has also been accompanied by the promotion of a ‘peculiar form of
homogenisation' of the world by American transnational power, since the development of 'global mass culture' which is dominated by television and film, as well as by the imagery and styles of mass advertising, is predominantly 'American' (Hall 1991: 27-8). In this context, Japanese popular culture is simply becoming one among the many consumer options available from different parts of the world. It is losing its symbolic idiosyncrasy, its essential 'Japoneseness', as Japanese cultural products are sucked into the maw of this American-dominated global cultural system, which relentlessly reproduces commercialised cultural signs and images for fugitive and depthless consumption through endless pastiche and simulation (Jameson 1983; Baudrillard 1983). These products are 'here and now and everywhere, and for its purposes the past [and, I would add, other cultures] only serves to offer some decontextualised example or element for its cosmopolitan patchwork' (Smith 1990: 177).

A Chinese scholar living in Japan, Chô (1998), makes a similar point about the consumption of Japanese popular culture in China. He notes the increasing circulation of Japanese cultural commodities, as well as general information about Japan, in Shanghai and argues that these events are paradoxically being accompanied by a decrease in Japanese cultural influence in China. Recalling how passionately the Chinese consumed Japanese popular literature, films and TV dramas in the 1970s, he claims that in the 1990s Japanese culture is being consumed simply as transient information and signs by a fragmented youth audience. Although his analysis is literature-oriented and tends to romanticise the past, when Japanese popular culture was more seriously received and absorbed into Chinese culture, his argument hits the point about the postmodern condition in which local audiences can enjoy many kinds of local and international cultural products as fickle consumers. In the 1970s and 1980s, Japanese TV programmes were viewed in the context of a scarcity of local software due to the low production capacity of the Asian media industries. With the proliferation of satellite and cable TV channels, as well as the development of the
production capacities of many Asian countries, Japanese TV programmes are now being broadcast to fill the abundant media space. In this context, they are popular in those countries, Chō (1998) argues, primarily because they are seen as repositories of information about trendy fashion, interior decoration and hair styles in urban Japan, which have few marked ‘Japanese’ features.

The question of ‘cultural proximity’

Although it hints at a significant change in the transnational consumption of Japanese popular culture, a ‘postmodern’ perspective like Chō’s does not sufficiently address the issue of why that culture is preferred to those from other parts of the world. If disaffection with ‘Japan’ has paradoxically generated a profusion of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, this might be because it newly provides something appealing that Asian audiences do not find in its local and American equivalents. The question to be asked then is this: In an age of global mass culture, what cultural resonances are evoked for East Asians by Japanese popular culture? Is the ascent of Japanese popular culture closely associated with the scent of transnational regional modernity in Asia that Japanese popular culture articulates?

In media studies, the notion of ‘cultural proximity’ has been used to account for such a regional resonance. It explains the audience preference for products from countries with which their consumers allegedly share cultural ties. Against the depiction of globalisation as the spread of and response to Western (American) popular culture, the emphasis here is on the regionalisation of the media and the dynamics of media-export within particular geo-cultural regions (Straubhaar 1991; Sinclair et al., 1996). Straubhaar (1991) has argued that there has been a development of national and regional markets in the periphery despite the dominance of the United States in the world TV programme trade. By indigenising American influences, some non-Western countries such as Brazil or Mexico have developed a local industry which can produce programmes by themselves and export them to the regional market. Audience
preference, as well as the maturity of local cultural industries, play significant roles in the development of local and regional TV markets. In his research in Latin American countries, Straubhaar (1991: 56) found that the audience’s search for ‘cultural proximity’ in television programmes reveals:

a preference first for national material, and, when that cannot be filled in certain genres, a tendency to look next to regional Latin American productions, which are relatively more culturally proximate or similar than are those of the United States.

Language is the most important factor in cultural proximity, but there are other cultural elements such as religion, dress, music, nonverbal codes, humor, story pacing and ethnic types.

No one would deny the empirical validity of the ‘cultural proximity’ thesis. The existence of geo-linguistic and geo-cultural TV markets has been proven not only in the Latin American context (Straubhaar 1991). Other studies (e.g., Sinclair et al. 1996; Lee 1991) also show that local TV programmes tend to be the most popular in any country and region. However, precisely because of its apparent empirical validity, the notion of cultural proximity resists further theorising. The significance of cultural similarity, as an influence on a TV viewer’s preferences, appears too obvious to merit investigation. Yet it is precisely the seeming naturalness of this idea that deserves interrogation.

These studies of intra-regional media flows suggest the significant role played by cultural-linguistic regional centres such Brazil, Mexico, Hong Kong, India and Egypt in the transnational flow of film/television. Such a grouping of cultural-linguistic regional markets, perhaps not surprisingly, tends to correspond to the ‘civilisations’ of Samuel Huntington’s clash-of-civilisation thesis (1993), even though Japanese, African and Slavic-Orthodox ‘civilisations’ are in most cases omitted from the analysis (e.g., Sinclair et al. 1996). Nothing is intrinsically wrong with such grouping, but if the notion of cultural proximity is used only to explain the tendency of audiences to prefer local programmes and programmes imported from countries of a similar cultural
makeup, then the study of its role in the consumption of foreign media products runs
the risk of representing culture in an ahistorical and totalising way. Such an approach
tends to be based on the assumption that there are given cultural commonalities
which spontaneously direct an audience’s interest towards media texts from culturally
similar regions. It ignores the diverse historical contexts and internal differences
which exist within cultural formations.

Likewise, the prevalence of Japanese popular culture in East Asia tends to be
easily accounted for in terms of presupposed salient cultural and racial similarities
(e.g., Yoshioka 1993; Ishii & Watanabe 1996; Asahi Shinbun 14 April 1998). Such
an account is deployed from various points of view. A journalist, Kumamoto (1993a: 215)
quotes a comment by a young Chinese mother on a Japanese TV drama for the
evocation of Japan’s close Asian ties hitherto hindered by Japan’s imperialist past: ‘It
does not sound strange if the Japanese speak Mandarin, because we have the same
skin color. Moreover the urban lifestyle of Tokyo, particularly fashion, is very appealing
to us [Chinese]’. As discussed in Chapter 2, this kind of observation is effortlessly
exploited by Japanese nationalists, keen to assert that other Asian nations essentially
yearn for Japan while at the same time claiming the commonality between them.
However, the belief is also promoted by their critics who, employing the same
premise, reach quite different conclusions. For instance, Murai (1993) flatly disagrees
with the notion that Japan exercises any significant cultural influence in East and
Southeast Asia; instead, he accounts for the spread of Japanese popular culture through
Asia dismissively in terms of its ease and readiness to be copied and imitated by
other Asian people, in comparison with Western products. Here the underlying
assumption of the existence of cultural and racial similarities between Asians and
Japanese as the self-evident cause of the spread of Japanese popular culture in Asia
remains uninterrogated.

As I show below, in my field research in Taipei I also discovered that most
Taiwanese tend to account for the appeal of Japanese TV dramas, if not completely,
at least in part, in terms of their assumed cultural proximity. This tendency is even more pronounced when they compare such programmes with their American equivalents. However, the critical consideration of this belief displays that ‘cultural proximity’ is never as self-evident as it appears to be. Most obviously, Japan does not share with other parts of Asia the most important factor of cultural proximity, namely, linguistic commonality. Unlike most South American nations, which, at the very least, possess a common language and history of Spanish colonisation, Asia is marked by enormous social, cultural and historical diversity. Even Huntington separates Japan from his grouping of Asian nations.

This is not to say that the notion of ‘cultural proximity’ is entirely fallacious and irrelevant to the analysis of the popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Asia. Rather, I suggest that the questioning of the obviousness of the notion directs us to rethink the dynamics of transnational regional cultural power. The appreciation of foreign media texts in terms of a favourable cultural distance is never power-free, given that the producing countries of such media texts are still limited to a small number of regional centres. Transnational cultural power does not necessarily mean the straightforward embodiment and recognition of one culture’s superiority over another but can be defined as the capacity of a culture to produce symbolic images and meanings which ‘appeal to the senses, emotions, and thoughts of the self and others’ (Lull 1995: 71; see also Thompson 1995). It can be argued then that Japanese cultural power in East Asia is distinguished by its ability to produce media products with which Asian audiences are encouraged to experience cultural resonance and immediacy expressed in the form of ‘cultural proximity’.

What I propose here is that by examining the notion of ‘cultural proximity’ in wider contexts and as dynamic processes, we can expose the nature and workings of Japanese transnational cultural power in the 1990s which is inextricably intertwined with audience perception of it. For this purpose, we can utilise Stuart Hall’s concept of ‘articulation’ (1996: ch. 6). As developed by Ernesto Laclau, the concept was
originally intended to explain how particular ideological elements become dominant in a specific historical and social conjuncture. The concept is based upon the dual meanings of the term ‘articulate’. To articulate is both to ‘utter clearly’ and to ‘form a joint’, and it is the latter meaning which Hall (1996: 141) emphasises:

An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances can a connection be forged or made?

It is the sense of historical contingency that tends to be suppressed in the concept of cultural proximity, but taking it into account can help us understand the context of the ascendancy of Japan’s intimate cultural power. The experience of cultural similarity perceived as such by audiences through the consumption of a particular programme is not given but depends upon specific historical and social conditions. We should ask under which historical conjuncture does the idea of cultural similarity become associated with the pleasure of a text. In Taiwan, it has been the development of media industries, especially cable TV, under the forces of media globalisation which has enabled Japanese dramas to be constantly shown. These structural factors can, in turn, be situated within the wider context of Taiwan’s democratic and liberal movements since the 1980s; the emergence of a pro-Japanese leader in 1988; and the material affluence brought about by the rapid economic growth of the 1980s. The last factor is of particular relevance to this chapter, as it could be the case that the rise of Japanese cultural export to Taiwan is facilitated by the perception of the diminishing temporal distance between Japan and Taiwan, generated by Taiwan’s economic development. These circumstances have to be considered in any attempt to make sense of how cultural proximity is articulated.

We should also carefully examine the way in which audiences identify with different texts. What is lacking in the study of cultural proximity is a sense of the active agency of the audience. Cultural proximity should not be regarded as a predetermined attribute of the text. Such a belief reduces the viewer’s active input in constructing
the pleasure of the text. Following Miller’s discussion of ‘a posteriori authenticity’ (1992), I argue that cultural proximity does not exist a priori but occurs a posteriori. Cultural proximity is not something ‘out there’. It is articulated when audiences subjectively identify it in a specific programme and context. One of the problems for the study of the regional flow of TV programmes is the relative absence of audience research. As Sinclair et al. (1996: 19) argue, audience research has concentrated on the reception of American programmes:

Fair more than for the USA, the success or otherwise of peripheral nations’ export is contingent on factors other than those captured by established modes of audience study. This explains why so little audience reception research has been able to be conducted on their products in international markets, and why we need instead middle range analysis to do so.

I agree with Sinclair et al. that middle range analysis, which addresses issues of acquisition, time-scheduling and the publicity of programmes, is important in understanding the global and intra-regional flow of TV programmes. Nevertheless, I would argue that so as not to conceive of cultural proximity in a deterministic way, it is also imperative to examine how and why certain programmes become popular and others do not, and what sort of pleasure, if any, audiences may find in identifying cultural similarity in specific programmes.

Of particular importance here is that the sense of cultural proximity, far from being the straightforward recognition of ‘real’ cultural and racial commonalities, might be the result of a positive identification with foreign media texts. Taiwanese viewers might watch certain Japanese dramas for reasons other than that they are from a supposedly culturally proximate country. A familiar cultural value does not necessarily offer pleasure in watching programmes. In some cases, audiences would reject a programme precisely because of the negative appeal of their society’s cultural values. We need to analyse the audience enunciation of cultural proximity, not by taking it at face value but by asking whether the attractiveness of Japanese dramas is truly associated with primordial cultural similarity.

In sum, the reconfiguration of Japanese cultural power, in terms of its capacity to
produce media artifacts which allegedly are culturally proximate to Asian audiences, can only be grasped if consideration is taken of the contexts in which it has emerged and of the textual pleasure experienced by audiences at a specific historical time. In what follows, I first look at the ‘middle range’ and structural/contextual factors which have led to the routine consumption of Japanese dramas in Taiwan.

The popularity of Japanese TV dramas and local market situations: Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan

What has become noticeable in the mid-1990s is that Japanese TV dramas amongst many genres of popular cultural forms are well received in many Asian countries. According to a 1997 Communication White Paper published by the Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication, the number of TV programmes exported to Asian markets in 1995 amounted to 47% of the total export and TV dramas occupied 53% of the export to Asia and 25% of the total export to the world.

The popularity of Japanese TV dramas varies from country to country. Although some dramas such as Oshin, Tokyo Love Story and 101st Proposal have been a hit in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore, Japanese TV dramas have been received most favourably in East Asian countries such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, and (to a lesser extent) China (see on China, Chö 1998; on Indonesia, Kurasawa 1998; on Thailand, Gaiko Forum November 1994). While the difference in the popularity of Japanese TV dramas cannot be explained entirely by the local TV market situation, an inquiry into such structural factors which regulate circulation and promotion of these shows in Asian markets is in order here.

In 1996, international programmes made up half of the programming of TCS 8, the most popular Chinese channel in Singapore. Almost 50% of them were from Hong Kong, 35% from Taiwan and 15% from Japan. The programming manager of TCS 8 said in an interview with me in 1996 that there was a strong trend towards Japanese popular culture in the early 1990s when Tokyo Love Story and 101 Proposal
became popular. He conceded, however, that this did not last long. He noted that Japanese TV dramas have not been consistently popular in Singapore because Japanese stars receive far less exposure in the local media than their American counterparts. His claim was supported by the chief editor of 8 DAYS, a well known local TV magazine, who cited this factor as the reason for the comparatively low ratings of Japanese TV dramas. The importance of exposure is, according to the editor, demonstrated by the Japanese pop duo Chage & Aska, who sing the theme song of 101st Proposal. The programming manager of TCS8 summarised the presence of Japanese TV programmes in this way:

The presence of Japanese TV programmes is increasing slowly. It was very little ten years ago. But it is still not quite visible or consistent. I think there is a potential but not enough time and money to put energy in promoting them in Singapore.

He said that this structural restriction renders negligible the influence of Japanese popular culture in Singapore. Western culture has always been the mainstream in there, he commented, while its Asian (Japanese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese) equivalents have been seasonal.

In Hong Kong the situation is different in one respect but similar in another. Japanese cultural influences are much more profound in Hong Kong. According to an interview with a programming officer of TVB Jade in 1997, the most popular Chinese channel in Hong Kong, in the week of 10 to 16 February 1997, 19.5% of all programmes broadcast on the channel were of foreign origin, and about three quarters of them were Japanese. Most are animations but dramas and game shows are also regularly broadcast. The officer also told me that the height of the popularity of Japanese TV programmes was, as in Singapore, in the 1970s and early 1980s, when about 30% of TV programming was occupied by Japanese productions. Between the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the share of Japanese TV programmes significantly declined, but since the early 1990s it has been slowly increasing again, as some Japanese dramas became popular. The TVB officer said to me that American dramas
were the most popular foreign programmes in the 1980s, but in the 1990s their Japanese equivalents have been in the ascendancy.

However, even Japanese dramas are not popular enough to compete with local dramas. The officer remarked that while TVB tried to promote a Japanese detective drama, *Kindaichi Shōnen no Jikenbo*, which features famous young Japanese idols, its rating point was less than 20 (the average for a local popular show is 30). This is because the audience for contemporary Japanese dramas is limited to young people between their mid-teens and mid-twenties. In Hong Kong and Singapore, where two TV channels dominate the local market, the main target audience is not younger people but children and housewives over 40, who comprise the most avid viewers. For this reason, any popular drama must deal with such issues as love and the family, according to the TVB officer. The same point was made by the programming officer of another station, ATV, who commented in an interview with me in 1997 that even the most famous and well-received Japanese drama in various Asian countries, *Tokyo Love Story*, was not very successful in terms of rating because it did not appeal to this target audience: ‘the response was good but the ratings were not good.’ He added that whereas Japanese TV dramas were popular among all generations in the 1970s, they are now only well-known among the younger generation.

Nevertheless, the existence of ‘open’ black markets of pirate videos and VCDs works in favour of the spread of Japanese TV programmes in Hong Kong. Even if Japanese TV dramas are not constantly broadcast by free-to-air TV channels, Hong Kong young people can watch most of Japanese dramas through pirated VCDs (Video CDs). In the Sino Centre Building where many shops sell such VCDs of Japanese TV dramas, the latest dramas are put on sale with Cantonese dubbing just a few days after the initial broadcast in Japan. Also information about Japanese TV idols regularly circulates in daily newspapers and weekly entertainment magazines.

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1 In September 1998, Japanese TV industries and the Hong Kong Customs and Excise Department finally carried out a raid on the shops of Sino Centre which sold pirate videos and VCDs of Japanese TV dramas and animation (*South China Morning Post* 8 September 1998, 11 September 1998).
there. These factors distinguish Hong Kong from Singapore in terms of the popularity of Japanese TV dramas.

However, it is Taiwan where the media market structure works most favourably for the exposure of Japanese TV dramas. In Taiwan, unlike in Singapore and Hong Kong, free-to-air channels have been relatively unpopular among young people and there are more channel choices via satellite and cable TV services. The satellite network, STAR TV, has been the pioneer in diffusing Japanese TV dramas throughout Asia since its inception in 1991. Although STAR TV has attracted much academic attention in terms of its pan-Asian satellite broadcast and its possible penetration into the Chinese market, from the outset the Taiwanese market has been a main target too. This is particularly the case in regards to the STAR Chinese Channel and Music Channel [V], which replaced MTV in 1994. Furthermore, as STAR TV launched a new Chinese channel, Phoenix, for the mainland Chinese market in 1997, the STAR Chinese Channel is broadcast exclusively for Taiwan. Japanese programmes, especially dramas, have been screening on prime time on the STAR Chinese Channel to attract a large Taiwanese audience. The manager of the STAR TV Chinese Channel told me in an interview that Japanese TV dramas are particularly important to STAR TV’s programming. It has set up the Japanese drama hour in the prime time slot since June 1992. According to her, Japanese programmes are indispensable for STAR TV’s strategy of localisation for the Taiwan market.

However, it is the rapid development of the Taiwanese cable TV market that has taken the strongest initiative in promoting Japanese TV dramas. (STAR TV is also watched on cable.) The development of cable TV has been crucial for the constant circulation of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan. While such programmes are generally not popular enough for the free-to-air channels, the emergence of cable channels

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4 Even the 15-year-old daughter of my neighbours in Sydney who are from Hong Kong watches the latest Japanese TV dramas by VCD!

5 It should be noted that this strategy was deployed by STAR TV from 1992, well before Murdoch’s take-over of STAR TV and the beginning of his localising strategy.
whose target audiences are more narrowly focused has brought about a new pattern of TV popularity. Given that the Taiwanese cable market has taken the strongest initiative in promoting Japanese TV dramas, before elaborating on their popularity in Taiwan, I should provide a brief outline of the history of cable TV in Taiwan.

In Taiwan, there are three free-to-air TV stations: Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV), the China Television Company (CTV) and the China Television Service (CTS). TTV was established in 1962; CTV, in 1969 by the Kuomintang (KMT); and CTS, in 1971 by the Ministry of Defence. Although all are officially commercial channels and privately owned, their programming is not free from state control. There is a quota for foreign programmes (30% or less) and by regulation at least 50% of the programmes should be non-entertainment. Cable TV started in Taiwan in the 1960s to rebroadcast the three channels to areas which could not receive air broadcast, but it was the illegal cable channels, most of whose programmes were foreign entertainment — Hollywood films, Hong Kong dramas and Japanese programmes — that became popular among the audience. To satisfy the audience’s hunger for entertainment programmes, which the three free-to-air stations could not offer, cable TV (which is called the Fourth Channel) has developed since the late 1970s.

The government attempted to exercise strict control over the illegal cable channels by cutting the cable, but cable operators quickly reconnected it and the popularity of the Fourth Channel has never died. The diffusion rate of the cable channels rapidly increased when the democratic and liberal movements gained currency after the end of martial law in 1987. Even the opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), used the Fourth Channel for political broadcasts. In this situation, the government changed its policy from banning to regulating the Fourth Channel. In 1993 the new Cable TV Law was finally passed. In the preceding year a new copyright law had been passed. This legislation made it possible for foreign channels and programme suppliers to broadcast their programmes through the cable (Hara & Hattori 1997).

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6 Another free-to-air channel, Formosa TV, was launched in 1997.
Even before the legislation, about 50% of households watched cable channels. The number increased after the legislation. In 1998, nearly 80% of households were enjoying cable television (*The Republic of China Yearbook* 1999) and Taiwan now has one of the most developed cable television systems in Asia.

**Japanese cable channels in Taiwan**

The Cable Law requires that at least 20% of the programmes on a cable channel are locally produced, but many cable channels obviously do not abide by this condition. Most channels buy their whole programming from overseas, mainly from the United States, Hong Kong and Japan. Lewis *et al.* (1994) argue that the development of cable TV facilitated the ‘re-Americanisation’ of Taiwan after the period when the people’s preference for local programmes decreased the number of American programmes in the 1970s and 1980s (see also Lee 1980). The inroads of ESPN, HBO, Discovery and CNN International can be said to be representative of this process. It should be noted in this respect that the United States put strong pressure on Taiwan to legalise the cable channels to protect American media industries from piracy and to enable them to run their businesses legally in Taiwan (Lewis *et al.* 1994).

However, the drastic increase of Japanese TV programmes in Taiwan has also been a significant trend since the early 1990s. After the Japanese government officially reestablished diplomatic relations with China in 1972, the Taiwanese government banned the broadcasting of Japanese language programmes. While Japanese programmes were widely watched through pirate videos and illegal cable channels in Taiwan, Japanese programmes became much more accessible when the Taiwan government removed the ban on broadcasting Japanese language TV programmes and songs at the end of 1993. In the wake of the policy abolishment, the colonial connection between the two countries surfaced, particularly in terms of business links. Typically, it is those who lived under the Japanese occupation and speak fluent
Japanese who, using their old connections with Japanese business circles, are mainly engaged in running Japanese cable channels in Taiwan. For example, the launch of the Japanese Po-shin Channel, a pioneering Japanese cable channel in Taiwan, according to my interview with its manager, would not have been possible without the old friendship between the Channel's former managing director and the president of Töei Movie Japan (see also Naruhodo the Taiwan October 1995). In this sense, the Japanese cultural presence in Taiwan continues to be shaped by the legacy of Japanese colonisation.

In 1997 there were five Japanese cable channels in Taiwan. Apart from NHK Asia which simultaneously broadcasts most programmes from Japan by satellite, four other channels — Video Land Japanese, Gold Sun, Po-shin Japanese and JET (Japan Entertainment Network) — buy their programming from Japanese commercial TV stations. These channels broadcast exclusively Japanese programmes 24 hours a day (repeating the basic programming of 6 to 10 hours a day). In addition, other cable and free-to-air channels also regularly broadcast such programmes. As a result, the number of Japanese TV programmes imported into Taiwan has greatly increased since 1994. In 1992 the total amount exported from Japan to Taiwan was about 600 hours (Kawatake & Hara 1994). There are no exact figures available for Japanese programme exports to Taiwan after 1993. However, in 1996 one Japanese commercial TV station, TBS, alone exported 1000 hours of programmes to Taiwan (my interview with TBS).

Before the introduction of the Cable Law, there had been as many as 600 cable operators; immediately after it, their number was reduced to 126.7 Since most operators can afford to broadcast at most 60 to 70 channels out of about 100 channel suppliers, it is crucial for channel suppliers to have their channels secured a place in the allocation of cable operators in order to maximise their penetration into a large

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7 In 1998, the number of cable channels was 96 and there were 103 licensed cable system operators in Taiwan (The Republic of China Yearbook 1999).
number of households. According to one survey, local general channels such as Super TV, TVBS and Santi-2 as well as global/transnational channels such as HBO, ESPN and STAR TV Chinese have the highest penetration in terms of subscriptions with cable operators. Most Japanese channels' penetration rate is ranked around 20th amongst 81 cable channels — Gold Sun 19th, NHK-Asia 21th, Videoland Japan 26th. These are placed above CNN, MTV, TNT Cartoon and Discovery (Red Wood Research Service 1996).

The penetration rate of course does not necessarily reflect the popularity of the channel. Another significant quantitative measure of popularity is ratings. While a survey by Ishii et al. (1996) shows that, apart from the three free-to-air TV stations, Video Land Japanese was the 6th most commonly watched channel and Gold Sun the 15th, we find that local and Western (mainly American) cable TV channels are more popular in Taiwan in terms of the cumulative reach (Hattori & Hara 1997; Ishii et al. 1996). However, if we look closely at specific genres and sections of the audience, we find that this is not always the case. As far as TV dramas are concerned, Japanese programmes attract greater audiences in Taiwan than Western/American ones and are even more popular than Hong Kong and Taiwan dramas (Hattori & Hara 1997; Ishii et al. 1996). This is particularly true with young audiences (13-25) and female (26-35) audiences. As Hattori and Hara (1997) suggest, young females in general like TV dramas, but not American ones, while young males do not rate dramas highly except Japanese ones. On asking people to give a mark out of ten for each genre, they discovered that overall Japanese dramas scored the highest with 6.8. In contrast, Western (American) dramas scored 6.6, Hong Kong dramas 6.2, and Taiwanese dramas 6.7. For both male and female audiences in the age groups 13-15 and 16-25, Japanese dramas scored significantly higher. The preference of young audiences for dramas shows an interesting contrast between Japanese and American

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8 This tendency of the strong female preference for Japanese TV dramas was also observed in my own survey in Taipei. See Appendix C.
programmes. While dramas constitute the strongest genre of Japanese TV programmes, TV dramas are the least appreciated American genre in Taiwan.

**Japanese idol dramas: something to talk about**

The appreciation of Japanese TV dramas by young people in Taiwan does not mean that they have become mainstream there. Cable TV channels' ratings are still low, compared to free-to-air channels. TV programmes of high ratings remain domestically produced ones as in the 1970s (Lee 1980). However, Japanese TV dramas' popularity is best measured not by ratings but by their central role in the daily gossip of young people. Given the scarcity of publicity about such dramas in the Taiwanese media, their renown owes much to word-of-mouth. A reporter writing on Japanese dramas for a newspaper informed me that: ‘Most high school and university students who watch Japanese dramas discuss the storyline with their friends. It is the most common topic for them just as Taiwan prime time dramas (8 PM in the evening) used to be’. The newspaper the reporter works for, *China Times* — the most popular daily — started an interactive column on Japanese dramas in February 1996.” Apparently the column is designed to target teenage readers for the newspaper’s Saturday edition.

There are many things that audiences want to talk about by watching Japanese dramas. Not surprisingly, one of the main drawcards of Japanese dramas for young Taiwanese is their actors. This is apparent from the common name for the genre of Japanese dramas, ‘Japanese Idol Drama’, which was coined by STAR TV. The name clearly shows that STAR TV thought that young Japanese idols would be the principal attraction of such dramas for Taiwanese. Many people informed me in Taiwan that this was indeed the case.

In addition, they remarked that they also enjoyed viewing these programs for the food, fashion, consumer goods and music that are presented in them. These items were not for the first time introduced to the Taiwanese through Japanese TV dramas.

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*The collection of the letters and columns were published in a book in 1997.*
Even before the advent of such programmes, they had already gained a certain renown in Taiwan through Japanese magazines. For instance, a popular fashion magazine for teenage females is non-no, a bi-weekly Japanese magazine. Most Taiwanese do not understand Japanese; they purchase such magazines predominantly for their pictures. Non-no was first imported into Taiwan the late 1970s and became popular during the 1980s. Approximately 100,000 copies (2 issues) are monthly imported from Japan. In 1993, non-no was by far the most popular foreign magazine in major book stores (Advertising Age January 1994). According to Nippan IPC, a Japanese firm that exports non-no, exports of the magazine increased in the 1990s (particularly in 1993-4) — roughly the time when Japanese dramas in Taiwan became popular. Such magazines, as well as Japanese TV dramas, inform the Taiwanese not only on what they should consume to improve their lifestyles, but on how they should consume — i.e., how to wear clothes properly, how to arrange furniture in a room to look stylish (e.g., Ichikawa 1994; Ueda 1996; Chô 1998).

However, there is more to watching Japanese dramas than admiring the latest in Japanese commodities and fashion. More importantly, it is their storylines and characters that Taiwanese audiences find appealing and thus talk eagerly about with their friends and colleagues. Their plots, settings and subgenres, ranging from urban love stories and family dramas to detective series, are diverse, but the most popular programmes are those that deal with the lives and loves of younger people in an urban setting. In most cases, the dramas are filmed in Tokyo and thus depict modern urban life in Japan. In contrast, Taiwanese TV dramas are more family-oriented and aimed primarily at housewives. Rarely do they engage with the experiences of young Taiwanese in modern urban settings. Hence it is the greater relevance of Japanese dramas that seems to account in part for their popularity amongst young Taiwanese viewers.
Watching *Tokyo Love Story*

It was *Tokyo Love Story* that ignited interest in Japanese dramas and prompted a recognition of their quality in Taiwan and other East Asian countries. Originally broadcast in Japan between January and March 1991, it was shown for the first time in Taiwan in 1992 by the STAR Chinese Channel over eleven one-hour long episodes. Briefly, the drama is a love story about five young men and women in their early 20s. The heroine, Akana Rika, who has spent some time in the United States, is an unusually expressive and active Japanese woman. She falls in love with Nagao Kanji (*'Kanchi' to her*), a gentle but rather wavering young man. Kanji, in turn, loves an old high school classmate, Sekiguchi Satomi, but she does not return his affections, preferring instead to have an affair with another old classmate, Mikami Kenichi. Although perplexed by Rika’s straightforwardness in expressing her love for him — on one occasion she famously exclaims, ‘Kanchi, let’s have sex!’ — Kanji nevertheless becomes attracted to her and enters into a relationship with her. Gradually, though, he becomes exhausted with their relationship and again attempts to link up with Satomi, whose relationship with Mikami has meanwhile broken up. Ultimately, Kanji and Satomi marry and Rika moves to the United States for work. The drama ends with their unexpected reunion in Tokyo several years later; Rika proves to be as expressive and forward-looking a woman as ever, with no regrets about the past.

STAR TV has broadcast *Tokyo Love Story* four times since 1992 and TTV, the most popular free-to-air channel, screened it twice in 1995. The success of the programme encouraged a group of university students to conduct research into its popularity (Li *et al.* 1995)\(^9\). In their survey of 61 university students, they found that about 83% had enjoyed watching the drama and roughly 65% had watched it more than twice. A crucial issue which was not dealt with in this quantitative survey is the exploration of the kinds of pleasure enjoyed in viewing *Tokyo Love Story*. As Len Ang (1985: 20) argues, ‘popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition’.

\(^9\) I thank Su Horng for giving me a copy of this research paper.
What matters then is how the audience can identify themselves with the drama and what sorts of realism the drama can offer to them.

The popularity of *Tokyo Love Story* had much to do with the identification of its female audience with its attractive heroine, Rika. Her active pursuit of love and frankness are seen as admirable and worthy of emulation. Her self-confidence and independence represented a desirable image of the ‘modern’ or ‘new age’ woman. My interviewees\(^{11}\) often expressed two seemingly contradictory statements about her. While on the one hand they would observe that ‘I have a strong feeling that she is exactly what I want to be,’ they would also remark that ‘I would not be able to become as brave and open as Rika’. It was thus Rika’s role as an ideal model that many women considered particularly appealing: she is what one could never quite become but one wants to be. Satomi, in contrast, served as Rika’s foil. She was the embodiment of the traditional woman — dependent, submissive, domestic and passive.

It may be the case that audiences find Satomi more empirically realistic in the Taiwanese context. As such she was an object of aversion for all of my interviewees. The juxtaposition of Rika and Satomi brings Rika’s attractiveness into sharp relief.

This sort of identification with the desirable is similar to what Richard Dyer (1992: 18) calls utopianism:

> Entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes — these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realised.

Dyer argues that entertainment does not offer ‘models of the utopian world’ but provides its consumers with the possibility of experiencing ‘what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised’ (1992: 18). Referring in particular to the musical, Dyer points out the importance of non-representational means such as music and colours, and the simplification and intensification of people’s relationships in

\(^{11}\) I conducted informal depth interviews with 18 young viewers (age ranging from seventeen year old to late 20s) of Japanese TV dramas in Taipei from mid-December 1996 to mid-January 1997 and in May 1997. See further Appendix A.
entertainment’s articulation of utopianism. Though Dyer’s argument is about musicals, these points well fit the structure of many Japanese idol dramas, including Tokyo Love Story. Apart from the comparatively large budget and the sophistication of production techniques, two structural and technical factors make Japanese dramas attractive for their Taiwan audiences. Firstly, Japanese dramas are not soap operas and always finish in 11-13 episodes (each episode being an hour long). By contrast, Taiwanese and American dramas seemingly never end. Most of my Taiwanese respondents commented that they felt these programmes were unnecessarily protracted. Because Japanese dramas finish in a comparatively short time and their plots are normally less complicated than those of soap operas, they found it easier to focus on these dramas and enjoy the progress of their narratives. In addition, Japanese dramas, like movies, use orchestral music and theme songs repeatedly and effectively. The use of a theme song in a drama is particularly important. Each week, the theme functions not just as background music but as a constitutive part of the climactic scene. The theme song works in such instances to encourage the emotional involvement of the audience. It thus serves to evoke ‘romance’, thus helping the audience to enjoy a ‘romantic, beautiful love story’, as one of my interviewees put it.

However, there is a crucial difference between Dyer’s utopianism and the realism of Japanese dramas. The attractiveness of Tokyo Love Story does not reside simply in making audiences feel that ‘something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realised’. Emotional involvement in the drama is facilitated by its depiction of something which the audience thinks and feels desirable but not unrealistic. It is not just a dream of tomorrow but a (possible) picture of today. Things happening in Tokyo Love Story also seem to be realistic or at least accessible to most of its young audiences. The same things could happen in their own everyday lives. On his homepage, a young Hong Kong man explained why he likes the drama in these terms:

The twenty-something urban professionals of the series face a tightrope of coping that young people in many Asian cities have faced, but rarely more sympathetically. The major attraction of Tokyo Love Story to me is
that it is not a story about somebody else. It is a story about our generation, about us, about myself. I can easily identify shadows of Rika or Kunichi among my peer group, even in myself (KEVIN'S HOME http://home.ust.hk/~kwtse).

This sense of the series being a 'story about us' was shared by the Taiwanese fans. More than 60% of those surveyed by Li et al. (1995) — and 75% of the female subjects — replied that love affairs such as those portrayed in Tokyo Love Story could happen around them. However, like the realism of Rika's character discussed before, this should not be straightforwardly read as evidence of the objective, empirical realism of Tokyo Love Story, with which audiences identify. As Ang (1985: 44-45) argues concerning audiences' identification with Dallas:

the concrete situations and complications are rather regarded as symbolic representations of more general experiences: rows, intrigues, problems, happiness and misery. And it is precisely in this sense that these letter-writers find Dallas realistic. In other words, at a connotative level they ascribe mainly emotional meanings to Dallas.

What audiences find 'realistic' in viewing Tokyo Love Story is thus not that an identical love affair would actually happen or that anyone can become like Rika. Li et al. (1995) suggest that one of the attractions of Tokyo Love Story for university students in Taiwan is its new style of portraying love, work and women's position in society. These are all issues which young people are actually facing in urban areas in Taiwan, but which American or Taiwanese TV dramas have never sympathetically dealt with. It is in at this more generalised level of meaning concerning love affairs and human relations represented in Tokyo Love Story that audiences in Taiwan perceive it as 'our' story.

The question of particular importance here is whether and how the 'realism' of Japanese programmes, the Taiwanese sense that they dramatise 'our' stories, is encouraged by a perceived similarity between Japan and Taiwan: whether the perception of cultural proximity facilitates the sense of immediacy. I asked Taiwanese audiences comparative questions about Japanese dramas, Taiwanese dramas and American dramas. Most of my interviewees in Taipei noted that emotionally they engaged
more with Japanese dramas than they did with Western or Taiwanese ones. Of course, insofar as Japanese dramas are broadcast in Japanese with Chinese subtitles, the Taiwanese cannot help but regard them as foreign; but for all that, they do not regard such dramas in quite the same way as they do American programmes. This is because Taiwanese audiences tend to remark that, racially and culturally, they have more in common with the Japanese than they do with the Americans. ‘Japan is not quite but much like us’, as another female in her early 20s said: ‘Yeah, Japan is a foreign county and this (foreigness) makes Japanese programmes look gorgeous and appealing. But the distance we feel to Japan is comfortable. Americans are complete strangers’. Another female Japanese drama fan in her mid-20s also mentions the relative cultural distances between Taiwan, Japan and the West:

I do not think that Japanese dramas are a totally new genre, something I’ve never seen before, but rather I’ve never seen such dramas which perfectly express my feeling... the West is so far away from us, so I cannot relate to American dramas.

As well, she opined that the likeness between family and romantic relationships in Japan and Taiwan made it easier for her to relate to Japanese dramas.

The above point can be illustrated further through a comparison of Taiwanese perceptions of *Tokyo Love Story* and an American drama, *Beverley Hills, 90210*. For instance, a woman in her early 20s, who had just started working for a Japanese cable TV channel and was an admitted fan of Japanese dramas, informed me that while she enjoyed watching the lifestyles and romances presented in *Beverley Hills, 90210*, she found Japanese love stories more accessible and resonant with Taiwanese situations.

Furthermore, some interviewees stated that, for all the programme’s colour and excitement, they could not imagine experiencing life as it was lived in *Beverley Hills, 90210*. A 17-year-old high school student declared that: ‘Japanese dramas better reflect our reality. Yeah, *Beverley Hills, 90210* is too exciting (to be realistic). Boy always meets girl. But it is neither our reality nor dream’. When I suggested that some Japanese dramas were not empirically realistic either, she replied ‘Well, maybe
not, but it may happen. Or at least I want to have it.’ Whereas the attractiveness of 
*Tokyo Love Story* stems from its mixture of alleged empiricist and emotional realism, 
*Beverley Hills, 90210* appears to many Taiwanese fans of Japanese TV dramas 
‘realistic’ in neither sense.

Audience preference and cultural proximity

Apparently, these comments suggest that Taiwanese audiences’ emotional involvement 
in Japanese dramas is fostered by a perceived cultural similarity between Japan and 
Taiwan. However, it is too simplistic to explain audience preference solely in terms 
of cultural similarity. The differing responses of Taiwanese to *Tokyo Love Story* and 
*Beverley Hills, 90210* may be the result not only of the sense of cultural proximity or 
distance these shows establish, but also the degree of their textual emphasis on 
intimacy and ordinariness. Rich lifestyles represented in *Beverley Hills, 90210* deter 
some Taiwanese audiences from identifying with the series. As a female university 
student told me in an interview, *Beverley Hills, 90210* is not a story about ordinary 
people and thus had little to do with her everyday life. It can be argued that some 
Taiwanese audiences’ discontent with the unrealistic affluent lifestyle depicted in 
*Beverley Hills, 90210* actually displays their disapproval of the drama’s narrative. 
The failure of their emotionally identifying with the way in which characters and 
human relationships are represented in the drama series might have secondarily 
generated their detachment from the material lavishness of the drama series (see Ang 
1985; McKinley 1997).12

Nevertheless, at the least, we cannot discount the possibility that the emphasis of 
Japanese dramas on the quotidian strengthens the sense of cultural proximity felt by 

12 McKinley (1997: 92) finds that young American audiences sense *Beverley Hills, 90210* as a story 
about themselves, even though they clearly recognise the gap between the extravagant life style 
represented in the drama series. What disturbs American audiences’ emotional identification with 
*Beverley Hills, 90210* is, as McKinley (1997: 92) suggests, not the unrealistic materialistic affluence 
but the lack of realism in the representation of characters and the symbolic meaning associated with 
general life experiences.
Taiwanese audiences. Most Japanese dramas depict the mundane lives of ordinary people rather than the glamorous dreamworlds of the rich often portrayed in American soap operas. The above-mentioned newspaper reporter of China Times also informed me that the American medical drama, *ER*, is of high quality and well received in Taiwan, but it did not get people emotionally involved with the medical world. According to her, *Kagayaku Toki no Nakade*, a Japanese drama about medical students, in contrast, did make many people in Taiwan feel like working as medical professionals.

More recently, a Japanese version of *ER*, *Kyuumei Byōdo 24ji*, which was broadcast from January to March 1999, also featured a female trainee doctor in the centre of the story and emphasises the layperson’s point of view. It might thus not only be the cultural proximity between Japan and Taiwan but also the focus on medical students rather than professional practitioners that made this Japanese drama look more intimate and ordinary than *ER*.

Another comment I frequently heard was that love is expressed more delicately and elegantly in Japanese dramas than it is in their more crass American equivalents. Japanese dramas, it was said, are more romantic and subtle at conveying emotion than American and Taiwanese shows, in which emotion tends to be presented in a over-exaggerated manner. The subtlety is associated with ways of directing as well as the story lines. A female in her late 20s gave me an example of such non-verbal subtlety in a Japanese drama:

I think Japanese dramas are very subtle in showing delicate feeling. Japanese dramas value the description of feeling deep inside. When a woman cries, her emotion is skillfully expressed by the movement of the fingers. A scene of parting is also well directed by the subtle movement of the fingers between lovers.

Another female in her mid-20s told me that:

I clearly remember that a scene of *Tokyo Love Story* very subtly used the actors’ backs to show the delicate sentiment of lovers’ parting. Such delicateness cannot be found in other [American and Taiwanese] dramas. I like Japanese dramas because I can feel and experience such delicate feelings.

The reporter of China Times gave me another example, saying that she personally
liked the romantic scene of *Tokyo Love Story* in which Rika narrated Kanji’s life history while putting candles one by one on a birthday cake. She said that she had never seen such an elegant way of celebrating a lover’s birthday.

In light of the fact that Japanese TV dramas are only famous in East Asia, it may seem that the reputed elegance of their representations holds a particular appeal for audiences of culturally proximate regions. The truth is, though, that the appreciation of subtlety in terms of non-verbal communication and the presentation of things and social relationships is not exclusively related to East Asian cultural commonalities. The Japanese skill of ‘wrapping’ is appreciated in the West as well (see Hendry 1993). Moreover, Taiwanese appear to believe that Japanese subtlety is very different from the Taiwanese mode of cultural presentation. It was when we discussed this reputed subtlety of the Japanese that Taiwanese usually lamented the poor quality of their local dramas. One interviewee stated that: ‘Taiwanese dramas unnecessarily exaggerated their stories. In Taiwanese dramas, females always cry, cry, cry. There is no subtlety at all in expressing emotion, as in Japanese dramas’. When I asked her whether Taiwanese TV could produce dramas in the same way, she said that:

No, I do not think Taiwan can produce (romantic) love dramas similar to the Japanese ones. Taiwan dramas cannot present delicate emotions in the Japanese way. I think it is not a matter of learning how to produce TV dramas, but that of the cultural difference between the two countries.

This indicates that the Taiwanese preference for the ‘delicateness’ or ‘elegance’ of Japanese dramas is not necessarily associated with any cultural proximity between Japan and Taiwan.

Even perceived common cultural values and attitudes cannot be straightforwardly regarded as the incarnations of some primordial cultural proximity. Li et al. (1995) argue that Rika’s attitude to love in *Tokyo Love Story* is different from that of the female characters in American dramas like *Beverley Hills, 90210*, which is too open and not single-minded enough. It is also different from that in Taiwan dramas which is generally represented as more passive and submissive. A postgraduate student in
Taiwan wrote to me in reply to my question of the difference between Rika, who spent some time in the United States and could therefore seem to be ‘Americanised’, and the image of American women in American dramas:

About Rika, I think it is true that people in Taiwan identify themselves with her more than with American women. My opinion is, this is because Rika is an Asian woman. She has yellow skin, black hair and speaks Japanese (or Chinese) on TV... I think not many people would relate Rika to America. Her education in the USA was not often mentioned in Tokyo Love Story. And I think Rika is not totally Americanised. She kept the American style of femininity only in her pursuing something directly. But she still has some traditional Asian femininity in her personality. For example, she loves a man faithfully. And that is why Asian women identify themselves with her. She is a mixture of American and Asian femininity — she represents the image of a “New Age woman” to the audience.

As the student’s remarks about Rika indicates, Japan is apparently regarded as culturally proximate because of its perceived ‘Asianness’, that is, the similar appearance and single-mindedness of Rika in Tokyo Love Story. Even in this case, however, the sense of cultural proximity perceived by the Taiwanese viewer in watching Tokyo Love Story should not be over-generalised to explain the popularity of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan. Viewers might find some similar cultural values concerning family and individualism in Japanese dramas, but the attractiveness of such values is articulated only when the audience consumes a specific programme. A widely acknowledged cultural value is not necessarily read positively. For instance, as we have seen, Taiwanese dramas often emphasise traditional values such as the ‘fidelity’ of women (Chan 1996: 142), but such values are not necessarily accepted by young Taiwanese. On the other hand, they respond positively to Rika’s single-mindedness because it represents their own values and thus can be related to. What is at stake here is not fidelity or single-mindedness in general but a specific single-mindedness as it is represented in Tokyo Love Story. It is a new, different kind of ‘fidelity’ that has been articulated through a Japanese reworking of cultural modernity in this particular media text.
Becoming ‘culturally proximate’

The preference of some Taiwanese viewers for Japanese TV dramas over American ones and the associated experience of cultural similarity is, I argue, suggestive of the shifting nature of the symbolic power of American pop icons as well as the nature of transnational cultural consumption in general. In non-Western countries, America has long been closely associated with images of modernity. Whenever American popular culture is consumed, people vicariously satisfy a yearning for the American way of life and appropriate the images of romance, freedom and affluence associated with it. As Featherstone (1996: 8) argues:

It is a product from a superior global centre, which has long represented itself as the centre. For those on the periphery it offers the possibility of the psychological benefits of identifying with the powerful. Along with the Marlboro Man, Coca-Cola, Hollywood, Sesame Street, rock music and American football insignia, McDonald’s is one of a series of icons of the American way of life. They have become associated with transposable themes which are central to consumer culture, such as youth, fitness, beauty, luxury, romance, freedom.

Indeed, I clearly remember, when I ate Kentucky Fried Chicken in the late 1970s in Tokyo, the feeling that I was becoming American. But this stage of cultural development is over. In 1995 I saw a 7-year-old Japanese boy express his amazement at seeing Kentucky Fried Chicken in the United States on TV, ‘Wow, there is a Kentucky in America as well!’ (see also Watson 1997). ‘American dreams’ have been indigenised in some modernised non-Western countries. It seems that some popular American icons have also become ‘culturally odourless’, in the sense that they may no longer be recognised as essentially ‘American’.

Tomlinson (1991: 175) argues that terms such as cultural domination or imposition are no longer appropriate to describe the current global cultural condition which is not necessarily coercive. He distinguishes globalisation from cultural imperialism in terms of the will to dominate:

Globalisation may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is a far less coherent or culturally directed process. For all that it is ambiguous between economic and political senses, the idea of imperialism contains, at least, the notion of a purposeful project: the intended spread of a social
system from one centre of power across the globe. The idea of
‘globalisation’ suggests interconnection and interdependency of all global
areas which happens in a far less purposeful way. It happens as the result
of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at
global integration, but which nonetheless produce it. (emphasis in original)

Although Chen (1996: 56) rightly criticises this kind of discourse on globalisation
because it ‘neutralises power relations’ in the world, we cannot deny that it is becoming
increasingly difficult to identify ‘the West’ (‘America’) as the only supplier of images
of modernity for people of modernised non-Western nations which have already
achieved a certain level of ‘modern’ affluence. ‘Americanisation’ seems to have
reached another level of significations. It operates at the level of form rather than
content: abstract concepts such as freedom, luxury and romance have diffused so
widely that there is no longer an unambiguous correlation between such concepts and
American symbols. ‘Americanisation’ has become overdetermined by local practices
and contingencies. Unlike the era of high Americanisation, when the form of capitalist
customer culture was closely associated with the content of American dreams (Frith
1981: 46), the content and image associated with it now tend to be detached from the
form. To appropriate Beilharz’s (1991: 15) argument about how Althusser’s concept
of ‘overdetermination’ points to the limitation of a Marxist concept of economic
base, ‘Americanisation’, like the economic base, could be ‘a kind of bluff, a slumbering
last instance never to be called upon’. The process of reworking modernity by the
non-West could be relatively autonomous from the base, ‘Americanisation’.

If the conception of ‘time’ in the modern, secular age became characterised by
homogeneity and emptiness (Benjamin 1973), what is now becoming homogeneous
and empty in the process of globalisation is the conceptual form of various images.
While the concept of ‘homogeneous time’ was the basis of the construction of ‘imagined
communities’ of the nation (Anderson 1983), the global diffusion of shared popular
cultural forms is not producing a singular global imagined community. Rather, it
intensifies cultural heterogenisation across the world. A globalising hegemony, as
Richard Wilk (1995: 118) argues, involves ‘structures of common difference’;
The new global cultural system promotes difference instead of suppressing it, but difference of a particular kind. Its hegemony is not of content, but of form. Global structures organise diversity, rather than replicating uniformity.

What the recent popularity of Japanese dramas in Taiwan suggests, however, is that the global diffusion of empty ‘forms’ not only structures diversity but also (re)activates intra-regional cultural flows and (a sense of) cultural proximity through the consumption of popular/consumer culture. ‘Content’ and ‘image’ are at once de-territorialised and re-territorialised at an intra-regional level. García Canclini (1995: 229) describes the two processes as ‘the loss of the “natural” relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, certain relative, partial territorial relocalisations of old and new symbolic productions’.

The re-territorialisation of ‘American’ images in East Asia is not brought about by the emergence of a new symbolic power. When I asked whether Japanese dramas had had any influence on her, a female Taiwanese interviewee in her mid-20s who used to love American programmes but now watches many Japanese dramas thoughtfully replied that:

Japanese dramas are more delicate than Western ones and I can relate easily to Japanese ones. They are more similar to our feeling . . . But not much influence . . . maybe Japan is a sort of mirror, but it is perhaps America that we always follow and try to catch up with.

Even for those who delight in Japanese TV dramas, ‘Japan’, as an object of yearning, does not enjoy the status that ‘America’ once did. As the above-mentioned reporter of China Times told me, ‘Japan is too close to have a yearning for’. The key expression is here rather ‘easy to relate to’. In Taiwan American celebrities are mainly movie stars, while their Japanese counterparts are TV idols who look like their fans; American movies may be glamorous and entertaining, but Japanese dramas are topics of everyday conversation and serve as vehicles for vicarious experience; things ‘American’ are dreams to be yearned for and conceptual forms to be pursued, whereas things ‘Japanese’ are examples to be emulated and commodities to be acquired.
The popularity of Japanese television dramas in Taiwan does not suggest that the relationship between Japan and Taiwan is, contrary to claims made by Japanese nationalists, one of centre-periphery. Rather, it indicates that the Japanese cultural presence in Taiwan is sustained by a sense of coevalness. As Fabian (1983: 23) argues in his discussion of how the Western denial of recognising the sharing of the same temporality with non-Western cultural others has been institutionalised in anthropological research, the term ‘coevalness’ connotes two interrelated meanings: synchronicity and contemporaneity. The development of global communication technologies and networks may further the denial of ‘contemporaneity’ of the periphery through the facilitation of ‘synchronicity’. To illustrate, Mark Liechty (1995: 194) elucidated the Nepali experience of modernity as ‘the ever growing gap between imagination and reality, becoming and being’. The disappearance of a time lag in the distribution of cultural products in many parts of the world has left wide political, economical and cultural gaps intact, so much so that they facilitated the feeling in non-Western countries that “catching up” is never really possible’ (Morley & Robins 1995: 226-7).

However, this is no longer the case with the relationship between Japan and Taiwan. A female interviewee in her early 20s who has long been a fan of Japanese popular culture stressed the emerging sense of shared temporality with Japan as reason for the rise of Japanese popular culture in Taiwan:

Taiwan used to follow Japan, always be a ‘Japan’ of ten years ago. But now we are living in the same age. There is no time lag between Taiwan and Japan. I think this sense of living in the same age emerged three or four years ago. Since then more people have become interested in things Japanese.

A manager of a Japanese cable channel explains this shift more astutely:

When Taiwan was still a poor country, we had just a dream of a modern lifestyle. It was an American dream. But now that we have become rich, we no longer have a dream but it is time to put the dream into practice. Not the American dream but the Japanese reality is a good object to emulate for this practical purpose.

13 For similar observations in Thailand, see Yoshioka 1992, 1993; in Indonesia, Kuratsawa 1998.
Modernity for people in Taiwan, especially for younger generations in urban regions, is no longer just dreams, images and yearnings of affluence, but lived reality, that is, the material conditions in which they live. As Taiwan has achieved a certain degree of economic development, the reference for ‘becoming’ for some Taiwanese young people has also changed from abstract to practical. Japanese TV dramas offer for their fans a concrete model of what it is to be modern in East Asia, which American popular culture could never have presented.

Seen this way, cultural proximity, if we still want to use this notion, should not be conceived of in terms of a static attribute of ‘being’ but as a dynamic process of ‘becoming’. The emerging dialectic of comfortable distance and cultural similarity between Japan and Taiwan seems to be based upon a consciousness that Taiwan and Japan live in the same time, thanks to the narrowing economic gap and the simultaneous circulation of information and commodities between the two countries. While Japan and Taiwan may share certain cultural values, for example, concerning family relations and individualism, such commonalities should not be essentialised to account for the popularity of Japanese dramas in Taiwan. Cultural proximity is a matter of time as well as of space. There is an ever-narrowing gap between Japan and Taiwan in terms of material conditions, the urban consumerism of an expanding middle class, the changing role of women in society, the development of communication technologies and media industries, the reworking of local cultural values and the re-territorialisation of images diffused by American popular culture. Under the at once homogenising and heterogenising forces of modernisation, Americanisation and globalisation, all elements complicatedly interact to articulate Japanese cultural power in the form of the cultural resonance of Japanese TV dramas for some Taiwanese viewers who synchronously and contemporaneously experience ‘Asian modernity’ in mid-1990s East Asia.

However, this point should not be generalised or over-emphasised. Western popular culture is still widely consumed in East Asia and there are many young people in
Taiwan who do not like Japanese TV dramas. Many economically deprived people are still excluded from the shared experience of modernity in the region. Neither should we engage uncritically with the transnational regional flow of highly commercialised materialistic consumer culture. The sense of contemporaneity might not be derived from objective reality but from an imagination which is fabricated by the instantaneous circulation of information and commodities in the region. This sense is oblivious of Japan’s colonial legacy in the region and lends credence to the voices of many Japanese Asianists who are desperately seeking commonalities between Japan and Asia, as I discussed in chapter 2.

Moreover, the analysis of intra-regional cultural flows and consumption highlights the newly articulated asymmetrical power relations in the region. While displacing the view of it as the articulation of Taiwanese yearning for Japan, the cultural immediacy which Taiwanese audiences feel in Japanese TV dramas does not necessarily articulate cultural dialogue on equal terms. Although the flow among East Asian countries, particularly between Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, is gradually becoming bilateral and more Japanese young people are also enjoying popular culture from other parts of Asia — Hong Kong films, Canto-pop or Taiwan idols (Asahi 20 January 1997) — there is no doubt that the flow of audiovisual products still tends to be one-way from Japan to other countries. The asymmetry is evident not just in terms of quantity but, more importantly, in terms of the perception of temporality manifest in the consumption of media products of cultural neighbours. While, as observed by a Taiwanese journalist, the sense of coevalness in Taiwanese experience in their consumption of Japanese popular culture also gives them a certain sense of vanity that ‘we’ve finally caught up with Japan’ (The Journalist 13-29 April 1998: 70), Asian popular culture does not necessarily signify the same perception of coevalness for Japanese consumers. The articulation of Japanese transnational cultural power as the capacity for producing cultural products through which Taiwanese audiences experience cultural proximity would be highlighted when we look at cultural flows in the opposite direction and the
experience of transnational regional modernity in it. Through the analysis of how people in Japan consume Asian popular culture, we can see that the uneven power relation is reproduced at the site of the intra-regional cultural consumption in Asia. This is the theme of the next chapter.
Popular Asianism in Japan:
Nostalgia for a (different) Asian modernity

In the previous chapter, I argued that the sense of cultural proximity which some Taiwanese audiences experience when watching Japanese TV dramas is closely related to an emerging sense of coevalness, the perception of a historical synchronicity between Japan and Taiwan. In this chapter, I examine the cultural flow in the opposite direction, that is, the representation and consumption in Japan of Asian popular culture and the idea of ‘Asia’. Through the analysis of popular Asianism in 1990s Japan, I discuss how the asymmetry in transnational cultural flows in East Asia is articulated at the site of media consumption.

Japanese interest in Asian popular culture did not start recently. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, Hong Kong kung fu films became quite popular and several Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Korean pop singers made their debuts in Japan. Although, compared with Japanese cultural exports to other parts of Asia, the flow of popular culture from these regions into Japan has been less extensive, the overall media coverage of Asian popular culture has drastically increased and interest in Asian films and pop music has captured broad Japanese audiences in the 1990s (see Across November 1994). Japanese representations and consumption of Asian popular culture has become so diverse that I cannot deal with all aspects of it in this chapter. Hence, in the following, I will focus on two topical issues in order to show the contradictions and ambivalence articulated in the Japanese discursive construction of ‘Asia’ and ‘Asian pop culture’. First, some Japanese critics and intellectuals have attempted to find in Asian popular culture different modes of non-Western modernity. This view, unlike the nationalist discourses discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, points to the attempt to reject and transcend asymmetrical conceptions of temporal and spatial difference between Japan and other Asian nations. The Japanese reception of the Singaporean
pop musician Dick Lee is a case in point. In the midst of the world music boom around 1990, Lee’s syncretic music prompted these commentators to challenge the hitherto dominant view of Asia as an inferior ‘other’ and to engage with ‘modern’ Asia on equal terms.

However, as Asian economic development stirred Japanese media and industry attention and broadened Japanese interest in Asian popular culture in the 1990s, such a self-reflexive posture was gradually swallowed up by Japan’s historically constituted conception of a culturally and racially similar but always ‘backward’ Asia. Through the analysis of mainstream commercials, films, TV dramas and publications in Japan, I argue that the self-critical stance in the discourse on Asian popular culture has become overwhelmed by a stress on the temporal lag between Japan and other Asian nations in the mid-1990s. Here, modernising Asian nations are nostalgically seen to embody a social vigour and optimism for the future which Japan allegedly is losing or has lost. This perception, revealing as it does Japan’s disavowal to realise that it shares the same temporality as other Asian nations, displays the asymmetrical flow of intra-regional cultural consumption in East Asia.

Based on empirical research I conducted in Tokyo in October/November 1997 and March/April 1998, I then show that the aforesaid ambivalences in Japan’s fascination with Asia are apparent in the Japanese reception of Hong Kong popular culture. In the mid-1990s, the frequent media coverage of the latter have significantly increased the number of fans of Hong Kong films and pop stars. While the approval of such fans still tends to be informed by a nostalgic longing, some perceive Hong Kong to be the modern equal of Japan. In their eyes, it is Hong Kong’s synchronous temporality with Japan, not its temporal distance, that has brought about the differences between Japan and Hong Kong. This perception encourages them to realise a different mode of Asian cultural modernity, one through which Japan’s modern experiences can be critically reconsidered.

This does not mean that the consumption of Asian popular culture in Japan shows
a critical engagement with the deconstructing of the prevailing conception of 'Asia'. Rather, Asian popular culture has become a site where the continuity, re-articulation and rupture of a historically constituted Japanese imagination of 'Asia' are all complexly manifest. It is these contradictions, embodied in the Japanese consumption of Asian popular culture, that I will attend to in this chapter.

**Commonality and temporal lag: the Japanese discourse on 'Asian' pop music**

A significant feature of the Japanese consumption of Asian audiovisual imagery is the prevalence of writing on the subject. As an editor of a Japanese magazine on Asian popular music told me in an interview, 'publications on Asian pop sell much more than the music itself in Japan'. Beginning in the mid-1980s, this trend became particularly conspicuous in the 1990s, with the growth in the popular literature on Asian countries (the so-called *Asia-bon*) (Maekawa & Ōno 1997). The hitherto dominant themes of books on Asia have focussed on Japan's role in World War II and its lingering economic exploitation of the region (e.g., Tsurumi 1980, 1982; Murai 1987; Murai et al. 1983). However, as other Asian countries have achieved greater economic development (an achievement manifested clearly in Seoul's hosting of the Olympic Games in 1988), an interest in the culture of urban Asia has become prominent.

In the 1990s, a noticeable trend in Asia-related publications has been the prevalence of travelogues and reportage, designed to introduce daily life in and the popular cultures of Asia to younger Japanese readers (Ōno 1996; *Asahi Shinbun* evening edition 17 September 1994). In these publications, Japanese writers attempt to understand Asia not through 'study' but through first-hand 'experience' (Maekawa & Ōno 1997). The main topics of *Asia-bon* range from consumer items such as food, shopping, beauty salons and massages to the media and popular culture (TV, films, music, etc.). While their encounters with these *quotidian* aspects of life in Asian cities often point to irreducible cultural differences between Japan and other Asian
nations, Japanese writers nevertheless perceive underlying commonalities. In a best-selling travel essay, *Ajiu Fumafumi Ryokô* (1994), Mure Yôko confesses that she had long been fascinated with the West and never had an interest in Asia, which for her had connoted backwardness. However, when she travelled to Hong Kong, Macau and Seoul for the first time in the early 1990s, she found these cities so modern and exciting that she became addicted to travelling across Asia. She encountered many curiously familiar scenes in Asia and realised that the region shared ‘something’ with Japan — though just what that ‘something’ was she does not make explicit. While travelling through the United States, she had enjoyed its sheer otherness, but in Asia she delighted in its ‘bit of difference’ based on sameness. Along with the elusive question of what Japan and other Asian nations share, what the deployment of this ‘familiar difference’ (cf. Ang & Stratton 1996) between them testifies to merits consideration here. If Japan’s Asian identity is evoked through the perception of a familiar difference rather than a cardinal cultural commonality, is this overtly or covertly employed to confirm Japan’s superiority? Or to feed on the imagination that Japan meets such nations on equal terms? It is Japan’s often contradictory posture toward Asia, the ways in which the spatio-temporal similarity and difference between Japan and other Asian nations are articulated, that I attend to through the analysis of a popular Asianism in Japan.

In the 1990s, Asian pop music has significantly stimulated Japan’s awareness of its Asian identity. In this regard, an intriguing statement is made on the cover of the

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1 Around 1980, two influential travelogues that deal with everyday life in Asia were published: Yamaguchi Fuminori’s *Hong Kong Tabi no Zainagoku Nôto* (‘Jumbled notes on a trip to Hong Kong’) (1979) and Sekikawa Natsumi’s *Sonor no Renshû Mondai* (‘Doing exercises in Seoul’) (1984). Both are forms of personal reportage. In contrast to the then dominant approach in works on Asia, which concentrated on Japanese colonialism and imperialism, Yamaguchi and Sekikawa focussed on their own experiences with the peoples and cultures of the region. The popularity of Asia as a tourist destination for younger Japanese has grown, with more than 60% of overseas travellers now choosing individual trips (Nihon Keizai Shimbun 29 January 1996). This trend has led to the increasing prevalence of travelogues. Now there are several series of personal travel guides such as *Asia Rakuen Matyouran* (‘Manual for Asian paradise’), *Asia Kanucha Gaido* (‘Asian cultural guide’) and *Wonderland Traveller*. The original series was *Chikyû no Arakikata* (‘How to wander around the world’), the first issue of which was published in 1981. This series quickly became the Bible of Japanese backpackers in the 1980s.
edited volume titled *Popu Eija* (‘Pop Asia’) (1990), ‘[the] Popular music of Asia reminds us that Japanese are Asian’. Judging from the content of the publication, in which more than ten Japanese music critics explore the relationship between Japanese and other Asian popular music, two elements appear to be behind this evocation of Japan’s Asian identity: the common experience of a (forced) cultural hybridisation and of indigenisation of foreign (mainly Western) cultural forms; and the impress of Japanese cultural influence. Which perspective is employed depends on the region put in focus. Some writers (Saitô 1990a; Shinozaki 1990b; Kawakami 1990) in the volume point out that as far as popular music style is concerned, Japan shares more with East Asian nations — Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea in this case — than with Southeast Asia. Such cultural commonality among East Asian popular music is, according to them, articulated through the reception of (Westernised) Japanese popular music. Saitô (1990a: 22) argues that ‘Japanese influence on Asian music industries is the key factor for the demarcation of the boundaries between East and Southeast Asia’. In Southeast Asia, the influence of English-language pop music has been direct, but ‘East Asian nations tend to prefer Japanese pop music, as it acquires somehow “[East] Asian” flavour through the absorption and indigenisation of Western pop music’ (Shinozaki 1990b: 105). Here, familiar difference is perceived in the way in which other East Asian nations develop their local pop music production through Japanese influence. Japan’s Asianness is articulated, as in hybridism discourse, in terms of its role as a translator between Western and Asian modern cultural formations.

Japan’s Asian identity is differently articulated when attention is paid to popular music in Southeast Asia, where Japanese commentators (Saitô 1990a; Shinozaki 1990b) acknowledge that Japanese cultural influence is arguably much weaker. Here,

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2 The regional divide between East and Southeast Asia can be seen in terms of the popularity of Japanese songs. For example, there were two popular Japanese songs in the late 1980s, but one was popular in East Asia and the other in Southeast Asia (Shinozaki 1990a). Among other Southeast Asian countries, Thailand is more influenced by Japanese culture, thanks to the enormous presence of the Japanese economy, as I exemplified in Chapter 3 by the Thai female who pretended to be a Japanese (see also Shinozaki 1990b; Morieda 1988).
as the subtitle of *Poppy Eijia* suggests — ‘Tingle with the excitement of cultural hybridisation when listening to Asian pop’ — Asian popular music illuminates the common act of producing local culture through cultural indigenisation and hybridisation. For one thing, the West’s dominant cultural power, underlining the shared experience of cross-fertilisation, articulates the similarity between Japanese and Southeast Asian pop music. As a young Japanese male commented, ‘I have listened mainly to Western pop music, but when I listened to Thai pop for the first time, it did not sound entirely strange to me’ (*Nihon Keizai Shinbun* evening edition 20 May 1995). This remark suggests that the familiarity of Thai pop to Japanese is due to its incorporation of Western pop elements. At the same time, the common practice of hybridisation also articulates the familiar difference of Southeast Asian pop music in a rather spectacular and exotic manner. Unlike East Asian pop music, according to Saitō (1990a: 23), ‘most Japanese audiences are attracted to its fascinating way of cultural cross-fertilisation of the local and the foreign’ (see also Kubota 1990). Southeast Asian pop music thus more often than not summons up the Japanese perception of a quite different mode of Asian cultural modernity. I will return to this point shortly.

Which of the two modes of familiar difference is emphasised — sometimes commingled — in the Japanese discourses on Asian popular culture and Japan’s Asian identity depends on the historical context as well. In the late 1980s, there was still a distinct gap between the cultural production capacity of Japan and other Asian nations. Japanese authors, in their search for Japan’s Asian connection, tended to encounter Japanese cultural influence in the region. The popular essayist, Morieda Takashi’s *Chōkanzu de Mita Ajia* (‘A worm’s eye view of Asia’) (1988) was a case in point. Morieda’s perspective was that of the urban consumer, and his work is free of the conventional focus on some authentic, traditional Asia. Morieda (1990: 68) stressed the significance of introducing the popular and consumer culture of Asia to Japanese readers, as this would deepen their interest in Asia, just as many people in
Japan became acquainted with the U.S. through Hollywood popular films. Examining popular and consumer culture in Asia, however, Morieda found the significant influence of Japanese culture in the region in terms of popular songs as well as food stuffs, fashion magazines and animations. While observing the asymmetry in the relations — both economic and cultural — between Japan and Asia, Morieda (1988: 235) expressed the hope that his book would be a first step to correct this asymmetry by assisting the bilateral flow of information between Japan and Asia:

In any case, there are many people in Asian countries who are fans of Japanese pop idols. In South Korea, people eat the same pickle as in Japan. Thai people love watching Doraemon and Oshin. These facts will make Asia more familiar and intimate to Japanese readers.

Since the Asia he introduced to the reader is one whose popular culture has been deeply influenced by Japan, Morieda’s intention of evoking Japan’s Asian identity by making the information traffic two-way ironically resulted in the confirmation of Japan’s dominant position in Asia.

In this period, there was also a Japanese attempt to forge a more self-critical discourse on the relationship between Japan and Asia via Asian popular music. Just as world music appeals to the Western ‘liberal/left’ as the ideological antithesis of an American-centric view of the world (e.g., Barrett 1996), Asian pop music serves for some Japanese commentators as an antidote to Japan’s exploitative relationship with Asia and to claims of Japanese superiority (based on Japan’s reputed closeness to American popular culture). An example of such a commentator is Shinozaki Hiroshi, a prominent writer on Asian pop, who in 1988 published a book on the subject, entitled Kasetioskoppu e Ikeba Ajia ga Mietekuru (‘Understanding Asia through pop music cassette tape shops’). In his work, Shinozaki explores the politics, economies and societies of Asian countries through their popular music. He also examines their relations with Japan with a reference to Japan’s imperialist history, its economic exploitation of them and the role of Japanese in the Asian sex industry. While recognising the influence of Japanese popular music in the region, he nevertheless
tries not to put Japan and other Asian countries on a linear developmental line. He confesses to feeling overwhelmed by a sense of *déjà vu* on hearing local music in many parts of Asia, but adds that this experience of cultural similarity was not based on his actual historical memory of Japan's past:

The historical path of one country is not necessarily followed by another country. I rather hope that other Asian countries will take different paths from that of Japan. Asia is a really tough other in that it is culturally quite similar to but simultaneously altogether different from Japan (Shinozaki 1988: 235).

While he implies that a primordial cultural similarity exists between Japan and other Asian nations, Shinozaki avoids comparing the contemporary Asian music scene with Japan's past and tries to conceive of the familiar difference of Asia on equal and coeval terms.

**Is Asia still one?: The Japanese appropriation and appreciation of Dick Lee**

Shinozaki's (1988) caution about the Japanese Orientalist conception that 'their' future is 'our' past was directed against a faith in Japan's advanced capacity for producing pop music in the late 1980s. However, the success of Singaporean musician, Dick Lee, in the world music trend around 1990 dramatically displaced this perception and threw a Southeast Asian hybridity into relief.5 Dick Lee has been the most successful Asian pop singer in the Japanese market in terms of CD sales figures.4 The attractiveness of his syncretic music for Japanese audiences lies in its playful mixing of Western pop and various adaptations of traditional Asian music. Particularly well-received were Lee's two albums, *The Mad Chinaman* (1989) and *Asia Major* (1990), in which he attempted to articulate his search for an impure identity as a Singaporean and an Asian respectively through the syncretic remaking of traditional

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5 Given that many authors (Shinozaki 1990b; Kubota 1990; Saitō 1990b; Kawakami 1990) refer to him, the publication of *Poppin' Ejia* itself was apparently caused by Lee's popularity in Japan.

4 These amount to about 100,000 copies, according to representatives of Japanese recording companies. While these numbers are impressive for an Asian musician, they are trivial compared to those of popular Japanese musicians, who sometimes enjoy sales of more than 3 million in the local market.
Asian songs and instrumentals in contemporary (Western) pop music styles. As Kitanaka (1995: 34), a well known music critic, suggests, the attraction of Lee’s music resides in the combination of two factors. The first is an exoticism which derives from the incorporation of local cultural traditions, whereas the second is a sophisticated modern music style, backed by the use of the latest technologies. Lee’s music made Japanese realise that Asian pop is not backward but represents a highly sophisticated mode of cultural hybridisation (e.g., Shinozaki 1990a; Tokyo FM Shuppan 1995: 168).

Dick Lee was a cause célèbre for Japanese critics because his music embodied a radical sense of a hybrid Asian identity which is beyond the reach of the self-contained Japanese cultural formation (e.g., Shinozaki 1990b: 107-108). Lee produced all by himself ‘a new sound by fusing West and East that Japanese musicians, who just mimic Western music style, could never do’ (Yoshihara 1994: 188). His music presents a different form of cultural negotiation between Asia and the West, a more cosmopolitan mode of hybridisation that Japan is yet to attain (e.g., Shinozaki 1990b; Kubota 1990). This point has been expanded by Nakazawa Shinichi (1990: 217), a Japanese advocate of postmodernism. He argues that Lee’s music reflects the postmodernist condition of Singapore, a floating intersection of cultures which, unlike China or Japan, lacks a strong sense of communal identity. Japan can never be such an intersection because it cannot resist the pull of communal gravitation. In contrast, Nakazawa (1990: 217-8) contends, in Singapore no attempt is made to insert its diversity of cultures into a nationalising melting pot that homogenises them:

Dick Lee for the first time succeeded in making Asian pop music attain a consistent multiplex structure, so much so that his music suggests the possibility of the mingled existence of multiple different rhythms in one song . . . Dick Lee as a Singaporean is free from a strong drawing force to the motherland and therefore has attained the freedom as well as the sorrow of a nomadic subjectivity (Nakazawa 1990: 218).

Nakazawa seems to suggest that Japanese musicians have long been endeavouring to indigenise foreign (Western) pop, but in a way that removes all traces of the original.
In Lee’s music, in contrast, the warp and woof of different musical traditions are highlighted. While, as observed in Chapter 2, the Japanese way of mixing cultures suppresses its foreign origins, thereby articulating ‘Japaneseness’ in the manner of rendering the product mukokuseki (expressing non-nationality), Dick Lee’s mixing is takokuseki (expressing multi-nationality/ethnicity), which subtly juxtaposes many diverse cultures without erasing their original features (Saitō 1990b).\(^5\)

Arguably, the above views on Lee’s music and Singapore fail to notice the contradictory cultural and identity politics operating in Singapore, the in-betweenness of which has not been brought about voluntarily but forced by the history of Western imperialism (see Ang & Stratton: 1997). Moreover, they celebrate Lee’s syncretic musical style and Singapore, as an idealised postmodern city of nomads, in a rather uncritical manner. It can be claimed, for instance, that Lee’s music is just a fashionable, commercialised, apolitical pastiche of Western pop and traditional Asian music; that his claim of possessing a pan-Asian identity is purely a promotional strategy; and that his claim operates, within the context of Singapore’s cultural policies, to stress a multi-racial, pan-Asian identity in nationalist terms (see Kong 1996; Wee 1996). However, the debate over the cultural politics of Lee’s music has, on the whole, failed to impact on Japanese critics and audiences, who appreciate it as they incorporate it into a Japanese context.\(^6\) In this sense, the Japanese discourse on Dick Lee’s music is reminiscent of a contentious issue of intercultural communication — the appropriation of cultural others via media consumption. The development of communication technologies has intensified the contact with cultural others predominantly through a mediated experience (e.g., Meyrowitz 1985; Morley & Robins 1995: 125-146). Accordingly, the development of international communications has made transnational media consumption a site where an Orientalist gaze upon a

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\(^5\) A similar comment on the difference between takokuseki and mukokuseki was made concerning Japanese animation production by a prominent Japanese animator, Oshii Mamoru (Oshii et al. 1996).

\(^6\) A noted exception is Shimokazi (1990a), who puts Dick Lee’s music in the political and sociocultural context of Singapore.
dehumanised, cultural other is invariably reproduced (Said 1978; Morley & Robins 1995: 125-146). Although it largely ignores the debate over Lee’s music in Singapore, the Japanese appropriation of his music, I argue, cannot simply be dismissed as an attempt to domesticate its innovativeness by casting it as an inferior, exotic, Asian other. Rather, it displays an effort to appreciate Lee’s music as the embodiment of an Asian modernity whose difference articulates a telling critique of the formation of Japanese modernity and its discourse on hybridism. This is a more encouraging posture of dealing with cultural otherness in transnational media consumption: engaging with it ‘in a relation of mutuality and equivalence’ (Hamilton 1997: 149) in order to change one’s own subjectivity.

Adopting the above perspective, Ueda (1994) asserts that Lee’s music can be employed as a tool to deconstruct the East-West binarism that has long dominated Japanese thinking on its relations with Asia. In his article ‘Datsu-Kindai, datsucho-datsua, datsu-Nihon’ (‘Transcending modernity, transcending the binary opposition of the West and Asia, deconstructing Japan’), Ueda (1994) contends that Lee’s music, with its affirmative emphasis on the dynamic and hybrid ‘banana’ identity of modern Asians — yellow on the outside, white on the inside — deconstructs a static, essentialist binarism of East and West that has long been prominent in Japanese conceptions of Asia.

Ueda makes his point by comparing Lee with Okakura Tenshin, a Japanese thinker who coined the phrase ‘Asia is one’ at the turn of the century. In his famous book, The Ideal of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan (1904), Okakura, using a binary East-West opposition, attempts to grasp ‘Asia’ as a coherent space characterised by the existence of ‘love’ underlying art and aesthetics in the region.7 More significantly, in his essentialist construction of Asia, Karatani (1994) has argued, Okakura does not simply attempt to articulate a cardinal Eastern value and aesthetic.

7 Okakura, it should be noted, wrote mostly in English and thus was writing for a predominantly Western audience. In his writings in Japanese, he stressed that a difference existed between Japan and China (see Cling 1998; Kinoshita 1973).
her, his work reflects his desire that Asia be given an imaginary coherence by
an. Here, Okakura’s argument is closely in line with the Japanese discourse on
oridism (Chapter 2). Okakura imagined not just Asian unity in diversity but a
ator, ‘Japan’, through whom this unity could be achieved in the first place.8
mitting Japan’s deep cultural and intellectual debt to China and India, Okakura
ued that many arts, religions and ideas that had been lost in other parts of Asia
re preserved in Japan. Okakura conceived of Japan as the museum of Asian
isations. Okakura’s famous assertion of ‘Asia is one’ (1904) thus assigned Japan
exclusive ‘historical mission not only to represent, but also to speak for the
ghost ideal of Asia’ (Ching 1998: 76).

In contrast, Ueda (1994) asserts, Dick Lee in his work does not reify the East-West
position. Even in his album, The Mad Chinaman, in which he expresses his
ubivalence over his position as a Singaporean between Asia and the West, tradition
ad modernity, Lee still tries to incorporate both sides of the binary rather than
orise one at the expense of the other. According to Ueda (1994: 46), Dick Lee’s
One Song’ succeeds in expressing an Asian aesthetic by incorporating different
Asian musical traditions and languages into a new form without rejecting the West:

Dick Lee’s message ‘Let’s sing one song’ is active and dynamic while
Okakura Tenshin’s ‘Asia is one’ is static. Dick Lee does not exclude
Western elements from his conception of Asia. The articulation of
Asianness goes hand in hand with the keen hybridisation of many elements
of West and East. Okakura’s conception of Asia was only derived from a
binary oppositioning between East and West.

Furthermore, Lee’s music does not presuppose any centre in the process of Asian
cross-fertilisation. Ueda (1994: 51) approves of Lee’s claims that many Asians share
a common identity and that, in the course of indigenising modernity, they have come

8 Okakura was specifically concerned with the arts, but his saying ‘Asia is one’ became infamous
when it was appropriated by the ideologues of Japanese imperialism in Asia in the 1930s. Hosokawa
(1998) demonstrates that they made use of Okakura’s ideas in their attempt to forge an Asian unity
through traditional music. For instance, an ethno-musicologist of the time depicted Japanese music as
the repository of all Asian music, as it ‘contained all the significant characteristics found in Asian
music traditions [sic]’ (Hosokawa 1998: 16). Music was thus the medium par excellence in which the
truth of the adage ‘Asia is one’ was manifest.
quire similar bodily feelings and sensitivities. Ueda (1994: 52-54) suggests that a conception of ‘Asia’ should not be derived from some essential Asianness nor the sharing of a common Other (the West). Rather, Lee’s music tells people in that if Asian popular music makes Japanese feel that they are Asian, it is use it reminds them of the shared modern experience of ever-cross-fertilising amics in Asia, where Japan’s position is not that of a transcending centre but ely that of a player — one among many — contributing to the production of a ‘syncretic culture.

Lee and East Asian capitalist cross-fertilisation

Superficiality of the Japanese appreciation of Dick Lee, however, has become nifest in his transient popularity and, more significantly, in the subsequent, twisted development of Lee’s advocacy of cultural hybridisation by Japanese cultural industries. hat is significant but missing in Ueda’s argument concerning the rise and fall of Lee is a critical consideration of how the Japanese appreciation of Lee’s music would work collusively with Japan’s project of re-configuring its leading position in emerging China-centred dynamic space of cultural cross-fertilisation (Chapter 4). ‘Lee’s music is symptomatic, but not directly reflective, of the ongoing reformations politico-cultural issues in Singapore’ (Wee 1996: 503). I suggest that its greater popularity in Japan than in other Asian countries is symptomatic of the resurgence of pan’s desire to generate a pan-Asian cultural fusion.

After interrogating his impure Asian identity in The Mad Chinaman (1989) and sia Major (1990), Lee tried to explore his persona as a modern ‘banana Asian’ in his next album, Orientalism (1991). He had come to realise that his trademark style – the subtle and playful interweaving of traditional Asian music with Western pop – could be pursued equally well by Westerners. As Lee (Nikkei Entertainment 5 February 1992: 12) commented:

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to acquire similar bodily feelings and sensitivities. Ueda (1994: 52-54) suggests that the conception of 'Asia' should not be derived from some essential Asianness nor from the sharing of a common Other (the West). Rather, Lee's music tells people in Japan that if Asian popular music makes Japanese feel that they are Asian, it is because it reminds them of the shared modern experience of ever-cross-fertilising dynamics in Asia, where Japan's position is not that of a transcending centre but merely that of a player — one among many — contributing to the production of a new syncretic culture.

**Dick Lee and East Asian capitalist cross-fertilisation**

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I know that if I re-make well-known Asian old songs in Western contemporary popular music style, the album will be well received by critics and sell. But I do not want to be a spurious ‘Asian’ artist. I think we should honestly acknowledge that our music style is after all deeply Westernised, that we are no longer as much ‘Asian’ as we believe. This does not mean that all we can do is copy the West but we should start creating a new Asianness based upon a recognition of the state of affairs.

When Lee produced Orientalism, he was convinced that Asian popular music should reflect the ‘cultural impurity’ of Asians in a positive way. However, the album was not as popular in Japan as his two previous works. It even disappointed Japanese audiences. As Ueda (1994: 48-49) notes, in Orientalism the affirmation of a ‘banana’ identity results in a more sophisticated Westernised music devoid of the juxtaposition of the modern and exotic. Alongside the decline in the popularity of world music in Japan, the discursive value of Lee diminished soon after his music lost its strong ‘Asian’, exotic flavour (Ueda 1994; Nikkei Entertainment 5 February 1992). Such ‘Westernised’ music is too familiar to Japanese audiences to be portrayed as a spectacular antithesis to Japanese hybridism.

More significantly, the release of Orientalism coincided with an increasing interest on the part of Japanese business in the expanding markets of East Asia, where the production of popular music had rapidly developed in the early 1990s under Western and (to a lesser extent) Japanese influence. This coincidence suggests two things about the Dick Lee phenomenon in Japan: firstly, it drew the attention of Japanese music industries to the value of combining traditional Asian music and Western pop in a sophisticated way; secondly, it alerted such industries to the potential of marketing and producing pan-Asian popular music icons (Nikkei Entertainment 9 September 1992: 12). Lee’s album title, Asia Major, was thus manipulated to connote the pan-Asian

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9 Dick Lee’s producer admitted that he consciously attempted to sell a new cross-fertilised sound for the most important market, Japan, but could not really catch up with the changing taste of Japanese audiences (Kawakami 1995: 103).

10 In Hong Kong, for example, the maturity of cultural industries in this period was marked by the emergence of local pop stars such as the Four Heavenly Kings (Jacky Cheung, Leon Lai, Andy Lau and Aaron Kwok), who have dominated the Chinese music markets in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.
market strategy of Japanese music industries (Nikkei Entertainment 9 September 1992). Ironically, then, at the same time that Lee’s music was subverting a Japan-centric conception of pan-Asian cultural fusion, it was encouraging Japanese music industries to expand into other Asian (particularly Chinese) markets by becoming an organiser of cultural hybridisation. Dick Lee’s dynamic pan-Asianism basically triggered Japan’s orchestration of the transnationalisation of Asian popular music.

This posture taken by Japanese cultural industries casts a shadow over the media representation of Asian popular music. Here, the desire for the creation of a pan-Asian cultural sphere still haunts the Japanese imagination strongly.11 Stimulated by the Dick Lee boom in Japan, a cultural critic, Kawakami (1990; 1995), enthusiastically expected that, just as Paris became the centre of world music in the mid-1980s, so would Tokyo become the centre of Asian popular music in the 1990s. In 1993 two popular magazines, Across (‘Trans-Asian Entertainment’, April 1993) and SPA! (‘Transnationalising Asian entertainment’, 24 February 1993), ran feature articles on transnational Asian entertainment. Both focussed on the interest of young Japanese in Asian popular culture. Across’s article relates that Asian countries were no longer just places suggestive of mystery and tradition for young Japanese; as well, young Asians who had been deeply exposed to Western culture had begun creating new local cultures. Nevertheless, both articles note the central role being played by Japanese cultural industries in the region’s cultural ebb-and-flow.

Also, the legacy of the ‘Asia is one’ ideology in Japanese media representations of Asian pop music in the 1990s is evident. During this period, Japan conceived of itself as the consumer showcase of hybrid Asian music. Although recent Japanese writing on Asian popular culture has been sensitive to the issue of diversity, it is surprising to

11 A feature article in Aera (20 January 1997) which reported the emergence of an East Asian pop triangle — the popularity of Japanese popular culture in Asia, STAR TV as an agent of disseminating pan-Asian popular culture and the popularity of Chinese pop in Japan — was titled ‘Ajitai kizuna yatte koto: Ajia poppu kyōdōkun’ (‘Asian kids are coming!: The emergence of an Asian popular cultural co-prosperity sphere’). Likewise, the subtitle of Morieda’s book (1988) is ‘The Great East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere in our age’.
see how often Asian countries continue to be lumped together in a single musical category, with the word ‘Asia’ (Asia) featuring in the title — a category from which Japan is omitted (the aforementioned *Poppu Eijia* is no exception). Take, for instance, *AsiaNbeat*, a TV series about Asian pop music broadcast between 1993 and 1995. While its Japanese presenter used to shout ‘Asia is one’, the programme would regularly lump together East and Southeast Asian pop music but exclude Japan. In this sense, then, ‘Asia is one’ really means that Asia is one only in and for Japan (Ichikawa 1994: 171). Likewise, NHK’s special TV programme, *Asia Live Dream* (26 December 1996), also covered many parts of Asia from a Japan-centric perspective. It featured more than twenty pop singers from ten Asian countries. In one segment, several Asian singers sang the theme song together with *Doraemon*, a character from a popular Japanese animation. All of this suggests that ‘Asia’ is re-imagined as a cultural space in which Japan is located in the implicit centre, playing the part of the conductor of Asian pop musical cross-fertilisation.

Lee himself quickly adjusted to the changing current and seemed conscious of what Japanese cultural industries expected of him with the expansion of East Asian pop music markets. In *21seiki no Bitoaru wa Ajia kara* (‘The Beatles of the 21st century will emerge from Asia’) (NHK Educational 8 March 1997), a TV programme that deals with the Asian popular music scene, the main topic of the programme is no longer Lee’s music but emerging Chinese rock musicians, whom some famous Japanese music critics and scholars expect to produce globally acclaimed popular music. That music would reflect social contradictions caused by rapid capitalist development in the region by appropriating Western musical styles (see Hashizume 1994). Dick Lee was once again cast in the programme as an Asian musician who embodied the transcendence of the East-West binarism. Lee this time renewed his *raison d’être* by introducing a new acronym, ‘WEAST’ (merging ‘West’ and ‘East’), to express the

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12 Although he apparently despises Canto-pop musical forms and does not speak a Chinese language fluently, Lee put out a Canto-pop album (Woe 1996).
importance of overcoming the old binarism. The intricacy of the Japanese appropriation and appreciation of Dick Lee appears to have culminated with his appointment to the vice-presidency of Sony Music’s Asian division in July 1998. Lee thus now officially works for a Japanese-owned global conglomerate, promoting the cultural hybridisation of East and West (Pop Asia no. 20 1998).

Back to the developmental axis

As the pendulum has again swung from a spectacular modernity embodied by Dick Lee (and some other Southeast Asian pop music) to a more familiar modernity featured in East Asian pop music, there has also been a change in the lexicon deployed to articulate Japan’s relation with Asia. Familiar difference has come to be explained mostly in terms of capitalist developmental temporality. Even relatively critical Japanese commentators are not immune to this discursive turn. While warning against the view that ‘Asia is following the way Japan passed ten years ago’, their interpretative frame of reference in dealing with cultural difference in Asia nevertheless tends to pull back from a synchronic spatial axis to a diachronic evolutionist temporality.

A case in point is Ajia wa Machi ni Kike (Go to the city and understand Asia) (1994), a well-received account of urban Asia. In the book, Ichikawa Takashi uses popular music to reflect on Japan’s position in and relationship with Asia, particularly the Chinese cultural regions. While acknowledging Japan’s influence by citing the many Japanese songs which have been covered by other Asian musicians (Chapter 3), Ichikawa argues that other East Asian countries are rapidly developing their own music styles by earnestly indigenising foreign (American and Japanese) influence (see also Marume 1994; Bart 27 June 1994). According to Ichikawa, Japan and those Asian countries differ less in terms of the act of indigenisation itself than in terms of the latter’s advantage in the developmental process. Unlike the modernisation of Japan, which was accomplished step-by-step, the modernisation of other East Asian countries can be described as a form of ‘leap’ development, in that they have acquired
economic and technological innovations without proceeding methodically. Ichikawa (1994: 144-155) considers popular music development in light of this theory. Japan developed its own musical styles through a long process of indigenising American pop; the corollary of this was the abundance in other Asian countries of Japanese 'cover’ songs. Ichikawa considers Asian copies of Japanese songs to be an example of leap development, in that Asian countries now effortlessly appropriate the fruit of Japan’s long indigenisation of Western pop.

Arguably, this leap development has brought about the much more condensed coexistence of many temporalities as well as of many cultures in one space than Japan ever experienced. This point is made by a Japanese scholar, Washida (1996: 41-42) with his observation of the synchronous juxtaposition of many temporalities in Shanghai:

All the temporalities I have experienced are hotchpotched like a soup or lie on top of one another like a kaleidoscope. The disappearance of all the temporal differences leads to an overwhelming sense of synchronicity . . . It is as if fifty years of our [Japanese] postwar experiences are all arranged in every corner of the city. I can also feel the multiple temporal layers in Japanese cities, but I’ve never known such a city where many temporalities are compressed in one space as in Shanghai.

This argument can be read as a Japanese attempt to displace the Japanese sense of superiority in terms of developmental temporality. The juxtaposition of multiple temporalities testifies to a different mode of constituting non-Western modernity operating in other Asian cities. The idea of a gradual progress does not capture what is going on in other Asian cities, according to Washida, where the development is being achieved from hop to jump, omitting the stage of step in China (Washida 1996: 43).

This discourse is reminiscent of a familiar argument concerning the situation of non-Western postmodernity. Unlike the postmodernity of the West, non-Western postmodernity is not the product of modernity’s completion: rather, as Buell (1994: 335) remarks, it
thrives on incomplete modernisation, the result of modernisation from the top down. Peripheral sites thus produce cultural situations in which distinct time frames (artificially) constructed by colonialism and Orientalism, and powerfully separated by developmentalism’s evolutionary narrative, circulate together.

Buell (1994: 335-7) is apt to see the demise of a grand evolutionary narrative in a peripheral postmodernity which articulates ‘the clash of differently encoded temporalities’ as well as the juxtaposition of many cultures. However, this kind of view tends to underestimate the deeply uneven nature of global capitalist modernity. The ‘always already postmodern’ situation of the non-Western periphery should not be celebrated uncritically, as it has been brought about by the legacies of colonialism and unequal power relations. Likewise, there is something very problematic in the above Japanese views on Asian (post)modernity. They rarely suggest an awareness that slums and hawkers’ stalls might be as much a constitutive part of globalised modernity as high-rise buildings and sophisticated hybridisations of popular music. If recognised at all, the existence of such an unambiguous asymmetry tends to be belittled as a transient stage in capitalist development which sooner or later will be supplanted by the achievement of material affluence, as happened in Japan (see Washida 1996: 41). The Japanese view above thus entrenches the sense of linear progressive development at the same time rejecting it. The notion of a linear step-by-step development might be displaced but the direction of the development does not change at all.

Since the allure of the disjunctive juxtaposition of many temporalities in a single place derives from the chimera of an earlier stage of spectacular economic development in Asia, it is not surprising that Japanese commentators, in articulating the common but different experience of Asian modernity through Asian pop and urban space, tend to wear a retrospective tone. Ichikawa (1994: 176-177), for example, associates a nation’s capacity to absorb foreign cultures with a specific developmental stage of high economic growth — a stage which Japan has passed and which other Asian countries are now approaching. It is often said that while Japan eagerly absorbed
Western cultural influences in the 1970s, it stopped doing so in the 1980s, with the result that its popular culture became centripetal and was confined to the national market (e.g., Kawasaki 1993; Mizukoshi & Baek 1993). Likewise, Ichikawa (1994: 176-177) asserts that Japan’s receptiveness to foreign cultural influences peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was experiencing high economic growth. The prevalence of Japanese cover songs in Hong Kong, he suggests, reveals not the inferiority of its music industry, but its great capacity for cultural absorption — a capacity which Japan once had — hence demonstrating the stagnant situation of the Japanese cultural formation. The discordant temporalities to be found in East Asian pop music or in modernising Asian cities such as Shanghai prompts the Japanese commentators to reflect on their own vivacious path to economic development.

While Ichikawa’s (1994) purpose is not to emphasise the temporal lag between Japan and Asia, we will see that such retrospective tropes have been easily exploited in a more haughty manner by representation of Asian societies and rising Asian pop idols in the mid-1990s in the Japanese media. The self-critical discourse on Asian popular music, forged among a relatively small community of music critics and (world music) audiences was gradually absorbed by the dominant media discourse; this discourse is distinctive in its disavowal that Japan and Asia inhabit the same temporal location. Before discussing the Japanese promotion and consumption of East Asian (Hong Kong) popular music and idols, we need to analyse this media discourse which has been characterised by a nostalgia for the vigorous economic development and industrialisation of Japan’s past.

Capitalist nostalgia for ‘Asia’

Nostalgia, once regarded as a symptom of extreme homesickness, has become a key term to describe the modern and postmodern cultural conditions (e.g., Davis 1983; Stewart 1993; Frow 1991). Frederic Jameson (1983) argues that nostalgia, together with pastiche, is a central feature of late capitalist image production. Nostalgia is no
longer what it was under modernism — the empiricist representation of an historical past; in the postmodern age, it has become the appropriation of ‘the “past” through stylistic connotation, conveying “pastness” by the glossy qualities of the image’ (Jameson 1983: 19). At the same time, the acceleration of the transnational circulation of images and signs, of contact with other cultures and the expansion of tourist industries have facilitated ‘the global institutionalisation of the nostalgic attitude’ (Robertson 1990: 53). The past images appropriated are no longer restricted to one’s own society, but include the mediated images of other cultures, which feed various modes of nostalgic longing. The appropriation of cultural images from other places thus evokes ‘imagined nostalgia’ and ‘borrowed nostalgia’; the first condition is one in which people are driven by mass advertising to yearn for a mediated world they have never lost (Appadurai 1996: 77), whereas the second is one in which people’s memories are constituted by their experiences of consuming mass-mediated cultural forms from elsewhere. As Buell (1994: 342) points out, ‘we not only manufacture our present cultures in closer relationship with each other than before, but also more and more overtly commingle the inventions of our memories and pasts’.

The politics of the transnational evocation of nostalgia is highlighted when it is employed to confirm a frozen temporal lag between two cultures, when ‘our’ past and memory are found in ‘their’ present. As Turner (1994: 116) argues, the Americans’ discovery of their lost frontier in the Australian outback represented in the film, *Crocodile Dundee*, displays ‘how effortlessly Australian difference might be appropriated to American ends’. This shows a moment when the recognition of cultural difference is immediately transfigured into the comfortable affirmation of unequal relations between superior-inferior and advanced-backward (see Said 1978; 116).

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13 For the account of how nostalgia has framed sociological discussions of modernity, see Turner (1987).

14 For the exploitation of nostalgia on tourism, see MacCannell (1976), Urry (1990), Frow (1991) and Graburn (1995).
Todorov 1984).

Such Orientalist tropes of nostalgia have played a significant part in Japanese representations of an idealised ‘backward’ Asia, in which the Japanese can find their lost purity, energy and dreams. Dorianne Kondo (1997) has identified two types of Japanese masculinist nostalgia vis-à-vis Asia in her analysis of magazine articles published in 1990. The first is a nostalgia for a pre-urbanised unspoiled nature in Bali. Bali is represented as a site which can be consumed by an affluent Japanese masculinist tourist for ‘spiritual renewal’. Kondo also finds in the representation of the premodern innocence of Thailand what Rosaldo (1989) calls ‘imperialist nostalgia’, which describes a Western hypocritical sense of yearning for what uncivilised non-Western societies are losing on the path to Western-led modernisation. It is ‘a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed’ (Rosaldo 1989: 108). Rosaldo is especially concerned with how an apparently innocent yearning can hide the collusiveness of such a nostalgia with the exercise of cultural and economic domination. The dominant (the West) mourns what the dominated (the non-West) is losing, while knowing that such a loss is inevitable if they are to become civilised and modern like ‘us’. Similarly, the Japanese nostalgic representation of ‘Asia’ can be called imperialist — or more precisely, capitalist — as Japan was not only an imperial power in the past but also plays a major role in the contemporary spread of global capitalism, one which has transformed and exploited many parts of the developing world.

Japanese capitalist nostalgia does not just mourn what is destined to be lost in Asia. More emphatically, what is grieved, through the predicted destiny of premodern Asia, is actually what Japan itself has lost or is about to lose. As Kondo (1997: 88) argues, regarding the Japanese representation of an apparently innocent Thai waitress:

Exposure to Japanisation, Westernisation, urbanisation, and other worldly forces will despoil this Thai flower’s shy purity and turn her into a tough, threatening hussy. . . . By mourning the fate of Thailand through his [Japanese journalist] projection of the waitress’s fate, the journalist also mourns what he clearly perceives to be the ravages of modernisation and
the loss of identity undergone in Japan.

Such a capitalist nostalgia, as well as the yearning for unspoiled nature, is firmly based upon Japan's unambiguous affluence and its dominant position vis-à-vis other Asians. Moreover such a privileged position assures Japan that the loss is revivable, as Kondo (1997: 94) observes:

Through consumption, Japanese can (re)experience their lost innocence without jeopardising the comforts of advanced capitalism that ensured its originary loss. Japan's neocolonial economic dominance assures access to spiritual renewal.

In the nostalgic representation of premodern 'innocence', Japan is not engaging in a dialogue with 'Asia' but consuming it for the transient pleasures of recuperation and refreshment.

The magazine articles Kondo analyses were published in 1990. The year was the apex of the Japanese bubble economy which let many Japanese sense Japan's hegemonic position in the world. Its economic power enabled Japanese to somehow pleasurably indulge themselves in a nostalgia for premodern innocence that Japan had lost. By the mid-1990s, however, this nostalgia had more to do with the deterioration of the Japanese economy and society. It arose in the context of a prolonged economic recession and a series of gloomy social incidents, such as an increasing number of brutal murders by teenagers and the nerve gas attacks in the Tokyo railway system by the Aum Supreme Sect. Nostalgia for Asia was no longer just a matter of pleasurably yearning for what Japan had lost; instead, it was now an attempt to regain the energy and vitality Japan had lost by identifying itself with the promising land of 'Asia'.

As a site for spiritual renewal, Bali has been surpassed by more mystical, destitute and chaotic sites in Asia such as Varanasi (India) and Kathmandu. Another dominant trend in Asia-related publications in the mid-1990s was the popularity of books depicting backpackers' experiences in Asia. The origin of this genre can be found in Sawaki Kōtarō's trilogy, Shin'ya Tokkyū ('Midnight Express') (1986a; 1986b; 1992). Sawaki's backpacker travel from Hong Kong to India, Nepal and finally to London
was closely followed in the mid-1990s. TV Asahi produced a documentary-drama from Sawaki’s *Shinya Tokkyû* in 1997 and a photo-journalist Kobayashi Kisci also followed Sawaki’s route in his phenomenally popular travelogue *Asian Japanese* (1995), which quickly sold more than fifty thousand copies (*Aera* 18 November 1996: 35). This photo-travelogue is a non-fiction, pictorial book about young Japanese wandering through Asia, people Kobayashi calls ‘Asian Japanese’. After resigning his job as a photographer for a sports newspaper, Kobayashi went to Asia because he was sick of the media-saturated daily life in Japan and wanted to transform himself. In Asia, he came across many Japanese who, like himself, were searching for their ‘real’ selves through an encounter with life in all its bareness and brutality. Not surprisingly, Kobayashi and his followers are criticised in Japan for indulging in forms of escapism from Japanese society (e.g., Saitô 1997; Sonoda 1997). While Kobayashi (1995) admits this, he asks what is wrong with escapism? Escape, he believes, is a powerful riposte to the deficiencies of Japanese society. A supporter of Kobayashi endorsed his point that, far from constituting an escape, her journey through Asia proved to be highly enlightening, since the life in dirty alleys in Asia taught her how to lead a simpler and more humane life. She likened Asia to a set of parents who had instructed her in the art of living (*Aera* 18 November 1996: 35).¹⁶

This motivation for travel to ‘premodern’ Asia is not new but has been the common

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¹⁵ The Japanese essentialisation of Asian pureness was also parodied in ‘Ajia no Junshin’ (‘Asian innocence’), a Japanese popular song by a female duo, Puffy, which became a phenomenal hit in 1997.

¹⁶ Ironically, Kobayashi’s romanticisation of travelling Asian Japanese was exposed by a TV programme’s commodification of backpackers’ travel. In 1996, an unknown comedian duo, Sarugane-seki, began tracing the same path by hitch-hiking. They had just 100,000 yen at the beginning, and had to find casual jobs and endure fasting and frequently sleeping in the open. All of their trip was documented and broadcast on a variety TV show every week. The audience at first just ridiculed Sarugane-seki’s wretched conditions, but as they saw the duo experience a ‘real’ life through their heart-warming communication with local people, crying over the physical threat and emotional fear they faced and being almost starved to death during the trip, Sarugane-seki became an object of applause and envy. The young audience were jealous of Sarugane-seki in that the duo experienced something substantial in life which could not be experienced in Japan (*Aera*, 18 November 1996: 34-35). They find romanticism in the poor materiality of Asia, enjoy role playing video games without realising that the games can be played only by affluent Japanese.
reason why some Japanese people travel in Asia at least since the 1970s (Nomura 1996). There is surely a positive aspect to this escapism, because it is at least an attempt to take a critical distance from Japan’s highly consumerist capitalist modernity. The problem is that people like Kobayashi are not aware of an Orientalist gaze on Asia which governs their encounter with Asia. Unlike the Western consumption of the non-Western, ‘primitive’ other (Torgovnick 1990), the articulation of Asia as Japan’s chimera is not dissociated from a perceived racial/cultural commonality. Kobayashi (1995: 4-5) writes: ‘I can feel anywhere in Asia to be an extension of Japan. It is something like Japan pulling strings with me. But in Europe or America, I cannot feel as such. Strings are totally cut from Japan’. However, this sense of connection strangely coexists with the rejection of historical coevalness. Kobayashi (1995: 5) continues:

A trip to an advanced Western country makes me feel something familiar to Japan. There is every modern commodity such as television, telephone and the recent pop culture in the West, all of which I already know as information. But when I am in Asia, I realise that there is nothing familiar which I can understand.

Kobayashi finds something strange but somehow familiar both in Asia and Europe, but in very different ways. Japan does not share its past with the West but both are living in the same affluent but boring, digitalised (post)modern age. Asia, in contrast, signifies some primordial commonality with Japan but both are not living in the same time. There is a frozen time-lag between Asia and Japan. Asia is never conceived as an equal interlocutor but only a magic landscape where the Japanese unfulfilled

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17 Kobayashi’s sense of a commonality with Asia is more apparent in his subsequently published Asian Japanese 2 (1996). Kobayashi this time went from Asia to Paris, a place which Kobayashi feels is the most different from Asia. He repeatedly juxtaposed Paris and Asia in binary oppositioning: Paris is where he thinks something through the sophisticatedly established cultural and artistic knowledge, values and materials, while Asia is where modern wisdom is superceded by bodily sensations — all he can do is feel, watch and hear something fundamental to life in a chaotic, dusty alley (Kobayashi 1996: 365-368); Paris is where Asian Japanese can no longer escape while Asian Japanese are allowed to indulge in the search for their real self in the affection and depth of Asia (Kobayashi 1996: 74); Paris makes Kobayashi stand out while he can comfortably ‘dissolve into Asia’ (Morris-Suzuki 1998) due to physical and physical proximity, and the disappearance of a sense of inferiority. In the final instance, however, Paris and Asia converge to Kobayashi’s narcissistic search for self as he is convinced that Asian Japanese, no matter which foreign countries they are in, are travelling away from a homeland called ‘Japan’ (Kobayashi 1996: 373).
search for a ‘true’ self is pursued. For ‘Asian Japanese’ travellers, Asia is a space ‘out there’ to which they can flee whenever they feel suffocated in Japan.

Nostalgia for modernising energy

While the site for transient spiritual renewal has gradually shifted from tourist resorts to backpackers’ penance, there is another significant change regarding the object of Japan’s nostalgia in the mid-1990s. Social and economic crisis and the prevailing pessimistic atmosphere about the future caused people in Japan to turn their attention to the ascendancy of other Asian nations that enjoyed rapid economic growth. It is not simply Japan’s economic development in the past but society’s energy in the present and the hope for the future that Japan nostalgically projects onto modernising Asia. As was represented in a weekly magazine:

> When we [Japanese] walked around Hong Kong and Bangkok, we were really overwhelmed by the energy people were releasing. It was the same kind of raw vigour that Japan once had at the time of high economic growth (Dime 16 September 1993: 19).

While Asia is not conceived as ‘premodern’ here, what Japan endeavours to see is obviously not neighbours inhabiting the same temporality. Rather, it displays ‘the kind of sympathy that identifies with the Other and yet denies him “coevalness”’, which is constitutive of ‘the Orientalising of the Other’ (Dirlik 1991: 406). Good old Japan is to be found in the landscape of the ever-developing Asia. Japan’s Asia is marked out by an immutable temporal and economic lag.

Kobayashi’s capitalist nostalgia for Asia displays a similar twist when he turns his attention to local Asians in Asia Road (1997). When listening to a nineteen-year-old Vietnamese female’s dream of visiting Japan someday, Kobayashi (1997: 172) had a strong yearning for her to utter their dream of the future. He envies Asians for having

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18 Kobayashi’s naïveté over the Japanese nostalgia for Asia is clearly evident in Asian Japanese 2. For instance, he was surprised to hear a Japanese woman living in Vietnam question the Japanese tendency to celebrate Vietnamese economic development; it was an attitude, she remarked, which failed to take into account the social problems this development had brought in its wake. For Kobayashi (1996: 48), her view was one that would never have occurred to a traveller like himself.
a vision of a better future, a belief that tomorrow will be better than today and a hope that Hanoi will be as developed as Tokyo in ten years. Vietnam's modernising vigour became the theme of a Japanese popular TV drama, Doku, which was broadcast in a prime time slot between October and December 1996 and attracted wide audiences.²⁹

Basically, it dealt with the relationship between a Japanese language teacher and her Vietnamese student in Japan. The publicity for the programme included the following catchphrase: 'Asian dreams will come true: She teaches Japanese, he teaches hopes and dreams'. During shooting in Vietnam, the Japanese actor playing the protagonist³⁰ and a producer were reputedly overwhelmed by the energy of the Vietnamese, young and old, who were willing to discuss their dreams (Uno! January 1997: 77). In the first episode's opening scene, the Japanese heroine, who visits Vietnam to see her friend, is impressed and entranced by the liveliness of the Vietnamese; as she admits, their vivacity stands in sharp contrast to the monotonousness of her life in Japan:

I realise how my face is expressionless and dull compared to Vietnamese people. What is the meaning of my life? Am I living this dull life for good? People in Vietnam are somehow marvelous, energetic, forward-looking, never looking back. They never give way to the hardship. Their company makes me feel I can become like them (from the first episode of Doku, broadcast on 17 October 1996).

The vitality of the Vietnamese is at once Japan's vanishing present and desired future. Precisely because they are still not quite modern, Vietnamese are energetic and can afford to dream of a bright future. The social energy of Vietnam as a developing nation is essentialised in frozen time.

The same nostalgia has been deployed in TV commercial films for the oolong tea drink of Suntory which has since 1991 featured a representation of peaceful, pastoral life in not-quite-modern China. A 1997 version, however, represents a fresh, unspoiled image of Chinese female flight attendants. Through scenes of putting on their make-up and preparing for the flight, of their inexperienced working attitude in the sky, and of

²⁹ The ratings were between 15% to 20%, which are well above the average rating of Japanese TV dramas.

³⁰ All the main characters, including the Vietnamese hero, were played by Japanese actors.
wandering through the rapidly changing landscape of Shanghai, the several versions of the film all depict the lively faces of two newly recruited Chinese flight attendants who believe in a good future and whose eyes are shining with hope. The film symbolically features a theme song of an animation series, *Astro Boy* which was popular in Japan in the 1960s. Though translated in Chinese, the lyric, ‘Flying to stars far beyond the sky’ is familiar to many Japanese. A modernising but simpler life in China is represented with a Japanese nostalgia for hope for a brighter future as Japan once had, and perhaps with a wish that China will not make the mistakes Japan has made.

In a well-received film, *Swallowtail Butterfly* (1996), the trope of nostalgia is utilised in relation to Asian immigrants to Japan. This is a fictional tale about Chinese immigrants who are lured to Japan by the prospect of securing a future and who settle in the lawless suburb of a mega-city in Japan, Yen Town. The main motif is the power and the energy of the migrants who do every kind of shady business to acquire yen. The film represents multi-cultural situations within Japan, Chinese, Japanese, English and a fictional migrant language fly back and forth. Yen symbolises the uneven and destructive forces of global capitalism which intensify the widening gap between haves and have-nots, the violence among migrants, Japanese discrimination against them and their sense of despair. In spite of representing multicultural chaos in Japan, what is strikingly absent in the film is any ‘real’ encounter between the Japanese and Asians. The main reason is that the film director is not interested in such realism. Instead, he aims to represent what Japanese have lost through imagined Others. The director, Iwai Shunji stated that:

I often felt that Tokyo has become something like a hospital which offers the resident every sort of service. We can somehow live our lives without demonstrating our inherent instinct for self-defence and surprise. I feel such a situation so suffocating and irritating that I really want to break through it. I simply have a sense of yearning for the power and energy of migrants coming to Japan who abandon their home country or work in a foreign city for their families. I want to produce a story about them (*Kinema Jumpō* no. 1202 1996: 44).
Actually the film is a story about ‘us’, as Iwai’s remark suggests that Yen Town is a kind of amusement park where he could transiently spend a stimulating time. Yen Town is where imagined Others live energetic lives full of dreams as well as frustration, but it exists only for Japanese audiences who can no longer live such a dream. The film starts and finishes with a superimposed title in a sepia scene overlooking Tokyo, ‘Once upon a time, when the Japanese yen was the strongest force in the world . . .’ The futuristic story is marked by a strong sense of nostalgia. Japan’s cultural Others are reduced to consumable signs for Japan’s lost dreamland.

These nostalgic tropes have dominated the representation of the rise of East Asian pop idols in Japanese popular magazines in the mid-1990s. Since the early 1990s, as Japanese cultural industries have extended their activities to other (mainly East) Asian markets, the lively East Asian music scenes have captured wide media attention in Japanese male magazines which introduced a number of Asian female idols. Here, the rise of idol singers in other parts of Asia is also clearly associated with the rise of other Asian countries and the relative decline of Japan in terms of economic power in the early 1990s. One of the most common words for depicting Asian female pop singers in Japanese media texts is that ‘Asia is vigorous (‘genki’):^{21}

Idols emerge where the society has vigour. The sharp contrast between Japan and Asia in terms of idol markets elucidates a decline in the vigour of Japanese economy and society. Like the economy, Asian idols are threatening the predominance of Japanese idol markets (Dime 5 October 1995).

Even if the flourishing of female pop idols is positively interpreted as a sign of the vitality of their societies, the feminised Asian vigour is represented only to reassure Japan’s temporal distance from ‘Asia’. The focus on Asian female idols had much to do with the Japanese music scene in the 1990s. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Japanese idol system culminated in the mid-1980s, but it has been replaced by dance music and band music in the 1990s (Inamasu 1993; Nishino 1996). The void of

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^{21} For the use of the term ‘genki’ in the media representation of Asian pop music, see also Vieux (23 March 1994); DENiM (April 1994, September 1995); Hanako (13 April 1995).
Japanese idols urged Japanese media to interpret the rise of idols in other Asian countries in terms of a retrospective sense of *déjà vu*. Another prevalent trope of Japanese media representation of Asian female pop and idols is *hajimetenanoni natsukashii* (something new in a ‘retro’ kind of way).\(^\text{32}\) A music critic, Uchimoto (1995: 120), writes that one of the main reasons why Japanese are attracted to Asian female singers is that these singers evoke a Japanese sense of longing for vanished Japanese popular songs which he believed still appeal to Japanese emotions. A popular monthly magazine, *Bart* (27 June 1993), features an article on Asian pop music, stating that Japanese popular music has become too West-inflicted to retain an Asian flavour. It refers to ‘Asian melancholy’: ‘Asian female idols sing the sort of “Asian” popular songs that Japan has forgotten’ (*Bart* 27 June 1993: 11). These authors obviously find the past image of Japanese popular music in Asian pop music scenes. As Uchimoto (1995: 120) writes, ‘the vanished Japanese popular music is to be inherited’ by Asian female idols, as if Asia’s present is Japan’s past.

To recapitulate my discussion so far, I have identified two modes of Japanese discourse and representation of Asia and Asian popular culture. One is an attempt of critics and intellectuals to engage with Asian cultural hybridisation on equal terms and to recognise a different mode of Asian modernity, which in turn offers self-critical insights into Japanese modernity and the dominant conception of a Japan/Asia binary. Such an attempt, however, is jeopardised by the tenacious recurrence of misrepresentations of Asia as always ‘behind’. As discussed in Chapter 5, the cultural resonance that Taiwanese audiences find in Japanese TV dramas is based upon a sense of coevalness and the articulation of cultural/racial proximity, the interplay of which is brought about by the disappearance of the economic gap and information time lag between their country and Japan. Japanese representation of Asian popular music and culture

\(^{32}\) This phrase is also used for other commodities which exploits the image of ‘Asia’ such as Japanese alcohol labelled ‘Asian’.  

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displays a rather different time-space configuration. The ever-increasing intra-regional cultural flows within Asia and the narrowing economic gap between Japan and some Asian countries have activated a nostalgic longing for modernised/modernising Asia.

On turning our attention to the consumption of Hong Kong popular culture in Japan, we realise that the picture is more intricate than it at first seems. While the appeal of Hong Kong culture is not fully captured by nostalgic tropes due to its economic strength and advanced cultural production, a nostalgic sentiment is still discernible in the audience consumption of Hong Kong popular culture. However, the Japanese fans’ reception of Hong Kong popular culture shows that the above two views cannot be clearly separated from each other but are commingled in a complex and contradictory way. It is how this time-space nexus is articulated in the Japanese audience reception of Hong Kong popular culture that I examine next.

**Promotion and consumption of fashionable modern Hong Kong**

Along with the nostalgic representation of Asia, another conspicuous trend of Japan’s popular Asianism in the mid-1990s is the heavy promotion of Hong Kong popular culture by Japanese cultural industries (see *Nikkei Entertainment* December 1997). This testifies that the renown of Asian popular culture in Japan is, like the spread of Japanese popular culture in East Asia, in part the result of the promotional strategies of local industries. The Japanese market has joined the intra-regional cultural industry coalition in Asia in promoting contemporary popular culture.

The prevalent sales message for Hong Kong popular culture was significantly different from the nostalgic representation I discussed above. The main strategy of the Japanese media is, rather, to sell ‘modern’ and ‘fashionable’ images of Hong Kong to a public more used to viewing the city as backward and dowdy. An example of a firm that pursued this tactic was Purenon H, a small film distribution company. To improve the image of Hong Kong films, Purenon H organises a Hong Kong film fan club, *Honkon Yamucha Kurabu*, and established a Hong Kong film shop, ‘Cine
City Hong Kong', in a trendy spot in Tokyo, where many young people enjoy window-shopping in a stunning atmosphere (Pacific Friend March 1995: 40). Puro'non H distributed Wong Kar-wai's film Chungking Express in Japan in 1995, which became a phenomenal hit there. It was admired because it was the first Asian movie that refrained from playing upon Hong Kong's alleged exoticism and, instead, made it look like any other major European city (say, Paris) (Edagawa 1997: 135-6). Apart from this quality of the film, the director of Puro'non H has strived to overcome the hitherto dominant image of Hong Kong films such as kung fu and premodernity in publicising it. The company chose the Japanese title, Koisuru Watasei ('A Loving Planet'), totally unrelated to the original title, Chungking Express, from more than two thousand possibilities, so that the film could sound modern and accessible to wider audiences (Nikkei Entertainment December 1997: 53).

The success of Wong Kar-wai's stylish collage films, as well as the lead up to the return of Hong Kong to China in July 1997, further fanned the flames of the interest in 'modern' Hong Kong popular culture in Japan. Japan's biggest cosmetic company, Shiseido, appointed two Hong Kong female actors, Michelle Lee and Kelly Chen, to appear in their commercials. Lee performed in the popular films Fallen Angels and Chinese Ghost Story, while Chen is a rising star. Thus two Hong Kong women are depicted as modern Asian beauties who are neither quite identical with nor totally different from Japanese women (Elle Japon August 1997). Kelly Chen was also chosen as the cover model for a new monthly magazine, Ginza, whose target audience consists of trendy women in their 20s in 1997.

The rise of the Japanese interest in modern Hong Kong culture was not confined to a masculine gaze; on the contrary, women play a leading part in it. Especially keenly-promoted by Japanese cultural industries are Hong Kong male stars such as Jacky Cheung, Andy Lau, Leslie Cheung and Kaneshiro Takeshi, all of whom have performed in Wong Kar-wai's films. Since December 1995, Hong Kong's 'four heavenly gods' have held concerts in Japan and increased their appearances in the
Japanese media.²³ Amuse, a Japanese production company, has contracted several Hong Kong stars such as Kaneshiro Takeshi for media appearances in Japan (Nikkei Trendy June 1997). In 1995 two Asian pop music magazines, *Pop Asia* and *Asi-pop*, were launched in Japan. Both mostly feature pop idols/stars in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Both magazines rapidly increased in sales figures — 20,000 copies for *Asi-pop* and 40,000 for *Pop Asia*, as in early 1998 (Aera 9 March 1998: 52). Although their names suggest that these magazines deal with Asian pop in a comprehensive manner, in fact they focus mostly on Hong Kong and Taiwanese male singers. With *Pop Asia*, this was not always the case. Initially it covered a broader range of Asian pop music, but as its editor told me in an interview, in order to increase its female audience, which constituted more than 85% of its readership, the magazine had to place more emphasis on Hong Kong and Taiwanese male pop stars (see also Aera 9 March 1998: 52).

Correspondingly, women’s magazines have often featured articles on ‘trendy’ Hong Kong male stars since the mid-1990s.²⁴ *Elle Japon*, for example, had two feature articles about Asian male stars in 1997. One appeared in June 1997, just before the return of Hong Kong to China. The other, published in November 1997, was titled ‘Sexy Asian guys’. Although also dealing with stars from Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, the article focused on Hong Kong film stars whose attraction is admired:

Gallant, sexy and with a sensitivity so delicate as to appeal to the maternal instinct . . . Asian stars have all these factors of a seductive guy. They attract attention not only in Asia but all over the world, because they attain an overwhelming aura of stardom and vigour (*Elle Japon* November 1997: 89).

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Japanese women who are quite sensitive to the new trend are now sensing male sexiness in Asian guys. Their sexiness is something Japanese guys do not have. Asian guys are becoming more and more stunning and beautiful with the economic development in the region (Elle Japon November 1997, 95).

These representations in Elle Japon clearly show an apparent shift in Japanese attention from Southeast Asia to East Asia. A feature article on Asia in a 1994 issue of another women’s magazine, Crea (November 1994), for example, carried a pictorial of attractive boys in Bali and Phuket. These boys were associated with the natural beauty of Bali and Phuket with phrases such as ‘eyes with purity and tenderness’, ‘calmly conversing with nature’ and ‘their pure heart undisturbed by urban city noise’. Likewise, Elle Japon also depicted Asian charm as ‘simple and supple, power articulated in chaos’ in its feature article on Asian culture in 1994 (5 March 1994). However, such capitalist nostalgia disappears in the 1997 Elle Japon articles. It clearly stresses that ‘modern Asian (Hong Kong) guys’ mark a new trend.

In the course of my research in Japan, I discovered that the Japanese promotion of Hong Kong popular culture has left its twisted mark on the way in which that culture is consumed by Japanese. The emerging depictions of Hong Kong as ‘modern’ and ‘trendy’ have endowed it in the eyes of many with great novelty value. Several fans overtly or covertly informed me that their interest in Hong Kong films and stars was motivated in part by a desire to prove their modish and sophisticated tastes. In this regard, it is worth noting that while Wong Kar-wai’s movies attract a relatively wide audience, the avid consumption of Hong Kong popular culture is still confined to a small community of aficionados. In Japan, the media began seriously covering Hong Kong stars only comparatively recently. Access to Hong Kong films and information

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25 In the early 1990s, Japanese women’s fascination with ‘pure’ beach boys in Southeast Asia attracted media attention. They are often described in a derogatory way as women’s equivalent of Japanese ‘sex tourism’. However, it was not just a pick-up-a-man phenomenon. Attracted to the life there, many women actually migrated to Bali by marriage (see Yamashita 1996; Across November 1994; Asahi Shimbun 19 August 1994; Arena 17 June 1996).

26 I conducted informal depth interviews with 24 Japanese female ‘fans’ (age ranging from early 20s to 50s) of Hong Kong films and pop music singers in Tokyo from mid-January to late February in 1997 and from mid-March to late April 1998. See further Appendix A.
about their actors is still not readily available. Hence joining fan clubs is an essential
means of obtaining such access and, equally importantly, of publicly acknowledging
that one is a devotee of Hong Kong and Taiwanese movies and stars.27

This partly explains why the average age of Japanese female fans of Hong Kong
films and stars is relatively high. Most fans I observed in Japan are in their late 20s
and 30s, and some are even in their 50s (see also Hara 1996; Adachi 1998). The
relatively high average age might be mainly due to the fact that Hong Kong stars are
in their 30s while the target audience of the Japanese idol system is predominantly in
their teens and low 20s. It has also something to do with the cost of money and the
effort required to collect information, as fans have to join several fan clubs and go
frequently to a small number of shops which deal with Hong Kong pop culture
(Adachi 1998).

I observed that like the Taiwanese audience of Japanese dramas, Japanese fans are
keen to talk about the films and stars and harbour a passion for them. As Jenkins
(1992: 23) argues, it is this identification with a fan community that gives them the
pleasure in discovering that they are not “alone”:

These fans often draw strength and courage from their ability to identify
themselves as members of a group of other fans who shared common
interests and confronted common problems. To speak as a fan is to accept
what has been labelled a subordinate position within the cultural hierarchy,
to accept an identity constantly belittled or criticised by institutional
authorities. Yet it is also to speak from a position of collective identity, to
forge an alliance with a community of others in defence of tastes which,
as a result, cannot be read as totally aberrant or idiosyncratic.

Like the fan culture depicted by Jenkins, the social communication among fans plays
an important role in the Japanese fan community of Hong Kong stars. Most fans I
interviewed mentioned that their friends and colleagues tended to regard their fondness
for Hong Kong pop stars as strange. As Hong Kong popular culture is still excluded

27 There are many fan clubs of Hong Kong and Taiwan stars and of Hong Kong film and music
lovers. The far largest one is a fan club of Hong Kong films, Honkou Yumichu Kurabu, which has
more than 12,000 members (Adachi 1998: 5). Other large fan clubs are Leslie Cheung’s (about 900
members), Leon Lai’s Leon Family (about 800 members), Jacky Cheung’s (about 500 members) and
Aaron Kwok’s (about 480 members) (see Pop Asia 1998: 72-74).

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from the mainstream in Japan and most interviewees told me about their experiences of the difficulty of sharing their interest in Hong Kong stars with their friends, constituting a community of taste is thus an important part of its Japanese fandom.

However, this does not mean that these Japanese fans think they are marginalised, as Jenkins suggests about Star Trek fans in the United States. It is an open question if there is a cultural difference involved in this, but Jenkins’s somewhat romanticised view of the solidarity and creativity of subordinated fan communities does not fit the Japanese fans of Hong Kong stars. What is apparent with Japanese fans is that they tend to pride themselves on the appreciation of a not-quite mainstream Hong Kong and Asian popular culture. Furthermore, the development of media technologies, the internet in particular, and the proliferation of media products has expanded the various kinds of segmented consumer niche markets. While Thompson’s (1995: 222) argument regarding these developments of media consumption that ‘being a fan is an altogether ordinary routine aspect of everyday life’ seems too sweeping a generalisation, it cannot be denied that fans commonly try to play up the idiosyncrasy of their taste to be differentiated from the mainstream. As Fiske (1992: 33) argues: ‘Fandom offers ways of filling cultural lack and provides the social prestige and self-esteem that go with cultural capital’. The consumption of Hong Kong popular culture confers social and cultural distinction on them (Bourdieu 1984). For some fans, Asian popular culture is a resource from which they can obtain cultural capital.

This point is made clearer when we realise that Japanese fans tend to have an ambivalent feeling about the popularisation of Hong Kong stars. On the one hand, they want other Japanese to know how attractive Hong Kong stars are. They want to show off their good taste to the mainstream. On the other, they also wish the object of their fascination to remain the best kept secret in Japan. Apparently, the latter

28 As I mentioned in chapter 3, otaku who are fanatic nerds of media products such as animations, videos and computer games were the object of severe criticism in Japan, because the word was associated with a series of brutal murders of preschool girls by a video nerd in 1989. But this case seems exceptional and Japanese society seems more tolerant to fan culture, as long as it does not do substantial harm to society. See Okada (1996), Ōsawa (1992).
reflects their discontent with the way in which Japanese entertainment industries manufacture disposable fame. As Hong Kong stars are commercialised by Japanese cultural industries, some fans are afraid that their ‘real’ attraction will be deformed and frivolously consumed. A female in her late 20s who is a fan of a Taiwanese star, Kaneshiro Takeshi, expressed in my interview with her a sense of disappointment over a collection of his photographs which was published in 1997:

Kaneshiro in this book looks stylish, but that’s all. I like him because he looks at once dazed and sturdy, but these characteristic are totally lost in those pictures. I think Japanese publishing companies made Kaneshiro a cheap commodity without understanding his real charm.

Although the above reveals my interviewee’s anxiety over the possibility that Kaneshiro may become another garish, throwaway commodity, she was also mortified by the fact that her keen interest in him was shared by vulgar teenagers. She told me that she was upset that Olive (3 July 1997), a popular teenage magazine, had run a feature story on him, and that another magazine had elected him as the fourth most popular male idol amongst its readers. Betraying a sense of elitism, she remarked that: ‘Kaneshiro should not have been covered in Olive. Its readers are mostly high school students. They are too young to appreciate his real charm. They wrongly regard Kaneshiro among other Japanese idols’. My interviewee’s conceit was based on the relative scarcity of exposure which Hong Kong and Taiwanese stars and films receive and the minority of fans who follow them. A common comment made by my interviewees was that they were proud to have known of a particular performer before he became famous. A woman in her early 20s who enjoys Asian pop expressed the point succinctly:

My interest in Hong Kong pop and Asian pop in general has not much to do with sympathy. I think I am more motivated by a desire to create my own world which is different from something given by the mass media. I tend to feel that I am losing my own individuality in standardised Japanese society. So I need to be absorbed in something minor, I mean, something others are not following, so that I can maintain my own individuality.

It is thus a sense of one’s precious uniqueness, a knowledge of one’s individuality, that justifies all the effort involved in being a serious fan of Asian popular culture.
Indeed, the arduousness of a fan's calling — the information that must be collected, the fan clubs that must be established and maintained, the media texts that must be sought after outside the mainstream Japanese media — only enhances the pleasure of these self-styled sophisticates who wish to differentiate themselves from the cultural 'dupes' of the mass media.

The truth is, however, that the former are closer to such 'dupes' than they care to admit. As noted earlier, it was in part the return of Hong Kong to China on 1 July 1997 that motivated some people to take an interest in its popular culture. This is obvious from the fact that most fans first began following Hong Kong films and stars around 1995, following the intensive promotion of these products in the media (Adachi 1998: 16-22). This media coverage has bolstered the confidence of fans in their taste and judgement, as it gives them the sense that they are at the vanguard of the latest trends. As a woman in her late 20s told me, 'I felt I am going ahead of others by appreciating the unknown Hong Kong stars as Hong Kong is now attracting much media attention'. For all their attempts, then, to distance themselves from 'mindless' consumers of the mainstream media, the interests of such fans have themselves been shaped to an extent by that media.

**Reflexive nostalgia for a different Asian modernity**

However, the Japanese fascination with Hong Kong popular culture is more than the familiar story of a freak subculture attempting to carve out a distinctive place for itself in a media-saturated society. Japanese media industries’ promotional strategy stressing the stunning contemporaneity of Hong Kong popular culture apparently generates interest among novelty-hunting people. Nevertheless, relatively mature-aged Japanese female fans often explain the attraction of Hong Kong idols by referring to the hey day of Japanese entertainment worlds which they enjoyed in their teens or early 20s. Here, in spite of the gendered inversion of the Japanese consumption of Asian popular culture, we can see that the female following of Hong Kong male stars
still shares a nostalgic orientation towards them.

This contradictory posture is hinted at in the aforementioned representation of Hong Kong male stars in *Elle Japon* (November 1997). In the article, the emphasis is seemingly placed, not on temporal distance, but on modern contemporaneousness. Nevertheless, the 'modern-ness' of Hong Kong is still marked by a sense of 'not-quite'. As described in *Elle Japon* (November 1997: 95), 'Japanese women are sick of Japanese men, who have become too effeminate to attain strong masculinity'. Together with the emphasis on economic development as the main cause for the emergence of sexy Asian guys, this suggests Japan's loss. The representation of Asian male stars by women's magazines projected what Japanese masculinity has given up in the course of Japan's high economic development onto a modern yet still behind-the-times Hong Kong male stars and media texts.

Such a contradictory nostalgic longing for 'modern' Hong Kong stars can be discerned in my interviews with Japanese female fans. On the one hand, Hong Kong stars satisfy their appetite for recuperating the lost stardom of Japanese performers. The most common response to a question about the attraction of Hong Kong stars during my interviews is their charismatic aura of stardom. According to them, Hong Kong stars are professional in a full sense as they are well trained to sing and act, always wearing the mask of stardom and extremely skillful at entertaining the audience. Their sincere and friendly attitude toward fans is also interpreted as an aspect of true stardom, as it shows their willingness to value fans. These two aspects, the aura of stars and the friendliness are regarded as two sides of the same coin. In contrast, Japanese idols look too casual to be identified as stars but are not at all friendly as Japanese management offices are very fussy about protecting their commodities from direct contact with anonymous fans. These criticisms are thus, again, directed to the way Japanese cultural industries manufacture idols and entertainments. As I argued in Chapter 4, the main difference between idols and stars is the perceived sense of intimacy and proximity. The strategy of producing pop icons with a 'boy-next-door'
image obviously works against the preferences of female fans who have reached their late 20s or 30s. As they mature, they come to find Japanese idols too superficial and artificial.

The aura of stardom is what Japanese idols used to attain, at least until the mid-1980s. A female fan in her mid-30s told me that she became fascinated with Hong Kong male stars around 1990. This was a time when her generation who were then in their late 20s no longer found Japanese popular music and idols appealing. She was then excited to find in Hong Kong a similar world of pop music idols which, in her experience, existed in Japan in the 1980s. As the organiser of the Japanese fan club of Leon Lai put it in an interview with me, ‘Hong Kong stars reminds us of a half-forgotten longing for heroes of our generation’. Hamaoka (1997: 63) in her essay in a popular weekly magazine describes the image of Japan’s lost idols as follows: ‘Not very radical music style as now; the existence of idols who unashamedly maintained their own narcissistic world; and who never betrayed the idealised image fans had of them, looking intimate at the same time’. The adolescent memory of a glittering Japanese entertainment world is apparently evoked by Hong Kong stars today (see also Hara 1996; Murata 1996).

The nostalgic yearning for Hong Kong popular culture is also being fuelled by a deep sense of disillusionment and discontent with Japanese society as well as the entertainment business. The attraction of the aforesaid films and performers, again, tends to be linked to the loss of energy and power of Japanese society in general, as women in their late 20s and late 30s told me:

Japanese TV dramas do not have dreams or passions. I sometimes enjoy watching them, but still feel [compared with Hong Kong actors] Japanese young actors lack a basic power and hunger for life.

Wong Kar-wai’s films always tell me how human beings are wonderful creatures and how love and affection for others are important for us to live. All of those are, I think, what Japan has lost and forgotten.

Through the consumption of ‘cosmopolitan’ Hong Kong popular culture, Japanese fans feel like regaining the vigour and hope they have lost in their daily lives, as two
interviewees in their mid-20s and late 30s remarked:

I think people in Hong Kong really have a positive attitude to life. My image is that even if they know they are dying soon, they would not be pessimistic. This is in sharp contrast to present-day Japan. I can become vigorous when watching Hong Kong films and pop stars on video. Hong Kong and its films are the source of my vitality.

Leslie Cheung makes me realise my virtue, something I forgot and gave up. I can get energy and courage to do what I could do in my 20s through Leslie.

These associations of present-day Hong Kong with Japan’s loss, it can be argued, still testify to Japan’s refusal to consider other Asian nations as dwelling in the same temporality. However, as I listened carefully to these fans, I came to think that the sense of longing for vanished popular cultural styles and social vigour does not exclusively attest to the perception of a time lag. It also displays the Japanese fans’ appreciation for the difference between Japanese and Hong Kong cultural modernity. Here, we can see an ambivalence in Japan’s nostalgia for a different Asian modernity: the conflation of a nostalgic longing for ‘what Japan has lost’ and a longing for ‘what Japanese modernity has never achieved’. What matters is Japan’s lack as well as Japan’s loss.

Most interviewees told me that they, like Taiwanese audiences of Japanese TV dramas, can more easily relate to Hong Kong stars and films than to Western ones due to perceived cultural and physical similarities. Western popular culture looks too remote from their everyday lives. However, unlike Taiwanese audiences of Japanese TV dramas, the sense of cultural and racial proximity tends to strengthen the Japanese fans’ perception of cultural difference between Japan and Hong Kong. What is crucial here is that such perception is facilitated by a recognition of the disappearance of temporal distance between Japan and Hong Kong. As a female in her late 20s told me:

I think that Hong Kong films are powerful and energetic. Hong Kong is apparently similar to Japan in terms of physical appearances, but I realised that its culture is actually completely different from us. [This is clearly shown by the fact that] Hong Kong has also achieved a high economic development, but still retains the vitality that Japan has lost.
Although acknowledging Japanese economic superiority to Hong Kong, this Japanese female fan does not assume that Hong Kong is also losing something important, becoming like ‘us’, precisely because Hong Kong has already achieved the same degree of economic growth and modernisation as ‘ours’.

Thus, what sets Hong Kong apart is neither solely attributed to some primordial cultural difference nor to some developmental difference. Rather, the difference between Hong Kong and Japan has become evident in the course of modernisation, especially in the way in which Western cultural influence is negotiated. A commercial film producer, Higuchi (1997), has argued that recent interest in Hong Kong and its popular culture reflects the increasing numbers of young people who sense a resonance between Japan and Hong Kong in terms of ‘the aesthetics of cultural borrowing’. However, what Japanese fans positively find in Hong Kong popular culture is, I suggest, rather, a different mode of Asian modernity, which antithetically demonstrates that something went wrong with the process of Japan’s modernisation. And this is closely related to the wholesale way in which Japan has absorbed Western culture.

As a women in her late 20s observed:

I think Japan is looking to the West too much. Many people in Japan look down on Asia, but this does not match the reality. Japan has been too influenced by the West to retain its own way, but Hong Kong still has its own style and system. In this sense, Hong Kong is culturally superior.

Like Dick Lee’s music, Hong Kong’s indigenised modernity has resisted the erasure of its ‘Asian odour’, while Japan has neither retained its own odour nor become truly ‘Western’. Japan has simply kept up its modern appearance, according to an early 30s informant: ‘In Hong Kong and perhaps in Taiwan as well, things traditional and modern subtly coexist even after they achieved high economic growth. Japan has thrown away the good old things so much so that everything looks merely quasi-Western’.

The Japanese mode of cultural absorption of Western culture is thought to have promoted the insularity of its society and culture. Hong Kong, in contrast, is very
cosmopolitan and the market for Hong Kong stars is really pan-Asian. A woman in her late 20s remarked:

I do not think Japan is superior to Hong Kong. On the contrary. In Hong Kong, East and West coexist without melding with each other. Japan in contrast absorbed and indigenised Western cultures at its convenience. As a result, Japanese culture has become closed and lost a meeting point with other cultures. I am very wary of this. It seems that Japan has come to a kind of dead-end situation and has no further possibility.

Like the criticism uttered by Japanese cultural producers and academics (Chapter 4), Japan’s cultural modernity is considered by Japanese fans of Hong Kong popular culture not to match that of Hong Kong’s, because Japan has been reluctant to link itself to the outside world. In contrast, Hong Kong, as a former British colony, has always, though forcibly, been in touch with the outside world.

It is thus the perceived crisis in their national identity that underlies Japanese fans' determination to transcend the narrow-minded life of a self-contained society and to become more cosmopolitan and connected to the larger world by consuming Hong Kong pop culture. Thus an introspective apprehension of Japan’s relations with other Asian nations is not just expressed by Japanese critics. It is also experienced by ‘ordinary’ consumers of Hong Kong popular culture. ‘Hong Kong’ presents Japanese female fans with an opportunity to realise that the idea of Japan being superior to Hong Kong is not just politically incorrect but also emotionally and culturally untrue.

Here, I suggest that a sense of coevalness perceived by Japanese fans towards Hong Kong finds its expression in the critical reflection on Japanese cultural modernity and accompanied efforts of self-transformation. This posture displays what Thompson (1995: 175) calls ‘the accentuation of symbolic distancing from the spatial-temporal contexts of everyday life’ in the media-saturated age. The abundance of information, ideas and images of other cultures and nations urges one to take a healthy, reflective distance from one’s own life, culture and society (see also Appadurai 1996). A working woman in her early 30s expressed how she had been transformed by Hong Kong popular culture:
Of course I cannot one hundred percent devote myself to Hong Kong. I simply observe myself consuming Hong Kong stars and films. I know I am looking for something I cannot get in my boring company life [through fictional, dreamlike worlds of Hong Kong stars and films]. But, by so doing, I have become more positive than before. I am now more interested in knowing about the language, history and Japanese prejudice against Hong Kong. My view of Japan has also changed a lot. I realise how we, Japanese, are short-sighted and that our affluence has been achieved at the expense of so many important things of life.

Japanese fans, unlike Japanese women who have ‘real’ contacts with Asian men and immigrate to other Asian nations via international marriage (Yamashita 1996; Nomura 1996), might neither wish to transform their lives by leaving Japan or encountering cultural others (males) in real situations. Nevertheless, their exposure to Hong Kong popular culture has encouraged at least some of these women to become more critically aware of Japan’s modern experiences and imperialist history. An accompanied self-reflexive praxis thus marks out their appreciation of the different cultural modernity of Hong Kong.

**Capitalist coevalness in East Asia**

The Japanese representation and consumption of ‘Asia’ in the 1990s shows that many Japanese are attempting to recuperate something they think their country allegedly either is losing or has lost. Whether Japan ever had the social vigour projected on Asian popular culture is highly debatable — and ultimately irrelevant. As many have pointed out, the object of nostalgia is not necessarily some ‘real’ past — the things that used to be (see Davis 1977; Stewart 1993).\(^\text{29}\) The important point here is that nostalgia arises out of a sense of insecurity and anguish in the present.

In the face of rapid modernisation and globalisation, nostalgia has played a significant

\(^{29}\) Stewart (1993: 26) argues: ‘Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.’ That the director of *Swallowtail Butterfly* is conscious of this is evident from his comments on certain scenes he saw in Shanghai, where people are cooking outdoors while chatting with their neighbours: ‘I am not sure if I really experienced the same thing as a child, but I somehow felt nostalgic for the scene ... [cooking outside] has little to do with vitality, but the scene might be associated with my faint memory of a vulgar and energetic Japan on the path of high economic growth’ (Iwai 1997: 6).
role in the imagining of Japan’s cultural authenticity and identity. These processes have intensified the country’s cultural encounters with the West, and these, in turn, have generated a nostalgic desire in Japan, ‘a longing for a pre-modernity, a time before the West, before the catastrophic imprint of westernisation’ (Ivy 1995: 241). A similar longing for the purity and authenticity of primordial life underpins Japanese media representations of, and backpacking trips to, ‘premodern’ Asia. However, in the Japanese reception of Hong Kong popular culture, nostalgia is projected onto a more recent past, not before but after the West, or, more precisely, one in conjunction with the West. This nostalgia for a modern Asia is not fed by a nationalistic impulse to get rid of Western influence or to recuperate an ‘authentic’ Japan. Rather, the issue at stake is how to live with Western-induced capitalist modernity, how to make life in actual, modern Japan more promising and humane.

This sense of urgency explains, if partly, why the object of nostalgia is directed to Asia’s present. Japan’s newly imagined ‘Asia’ serves as a contraposition to their own society — one which is commonly regarded as suffocating, closed and rigidly structured as well as worn down by a pessimism about the future, instilled by a prolonged economic recession. Here, ‘Asia’ is not simply idealised as the way things were in Japan. Some people in Japan also appreciate it, for the purpose of self-reformation, as representing an alternative, more uplifting cultural modernity.

I have tried to show the ambivalence of Japanese consumption of ‘Asia’ by identifying such a self-reflexive mode of nostalgia. Nevertheless, I would like to conclude this chapter by saying that Japan’s appreciation of Hong Kong modernity is always at the risk of the simultaneous reproduction of tamed cultural others. Murai’s (1990) observation concerning the ‘Asia boom’ in late 1980s Japan still holds true here; a Japanese consumerist gaze on Asia is lured by Asian exoticism and is not concerned with the asymmetrical relations between Japan and other Asian countries.

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80 Such nostalgic search for ‘authentic’ Japan has been relentlessly provoked by domestic tourism (e.g., Robertson 1990b; Ivy 1995; Creighton 1997; Graham 1983).
Kelsky (1996: 187) argues, concerning Japanese women who seek out foreign (American) male lovers, that their border-transgressing penchant might have demolished the reigning stereotype of the submissive Japanese woman; nevertheless, it at the same time reinscribes a clearly drawn boundary between the Japanese and others, for such women ‘transform the foreigner into a signifier whose primary purpose is to further their domestic agendas’. This point is illustrated by the Japanese female fans’ mediated consumption of Hong Kong stars. Even if the nostalgic gaze on Hong Kong might be replaced by the realisation that ‘they’ are just as modern as ‘us’ in a different way, it cannot be denied that they reduce Hong Kong to a convenient and desirable Asian other. In her book On Longing, Stewart (1993: 146–7) argues that the souvenir collection generates a sense of temporal (antique) and spatial (exotic) longing for authenticity. Similarly, ‘Hong Kong’ is easily rendered other, an other which is, like the souvenir, located spatially and temporally ‘within an intimate distance’, so that Japanese can ‘appropriate, consume, and thereby “tame” it for the narcissistic search for self (Stewart 1993: 146–7).

The admiration for Hong Kong in terms of its subtle juxtaposition of East and West has, like the view on Chinese leap development I discussed earlier, much in common with the Western stereotypical image of the chaotic vulgarity of East Asian (mainly Japanese) cities which have been represented since the 1980s in Hollywood futuristic films such as Blade Runner, Neuromancer and Black Rain. These Western films represented the chaotic coexistence of West and East, high-tech landscapes and premodern, traditional and vulgar lives, in an Orientalist fashion (Yoshimoto 1989). Likewise, the animation director, Oshii Mamoru, in producing a futuristic animation, The Ghost in the Shell, changed the location from Tokyo in the original comic version to Hong Kong in order to depict a futuristic cyber-city where the traditional and the high-modern disjunctively coexist (Oshii et al. 1996). More recently a computer game, Kowloon’s Gate, represented Hong Kong as a modern but chaotic space where rationality and irrationality are fused together as the distinctions between good and
bad, reality and fantasy are blurred (Asahi Shinbun 6 May 1997). According to the
game creator (Asahi Shinbun 25 February 1997), Hong Kong is a model for modern
Japan that is neither Asia nor the West while at the same time embodying both.
Japanese modernity has been so keen to keep the social order that it has institutionalised
and tamed the chaotic co-existence of the rational and the irrational, but Hong Kong
has the possibility of producing something totally new out of such chaos. It is untenable
to ignore the existence of an Orientalist imagination behind such an idealised image
of Hong Kong.

Furthermore, while showing the possibility of transcending Japan’s denial of
equality with Hong Kong, the Japanese appreciation of Hong Kong cultural
modernity at the same time reproduces a ‘backward’ Asia. Being critical of the
Japanese mode of negotiation with the West nonetheless affirms Western-dominated
capitalist modernity. As Morris-Suzuki (1998: 20) argues, the new Asianism in Japan
‘no longer implies rejection of material wealth and economic success, but rather
represents a yearning for a wealth and success which will be somehow different’
(emphasis in original). The fans’ armchair engagement with ‘Hong Kong’ modernity
depends crucially on its imagined capitalist ‘sophistication’ as opposed to the lack
thereof in ‘Asia’. Many Japanese fans of Hong Kong popular culture emphasise the
difference between ‘Hong Kong’ and ‘Asia’. They rejected the dominant media’s
tendency to use the term ‘Asia’ to refer to Hong Kong male stars. This, on the one
hand, looks a promising corrective to the Japanese propensity to construct an abstract,
totalising conception of ‘Asia’. However, the demarcation between Hong Kong and
Asia is imperative for many fans, as the latter is predominantly associated with the
image of backwardness (see also Adachi 1998). I have often heard in my interviews
the remark that premodern China would corrupt Hong Kong’s charm:

31 For example, Nikkei Entertainment (December 1997) had a feature article on ‘how to become
addicted to Asia’. The article predominantly dealt with Hong Kong and Taiwanese popular culture
and idols, but the magazine uses the term ‘Asia’ rather than ‘Hong Kong’ or ‘Chinese’. The same is
true with the article in Elle Japan (November 1997).
I am afraid that Hong Kong might be more Sinicised after the return to China. Hong Kong is losing a liberal atmosphere of 'anything goes' by political self-restriction and is influenced by more traditional mainland Chinese culture which is definitely old-fashioned.

The British presence has made Hong Kong sophisticated and something special. But I think Hong Kong is becoming dirtier and losing its vigour after its return to China.

China is threatening to destroy the cosmopolitan attraction of Hong Kong not only because of its rigid communist policy, as pointed out by Japanese commentators (e.g., Edagawa 1997), but because of its 'premodern' Chineseness. The imagining of a modern, intimate Asian fellow is still based upon the reconstruction of an oriental Orientalism. As observed in the depiction of Asian male stars in Elle Japan, 'Asian guys are becoming more and more stunning and beautiful with economic development in the region'. A certain degree of economic development is thus a minimum condition for other Asian cultures to enter 'our' realm of modernity. 'Premodern' Asia never occupies a coeval space with capitalist Asia but represents a place and a time that some Japanese fans of Hong Kong popular culture have no desire to consume.
Concluding remarks:
Japan's Asian Dreamworld

In the thesis, I have explored various aspects of transnational popular cultural flows — intellectual discourses, marketing strategies and audience consumption — through which Japan's conception of being 'in but above' or 'similar but superior' to Asia is asserted, displaced and re-articulated. Regarding Japan's cultural return to Asia in the 1990s, one cannot help but be struck by its multi-faceted and contradictory dimensions. However, these dimensions have been obscured by a historically constructed taxonomy of binary oppositions between 'Asia' and 'Japan' — with 'the West' as a powerful third Other — which still strongly curbs the Japanese transnational imagination. Various discursive tropes — both positive and negative, self-congratulating and self-critical, unequivocal and ambivalent — have been employed by Japanese observers in assertions of Japan's transnational cultural significance and in expressions of its (asymmetrical) relationships with other Asian nations. Nevertheless, they all ultimately tend to be contained by an all-absorbing idea of 'Asia', only to provide further momentum for discussing the issue in binary terms.

It is all too tempting to dismiss Japan's totalising conception of Asia with the theoretical consideration that 'Asia' is only a discursive construct, devoid of any substance or coherence, and that therefore there is no Asia. Yet to do so would be beside the point, for the issue at stake here is not the appositeness of the term 'Asia'. If we recognise the impossibility of talking about Asia in a generalised manner in the first place, what we should attend to then is why Japan's psychic investment in imagining 'Asia' has been re-articulated in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The reason might be readily sought in the resurgence of the idea of the super-national cultural/civilisational regional bloc in the 1990s. Admittedly, the newly articulated

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1 I thank Christine Yano for suggesting this term in co-organising a panel for the 1999 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Boston. I am also inspired by an insightful comment, made by Marilyn Ivy.
Japanese interest in Asia still has much to do with perceived cultural and racial commonalities, age-old historical connections and geographical proximity. Nevertheless, commercialised transnational cultural flows are this time playing a significant role in the demarcation of the cultural boundaries — albeit porous and transient — of Japan’s Asia. While conservative theorists are busy essentialising civilisational blocs as the largest cultural entities in the world (Huntington 1993), the capitalisation on the sense of cultural immediacy and proximity in the formation of supra-national regional popular cultural markets has made the articulation of the concrete geographical reach of Japan’s Asia not quite congruous with that based on traditional cultural/civilisational commonalities.

There is a clear tendency discussed in this thesis that as the traditional high cultures of Asia have been replaced by a capitalist consumer culture (Ching 1999), Japan’s Asia is gradually shrinking in its reach of transcultural resonance and imagination. The pan-Asianism of Okakura Tenshin, in which Asia was defined by its non-Westernness, included Arab chivalry, Persian poetry and Indian thought (though Japan’s actual imperial expansion was restricted to East and Southeast Asia), but by the early 1990s it encompassed only Southeast and East Asia. Furthermore, by the late 1990s, it tended to embrace only East Asia: Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. This grouping of East Asian nations would easily provoke assertions of primordial cultural commonality (for example, a shared Chinese cultural legacy). However, the relatively minor role China plays in the intensified East Asian popular cultural flow — though China’s weight has been articulated in terms of its huge market size — highlights the significance of the penetration of West-dominated global capitalist culture in the spatial demarcation and formation of transnational regional modernity in the 1990s. In light of that culture’s pervasiveness, it has become untenable to continue regarding the West as the object of othering, against which a totalising idea of Asia can be advocated. With the spread of capitalist modernity, the West is now everywhere.
In this emerging Asian capitalist sphere, Japan’s exploitative articulation of Asian cultural commonality has been reframed to accommodate itself to the disjunctive transnational flows of capital, cultural products and imagination (Appadurai 1996). In the 1990s, a singular cultural geography called Asia, with its rich diversity and contradictions, has emerged for Japan as a ‘dreamworld’ in which Japanese can imagine things in the way they want them to be. It was Walter Benjamin who coined the term ‘dreamworld’ in the 1930s to describe the emergent sites which stirred capitalist consumer desire such as department stores and arcades. As Featherstone (1991: 23) remarks, ‘[t]he vast phantasmagoria of commodities on display, constantly renewed as part of the capitalist and modernist drive for novelty, was the source of dream images which summoned up associations and half-forgotten illusions’. Likewise, in the 1990s ‘Asia’ has served to fuel Japan’s imagination of a phantasmagoric capitalist dreamworld, one which transcends (if only temporarily) the contradictions and limitations of containing intensified transnational flows within a nationalist framework.

Spectacular capitalist development and the ever-changing urban landscapes in Asia have exhilarated the Japanese capitalist desire for Asia in multiple ways. For conservative thinkers, capitalist modernising Asia is a site where Japan’s long-standing nationalist project for extending its cultural reach to a pan-Asian sphere has been re-activated. In this case, Japanese capitalist consumer culture has not simply offered a sense of nationalistic pride; it has also played a diplomatic role in healing the wounds inflicted on Asia by Japan’s imperialist history. For Japanese cultural industries, Asia has offered a business opportunity for the trying out of the transnational reach of Japanese popular cultural production methods. It has stimulated an unfulfilled fantasy of Japanese cultural industries that a trans-Asian — and possibly global — pop star will one day emerge from the region through Japanese initiative. Finally, Japanese audiences have been attracted to various sorts of Asian popular culture, which inspire nostalgia for the hey day of Japanese capitalist development. As the
exploitative transnational dynamics of the cultural and capital flows has moved from the Japanese archipelago to other parts of Asia, Asia has come to remind some people in Japan of a half-forgotten social vigour and hope.

All of these indicate that Japan’s Asian dreamworld is a product of globalising forces, which have made it no longer tenable for Japan to contain its cultural orientation and agendas within clearly demarcated national boundaries. In this sense, Japan’s ‘return to Asia’ project demonstrates that transnational popular cultural flows at once displace and re-demarcate national/cultural boundaries. The transgressive tendency of popular culture has been facilitated by the development of communication technologies and the integration of cultural markets. Such developments have not only intensified the instantaneous global circulation of ideas, images and commodities, but also drastically promoted the global cross-fertilisation of popular cultural forms, to the extent that the identification of the original source of cultural forms becomes impossible and irrelevant (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Lull 1995). Nevertheless, this boundary-violating impulse of cultural hybridisation is never free from nationalising force. As Tomlinson (1991: 54) argues, referring to Barthes’ discussion of ‘myth’, any claims to universality ‘nearly almost relate to some project of domination’. The Japanese articulation of a dreamworld Asia is no exception. The growing Japanese interest in its cultural export tends to be informed predominantly by nationalistic concerns; that is, to articulate a distinct ‘Japaneseeness’ in popular cultural forms, to raise Japan’s position in Asia and to (re)assert Japan’s cultural superiority.

It is important to note that the resurfacing of Japan’s nationalistic project to extend its cultural horizon to East and Southeast Asia is not simply discursive or ideological. It is structurally backed by a general increase in Japan’s transnational cultural presence and influence under the de-centring forces of cultural globalisation. Tomlinson (1997) enumerates three reasons why we should reframe the issues posed by the ‘cultural imperialism’ thesis with a de-centred perspective of globalisation. They are the question of the impact and the ubiquity of Western cultural products in the world; the dialectic
nexus between global and local in terms of ongoing cultural hybridisation; and the de-centring process of Western cultural hegemony. The ascent of Japanese media industries in the process of media globalisation seems to be a testimony to all three. The increasing flow of Japanese TV programmes into other Asian markets refutes the unambiguous power of Western cultural products in the world; the localisation strategies of Japanese cultural industries are grounded upon the exploitation of global-local dynamics; the global circulation of Japanese animations and the involvement of Japanese corporations in global media conglomerates show the diffusion of cultural power. The activities of Japanese media industries at three levels — global, regional, local — suggest that the de-centred process of cultural globalisation has given added weight to their transnational activities. Here, we should remember that while the main corporate actors of cultural globalisation disregard the rigid boundaries of nation-states, their national origins are limited to a small number of powerful nations including Japan, and that transnational corporations still operate most of their transnational business from their home country, hence their profits are enjoyed largely within national boundaries (Hirst & Thompson 1997). The framework of the nation-state, both as a spatially-controlled entity and as a discursively-articulated geography, does not lose its prominence in the analysis of uneven global cultural flows (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1991; Ang & Stratton 1996).

However, this thesis has also shown that the allure of Asian capitalist phantasmas andoria cannot be entirely contained by the national imaginary, hence embodying a potential for mustering up a progressive transnational imagination. Japan’s dreamworld Asia offers the site of concrete — both actual and mediated — encounters with the ever-changing landscapes of other Asian modernities, in which people in Japan are driven to realise that Japan and other Asian nations have been deeply inscribed by each other and that their relations are becoming more and more immediate and complexly interlocked in the multi-layered web of transnational connections’ (Hannerz 1996). While we know theoretically that Asia is culturally diverse and that Japanese
relations with Asian nations are marked by variations, the Japanese engagement in
dreamworld Asia has illustrated how diversity works concretely in the way in which
transnational encounters and imaginations generate the (partial) demise of the Japanese
nationalist project.

The empirical analysis of the expansion of Japanese cultural industries into Asian
markets shows the impossibility of dealing with Asia as a singular entity. Through
their actual encounter with producers and audiences of Asian cultural markets, Japanese
cultural industries representatives and critics have come to realise that the idea of
Japan orchestrating the construction of a pan-Asian cultural sphere is illusionary, and
that the actual conditions on the ground in Asia do not equate with Japan’s perception
of its cultural influence in the region. Through their inroads into Asian markets,
Japanese cultural industries have been forced to recognise that Japan’s cultural reach
in each Asian nation varies according to such factors as its historical legacy and the
particular political, economic and cultural conditions in that nation. They now more
readily acknowledge the active agency of other Asian nations as those nations negotiate
with transnational flows in ways different from Japan’s own past experiences.

It is in the encounter with a concretised Asia (e.g., appreciating Wong Kar-wai,
Dick Lee or Leslie Cheung, not ‘Asian’ film or music in general) that we can detect
self-reflexive voices and the realisation that Japanese must meet other Asians on
equal terms. Japanese (mostly female) audiences of Asian popular culture overtly or
covertly reject the singular notion of Asia, which occupies the dominant discourse in
Japan, to appreciate the cultural specificity of particular Asian cultural productions
and the different modes of Asian cultural modernity articulated in them. The capitalist
Asian dreamworld feeds on Japan’s transnational regional imagination through Asian
popular cultural consumption, which goes beyond the mere reconfirmation of what
has already been known about Asia and Japan. Here, the idea of Japanese cultural
superiority to other Asian nations is displaced, facilitating a more dialogic engagement
with other Asian cultural modernities; dialogic in the sense that it involves self-
transformation and a re-definition of one’s own culture through a developed consciousness of a shared temporality with different Asian modernities.

Appadurai (1996) argues that the acceleration of transnational cultural flows, through the development of communication technologies as well as the escalation of the transborder movement of people, has dramatically transformed the role of social imagination in the texture of people’s everyday life (see also García Canclini 1995). As ‘[m]ore persons throughout the world see their lives through the prism of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms’ (Appadurai 1996: 53-4), the consumption of transnationally mediated fantasy and imagination has become deeply inscribed in social practice and identity construction.

While Appadurai (1996: 55) argues that ‘the link between the imagination and social life . . . is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one’, I have tried to show in this thesis that such a transnational imagination still needs to be articulated within a specific cultural geography. The reception of Japanese TV dramas in Taiwan and Japanese popular Asianism highlight the imperative of developing a new conceptual toolkit for the analysis of intra-regional dynamics among Asian people and nations, other than those which have been concerned with the ubiquity of Western media and popular culture in the formation of non-Western modernities. Non-Western countries have tended to look to the West when gauging their nearness to or distance from Modernity. The non-West’s encounter with the West has always been based upon the expectation of difference and time lag. However, some ‘modern’ East Asian nations are now bypassing the West and finding a resonance in other Asian modernities while simultaneously recognising their differences. What is occurring does not have much to do with an exclusive and homogeneous Asian values discourse (e.g., Ogura 1993). The emerging resonance has become conspicuous with the discovery of neighbours sharing similar experiences of indigenising Western capitalist modernity. The transnationalisation of commodified popular culture has generated an intra-Asian search for a common frame of reference for cultural emulation and social praxis.
Transnational media consumption articulates 'a new social and communicative space' in which people can positively and reflexively rethink their own cultures and those of others (Gillespie 1995: 206). It helps transform people's views of 'their' as well as 'our' modern experiences and reconceive the cultural boundaries 'not to divide, to exclude, but to interface and construct' transnational alliances (Buell 1994: 341).

Having said all this, though, it remains a highly contested issue whether or to what extent transcultural encounters through popular cultural flows really lead to constructive dialogues between Japan and other Asian nations. By examining cultural flows in both directions — from Japan to Taiwan and from Hong Kong to Japan — this thesis has shown that the transnational imagination is unevenly and unequally experienced via media consumption. While the intra-regional cultural flows and consumption among East Asian nations such as Taiwan, Japan and Hong Kong make young people in the region realise some familiar difference in other Asian cultural modernities, the capitalist exploitation of cultural resonance in Asian regions has produced a new asymmetry, one which works in favour of Japan. As transnational cultural flows are always already deeply inscribed in uneven and unequal power relations, the synchronously mediated consumption of information and images of other Asian nations under the structural forces of globalisation may proliferate monologue rather than facilitate dialogue.

Nothing guarantees any promising future for the construction of a more egalitarian and dialogic relationship between Japan and other Asian nations. Nevertheless, the mediated encounter with other Asians will continue to feed new modes of transnational imagination among people in Japan and other Asian nations. Following Benjamin, who tried to discern in the capitalist dreamworld "dialectical images" with the power to cause a political "awakening" (Buck-Morss 1983: 215), I find no reason to entirely abandon the radical, and unforeseeable, possibility unleashed by the proliferation of transnational imagination through popular culture. As Appadurai (1996: 7) argues, imagination summoned up by fantasy through media products is
not simply privately owned but can be a collective one which 'has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise... The imagination is today a staging ground of action, and not only for escape'. In order to foster optimism — through changing the monological social imagination to a more dialogic mode and turning the imagination from private fantasy to a vehicle for self-transformation and social change as a real project — the recognition of and critical engagement with the inequality of transnational interconnections and interpenetrations remain fundamental.

The 1990s has been the decade of Asia in many senses. The decade opened with the spectacular economic development of the region which has made Asian nations more assertive against Western powers. The Asian economic miracle was followed by a dramatic downfall due to the recent financial and economic crisis in the region, which occurred in the year of the historical event of Hong Kong's return to China. (And the millennium is closing with signs of economic recovery in some Asian countries.) While the crisis has highlighted the persistence of Western (particularly American) economic power, it has not stopped Japan's engagement with Asia as well as the intra-Asian cultural flows and interactions.

A prolonged recession and financial crisis in Japan and many parts of Asia has apparently put a damper on self-congratulatory discourses of Asianism. The Japanese craze for the capitalist Asian dreamworld is no exception. The Asian boom in Japan seems to have been culminated around 1997 when Hong Kong returned to China and the economic crisis hit many Asian countries. However, the economic crisis in Asia, far from discouraging Japan from engaging with the region, has activated nationalistic discourses and facilitated intra-Asian popular cultural connections in new ways. In the intellectual field, the discussion on Japan's leading role in Asia is still capturing the attention. A right wing ex-politician, Ishihara Shintarō who was elected the Governor of Tokyo in 1999, has published another book in the 'Japan-that-can-say-No!'
series, *Sensens Fukoku: ‘No’ to iera Nihon keizai* (‘A proclamation of war: Japanese economy that can say No!’: For the liberation from American financial slavery’) (Ishihara & Hiotosubashi Sōgō Kenkyūjo 1998). This time the demonised enemy is the American financial system. Ishihara argues that Japan should fight against the latter for the sake of Asian recovery. Hence once again, Japan is depicted as the champion of the Asian cause. A strong emphasis on Asian solidarity is again accompanied by the assumed leadership of Japan. Similarly, another eloquent Asianist, Ogura (1999), has restated his position by calling for Japan to take a leading role in the ‘creation of new Asia’; collective action, rather than the mere discursive articulation of ‘Asia’, is needed, he claims, to check American global domination and make shared Asian political and economic interests more explicit in the international community.

The expansion of Japanese popular culture in Asia has not stopped suddenly either. It is true that the economic crisis has to some extent inhibited the spread of Japanese popular culture in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. It has deterred local TV stations from buying Japanese and other foreign TV programmes whose prices soared due to the drastic fall of the local currencies. In contrast, the crisis has not curbed the spread of Japanese popular culture to East Asia. In Hong Kong, we have seen a Japan-boom since 1998. Young people wear T-shirts with (meaningless) Japanese characters on them and Japanese TV dramas have captured a wider spectrum of young audiences than ever before (*Honkon Posuto* 18 September 1998; *Asahi Shimbun* 12 September 1998). In Taiwan, Japanese TV dramas are still attracting a broad strata of young people and TV commercials featuring Japanese culture and language are in vogue. The rising

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2 From my conversation with Kurasawa Aiko in November 1998 who is conducting a research on Japanese popular culture in Indonesia.

3 A TV programme of NHK BS-1, *Ajia Jōhō Kōsan* (‘Information cross-reads of Asia’) often covered the spread of Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. The following information about Japanese popular culture in Hong Kong is from the programme of 7 November 1998.
Japanese pop star, Utada Hikaru's CDs — both single and album — had been at the top in terms of sales figure for seven consecutive weeks in 1999 *(IFPI Taiwan hit chart 16-22 August 1999)*. In tourism, the economic downturn has brought Japan's geographical as well as cultural proximity into relief and has led to an increase in the number of tourists travelling from Hong Kong and Taiwan to 'trendy' Japan in 1998 *(Aera 7 September 1998)*. In late 1998, the South Korean government finally relaxed its regulation policies on the import of Japanese popular culture, leading to a rush of Japanese media products into the nation.³ Here, Japan's inroads into East Asian cultural markets has been furthered by the Asian economic crisis, as it has highlighted Japan's dominant economic position in the region. It was no accident that the President of South Korea announced the relaxation of the ban on the import of Japanese cultural products during his official visit to Japan, for the purpose of his visit was not just to exorcise the ghosts of Japanese imperialism but also to secure Japanese capital investment for the economic restructuring of the country *(Asahi Shimbun 9 October 1998)*. Likewise, the economic slump seriously hurt Hong Kong film industries. In 1998, the difficulty of attracting capital reduced film production by a third of its high time.⁴ This only enhanced the allure of Japanese capital and offered Japanese film industries a golden opportunity to increase their involvement in Hong Kong film production.

Cross-cultural fertilisation between Japan and East Asia in popular cultural production has been strengthened as well. The second biggest advertising agency in Japan, Hakuhōdō, organised a film co-production by seven Asian countries in 1998 *(Aera 19 October 1998)*. It features a Hong Kong star, Leslie Cheung and a Japanese actress, Tokiwa Takako. More Japanese pop music artists now regularly tour Hong Kong and Taiwan. A 'hybrid' pop group, Circule, made up of two Japanese, two

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³ 13 August 1999, *Rinjin wa Pàtòna* ('Neighbouring partnership between Japan and South Korea') (NHK)

South Koreans and one Chinese, made their debut in Japan and South Korea in 1998 (Asahi Shinbun 16 July 1998). One of the most popular Japanese drama series in 1998 featured Taiwanese-Japanese actor, Kaneshiro Takeshi and this TV drama series was broadcast almost simultaneously every week in Japan and Taiwan (Aera 19 October 1998). Wong Kar-wai’s new film, 2046, in turn features the most popular Japanese actor, Kimura Takuya. Beijing-born pop singer, Faye Wong sings the theme music of the Japanese computer game, Final Fantasy VIII; the song reached the top 10 in Japan (Nikkei Entertainment May 1999).

Thus, the recent economic crisis has not hindered but rather illuminated, in a new guise, the main features of the intra-regional cultural flow in East Asia that this thesis has examined: the lingering American cultural and economic supremacy in the world; the significant Japanese cultural presence in Asia; the Japanese nationalist desire to represent ‘Asia’; the capitalisation of regional cultural resonance and proximity; and the intensification of cross-fertilisation in affluent East Asia whose cultural imaginaries are increasingly separate from the have-nots in Asia. Put bluntly, the recent crisis has testified anew that it is after all the deep inscription of West-dominated capitalist modernity that frames the exploration of the meaning of being Asian in the 1990s.

While it remains to be seen whether the perimeters of Asia will shrink further or expand again, and whether China will fully join the capitalist club in the years to come, it seems untenable to expect revolutionary modes of Asian resistance against global capitalist consumer culture. West-inflicted global cultural and capital flows will continue to relentlessly capitalise on intra-Asian cultural resonance, at the same time reproducing unequal cultural power relations in multiple and multi-layered ways. This thesis just begins to grapple with the fascinating but underexplored study of cultural globalisation in the context of intra-Asian interactions. No clear-cut, armchair speculation — be it optimistic or pessimistic — would be able to fully capture the contradictory and unforeseeable processes. We need to continue to attend to what is going on in the real world to critically examine the way in which cultural (in)symmetry
and dialogue are articulated through transnational cultural flows between Asian nations; above all, the way in which the phantasmagoria of dreamworld Asia holds the allure for the Japanese trans/national imagination.
Appendix A: List of interviewees in field research in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tokyo (academics not included)

Singapore

*January 1995
<Music Industries>
- General Manager, Pony Canyon Singapore

<TV industries>
- Producer, Asia Bagus!
- Manager, MICS Company
- Chief Correspondent, Nagoya TV

<Advertising agency>
- Managing Director, Hakuhodō Singapore
- Managing Director, I&S
- Director, Chō Senkō

<Others>
- A past winner of Asia Bagus! (a female in her early 20s)

*December 1996
<Music Industries>
- General Manager, Pony Canyon Singapore
- Managing Director, Pony Canyon Singapore

<TV industries>
- Executive Producer of Asia Bagus!, TCS
- Assistant Vice-President (Channel 8), Programming Division, TCS
- Programming Manager (Prime 12), Singapore Television Twelve
- Managing Director, Japan Entertainment Television (JET)

<Others>
- Chief Executive Officer of eighadays, Caldecott! Publishing
- Editor, Panpac Publications
- Senior Manager, Takashimaya Singapore
- Director, Japanese Video and Record shop
- One female fan of Japanese TV dramas in her mid-20s (office worker)

Malaysia

*January 1995
<TV industries>
- Managing Director, Kyōdō Television (Malaysia)
- International Marketing Director, Kyōdō Television (Malaysia)

Taiwan

*December 1996 - January 1997
<Music industries>
- Managing Director, Tree Music & Art
- Managing Director, Pony Canyon Taiwan
- President, Big Blue Productions
- Managing Director, Kolin-Denon Entertainment
- Director, Famous Production
- Deputy Managing Director, Sony Music Entertainment (Taiwan)
- General Manager, ERA EMI Taiwan
- President, Magic Stone Music
- Senior Marketing Officer, Magic Stone Music

<TV industries>
- President, Goldsun
- Supervisor, Japanese Channel, Videoland
- Deputy Manager of Programme Department, Chinese Television System (CTS)
- Deputy Manager of News Department, Po-Hsin Multimedia
- Vice President, China Television Company (CTV)
- Manager, Sales Department, CTV
- Producer, CTV
- Programme Officer, STAR Chinese Channel
- Manager, Scholar Japanese Channel
- General Manager, MTV Taiwan
- Chief Programme Sales & Acquisitions, Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV)
- Manager, Mercuries General Media
- Director of Music Channel, Chinese Satellite Television Communications Group
- Programme Research Supervisor, Marketing Division, Chinese Television Network
- Executive Manager, Satellite Entertainment Communication (JET TV Taiwan)

<News and Publishing>
- President, Cable and Satellite Magazine
- Chief Editor, Taiwan Tsitshin
- Taipei correspondent, Sankei Shinbun
- Editor, Naruho-do The Taiwan
- Research Editor, Japan Digest
- Manager, Taiwan Tôhan
- Chief Editor, Up To Boy
- Reporter, Min Sheng Family TV Weekly
- General Manager, Q Books Centre International
- Reporter, Division of Cultural News, China Times
- Chief Editor, G'utto Taiwan

<Others>
- Media Research and Client Service Manager, SRT Media Services
- Broadcaster of Japanese language programme, Broadcasting Corporation of China
- Senior Researcher, Red Wood Research Services
- Researcher, Television-Culture Research Committee
- Department of Publication Affairs, Government Information Office
- Managing Director, Creative Department, Taiwan Advertising, A Dentsu Company
- Branch Manager, I&I Taiwan
- Supervisor, Tower Records Taipei
- President, 7's way

<Japanese TV drama fans>
- One female in her early 20s (office worker)
- One female in her early 20s (office worker)
- Three females in their late 20s (office workers)
- One female in her mid-20s (office worker)
- One male in his mid-20s (office worker)
- One female in her late 20s (office worker)
-Two female high school students
-One female in her mid-20s (office worker)
-One female in her mid-20s (office worker)
-One female in her mid-20s (office worker)
-One female in her late 20s (office worker)
-One female in her early 20s (postgraduate student)

*May 1997*

<Music industries>
-President, Magic Stone Music
-Managing Director, Pony Canyon Taiwan

<TV industries>
-Executive Manager, Satellite Entertainment Communication (JET TV)
-Programming Officer, Goldsun

<Others>
-Chief Editor, Japan Digest
-Branch Manager, I&S Taiwan
-Reporter, Division of Cultural News, China Times

<Japanese TV drama fans>
-Two male and one female university students in their late teens

**Hong Kong**

*February - March 1997*

<Music industries>
-Managing Director, AVEX Asia
-General Manager, A&R Development, Sony Music Entertainment (Japan) Hong Kong office
-Assistant Manager, Anmuse Hong Kong
-Manager, Music Factory

<TV industries>
-Programme Executive, Jade Purchasing & Scheduling Department, Programme Division, Television Broadcasting (TVB)
-Senior Programme Acquisition Officer, STAR Chinese Channel
-Assistant Manager, Programme Purchasing Department, Asia Television (ATV)
-Senior Programme Officer, Programme Acquisition, Wharf Cable
-Director, Music and Artist Relations, Channel [V]

<Other media industries and shops>
-Chief Editor, Hong Kong Post
-Shopowner of Japanese Video and Music shop, Sino Centre Building

**Tokyo**

*November 1994*

<Music industries>
-President, Sony Pictures Entertainment (Japan) Inc.
-Assistant Director, HoriPro Entertainment Group
-Associate General Manager, International Servicing & Asian Affairs, Sony Music Entertainment
-Assistant Manager, Soundasia Music Products

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- Senior General Manager, Epic/Sony Records
- Assistant General Manager, Domestic A&R, WEA Japan
- Director, Pacifica Inc.

<TV industries>
- Producer of Asia Bagus?, Kyōdō Television
- Producer of Asia Bagus?, Fuji Television
- Manager, Media Services, TV Division, Dentsū
- Assistant manager, Program Planning & Promotional Department, Media Services, TV Division, Dentsū
- Director, International Operation & Business Development, Nippon Television Network (NTV)

<Others>
- Staff reporter, Culture & Arts Division, Asahi Shinbun
- Manager, Dragon Films (Chinese video rental shop)

<Media-related associations and foundations>
- Deputy Director, Broadcast Policy Division, The Japanese Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications
- Deputy director, International Relations, The National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan
- Executive Director, Japan Media Communication Centre
- Auditor, Hōsō-Bunka Foundation
- Managing Director, Audio-Visual Department, The Japan Foundation

* January - February 1997

<Music industries>
- Assistant Director, HoriPro Entertainment Group
- Assistant General Manager, International Business Affairs Department, Pony Canyon
- General Manager, Rock Records (Japan)
- Managing Director, International Division, Amuse
- Manager, Music Publishing, AVEX group
- Associate General Manager, International Servicing, Asian Affairs & Import Disc, Sony Music Entertainment
- Senior General Manager, Epic/Sony Records
- A&R Manager, International, Kitty Enterprises, A PolyGram company

<TV industries>
- Producer of Asia Bagus?, Fuji Television
- Assistant Director, International Operation & Business Development, NTV
- Director, International Department, Business Affairs Division, Fuji Television
- Senior Manager, Local TV Programme Department, Media Services, TV Division, Dentsū
- Manager of International Sales Division, Television Tokyo Medianet
- Deputy Vice President, Media Policy & Strategy, International Programme Sales, Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS)
- Deputy Vice President, Department of Network Relations and Programme Sales, TBS
- General Manager, Visual Media Department, Sumitomo Corporation

<Other media industries>
- Editor, Pop Asia
- Director, International Department, Tōei Animation

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Sales Manager, International Publications Services, Nippan IPS
Manager, Asia Eiga (video rental shop)

**October - November 1997**

<Music industries>
- Assistant Director, HoriPro Entertainment Group

<TV industries>
- Assistant Director, International Operation & Business Development, NTV

<Others>
- Chief Editor, Asian Pops Magazine
- Editor, Pop Asia
- Manager, Cactus Club (Hong Kong and Taiwan popular cultural goods shop)

<Japanese female fans of Asian popular culture>
- Two college students in their early 20s
- One self-employed in her mid-20s
- One university student in her early 20s and two office workers in their late 20s
- One self-employed in her late 30s and one housewife in her early 50s
- One office worker in her early 20s
- Six office workers (three in their early 30s, two in their mid-30s and one in her late 30s)
- One office worker in her mid-20s
- One university student in her early 20s and two office workers in their late 20s

**March - April 1998**

<Music industries>
- Assistant Manager, Promotion, International A&R, Warner Music Japan

<TV industries>
- Producer of Asia Bagus!, Fuji Television
- Deputy Vice President, Media Policy & Strategy, International Programme Sales, TBS
- Director, International Department, Business Affairs Section, Fuji Television
- General Manager, Broadcasting Group, Planning Division, Japan Sky Broadcasting

<Others>
- Manager, Tsutaya Nakanoakaue (video rental shop)
- Manager, Kineki Omori (film theatre)

<Japanese female fans of Asian popular culture>
- President and vice president, Aaron Kwok Fan Club in Japan
- President, Leon Family (Leon Lai Fan Club in Japan)
- One housewife in her late 40s
- One professional in her mid-40s
- One housewife in her mid-20s, one university student in her early 20s and one office worker in her mid-20s

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Appendix B: Questionnaire survey of Asia Bagus! studio audiences at Singapore TCS studio (January 1995)

Total number of respondents: 58
( ): number of respondent

1. Age:  
   10-15 (7)  
   16-20 (39)  
   21-25 (7)  
   26-30 (5)

2. Sex:  
   Female (19)  
   Male (39)

3. Ethnicity:  
   Chinese (31)  
   Malay (15)  
   Indian (5)  
   Eurasian (4)  
   Others (3)

4. Occupation:  
   student (39)  
   Office worker (5)  
   Professional (5)  
   Housewife (3)  
   Shop assistant (2)

5. Asia Bagus! is a weekly TV programme. How often do you watch Asia Bagus!?!  
   Every week (24)  
   Fortnightly (5)  
   Monthly (7)  
   Hardly ever (14)  
   Never (8)

6. What do you think of Asia Bagus!?!  
   Excellent (9)  
   Interesting (16)  
   Not bad (21)  
   Boring (5)  
   Awful (4)

7. What is the most interesting aspect of Asia Bagus! to you?  
   Talk (13)  
   Songs of contestants (15)  
   Fashion (6)  
   Studio set (7)  
   Coverage of trends in Asian popular culture (13)

8. Which country do you think is mainly responsible for producing Asia Bagus!?!  
   Singapore (22)  
   Malaysia (2)  
   Japan (23)  
   U.S.A. (2)  
   Australia (2)  
   Do not know (7)
9. Which of the following statements describe appropriately for you the quality of *Asia Bagus*? 

YES NO

(36) (16) Presenters are very attractive.
(33) (19) All contestants are fashionable.
(22) (29) *Asia Bagus* is very much Malay.
(33) (18) Overall images of the show are trendy
(16) (34) *Asia Bagus* reflects Singaporean culture very well.
(9) (42) *Asia Bagus* is too Westernised.
(42) (11) The charm of *Asia Bagus* is its mixture of many Asian cultures.
(13) (37) I see too much Japanese influence in the programme.
(15) (35) *Asia Bagus* is more interesting than *Fame Awards* and *Star Search* (both are local talent quest programmes in Singapore)
(23) (27) Contestants of *Asia Bagus* perform in a very intimate way.

10. Please tell me something about yourself. What is your favourite pastime? You can tick more than one.
   
   Dining out (17) Karaoke (18) Shopping (25) TV/Video (23)

11. Which Japanese popular/consumer culture are you familiar with? You can tick more than one.
   
   Karaoke (9) Comics/Animations (20) Music (4) TV programmes (8)
   Cinema (3) Fashion (16) Department stores (19) Electronic goods (26)

12. Do you listen to Japanese pop music?
   
   Yes (7) No (51)

13. How do you feel about Japanese influences on popular culture in Singapore?

   Very strong (4) Strong (3) Fair (21) Weak (6) Hardly (5)
   Do not know (19)

14. How far do you think Japanese popular culture penetrates Singapore?

   Very much (3) Much (6) A little bit (17) Hardly at all (5) Nothing (3)
   Do not know (24)
Appendix C: Questionnaire survey of TK Family concert audiences at Taipei (May 1997)

Total number of respondents: 51
(): number of respondent

1. Sex
   Female (30) Male (21)

2. Age.
   15-19 (34) 20-24 (10) 25-29 (5) 30-39 (2)

3. How many days a week do you watch Japanese TV programmes?
   Every day (19) 4-5 days (8) 2-3 days (8) one day (6) Rarely (5) Never (5)

4. Do you think 'things Japanese' are more fashionable and attractive than 'things Western/American'?
   Yes (38) No (10) No response (3)

5. With the following genres, which country of origin are most attractive to you, Japanese, American or Taiwanese?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>U.S.A.</th>
<th>Taiwan</th>
<th>No response</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>(26)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
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<td>Films</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<td>Pop music</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
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<td>(4)</td>
<td>(38)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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<td>(3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>(40)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<td>Foods</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<td>(20)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>(32)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer goods</td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Do you think you belong to the Japanophile group as described in the media?
   Yes (23: Female 11, Male 12) No (28: Female 19, Male 9)
*A breakdown of the responses to question 5 against the responses to question 6:

(Q6. Yes: 23)

<table>
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(Q6. No: 28)

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<td>(11)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

-In both cases, there is a strong tendency that film and sports are dominated by a preference for American products; comics and fashion by Japanese; and food by Taiwanese.

-People who regard themselves as Japanophile tend to show a stronger preference for Japanese popular music, idols, life styles, foods, consumer goods. They tend to watch Japanese TV programmes more often. Out of 23 respondents, 14 answered that they watch every day and three, four or five days a week. More males tend to regard themselves as Japanophile.

-The most interesting difference is shown in the preferences for TV dramas. Paradoxically, people who regard themselves as Japanophile tend to prefer Japanese TV dramas less. This can also be explained by gender difference. 8 out of 11 females who regard themselves as Japanophile prefer Japanese TV dramas, while just 2 out of 12 males who regard themselves as Japanophile prefer Japanese TV dramas. A similar tendency can be discerned among all respondents. 19 out of 30 females prefer Japanese TV dramas, compared with 7 out of 21 males.
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