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Romancing Urban Modernity in Tokyo, Taipei, and Shanghai: The Film *About Love* and the Shaping of a Discursive East Asian Popular Culture

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> Just as someone from Hong Kong would be overwhelmed by a sense of déjà vu upon visiting Tokyo or Seoul, a person from Tokyo travelling to Hong Kong or Seoul would be struck with the same feeling. Before setting foot in a place, we are forced to associate with all sorts of images about that place. At the end of a labyrinth of copies of copies, we finally arrive, tired and exhausted, at the actual city, but it is no longer a heart-pounding adventure, but a simulation of an adventure – a "hyperreal" experience, to borrow Umberto Eco's term. As long as we are in the midst of the structure of déjà vu, we can no longer visit "real" unknown places anywhere on this earth.[1]

Written at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Japanese critic and film historian Yomota Inuhiko's observation about the interchangeability of the East Asian metropolises of Tokyo, Seoul, and Hong Kong through a shared consumption of "nostalgia/familiarity" rings true.[2]

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What is debatable is whether such an observation would have had equal resonance two or three decades ago, when the cityscapes of Hong Kong, Seoul, Taipei, Singapore, and Tokyo in the 1960s and 1970s would have been more distinct from one another. However, over the intervening decades, interconnected socio-economic, cultural, and political factors—ranging from the emergence of urban middle classes across most East and many Southeast Asian societies, to the emergence of civil societies in previously authoritarian societies such as South Korea and Taiwan—have facilitated the emergence of the kind of commonality across urban East Asia that Yomota makes reference to in the above comment.

This chapter is situated against the backdrop of the body of work that has emerged since the late 1990s focusing on this increasingly visible border-crossing collective identity through much of middle-class East, and possibly Southeast, Asia. This is an identity that is often most visibly articulated through spaces of popular culture—what Chua Beng Huat labeled a discursive East Asian popular culture that lends itself as a clearly delineated framework for theorization and analysis.[3] Discourses centering around imaginings and articulations of "commonness" across the region are not new—the writings of early-twentieth century Asian public figures such as Indian Nobel Laureate poet and nationalist icon Rabindranath Tagore or the Japanese art critic and intellectual Okakura Tenshin, on the one hand, or, the discourse of common "Asian-ness" at the heart of Japan's "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere" imperialist project of the 1940s, on the other, are evidence of such earlier reflections, from quite varied ideological standpoints, about a collective "Asian" identity.[4] However, as flagged in the works of various writers in recent years, in contrast to the more political and/or philosophical slant of some of the earlier articulations of "commonness," the discourse which emerged from the 1990s was (and continues to be) situated within the socio-cultural and economic conditions of postcolonial, post-Cold War globalizing late-capitalist modernity in East Asia.[5] Significantly, as these writers stress, it has been regionally interlinked conditions of (in particular, urban) modernity, rather than culturally deterministic explanations about shared "Confucian" (or more broadly, "Asian") values, that have underpinned articulations of this border-crossing identity.

As mentioned, this emergent post-1990s border-crossing commonness comes across most prominently in spaces and practices of popular culture—music, fashion, design, public spaces, and visual culture. Axiomatic to its articulations has been the consumption

of a commodified urban modernity—indeed, "hyper"-modernity—symbolized through discourses of youth (male and female), beauty, romance, and significantly, nostalgia. Furthermore, these articulations have been strongly influenced by flows out of, and between, regional nodes of "cultural cool," or, in Eric Ma's words "satellites of [urban] modernity."[6] Importantly, these flows are not unidirectional, and are uneven in terms of economic, political, and discursive power.[7] Arguably, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and to an extent, Hong Kong have been the most noticeable of these nodes of "cultural cool," in terms of influence on the expressions of this border-crossing popular culture. Japan, in particular, has played an especially significant role in shaping the contours of this popular culture. As the first of the East Asian societies to attain the status of an affluent, industrialized, late-capitalist economy, Japan became both an economic and a (popular) cultural blueprint across the region by the 1980s.[8] Moreover, while close to two decades of economic stagnation since the early 1990s may have resulted in Japan losing its appeal as a regional economic role model, its influence in terms of popular culture (specifically its reputation as a center of "cultural cool" both regionally, and increasingly, globally) has continued. This is an influence that has been direct, but also, increasingly, one that may be redirected and siphoned through intertextual and intercultural transferences and flows in the region.[9] Consequently, popular culture texts associated with, for instance, Taiwan or South Korea may in fact have had their origin in Japanese popular culture (often in a different textual genre). The best example of this is the various transferences that have occurred, over more than a decade, of the 1990s Japanese *shōjo manga* (girls' comic) series *Boys over Flowers* (*Hana yori dango*). Through much of East and Southeast Asia, the text is associated more with the Taiwanese TV drama adaptation *Meteor Garden* (*Liuxing huayuan*), or, more recently, with the South Korean TV series *Boys over Flowers* (*Kkotboda namja*), rather than with the original Japanese manga. Other recent examples of this process include *Initial D* (*Tou wen zi D*), the 2005 Hong Kong movie featuring Taiwanese celebrity Jay Chou (Chapter 9), or the 2008 South Korean film *Antique Bakery*, both adapted from Japanese manga and anime originals (*Seiyō kottō yōgashiten*; *Sayangkoldong yangkwajajeom Aentikeu*).

This chapter, using the framework suggested by Chua Beng Huat, looks at how the dynamics and complexities (and contradictions) in the shaping of this discourse of a Japan-inflected regional popular culture are played out in one specific popular culture text—the joint Japan–Taiwan–China film, *About Love*, which was released in 2005.[10] Compared

with the relatively amicable situation at the end of the 2000s, during the middle years of the decade official political relations between Japan and China, and Taiwan and the mainland, were at an especially low point. Foregrounding this was, on the one hand, growing pro-secessionist sentiment in Taiwan, and, on the other, heightened tensions between China and Japan as a result of territorial disputes and Chinese anger over the continued watering down of Japan's past history of aggression on the mainland in Japanese school textbooks. In this sense, it may be argued that *About Love* came out at a significant juncture in the history of East Asian dialogues with modernity.

The film consists of three interlinked "filmlets" set respectively in Tokyo, Taipei, and Shanghai, and directed by individual film-makers from each of these locations. The stories within the "filmlets" revolve around the lives of a set of visually stylish young people moving between each of these locations and dealing with issues of separation, love/longing/romance, belonging, and nostalgia. Significantly, throughout the narrative "Japan" (specifically, "Tokyo"), through stylistic and thematic markers, is packaged and presented as a regional space of urban (hyper-)modernity, of "cultural cool" and, especially, romance. This discourse of romance and nostalgia/longing, as suggested by the title of the film, acts as an important discursive (indeed, ideological) binding thread through the text. This chapter engages with the ways in which this discourse of romance, as articulated specifically in the film, constitutes an important framing element of this emergent popular culture. The Japanese freelance writer Shimamura Mari referred to the diffusion of this discourse of romance as a "romantic virus" which started to sweep across East Asia about the same time as the SARS virus outbreak in many parts of the region.[11] Shimamura, as well as several other writers, has highlighted both the centrality of the discourse of romance, and also importantly, the agency of female consumers (and more, broadly, feminine desire and fantasy) in the shapings and articulations of this popular culture.[12] The argument here is that this feminized/romance-inflected reading of regional dynamics may provide a counter-reading to (masculinized) official and semi-official discourses of national identity and inter-state relations in East Asia. This comes out, for instance, in the 2001 joint Japanese–Korean television drama series *Friends* focused around a growing romantic relationship between a Korean man and a Japanese woman who meet in the third space of Hong Kong, or more recently, in the 2008 Taiwanese feature film *Cape Number 7* (*Hai jiao qi hao*) exploring romantic attachments between Taiwanese and Japanese at two very different historical junctures in the relationship between

the two states.[13] Both texts, through their infusion of discourses of (particularly cross-cultural) romance, allow for a diffusion (or at least a circumvention) of the sometimes difficult and emotional issues that often shape the political and media interactions between the various states and societies in the region. It is in this context that the film *About Love* is discussed in this chapter. I start by expanding further on the framework of the discursive East Asian popular culture suggested by Chua, and engaged with by numerous scholars in recent years, before going on to situate the film within this framework.

A discursive emergent East Asian popular culture: tracing the delineations

As Koichi Iwabuchi points out, until not very long ago, analyses of the dynamics associated with globalization were heavily slanted toward what he terms a "West-Rest paradigm."[14] However, as Iwabuchi highlights, the reality is one where intra-regional and even domestic flows of culture, capital, technology, ideas, images, and people—the interfaces constituting the "scapes" conceptualized by Arjun Appadurai in the mid-1990s—may be of equal significance.[15] Moreover, as with the dynamics of globalization at the macro/global level, these intra-regional and local flows may be just as fraught with contradictions and power inequalities. In the context of East (and to an extent, Southeast) Asia, these intra-regional flows have been the focus of both academic and non-academic discussion since the 1990s. While much of the initial discussion focused on economic, technical, and capital flows, such as investment or technology transfers, the importance of cultural flows, particularly popular cultural flows, has been increasingly addressed in a growing body of literature since the late 1990s/early 2000s. This increased focus on regional flows of popular culture was situated within the context of the growing visibility in East/Southeast Asia of Japanese popular culture through the 1990s, and subsequently popular culture flows out of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and especially South Korea.[16]

As highlighted above, each of these locations came to represent progressively interlinked "satellites of [urban] modernity," flows between which formed the crucible for the kind of interchangeable urban modernity Yomota alludes to above. Moreover, within the context of this common urban modernity mediated through popular culture practices and products, Japan, as attested to in a range of studies, played a particularly significant role.[17] Iwabuchi, addressing the regional circulation of Japanese TV drama, makes the point that while cultural flows

in the region "are multilateral, the circulation of Japanese popular culture has become particularly prevalent." This led to a situation whereby Japanese popular culture products and practices were no longer considered "something spectacular or anomalous" but, rather, their presence had become "mundane in the urban landscape of East/Southeast Asia."[18] One of the reasons offered for the seemingly seamless transference of popular culture products and practices from Japan and other regional "satellites of urban modernity," frequently by individuals engaged in the consumption and embodied practice of these popular culture products, is, as writers such as Iwabuchi and Lisa Yuk Ming Leung have noted, the notion of "cultural proximity" or "cultural covalence."[19] However, as Iwabuchi, Leung, and others point out, while cultural similarities between Japan (or for that matter, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other regional "satellites of modernity") and societies in East, and possibly Southeast, Asia may well play some part, factors such as historical experiences of modernization, as well as specific socio-cultural and economic conditions through which "late modern temporality" are experienced by (particularly) younger consumers in urban East/Southeast Asia, are far more significant.[20]

Also underlying the permeation of Japanese popular culture has been the supposed "cultural odorless-ness" of those texts and practices (for instance, anime or fashion) which find easy acceptance in the region. At the same time, particularly in recent years, these very same "culturally odorless" products have been "re-odorized" as Japanese, due to the extra cultural capital associated with discourses of "Japan as hyper-modern" or "Japan as funky" in circulation, both in the region, and, increasingly, globally. This simultaneously culturally odorless/culturally re-odorized Japan-inflected popular culture as part of a border-crossing urban modernity is visible at the street level across the region, from Seoul to Singapore, and also increasingly, globally, through what Christine Yano refers to as Japan's "Pink Globalization."[21] It is played out in a variety of popular culture texts (songs, television dramas, manga, anime, etc.) and styles and practices (Japanese-influenced fashions and hairstyles, layout of glossy magazines, the design of retail outlets and public space, storylines and visual packaging of TV dramas, discourses of male and female beauty, etc.).[22] Moreover, in the context of a collective East/Southeast Asian urban modernity, the juxtaposition of the dynamics of cultural odorlessness side-by-side with processes of cultural re-odorizing allows for manifold translations and transfigurations, leading to situations where the Japanese influence may well be invisible to some consumers of the particular text or practice, but consciously

apparent to others. An example would be the Korean popular culture boom sweeping large parts of East/Southeast Asia (including Japan) in recent years. At one level, it may appear, from the popularity of Korean TV dramas or through the appeal of idols and performers such as the musician Rain or boy bands like DBSG/TVXQ/Tōhōshinki, that South Korea has replaced Japan as the ultimate in Asian hyper-cool.[23] However, as writers such as Chua and Lee Dong-Hoo point out, underlying the emergence of Korean popular culture has been the (sometimes very deliberate) incorporation of elements of Japanese popular culture, which are then repackaged and disseminated through the region and marked as products of a "Korean-inflected" border-crossing modernity.[24] A similar case could also be made for products of Taiwanese popular culture such as the successful series *Meteor Garden*, based on the Japanese girls' manga *Hana yori dango*, but which came to be strongly associated through the region with Taiwan.[25] Such processes of translation and transfiguration bring into question assumptions about authenticity and origin in the shapings of popular culture in the region, and the framings of urban modernity.[26]

The dynamics and complexities at play in this emergent shared urban modernity were best theorized by Chua Beng Huat in the discursive construction "East Asian popular culture." It is largely the framework originally suggested in Chua's paper, and further elaborated on in some of his subsequent work, which is deployed as the basis for the analysis in this chapter.[27] In his discussion, Chua drew attention to the fact that in contrast to the now largely discredited 1990s notion of a common Confucian socio-cultural heritage linking the East Asia plus one (Singapore) "dragon economies," what does provide more of a common framework is an "empirically highly visible cultural traffic" which since the 1980s has "criss-crossed the borders of the East Asian countries and constituted part of the culture of consumption that defines a very large part of everyday life of the population throughout the region."[28] Moreover, integral to this "highly visible cultural traffic" are very deliberate decisions and strategies of production and distribution on the part of cultural industry stakeholders, which, as discussed below, may exert just as significant an influence in the shaping of a common urban modernity as consumer affinity or cultural proximity.

In conceptualizing this East Asian popular culture as an analytical category, Chua underscores the need to address the ways in which a common East Asian identity may be "an ideological effect of the production and consumption of the popular culture."[29] With specific reference to the discursive construction of such an identity, Chua delineates

five aspects of the ways in which popular culture products may work in concert (to allow for this common identity). First is the representation, in many of the border-crossing popular culture texts, of East (and parts of Southeast) Asia as emphatically modern and urban.[30] This foregrounding of the urban, according to Chua, facilitates cultural border-crossings in East Asian popular culture; as he notes, "in contrast to the idea of 'tradition' that specifies 'uniqueness' and 'boundedness' of a culture, the urban increasingly lacks specificity, it is 'anywhere,' 'anyplace' and 'anyone,' the urban thus passes through cultural boundaries through its insistence on 'sameness.' "[31] This border-crossing urban anywhere/everywhere-ness is best embodied, for instance, in public spaces—financial districts, shopping malls, hotels, upmarket cafes and restaurants, airports, and so on.

Following on from this is an emphasis in many of the popular culture texts on young, professional singles, living and working in the city, with the (parental or extended) family occupying only a background presence. The family, in Chua's words, "appears to alternate between an obstacle to and a refuge from romance and the city."[32] This interconnection between the city and romance as a key aspect of an East Asian popular culture is also highlighted in Leung's work on the consumption of Japanese TV drama by female viewers in Hong Kong. She notes that

> Trendiness and possibilities of romance join forces as a formidable team in the aestheticization of the urban. Time and space are highly organized around traffic lights, zebra crossings, narrowness of pavements—signs of the "metropolitan experience"... Besides organizing human activities, they also help organize human relationships. The Japanese dramas are explicit in conveying the possibility of romances in the city: despite the hurried pace of life, you will be bound to meet your Mr Right or Miss Right among the crowd through a chance encounter, on the zebra crossing, at the traffic lights... romance is deemed "trendy" in terms of modern day relationship [*sic*]: haphazard, fleeting, transitory, but always in the eternal present.[33]

Importantly, it is a Japanese city, specifically contemporary Tokyo, that often becomes the regional signifier for this fantasy of urban romance.

The third aspect highlighted in Chua's discussion is an emphasis on a universal "middle-classedness" of lifestyle, despite a reality of relativities of income across the region. This emphasis on the common denominator of lifestyle (as opposed to, say, income) makes border-crossing popular culture texts such as Korean or Japanese TV dramas more personally

identifiable regionally. The bodies (on screen, in magazines, in manga) are interchangeable stylish, young, professional, urban East/Southeast Asian bodies; this allows for individual consumers to "interpellate themselves into the screen [or respective textual context] by temporarily or permanently suppressing their national/ethnic identities."[34]

Fourth, in the context of Chua's framework, the influence of Japanese popular culture in the expressions of a common East Asian popular culture is evident in the cultivation of the genre of stylishly packaged "beautiful youth" (*bishōnen* in Japanese; *kkonminam* in Korean). Male icons of this popular culture, be they in Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, or even places such as Thailand, increasingly conform to a standardized packaged ideal of male beauty, best epitomized in the vaguely androgynous/feminized (but nevertheless outwardly heterosexual) *bishōnen* look long associated with the *Johnny's-kei* male idols in Japan,[35] but now diffused throughout the region, as a soft masculinity that transcends national boundaries and markers (*mukokuseki*, in Japanese, *mu-kuk-jok*, in Korean).[36] Boy bands such as Arashi and KAT-TUN from Japan, or TVXQ/DBSK/Tōhōshinki and F.T. Island from Korea, are perhaps some of the best known recent exemplars of this look. These male icons of East Asian popular culture, in Chua's words, "are boyish, have brown-tinted, full, fluffed-up long hair and are earnest, if not innocent—a mode of 'beautiful masculinity.'"[37] The females, on the other hand, are "beautiful, of course, self-confident with very non-revealing clothing . . . showing very little explicit sexuality."[38] Significantly, the packaging of this youth beauty and style is so similar as to be interchangeable across locations, thereby opening up "visual and discursive room for the insertion and projection of an idea of 'Asian-ness' with nationalities suppressed."[39]

The fifth, and arguably particularly significant, aspect of the discursive construction of an East Asian popular culture-mediated identity, is the reality that rather than underlying cultural similarities (such as a shared Confucian heritage) being a determining influence, the crafting of such an identity is more a product of very deliberate and conscious interventions by commercial (and increasingly, official) organizations and bodies. These have a stake in ensuring the commercial success and viability of cultural products, and in the case of official governmental players, as a tool of foreign policy—for instance, the proactive role the Japanese government has been taking in recent years to promote Japanese popular culture as a tool of "soft power" foreign policy, or the South Korean government's encouragement and shaping of popular cultural industries as an element of economic policy in the wake of

the 1997 Asian financial crisis.[40] To this end, industry (and government) players may adopt a variety of strategies that translate into a reinforcing of a common/shared East Asian popular culture. These strategies include co-financing and production, as well as the deliberate packaging of anywhere-ness/everywhere-ness and the mixing of artistes and texts from different locations. At the most extreme, Chua observes, "a film may even be divided into 'filmlets,' each coming from a different location, with its own directors and artistes."[41]

The film *About Love*

It is in the context of the above discussion that I analyze the film *About Love*, jointly produced by film studios in Japan, Taiwan, and China, and released commercially in 2005. At one level, there is nothing particularly impressive about the film—a product of mainstream film industry, of fairly mediocre quality, tapping into a (presumably) female audience market. However, what makes the text significant for my purposes here is that all the various issues discussed above—the embodied practices of urban modernity, the commodified consumption of nostalgia, the fissures and disjunctures that emerge as part of late modern border-crossings, for instance—are played out and brought to the surface in the film.

In line with Chua's description of collaborative efforts referred to above, the film consists of three interlinked filmlets, set (in order of sequence) in the three locations of Tokyo, Taipei, and Shanghai (and each bearing the title of the respective city). Each is directed by a film-maker from one of the locations—Shimoyama Ten (Tokyo), Yee Chih-yen (Taipei), Zhang Yibai (Shanghai). The cast is drawn from the various locations, and includes some reasonably well-known actors: Ito Misako, Tsukamoto Takashi, Kase Ryō, Chen Bo-Lin, Mavis Fan. At the same time, the cast—in terms of visuals and packaging—fits well with Chua's description of the inter-transferability of looks and characters as a feature of border-crossing collaborative texts. Indeed, as we will see, while each one of the filmlets has a stand-alone narrative autonomy, some of the characters weave through, and connect, the filmlets. Another underlying current—as suggested by the title—is the supposedly universal (and border-crossing) search for, and unexpected encounters with, love/romance (in urban modernity).

The first filmlet, "Tokyo," revolves around the relationship between Yao (Chen Bo-Lin), a young Taiwanese in Tokyo to study to become an animation artist, and Michiko, an artist trying to get over a break-up

with her boyfriend, currently in Taiwan. Yao first encounters Michiko at the location which arguably has become one of the most iconic in terms of symbolizing Japan's (and indeed East Asia's) urban hyper-modernity—the large, busy crosswalk in Shibuya, one of the premier hubs of Japanese youth and street-culture.[42] Tokyo, as visually packaged in the film, and through references made by the characters, quite clearly comes across as an undeniable node of global hyper-modernity. One of the first scenes, for instance, has Yao explaining his reasons for coming to Tokyo—just as anyone aspiring to be a top soccer player would go to Italy, anyone wishing to be an expert in animation and computer graphics had really no option but to study in Tokyo.

Yao starts doing black-and-white sketches of Michiko and secretly pinning them to the glass door of her studio. However, they never actually meet one another face to face. Until the final scene of the filmlet, their encounters seem to encapsulate Leung's characterization of urban—"haphazard, fleeting, transitory, . . . always in the present."[43] Indeed, there is no conversation, no actual meeting between the two. Their encounters seem reminiscent of the proverbial "ships passing in the night" right through until the end, when after almost missing each other, they do finally connect, significantly at the same Shibuya crossing where they first encountered each other. Their encounter closes the Tokyo episode, with the two communicating verbally for the first time through the mutual greetings of "*hajimemashite*" (Japanese) and "*ni hao*" (Chinese).

Language working against, as well as facilitating, border-crossings is a theme that runs through all three of the filmlets.[44] In the Tokyo episode, a parallel narrative revolves around the relationship between Yao, a Japanese classmate of his, Yuka, who, it becomes obvious through the film, has an (unreciprocated) attraction toward Yao, and Min, a young woman from Shanghai in Tokyo to study to be a beautician. Yuka first introduces Yao and Min to each other when she gets them to pose as models for a photo-shoot she wants to do on the theme of "*de-ai*" ([chance] encounter). This *de-ai* becomes a bridge not just for (the open-ended) possibilities of border-crossings between Japan and Taiwan, and Japan and China, but also between the latter and Taiwan. Yao reflects that the *de-ai* is "always about two people who cannot meet... A girl from Shanghai and me from Taipei are sharing the sunny skies of Tokyo. Between us there is this feeling . . . One day, we will meet. That picture spreads the warm future all around me like a fine spring day."

Notwithstanding the clichéd sentimentality of Yao's reflection, there is something significant to consider here. As Chua's analysis suggests,

the discursive construction of an East Asian popular culture-derived common identity is a conscious project. Coexisting side-by-side with the crafting of commonality is the potential for that commonality to unravel as a consequence of ever-present fissures and fault-lines coming to the surface. Significantly, *About Love* was made at a point when relations between Japan and its neighbors (particularly the two Koreas and China) were at an especially low point, as a result of territorial disputes and friction over revisionist moves in Japan in relation to its pre-World War II and wartime history.[45] Similarly, the film also coincided with a period when relations between China and Taiwan too were strained, partly as a consequence of the visibility of pro-independence sentiments in Taiwan, with a government sympathetic to secession from the mainland having recently come into office. Given this, Tokyo, in this film, seems to become a sort of neutral third space of pan-East Asian urban modernity in, and through, which China, Taiwan, and Japan can articulate, and perhaps to some degree resolve, their mutual anxieties.[46]

The second filmlet, "Taipei," explores the theme of language in border-crossing encounters further. The plot revolves around the relationship between Ah Si (Mavis Fan) a young Taipei woman who, like Michiko in Tokyo, has just come out of a break-up with her boyfriend, and Tetsu/Tecchan (Kase Ryō), a young Japanese man studying in Taipei. Tetsu, it emerges through the course of the narrative, is the lover who, through a short four-second phone communication, had broken off a three-year relationship with Michiko in Tokyo in the first filmlet. Tetsu, it seems, had met Ah Si at a bar and had passed on his contact details to her; while not directly cited, the implication seems to be that his meeting Ah Si led to his decision to break off his relationship with Michiko. The film opens with a scene of Ah Si, unable to sleep (due to the anguish of her break-up), trying to assemble a bookcase in the middle of the night. Unable to move it by herself, she calls Tetsu, who had given her his number when they met at a bar. Tetsu arrives with a bottle of wine, clearly with quite different expectations than moving a bookcase. As they try to communicate with each other, Tetsu's lack of fluency in Chinese (and, of course, Ah Si's non-existent Japanese) leads to hilarious communication faux pas, as well as attempts to use language as a bridge. At the point when it looks like they are on the verge of sexual intimacy, Ah Si pulls back and apologizes for "using" his body as a substitute for her former boyfriend. Tetsu, in turn, says he understands, and confesses to having done the same thing (significantly their communication at this point is through writing *kanji*, Chinese characters common to both languages, on a blackboard). Ah Si asks Tetsu to

go with her to see her former boyfriend the next morning. Ah Si's former boyfriend, it turns out, runs a surf shop in what appears to be a semi-rural coastal region. She tries to get Tetsu to arrange a meeting for her with her former lover, something that leads to nothing, apart from other scenes of sometimes hilarious, occasionally poignant, language mis/communication. The two return to Taipei on Tetsu's motorbike. As they enter a long, featureless tunnel which offers respite from the rain, Ah Si silently appreciates the comfort Tetsu is giving her. The final scene of the filmlet has Tetsu, studying in his apartment on a dismal rainy morning, calling up his former girlfriend in Tokyo, Michiko, and ending with an articulation of gratitude ("*arigatō*").

In contrast to the packaging of Tokyo in the first filmlet, Taipei is represented quite differently. There are no scenes of Taipei's urbanscape, for instance. The inside of Ah Si's apartment, and the long characterless tunnel connecting Taipei and the coastal location Tetsu and Ah Si travel to, are the only visual images of Taipei. Rather, the visuals focus on the semi-rural coastal location. On the one hand, this may mark the kind of hierarchy of urban modernity referred to earlier, whereby Japan/Tokyo becomes the embodiment of the urban hyper-modern contemporary "now," and Asia (and specifically Taipei) is constructed/consumed through a nostalgic harking back to what has been lost—what Iwabuchi refers to as Japan's "capitalist nostalgia."[47] However, in the context of the ways Taipei is portrayed in *About Love*, it should be noted that the semi-rural coastal community depicted is quite markedly not a traditional fishing village (with, for instance, rows of drying fish strung up on racks). Rather, the rural-ness conveyed is along the lines of a very sanitized, commodified nostalgia, a sort of utopia away from the city. For instance, the shots in the background while Ah Si and Tetsu wait for her former boyfriend to appear are of appealingly rundown (as opposed to shabby or slum-like) beach shacks. There are shots of an appropriately "retro-trendy" red Volkswagen Beetle parked by the side of one of these, and the individuals encountered (including Ah Si's boyfriend) are young surfers, in some respects the ultimate embodiment of late modern cool, not rural fisher folk. Indeed, like the hyper-modern cityscapes, this hyper-modern rural chic could also be anywhere and everywhere in modern Asia—if anything it is reminiscent of a scene from a novel by Murakami Haruki, the globally (and, especially, regionally) popular Japanese novelist whose writing perhaps best embodies the flavors of late-capitalist "hyper cool."[48]

The final filmlet, "Shanghai," best captures the contrast between the consumption of a nostalgic past and the present reality of a shared

urban temporality. In this film, Shūhei (Tsukamoto Takashi), last seen in the "Tokyo" story bidding farewell to students to whom he teaches Japanese (including Yao from Taiwan) before returning to Shanghai to continue his Chinese language study, arrives at a small suburban general store in Shanghai run by a middle-aged Chinese woman. This woman lives upstairs from the shop with her high-school aged daughter, Yun, and Shūhei rents a room from them. During his stay in Shanghai, Shūhei is befriended by the owner of an upmarket Spanish café-bar, who had lived in Japan (and hence speaks Japanese) and for whom Shūhei starts to work on a casual basis.

The film focuses on the relationship between Shūhei, the girlfriend he had left behind in Japan, who subsequently breaks off their relationship and moves to Barcelona, and the young Shanghai schoolgirl, Yun. Yun develops an unarticulated crush on Shūhei, who appears to hover between recognition and non-recognition of her feelings for him. Yun's crush on Shūhei is expressed through her own fascination with both Japanese/Japan and Spanish/Spain (and, specifically, Barcelona). As Shūhei, having finished his stay in Shanghai, is about to leave, Yun bids farewell using a Spanish phrase. In response to Shūhei's question about the meaning, she claims that it is Spanish for "goodbye." Consequently Shūhei too keeps repeating the phrase, as his taxi pulls away from Yun. It is only a year later when Shūhei revisits Shanghai that he discovers, quite by accident (and once again, through humorous language mis/communication) that the expression Yun had used was actually the Spanish for "I love you" ("*te quiero*"), thus giving shape to what had previously been the indistinct, nuanced currents of romance between the two. Shūhei returns to the shop-house he had lived in with Yun and her mother, only to find that it has been demolished to make way for new urban development; the final scene of the filmlet is perhaps the most evocative of the transition from an earlier era of urban modernity, symbolized in the film (and more generally) through the commodified nostalgia of the alleyway with the red-brick shop-house, to the new urban hyper-modernity in Asia which Shanghai is increasingly starting to epitomize, conveyed through the high-rise buildings visible in the distance, through the cleared lots previously occupied by streets of shop-houses. Specifically, the use of symbols of both an older urban modernity and contemporary late-capitalist East/Southeast Asian modernity brings to mind Ackbar Abbas' analysis of the incorporation of commodified nostalgia of the past into contemporary Shanghai's project of building urban hyper-modernity, what he labels the "anticipation of reappearance."[49] If Tokyo stands for an urban hyper-modernity that, in

the context of Japan's prolonged economic unraveling, may well be on the way out, at least insofar as the way in which it has been imagined over the past three decades, Shanghai is suggestive of the Asian urban hyper-modernity that is about to unfold over coming decades—as underscored by its hosting of the 2010 World Expo.

Conclusion

At one level, *About Love* can be read as little more than a stylistically beautiful piece of film, which fails to go beyond a fairly superficial level. However, the reason for engaging with the film in this chapter lies in the ways that it allows one to reflect on the contours of a collective identity across East (possibly Southeast) Asia. This border-crossing identity is premised not on any notion of ethnic or religious similarity, but more on a very disjointed sense of a common urban modernity at the core of which are interweaving discourses of youth, consumption, and middle-class lifestyle. Moreover, integral to the success of border-crossing texts, such as *About Love* (or, for that matter, the early-2000s Korean-Japanese television drama *Friends*, or the 2008 Taiwanese hit movie, *Cape Number 7*, referred to previously), is the embedding of slickly packaged discourses of commodified nostalgia and (cross-cultural) romance, which facilitate the transcending of economic, political, cultural, linguistic, and ideological differences between states and societies in the region. In this regard, *About Love* (as well as other texts in the same genre) sits well within Chua Beng Huat's analysis of the construction of an identity framed through an increasingly common East Asian popular culture. Indeed, it could be argued that not only does the film embody the five aspects of the ideological effect of this East Asian popular culture, it can also be read as a deliberate intervention toward actively reinforcing this ideology of an identity crafted through an urban modernity channeled and articulated through popular culture.

However, at the same time we need to remain aware of the limits of this discourse of a popular culture-mediated regional identity. Notwithstanding the apparent success, at one level, of texts such as *Cape Number 7* or *About Love* in transcending differences between countries, at another level these differences, whether they are based on memories of Japan's colonial legacy, or the ideological differences between China and Taiwan, or even gendered differences in the reception of such texts among consumers, remain considerations that cannot be overlooked. Indeed, as demonstrated through the blacklisting in China of the popular Taiwanese singer A-mei (Chang Huei-mei) because of her

public support for Taiwan's pro-separatist President Chen Shui Bin in 2000, or the masculine resentment among some sectors of the population in Japan, Taiwan, and China at the popularity of the "Korean Wave" among female consumers in those societies, popular culture may equally be a space for these differences to come to the surface.[50] As Eva Tsai, in her discussion of popular culture icons such as A-mei caught up in the cross-currents of political and ideological differences, reminds us, "popular culture does not resolve political issues by being politics' naïve 'other.' " Rather, as she highlights in relation to border-crossing popular culture texts that appear to transcend regional differences, such texts may "become resources in popular culture narratives for grasping divergent experiences, but they are not, in themselves, sufficient spaces for reconciliation."[51] Perhaps it is with this in mind that we need to return to Yomota's comment about the ways in which popular culture-inflected imaginings of urban modernity in East Asia contribute, at one level, to a sense of border-crossing familiarity.

Notes

1. Inuhiko Yomota, "Stranger Than Tokyo: Space and Race in Postnational Japanese Cinema," trans. Aaron Gerow, in *Multiple Modernities: Cinemas and Popular Media in Transcultural East Asia*, ed. Jenny Kwok Wah Lu (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), 89.
2. My use of names in the body of this chapter adheres to the order followed by the authors in their published works. Consequently, in the use of East Asian (Chinese/Japanese/Korean) names, depending on the preference of the authors themselves in the published works cited, I use both the surname/forename order (e.g., Yomota Inuhiko, Chua Beng Huat) and forename/surname (Koichi Iwabuchi). In cases where the East Asian name mentioned is not an author of a work cited, I use the surname/forename convention (e.g., Okakura Tenshin).
3. Chua Beng Huat, "Conceptualizing an East Asian Popular Culture," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 5, n. 2 (2004): 200–21.
4. See, for instance, Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb, "Introduction: Japan and the Transformation of National Identities in Asia in the Imperial Era," in *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895–1945*, ed. Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 1–22; Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008); Pekka Korhonen, "Common Culture: Asia Rhetoric in the Beginning of the 20th Century," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9, n. 3 (2008): 395–417; Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).
5. See Leo Ching, "Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital," *Public Culture* 12, n. 1 (2000): 233–57; Chua, "Conceptualizing" and "Engendering an East Asia

Pop Culture Research Community," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, n. 2 (2010): 202–6; Koichi Iwabuchi, "Nostalgia for (Different) Asian Modernities: Japanese Consumption of Asia," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 10, n. 3 (2002): 547–73; Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Koichi Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Cultural Globalization and Asian Media Connections," in *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 1–22; Jonathan D. Mackintosh, Chris Berry, and Nicola Liscutin, "Introduction," in *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes*, ed. Jonathan D. Mackintosh, Chris Berry, and Nicola Liscutin (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 1–22.

6. Eric Kit-wai Ma, "Consuming Satellite Modernities," *Cultural Studies* 15, n. 3–4 (2001): 444–63. The term "cultural cool" draws upon journalist Douglas McGray's notion of "Gross National Cool" with reference to the shift in Japan's global profile from an economically influential, but culturally insignificant, player in the 1970s and 1980s, to a nation that, largely through its youth and popular culture, took on a fashionable, cutting-edge profile in the global imagination from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. See Christine Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cool as It Grabs the Global Imagination," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, n. 3 (2009): 681–8. Significantly, it was the very conditions of economic affluence and capitalist late modernity underpinning the shift from a manufacturing/tangible products-based economy to one defined through post-industrial cultural and knowledge intensive industries that contributed to the "cultural cool" status. The same may be said for other emerging nodes of regional and global "cultural cool"—growing economic affluence (among other factors) helps in the reimagining of that society's (often pre-existing) popular culture. The best examples are South Korea and India. Until the 2000s neither country was regarded as being particularly fashionable. Rather, the association was more with tradition and backwardness. Yet, in the case of both nations, the export of popular culture has contributed to their redefinition in the regional and/or global imaginary as fashionable—South Korea through its association with popular television dramas and "sexy" male and female idols, and India through "Bollywood" visual culture. At the same time, the economic and social transformations in both nations, since the 1990s, also contributed to their rebranding. Thus, my use of "cultural cool" also resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital." See Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 17–21. My use of the term "hyper-modern" assumes a continuity with the conditions of modernity, rather than (as some views of postmodernity would suggest) a rupture with them. It is "the experience of intensity, instantaneity, urgency, instant gratification, and especially *excess*" by which the hyper-modern can be distinguished from the postmodern in the work of Nicole Aubert, for instance, as Simon Gottschalk notes, "Hypermodern Consumption and Megalomania: Superlatives in Commercials," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, n. 3 (2009): 310. Moreover, whereas postmodernity implies the "quitting of modernity," hyper-modernity is characterized by the intensification of the very economic, political, and socio-cultural logics of modernity,

as Sébastien Charles points out, "For a Humanism amid Hypermodernity: From a Society of Knowledge to a Critical Knowledge of Society," *Axiomathes* 19, n. 4 (2009): 392. An example would be the Global Financial Crisis of 2008–09, which represented this intensification (and, indeed, excess) of the logic of capitalist economic modernity. Thus, in the context of the argument in this chapter, the popular culture-inflected "border-crossing" East Asian identity, and its various symbols (such as the urban cityscapes of Tokyo, Taipei, Shanghai, etc.), are an *extension* (and intensification) rather than an exit from conditions of modernity in the region.

7. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi, "Introduction: East Asian TV Dramas: Identification, Sentiments and Effects," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 1–12.
8. Leo Ching, "Imaginings in the Empires of the Sun: Japanese Mass Culture in Asia," in *Asia/Pacific as Space of Cultural Production*, ed. Rob Wilson and Arif Dirlik (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 262–83.
9. See Romit Dasgupta, "The Film *Bishōnen* and Queer(n)Asia through Japanese Popular Culture," in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, ed. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto (London: Routledge, 2006), 56–74, for discussion of these processes of intertextual/cultural transferences. See also Koichi Iwabuchi, "Reconsidering East Asian Connectivity and the Usefulness of Media and Cultural Studies," in *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes*, ed. Jonathan D. Mackintosh, Chris Berry, and Nicola Liscutin (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009), 25–36.
10. Reflecting the border-crossing element of the film, the title has versions in three languages—*About Love* (English), *Abauto rabu* (Japanese), *Guan yu ai*, and in some versions, *Lian ai di tu* (Chinese). This latter title, which might be rendered as "Maps of Love," captures a sense of the border-crossing flows of romance underpinning the text. In this chapter, I distinguish between the the Republic of China (ROC) on the island of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland, by referring to the former as Taiwan and the latter as China.
11. Mari Shimamura, *Romanchikku Uyirusu: Tokimeki Kansenshō no Onnatachi* [*Romantic Virus: The Women Caught up in the Epidemic*] (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2007).
12. See, for instance, Elizabeth MacLachlan and Geok-lian Chua, "Defining Asian Femininity: Chinese Viewers of Japanese TV Drama in Singapore," in *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 155–75; Eva Tsai, "Empowering Love: The Intertextual Author of *Ren'ai Dorama*," in *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 43–67; Yukie Hirata, "Touring 'Dramatic Korea': Japanese Women as Viewers of *Hanryū* Dramas and Tourists on *Hanryū* Tours," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 143–55; Yoshitaka Mōri, "*Winter Sonata* and Cultural Practices of Active Fans in Japan: Considering Middle-Aged Women as Cultural Agents," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing*

the Korean Wave, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 127–41.

13. Oscar Chung, "Showtime for Taiwan's Movies," *Taiwan Review* 59, n. 1 (2009), http://taiwanreview.nat.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=47400&CtNode=1337&mp=1 (accessed May 30, 2010).
14. Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Cultural Globalization," 3.
15. Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture and Society* 7, n. 2 (1990): 296–301.
16. For discussion of the dissemination of Japanese popular culture through the region in the 1990s, see, for instance, Koichi Iwabuchi, "Becoming 'Culturally Proximate': The A/scent of Japanese Idol Dramas in Taiwan," in *Asian Media Productions*, ed. Brian Moeran (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001), 54–74; Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization*; Iwabuchi, ed., *Feeling Asian Modernities*; Lisa Yuk Ming Leung, "Romancing the Everyday: Hong Kong Women Watching Japanese *Dorama*," *Japanese Studies* 22, n. 1 (2002): 65–75. For discussion of popular culture flows out of other regions in East Asia, see Chua, "Conceptualizing"; Hae-Jong Cha, "Reading the 'Korean Wave' as a Sign of Global Shift," *Korea Journal* 45, n. 4 (2005): 147–82; Doobo Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," *Media, Culture and Society* 28, n. 1 (2006): 25–44; Chua and Iwabuchi, ed., *East Asian Pop Culture*; Rachmah Ida, "Consuming Taiwanese Boys Culture: Watching *Meteor Garden* with Urban *Kampung* Women in Indonesia," in *Popular Culture in Indonesia: Fluid Identities in Post-Authoritarian Politics*, ed. Ariel Heryanto (London: Routledge, 2008), 93–110; Daniel Black, Stephen J. Epstein, and Alison Tokita, ed., *Complicated Currents: Media Flows, Soft Power and East Asia* (Clayton: Monash University ePress, 2010), http://www.epress.monash.edu/cc/ (accessed January 15, 2011).
17. For instance, Ching, "Imaginings in the Empires of the Sun"; Chua, "Conceptualizing"; Iwabuchi, "Becoming 'Culturally Proximate' "; Iwabuchi, *Feeling Asian Modernities*; Leung, "Romancing the Everyday"; Kelly Hu, "The Power of Circulation: Digital Technologies and the Online Fans of Japanese TV Drama," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, n. 2 (2005): 171–86.
18. Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Cultural Globalization," 2.
19. Iwabuchi, "Becoming 'Culturally Proximate' "; Leung, "Romancing the Everyday."
20. Iwabuchi, "Introduction: Cultural Globalization," 12.
21. Yano, "Wink on Pink." See also, Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Inuhiko Yomota, *"Kawaii"-ron* [*Theory of "Cute"*] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2006); Mark McLelland, "(A)cute Confusion: The Unpredictable Journey of Japanese Popular Culture," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 20 (2009), http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20/mclelland.htm (accessed May 28, 2010).
22. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 215–17.
23. See Cha, "Reading the 'Korean Wave' "; Chua and Iwabuchi, *East Asian Pop Culture*; Ingyu Oh, "Hallyu: The Rise of Transnational Cultural Consumers in China and Japan," *Korea Observer* 40, n. 3 (2009): 425–59.
24. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 207; Dong-Hoo Lee, "Cultural Contact with Japanese TV Dramas: Modes of Reception and Narrative Transparency,"

in *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*, ed. Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 251–74.

25. See Ida, "Consuming Taiwanese Boys Culture."
26. Dasgupta, "The Film *Bishōnen* and Queer(n)Asia."
27. See, for example, Chua, "Engendering an East Asia Pop Culture Research Community."
28. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 202.
29. Ibid., 215.
30. The exception here, as Chua points out, is China, where themes of the rural are still visible in popular culture texts; see Chua, "Conceptualizing," 216. In the case of the other societies in the region, the rural serves as an occasional outlet for nostalgia and fantasy. This also makes visible hierarchies between the urban modern (usually embodied in the hyper-modernity of urban spaces in cities such as Tokyo, Taipei, or Shanghai), and the less developed, but nostalgia-infused suburban/rural. This hierarchy also gets replicated in a regional context, for instance in the way "Asia" is often a space for nostalgic consumption in "hyper-modern" Japan; see Iwabuchi, "Nostalgia for (Different) Asian Modernities"; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Invisible Countries: Japan and the Asian Dream," *Asian Studies Review* 22, n. 1 (1998): 5–22.
31. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 216. Indeed, this border-crossing urban anywhere/everywhere is suggestive of aspects of the "Generic City" discussed by the Dutch architect and theorist Rem Koolhaas in "The Generic City," in *S, M, L, XL*, ed. Jennifer Sigler (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995), 1238–64. Ackbar Abbas notes that a distinctive feature of the Generic City is the overcoming of "any fixation of identity" and the emancipatory association of this anywhere/everywhere-ness. Significantly, Abbas makes a distinction between the Generic City and a postcolonial city—while the postcolonial has implications of "rediscovering or reinventing an identity that colonialism has threatened to eradicate" the Generic City is essentially ahistorical (or even "post-historical"). Ackbar Abbas, "Cinema, the City, and the Cinematic," in *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age*, ed. Linda Krause and Patrice Petro (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 147; Ackbar Abbas, "Affective Spaces in Hong Kong/Chinese Cinema," in *Cinema at the City's Edge: Film and Urban Networks in East Asia*, ed. Yomi Braester and James Tweedie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 29–30.
32. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 216.
33. Leung, "Romancing the Everyday," 72.
34. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 216–17.
35. This refers to the male idols/celebrities groomed for public consumption by the Johnny's Jimusho talent agency in Japan, which has been important in male-idol production for several decades. The agency, headed by Johnny Kitagawa, has been responsible for grooming and selling to the public such big-name music and idol groups as *SMAP*, Arashi, and KAT-TUN. For further background discussion, see Fabienne Darling-Wolf, "SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity: Constructing the Perfect Female Fantasy in Japanese Popular Music," *Popular Music and Society* 27, n. 3 (2004): 357–70.

36. Sun Jung, "The Shared Imagination of *Bishōnen*, Pan-East Asian Soft Masculinity: Reading DBSK, *Youtube.com* and Transcultural New Media Consumption," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 20 (2009), http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue20/jung.htm (accessed May 28, 2010).
37. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 217.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. For discussion of the Japanese government's use of soft power, see Koichi Iwabuchi, " 'Soft' Nationalism and Narcissism: Japanese Popular Culture goes Global," *Asian Studies Review* 26, n. 4 (2002): 447–69; also Koichi Iwabuchi, "Lost in TransNation: Tokyo and the Urban Imaginary in the Era of Globalization," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 9, n. 4 (2008): 543–56; Michal Daliot-Bul, "Japan Brand Strategy: The Taming of 'Cool Japan' and the Challenges of Cultural Planning in a Postmodern Age," *Social Sciences Japan Journal* 12, n. 2 (2009): 247–66. For discussion in the context of South Korea, see Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture."
41. Chua, "Conceptualizing," 217.
42. Indeed, their encounter at the Shibuya crosswalk captures perfectly Lisa Leung's observation of chance encounters leading to romance underpinning urban modernity. As Leung points out, the opening trailer to each episode of *Love Generation*, a late 1990s Japanese TV drama immensely popular throughout East/Southeast Asia, played up this possibility of chance encounters through hands accidentally brushing at busy crosswalks, leading to romance. See Leung, "Romancing the Everyday," 72.
43. Ibid.
44. Rio Otomo, in a discussion of the relationship between the male character played by the Japanese actor and idol Kimura Takuya and the local hotel owner's daughter played by Faye Wong in Wong Kar-Wai's film *2046*, draws attention to the dynamics of desire and suppressed emotion expressed through language, specifically Japanese, as a means to transcend and indeed paint over the violence of the past. See Rio Otomo, "The Hong Kong Connection: Wong Kar-Wai's *2046* and Japanese as the Language of Desire" (paper presented at the Imaging Japan Symposium, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, February 2005), http://rio-otomo.net/ (accessed May 28, 2010).
45. For further discussion, see, for instance, Hironori Sasada, "Youth and Nationalism in Japan," *SAIS Review* 26, n. 2 (2006): 109–22.
46. This is not dissimilar to cinematic representations of Hong Kong and Taiwan as discursive third inter-spaces for China/Taiwan/Hong Kong interconnections and anxieties to be played out in 1990s films such as *Chungking Express*, *Happy Together*, and *Hold You Tight*. See, for instance, Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid Comrades: Representations of Male Homosexuality in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 101–2, 164–6; Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Audrey Yue, "What's so Queer about *Happy Together*? A.K.A Queer(n)Asian: Interface, Community, Belonging," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, n. 2 (2000): 251–64.
47. Iwabuchi, "Nostalgia for (Different) Asian Modernities," 549–51. See also Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh's discussion of representations of Taipei as an "other"

space (in relation to Japan) in the films of Japanese director Miike Takashi, in "Taipei as Shinjuku's Other," in *Cinema at the City's Edge*, 55–67. The lack of identifiable markers of Taipei's cityscape in *About Love* echoes Abbas' observation about the treatment of Hong Kong in Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* and his subsequent *2046*. As Abbas notes, "the city as such seems to have disappeared, replaced by an interior . . . much of the action in these films, the small 'capillary action,' takes place in enclosed spaces." Abbas, "Affective Spaces in Hong Kong/Chinese Cinema," 31.

48. For a discussion of the appeal of Murakami Haruki, both in terms of his texts and his personal significance as a literary and popular cultural icon, throughout East Asia, see Margaret Hillenbrand, "Murakami Haruki in Greater China: Creative Responses and the Quest for Cosmopolitanism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68, n. 3 (2009): 715–47; and Jiwoon Baik, "Murakami Haruki and the Historical Memory of East Asia," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 11, n. 1 (2010): 64–72. Indeed, as Baik points out (64–5), Murakami and his works have come to signify the "younger generations' common desire" across the entire region. Both Baik and Hillenbrand point to the significance of the consumption of slick nostalgia through Murakami's texts as integral to this regional (and indeed, global) appeal.
49. Ackbar Abbas, "Play It Again Shanghai: Urban Preservation in the Global Era," in *Shanghai Reflections: Architecture, Urbanism and the Search for an Alternative Modernity*, ed. Mario Gandelsonas (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), 37–55.
50. See Eva Tsai, "Existing in the Age of Innocence: Pop Stars, Publics, and Politics in Asia," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 217–42; Fang-chih Irene Yang, "Rap(p)ing Korean Wave: National Identity in Question," in *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 191–216.
51. Tsai, "Existing in the Age of Innocence," 241–2.

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