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Theorizing New Asian Cinemas: Problems of the Historicist

Approach

1. Historicism and the construction of 'Asian Cinema'

The rise of New Asian cinemas has paved a new path for the critics and scholars of Film Studies all over the world. These new cinemas, particularly from the East-Asian countries, not only boost up the industrial-economic aspects in the form of transnational circulation of East Asian films in the global market, but also inspire a new theoretical approach to Film Studies. There is an urge to construct a set of new theoretical tools that can address the new Asian cinemas.

But as a researcher of new Asian cinemas, I encounter a problem of the inadequacy of theoretical tools. I will just give an example: Nick Browne, in the 'Introduction' to *New Chinese Cinema: Forms Identities Politics*, writes, "In the People's Republic [of China] the mutation of aesthetic and ideological cinematic forms is the consequence of an effort by a range of filmmakers to conceive anew the relation of aesthetic and politics..."¹. In the next paragraph he says, "Two fundamental aesthetic poles mark the dominant cultural tendencies enacted across the films of the new period in both Taiwan and Hong Kong – the traditional (nostalgic) and the modern (the cynical, the discontinuous)."² Two things are clearly reflected here: the New Chinese Cinema is a 'new' object of study and in order to read it one must encounter the 'new' relationship of aesthetic and politics invoked by the fifth/sixth generation Chinese filmmakers. And then comes an explanation that tries to solve the riddle in order to fit it into the given paradigm of 'Film Studies'. Browne observes that the Chinese cinema in the 1980s produces a 'continuing and convulsive effort'³, which he identifies as the enactment of 'cultural dilemma' of the post-maoist Chinese society. The use of expressions like "convulsive effort" and "cultural dilemma" indicates that the Chinese cinema of the 80's is an exception as opposed to a 'norm' that dominates the theoretical paradigm, that is, this cinema is a phantom entity in the realm of Western paradigm of World Cinema.

Now, the question is how to study these conceptual relations of representation, politics and history in a time of intellectual crisis of older historiography. Particularly when the nation-state that holds these relations as an institution, is undergoing a functional and conceptual change it is not very easy and convincing to offer a solution by working out the problem with the common theorem of the (bi)polarity of tradition and modernity. Even if they are not considered as constituting the universal binary, rather as two forces operating on the same plane in a modern society, the temporal frame of understanding these two terms seems problematic in this particular context. And the context, i.e. the new East-Asia, is in a very complicated state where the application of these categories nation-state, modernity, tradition, postmodernity, globality or nativism cannot be seen as unproblematic.

One must acknowledge that the ‘newness’ of the new Asian cinemas lies in its location outside the old geopolitical frame of understanding ‘modern cinema’. The phrase ‘modern cinema’ in Film Studies means — the national cinemas labeled either as so-called art films made for the release in international festival circuit of Europe and America, or popular films which earn revenue, more or less within a national market. The rubric of ‘national cinemas’ has helped Film Studies to conceptualize the socio-political and economic ground as well as the cultural specificities from which a (national) cinema emerges. Now the issues regarding the methods appropriated for the understanding of so-called cultural specificity, its historical and epistemological construction, is there to be addressed in Film Studies.

“In Film Studies”, Vitali and Willemen write in the ‘Introduction’, to *Theorising National Cinema*, “the notion of cultural specificity that may be deployed against the universalizing ethnocentricity at work operates at the level of this geo-temporal construction of the national.”⁴ This ‘geo-temporality’ that constructs the theoretical framework in Film Studies finds unease in applicability in the context of new Asian cinemas. The newness, if we just follow the apparent logic, lies in its transnational features, which makes it really difficult to locate the new Asian cinemas in the framework of national cinema. The flow of the capital across national boundaries reshapes the culture industry which is often explained as ‘the realm of uncertainty’. This newness has been already widely appreciated both by the cinephiles and by the practitioners over the last one and half decade. But a radical shift in film practice and film viewership has not ensured a radical shift in the theoretical plane as such. The critical understanding of the newness is often hindered by the limitations of the earlier theoretical premises. Perhaps the remnant of a ‘geo-temporal’ approach, which film theories should rework, if not give up, still dominates the unconscious of the theoretical framework. In the era of the modern the theoretical approach to cinema, like all other disciplines, is directly or indirectly based on the geo-politics which primarily is the yield of conceptualizing Europe as the origin of the discourses of modernity. A certain understanding of the development of capital all over the world provides the basis of the division of the ‘developed’ West and the ‘developing’ non-West. Dipesh Chakrabarty terms this way of understanding the past ‘historicism’.⁵

The West experienced the development of capital in such a way that fixes the notion of the ‘ideal’ journey of the past/history. The non-West, in comparison with the ‘ideal’ Western past, constructed its modernity with the experience of the ‘uneven, imposed and incomplete development’ of the capital – and thus is deemed as developing. “Historicism”, Chakrabarty writes, “thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West.”⁶ The inevitable teleology which informs historicism as the foundation of theories led to a conclusion that the West is the domain assigned to the culture of ‘real subsumption’ and the non-West, the Other, manifests the culture of the ‘formal subsumption’.

The identity of Asian cinemas in the Western eyes, as a non-Western cultural product, was long connected to this historicist approach. Since the 1950s, with the discovery of Japanese cinema by the European audience, Asian cinema had been ghettoized within the boundary of a

geo-cultural specificity. The idea of the 'cultural distance' triggered by the historicist approach helped the critics to identify Asian cinemas as the cinematic manifestation of a rather obscure but over-used construct called 'Asian mode of representation'. Even, a critic like Donald Richie, who knew Japanese culture thoroughly, discovered a certain 'Asian morality' in Ozu's films, which he claimed was the driving force of Ozu's narrative.⁷ Asian cinema, which was understood as archaic though not truly exotic, obtained its position in modern cinema as an endless source of the cultural production of the traditional and the transcendental.

The appreciation of the new Asian cinemas in the post-Cold War era as 'global' cinema indeed follows a different logic. Earlier Asian cinemas had two very distinct identities: one, as a significant contributor to the World Cinema, and two, in a more radical appreciation, as a significant non-Western cinematic mode. The first follows the logic of national cinemas and the second follows the differential logic, of being distinctly different from the dominant mode of representation of Hollywood as well as European art cinema. However, postcolonial theories have taken a radical step in the process of 'unthinking Eurocentricism'. Postcolonial thinking has not confined itself either to the conventional approach to 'national culture' or to the 'world view' of universal culture, and has provided Film Studies, particularly in the non-Western countries, the necessary theoretical and methodological tools to encounter the imposed division of the 'developed' and the 'developing'. Having been equipped with Postcolonial theories, Film Studies could argue that the Western mode of representation should no longer be considered as the 'pure' and 'ideal' form which the non-Western modes ideally strive to attain.

The realism debate in non-Western cinema in the last two and half decades is the very example of this kind of approach. The realism in Asian cinema has been considered as a Western form adopted here by the middle-class filmmakers and the aspirant auteurs. On the other hand melodrama has been considered a form directly related to people's culture in the non-West. Postcolonial thought, as a critic of historicism, extend the realism debate into the realm of art/popular dialectics. The art cinema as the example of 'less popular' approach has been treated as aestheticism or often as a mimicry of the Western form. It's true that this critique of realism and art cinema in a way opened a whole gamut of new research in popular cinema and located Film Studies in the map of Cultural Studies, but the new Asian cinemas have been taking film culture, at least partially beyond the art/popular and realism/melodrama debates. The rapidly growing numbers of cinephiles, who previously looked out for art films and auteur cinema, as well as the large audience who fed revenue to the film market, have found overlapping interests. The rapidly increasing popularity of these films is blurring the boundary between 'art' and 'popular'.

The sharp elevation of the economic status of the East-Asian countries in the recent past and the subsequent massive growth of consumer culture have created a situation that erases the non-Western identification marks from the East-Asian cities. The qualification 'higher form' was assigned to realism as it was the standard practice of the cinematic form of Hollywood and Europe. The departure of Hollywood (and European cinema) from the center of the economy of cinema definitely problematizes the legitimacy of adding a historical value to the realist practices

in the case of recent East-Asian films, and thus problematizes the understanding of the non-realist forms as ideological 'difference' to the dominant mode of representation.

Understanding new Asian cinemas in terms of formal aspects is also becoming very difficult, as the application of forms is losing its consistency very rapidly. For example, the high degree of dissonance and reflexivity in the body of the realist texts produced by the Taiwan filmmakers, the flamboyant and high-tech costume dramas made by the Chinese fifth generation filmmakers, the Hong Kong thrillers and bizarre love stories destroy "the appearance of coherence" of the form. It's really difficult to identify one or any definite number of common threads in the narrative forms in these films so that the *langue* of a social discourse can be identified. This extremely contingent, as opposed to coherent and consistent, nature of the use of the formal devices is witnessed in the works of the globally acclaimed filmmakers from the East-Asian countries. The modernist tools of explaining the individual creation in cinema whatever it is called - *auteur policy*, *authorial stance* or *auteur study* - does not prove satisfactory. Hence the *auteur*, as a historical production, has to be approached with some new theoretical interventions since the 'coherence' in form as the identity of the *auteur* visibly disappears.

The focus, in recent times, has shifted from form to a much more inclusive category i.e., narrative. The system of narrative, as Stephen Heath says, is a "subject-producing machine". His position on narrative is that the human subject is not first of all constructed and then placed within social and ideological formations, but that constructing and placing are one and same process, which continues interminably.⁸ Narrative, in comparison to form's concrete structure, is more contingent in nature. The narrative, formation of a subject where the possibilities of development are not pre-given may get rid of the a-priori and consequently opens the text out. Fredric Jameson's seminal article 'Remapping Taipei'⁹ is an attempt to address East-Asian cinema through narrative.

In 'Detouring Korean Cinema', Paul Willemen also addresses this new situation through narrative, but in a much more complicated conjectural fashion.¹⁰ As Madhava Prasad argues, Willemen in this essay suggests that any film text is a composite of pre-modern and modern, which are orchestrated by the narrative voice.¹¹ Having borrowed from Franco Moretti's formulation¹² of 'narrative voice', which emerges as the result of a compromise between the "foreign form" – the modernizing forces, and "local material" – the traditional and archaicising forces, Willemen argues that the "narrative voice" that can also be identified as "local form" is a correlation of "subject constellation" offered by a narrative. Willemen argues that the mode of address of Korean cinema orchestrates the 'traditional' (constructed/imagined) and 'modern' articulated through 'narrative voice'. He identifies the influence of two modernities in colonial and post-colonial South Korean society. Japanese modernity came in the form of colonialism in Korea and Western modernity has come mainly in the form of US modernity. Though modernity is desirable, South Korean society often opposes Japanese modernity as it was introduced by colonial power. But it does not mean that its attitude toward Western modernity is uncritical. Contemporary South Korean society often opposes and criticizes the US modernity as

hegemonic. What is important in his approach is that consciously avoiding the historicist trap of the binary of tradition /modernity, he proposes the agency of 'tradition' still operative and thus no longer lost in the history of the triumph of the modernity. He proclaims, "the modernizing and the archaicizing forces orchestrated in modes of address are not peculiar to non-Western practices". From this particular point of argument, Willemen expects a "Comparative Film Studies" to emerge as a new guide to world cinema.¹³

The discomfort that I feel with this model is twofold – one, Willemen never makes clear the interfaces among different modernizing forces themselves that may produce the complicated crosscurrents of the formation of subjectivity in a (cinematic) narrative. The contemporary phenomenon of the Globalization, which appears as the principal 'modernizing force', is being confronted by 'modernity' itself. Willemen addresses this question obliquely as "the tension of subjectivity and identity" where 'modernizing force' is associated with subjectivity and 'modernity' is associated with identity.¹⁴ It seems as a rather simplistic division of two components of a complicated whole. As modernity is not only a question of identity; it is a question of being, or at the organic level, managing livelihood also. The transition from modern to postmodern, or from one aspect of the modern (dominated by the national industrial capital) to the other (dominated by the global finance capital), is not a blissfully ignorant process. The transition is a painful and eventful one because the changes of habitation, profession, and the economics of rural-urban relationship give rise to discontent and discomfort, particularly in the non-Western countries. Identity politics hardly informs these crosscurrents within modernizing forces in operation as it generalizes the subjective positions and misses the nuances and minor elements in the formation of an experiencing subject in a film narrative. Rey Chow expresses her resentment with this as identity politics to her is "politically retrogressive". She says, "By insisting that artificial images somehow correspond to the lives and histories of cultural groups, identity politics implicitly reinvests such images with an anthropomorphic realism [.....] If we, however, remember that what are on the screen are not people but images, the conventional, identity-politics-driven understanding of cinematic identification will have to be abandoned."¹⁵ It is evident from the contemporary political history that modernity in different parts of non-West resists the modernizing forces of global capitalism. But it cannot be that the resistance is an attempt to restore identity. In a number of East-Asian countries capitalist modernization is enhanced under the guardianship of quasi-dictatorial political system, as Samir Amin has shown¹⁶. People's agitations in these societies are demanding democratic rights and building resistance against capitalist globalization – this cannot be translated as mere identity politics.

These crosscurrents in Asian cinemas, which Willemen has misunderstood as identity politics, are often manifested in cinema in the form of melodramatic imagination. It is evident that the most popular form of cinematic representation in Asian cinemas is melodrama. Wimal Dissanayeke observes that melodramatic forms are still functioning in different Asian cinemas as prevailing modes even though melodrama functions differently in different cultural contexts.¹⁷ Once film criticism saw melodrama as a form that emerges from traditional milieu,

placing realism as its binary opposite. Later, both in Europe and non-West, melodrama has been found to be a historically modern form of popular cultures. Madhava Prasad, for instance, studied the role of melodramatic imagination in Asian cinema in general with special reference to Hindi cinema, and his seminal work investigates how melodramatic forms originate and function as the expression of cinematic modernity in Indian popular culture.¹⁸

He argues that the linear historical narrative of aesthetic periods – melodrama, realism, postmodern forms – was conceptualized according to the experience of the First world. “These differences”, says Prasad “have the synchronic spatial distribution based on a socio-political logic that must be investigated.”¹⁹ What I find more interesting is Prasad’s contention that realism and melodrama are the “twin cultural modes of capitalism, emerging more or less in parallel in Europe”, and hence “realism and melodrama were two complimentary as well as contradictory aesthetic expressions of a single social form”.²⁰

A large number of critics have produced research on the melodramatic imagination in different Asian cinemas. They are helpful for the research in national cinemas in Asia. But as far as the history of the development of cinema from early to national, and national to global, in Asian nations is concerned, we need to address some missing links to map this journey. Otherwise there is a danger that Asian cinemas are essentialized as melodramatic. In order to elucidate my point I would like to draw example from Japanese cinema.

The research in early cinema in Japan reveals that the Japanese silent cinema, till the early 1930s, used fast movement, dynamic montage and gags. Peter Rist writes, “The most striking observation to be made of this event was the incredible dynamism of these films in contradiction to what is normally regarded as the distinctive ‘stillness’ of Japanese cinema”.²¹ He observes incredible fast pace of the action sequences in the editing, camera movement and character movement, particularly in the sword-fighting sequences in the *chambara* films made between 1925 and 1931. In *jidai-geki*, *gendai-geki* and *keiko eiga* - the other silent cinema genres in Japan - we find the same tendency for fast movement. Rist observes ‘realist’ camera movement in *gendai-geki* films and Eisensteinian montage in “left tendency (*keiko eiga*)” films.²² But as Japanese cinema switches over from silent to sound, we find it, unlike Hollywood, developing a slow-paced melodrama, shunning the fast realist and constructivist tendencies of silent films. The slow movement in Japanese melodramas was later identified largely as the national cinematic style of Japan. How and why did this quick transformation from fast realism to slow melodrama take place in Japanese cinema? One simple answer can be that this is an aesthetic choice encountered on the way from silent to sound. But this answer does not satisfy the critical query. If one takes stock of the amount of works produced on Japanese cinemas, it is found that the bulk is invested to the slow-paced melodrama films. But very little work has been done on the transformation of cinematic mode of address in the 1930s. What I see as a missing link is this lack of knowledge production in certain historical aspects of Asian cinemas. The missing link is there in the historical understanding of Chinese and Korean cinemas too.

The problem lies in the long history of West's epistemological encounter with the non-West. There is a tendency to identify non-Western culture as national culture without an investigation of the construction of the national, which Prasad calls, "synchronic spatial distribution [of culture] based on the socio-political logic". Following this logic it is very easy to believe, say, Japanese Cinema as a concrete, if not homogeneous, form, but it is hard to acknowledge the heterogeneity in that cinema. In the non-West the comprehensive milieu of modernity and the functional aspect of modernization rarely have a straight and simple correlation. It is true that the increasing influence of modernity is related to modernization. But there is a difference between technological modernization and cultural modernity. Technological modernization directly reciprocates capitalist development and industrial development, whereas, cultural development is engendered by the historical encounter of the experiencing subject with the capitalist and industrial growth. Willemen's take on the Moretti model, and the way he applies his formulation in the case of Korean cinema in order to inaugurate the idea of 'Comparative Film Studies', attempts to address the complicated nature of cultural development in Asian cinemas.

Before we enter into the Comparative Film Studies debate let us revisit the form/content and modernity/tradition debates - as they occupy a central position in the discussions of Asian cinemas.

2. *Postcolonial approaches to the meaning of tradition*

The form/content division played a very important role in the Western scholars' critical understanding of non-Western cinemas. A number of Western critics have drawn on this division while addressing Asian cinemas. Noel Burch and Roland Barthes in their significant writings on Japanese cinema and culture employed the formalist division of form/content in their approaches. Later, David Desser and David Bordwell, accepting the same "formalist reification of a form/content division" presented their cases criticizing the positions taken by Burch and Barthes.²³ Along with this formalist tendency, form/content division, as a critical tool has also been addressed by a number of Western critical schools for a broader purpose of the historical understanding of the tradition/modernity division in the non-West. Cultural critics influenced by Marxist thought both in West and non-West apply this division in order to approach dialectically the role of tradition/modernity in the formation of modern cultures in the non-Western societies.

Franco Moretti attempts to read the cultural ramification of the colonial encounter between modernity and tradition with the help of form/content division. His subject matter is the novel. Willemen accepts Moretti's conjecture that modernity introduced itself as a foreign *form* and encountered traditional native cultures. When modernity comes, it appears, as a new mode of production in the sphere of the economic and the political; and that finally results in a set of production relations, which are 'social'. One cannot not be sure though if (Western) modernity, which was introduced as a 'foreign' economic and political concept to a native land, develops specifically as a *form*. Later in another article ('For a Comparative Film Studies') Willemen re-worked Moretti's model and proposed that the compromise takes place more precisely between "local material" and "capitalist modernization".²⁴ But even in this later essay he left the

national question in colonial and post-colonial cultures unaddressed. The advent of the colonial modern must have generated an unease and subsequent resistance in the colonized society. In the primary phase it was a battle between the pre-modern (read pre-colonial) and the modern. But as nationalism emerges as the major mobilizing force after the battle has been generally resolved in favour of the colonial mode of production, the latter is challenged not by the pre-modern but by a new discourse related to a modern production system that first tries to jeopardize the colonial or dominant mode of production and then assert an alternative mode of production in economy, and finally generate subsequent production relations as the new social. And all this takes place within the domain of modernity.

My understanding of Moretti's conjectures is that the historical moment of the coming of the modernity is decisive. Decisive- because this is the moment when modernizing forces as forms of colonialism and capitalism face resistance from the pre-modern native modes of productions, which we later understand as traditional force. But the problem of counting this historical moment as 'decisive' in cinema is that cinema came into being as a courier of twentieth century when even the colonized countries in Asia and Africa had advanced to the peak of (colonial) modernity. That moment must be important to an art-historian, even to a literary critic, as those media existed before that moment and as a result they might reflect the initial clash between two modes of production. For example, Janaki Nair identifies the moment of the victory of British colonialism over an Indian emperor Tipu Sultan as the triumph of western Perspectivalism over the practice of multiple perspectives in paintings.²⁵ Or as in Ghalib's poetry one can find the contradiction of pre-colonial tradition and the colonial modern. But cinema is a gift of high modern technology and society, and it was an industrial product, not an art-form in the classical sense. Cinema had missed the historical moment of coming of modernity, and could only experience the tradition that was encapsulated in the modern discourses. One cannot get back to tradition; one can only articulate it by naming it. And it lacked the symbolic system that once upon a time could express the lived experiences of tradition beyond modernity. So the discourse always slips from 'naming the tradition' to 're-naming the tradition' in cinematic language.

Moretti invokes the model to understand a historical moment, not geo-politics. A problem crops up as Willemsen arbitrarily places 'foreign form' and 'local content' as two mutually interactive categories without considering their historicity. The geo-politics of 'foreign' and 'local', one should note, is less about spatiality and more about temporality – as the earlier is associated with 'form' and the later is associated with 'content'. My point is when one thinks about a form (s)he reflects on the development and consolidation of a certain use of a set of artifices, and it's ideological ramifications. Madhava Prasad calls this the "content of the form".²⁶ In this formulation 'foreign form' indicates the diachronicity of its evolution and its geo-temporal dissemination from West to the non-West through historical time. The 'local content' which is deemed to be immobile and sluggish in respect of time, notwithstanding its existence and change in very complicated national and pre-national modern histories, is assumed as a cultural object that is 'ossified'.

It seems as if the articulation of the ‘narrative voice’ is awaiting the moment ‘local content’ encounters the ‘foreign form’. Form, by default, invites a scientific study of its structure, justifies itself in terms of its historical origin; and content, more specifically, local content, has been always studied as culture located spatially. So what we need in order to explain the cinematic modern in the non-West is to historicize the emergence and development of the cinematic form in the context of national culture. The non-West encountered cinematic form not in the wake of colonialism but in early 20th century when technological, scientific and political modernity had already been globalized by colonialism and nationalism. As we consider the temporality of the development of cinema in the late 19th century, we find that cinema as technology reached, say, a Belgian photographer and an Indian painter almost at the same time, i.e. by 1896. Cinema as a medium of expression, unlike the novel, has not travelled from West to the non-West temporally. The novel can be considered a derivative form in the non-West, but cinema emerged as a global medium of expression from the very beginning. Actually, the moment the cinematic form emerges in a non-Western country it immediately encounters not tradition but a new form of modernity tending towards the national-modern.

This new modernity in a colonized country, fostered by nationalism and/or socialism in opposition to the colonial modern, often re-invokes tradition, as Frantz Fanon has shown in his ‘On National Culture’. This is done in order to historicize the native past as national history.²⁷ It is to be kept in mind that historicizing the national past is out and out a modern project. This project of reinventing tradition appears most strongly in the field of culture. (The postcolonial histories written by Fanon, Benedict Anderson and Partha Chatterjee have produced substantial arguments how ‘tradition’ is subsumed by the ‘nationalist modern’²⁸). But this emerging nationalist discourse never attempts to invert the mode of production in order to get back to the pre-modern order. Rather, the opposed colonial modernity, the desired nationalist alternative and the invented tradition all contribute to a prognostic vision of the imagination of nation.²⁹ And the ‘reinvented tradition’ which is manifested in the colonial and post-colonial art and culture no longer functions as archaicizing force but is a part of the same prognosis that imagines the (future of) the nation.

The Moretti model, constituted with the idea of ‘foreign form’ and the ‘local content’, might indicate its resemblance to the Marxist model of base and superstructure. It sounds like foreign form introduced by the colonial force encounters the local content (i.e. pre-colonial material life) and finally gives rise to the synthesized local form as the new relations of production in the sphere of culture. But Marxists understand colonialism in a much more complicated way. As Marxists studied colonialism or imperial aggression and dominance in a native country like India or China, they emphasized the mode of production, its transformation and the production relations that affect the material life of people. It is not wise to draw the inference that Marxism holds a fixed and simplistic framework that the industrial mode of production is foreign and the artisanal modes of production, which Marx describes as ‘Asiatic mode of production’³⁰, are local. This framework only explains the early phase of colonialism. The synthesis or

compromise, whatever one prefers to call it, takes shape in time. The whole scenario becomes complicated with the emergence of the bourgeois class in a colonized country and with the rise of nationalism and in some cases germination of socialist movements. The clash of the 'Asiatic mode of production' with industrial modernity is only a basic idea in Marxism to understand the colonial condition in the non-West.

Marxism after Marx reviewed the question of nationalism and colonial dominance all over the non-Western world in the first half of the 20th century. Luxemburg, Lenin and Kautsky engaged themselves in a debate that took place in the 1910s.³¹ An important part of the debate addressed the question of nationality, nationalism and imperialism in the non-West. Luxemburg defined self-determination of the nations, colonized or un-colonized, as a politico-legal right which must first be achieved universally. This implies that the issue of class should come after a nation has achieved its sovereignty. Lenin was more interested in drawing the discourse into the domain of political economy. He saw nationalism in the light of a capitalism-dominated global system, and argued that the "final victory of capitalism over feudalism" has been linked up with nationalism. Lenin adds that self-determination of nations means the political separation of nations from the alien bodies.³² It is clear that both Luxemburg and Lenin, though they differed to a large extent, emphasize the ideological concerns of nationalism and nation formation in the context of development of capitalism and class consciousness.

Luxemburg underlines the sovereignty of the nation as a universal-democratic right while Lenin is more critical on the issue as he points to the politics of the formation of the national 'self'. The construction of the national 'self', as Lenin indicates, is based on the process of othering the alien nations. We must also note his understanding of nationalist and anti-colonial struggle in the non-West, particularly in Asia. He observed the case of Japan as a free nation which not only developed a national capital but also established itself as the strongest ever imperialist force in East Asia.³³ And Japan interestingly did not give up the artisanal mode of production entirely; it managed to sustain the artisanal mode of production and traditional customs within the newly developed industrial mode of production and modern life. Capitalism, as a modernizing force in Japan, was not hindered by this phenomenon of the inclusion of the traditional into the modern but helped Japan to establish itself as a modern capitalist nation. Tradition adapted/reinvented selectively in the modern no longer was acting as an archaizing force, but appeared as a tool that helps construct a 'Japaneseness' on the basis of othering the neighborhood nations in East Asia. The films of Yasujiro Ozu, for example, the pet location where the Western critics found the 'alternative' modernism and melancholy, are being reviewed and criticized by the Korean film critics like Kim Soyong as an aesthetic venture to conceal the 'imperialist' Japan.³⁴ Though intense textual criticism of his films shows that Ozu has not left Japanese nationalism and war unproblematic. But what is important to me is the fresh discourse initiated by Soyong which addresses the political and cultural dynamics in trans-Asian frames.

It is really difficult to measure the role of categories like nationalism, tradition, capitalism in non-Western nations within a modular formula. We have another very interesting example of the

Chinese theatre. The Chinese peasantry largely belonged to the feudal mode of production in the third and fourth decades of the 20th century. But they came up as the largest anti-imperialist and nationalist force with a view of radical reform in the mode of production in order to modernize social relations. The idea of nationalism in China is not a product of the historical process of the triumph of capitalism over the feudal system as presumed by the European Marxists. Maoists in China in their organizing phase and after the success of the socialist-nationalist struggle sustained the political battle against feudalism and the traditional in order to modernize and de-imperialize the society. But interestingly, in the cultural front they wanted not only to preserve and restore some traditional art forms but to revive and popularize the folk art as the modern culture of the people.³⁵ One must note here that traditional culture had been de-contextualized from its basic mode of production, i.e. feudalism, and was re-contextualized in order to construe the cultural identity of the people of China as a peasant identity.

The history of the development of Chinese traditional theatre in the 20th century is of interest in this connection. Though Chinese traditional theatre achieved its foreign reputation for its prestigious *jingju*, the actual traditional form was *xiqu* (theatre of songs). But *xiqu* is not a single form; it was being practiced in various different forms in different districts of China. Later Beijing Opera, as an improvised form, developed in the 19th century and was widely acclaimed among the urban population while the revived *xiqu* was very popular among the peasantry even in the 20th century.³⁶

The history of the development of *xiqu* in 20th century and its reception by the modernists is fascinating. The New Cultural Movement, the first organized modernist movement in China, started in 1917. This movement, also known as May Fourth movement, declared *xiqu* as anti-progressive and rustic.³⁷ They introduced Western theatre in China with a view to replace the traditional forms. But since the 1920s Communist Party in China placed value in *xiqu* as a theatrical form practiced by the common peasantry as a culture that opposes the aesthetics of elite Chinese royal opera. As Mao Ze-dong took a personal interest in traditional folk literature and theatre, since the 1930s the collection, preservation and circulation of *xiqu* got a new impetus. In the 1940s, as recorded in historical documents, *xiqu* was being censored and partly banned in the temporary capital of Kuomintang-dominated Chongqing while it was warmly welcomed and widely practiced in Yan'an district, the base of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party.³⁸

In the 1940s and 1950s, the old mythic *contents* of the traditional Chinese theatre were replaced with the oral history of the peasant movements that took place in Chinese hinter-lands, though the traditional *form* i.e. three-sides-open stage, *jian chang* (visible stage assistants) and *er dao mu* (inner curtain), etc., were restored. On the other hand, Beijing Opera, under the influence of modernist intellectuals, replaced the traditional *forms* to a great extent with the Western proscenium craft, while the mythic *contents* were restored. The Maoist ideologues of culture were not interested in Westernizing the *xiqu*. They found (Western) realism a bourgeois mode of expression and held traditional form, coupled with the historical-revolutionary content, as more

‘progressive’. Even the influences of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold were disliked.³⁹ A captain of Maoist army who was very close to the leader writes: “I found that he liked all Chinese folk literature and arts, [but] he was not interested in foreign literature and arts very much.”⁴⁰

But this cannot be the single timeless clue with which one can read the development of Chinese traditional theatre in the 20th century. In the period of the Cultural Revolution (1964-1976) the attitude of the Chinese Communist Party towards traditional art-forms changed. In order to uproot all traces of feudal remnants from the Chinese society, Mao declared a crusade against the practice of traditional arts, particularly against the mythic narratives and costume drama performed in the Beijing Opera. Chinese theatre was drastically censored and the artists and intellectuals who argued in favour of the traditional art-forms were purged.⁴¹

The iron curtain lifted in the 1980s with the coming of Deng Xiaoping into power. The open market economy brought fresh air also in the Chinese art and cultural practices. And a new Chinese bourgeoisie emerged as a result of the open-market economy, ironically whose (modernist) predecessors once had written off the traditional practices as anti-modern, sought to bring back the practice of Chinese traditional art and theatre.⁴² Since the 1980s the revivals of Daoism and Confucianism have also been witnessed. The performances of traditional theatre in Beijing Opera now became an attraction for the foreign tourists, and became viable cultural goods for export. Clearly, the regeneration of the traditional in the field of art, culture, performance or philosophy in contemporary China is motivated by the globalizing forces in the era of economic liberalization. The proposed comparative cultural analyses constituted with the categories ‘foreign form’/‘local content’ seems very inadequate in apprehending the contemporary cultural dynamics of the PRC.

In the Chinese cinema of the 1980s, we find two strong currents. One, the practice of realism, which emerged as a critique of the melodramatic fourth generation films made in the era of the Cultural Revolution, and the practice of avant-gardism inspired by French New Wave of 1960s. And two, the historical narratives of pre-Maoist China told in the form of spectacular costume drama and action films.⁴³ Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou have made a number of such films which have been released in foreign film festivals and sold well in the film-markets of Europe and USA. It is quite clear that the Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers’ take on tradition is ambiguous, and, according to some critics, motivated by the market. As Zhang Yimou says in an interview with Michael Berry, the reason why he is so keen to make films related to the narratives dealing with the traditional past is not clear to him – it might have some connection to his “time spent growing in north-western China and Chinese folk-lore”⁴⁴ ; or it might have been triggered by the bitter memory of the Cultural Revolution which ignited his desire for traditional art-forms, since the ‘traditional’ after Cultural Revolution is antithetical, at least in face value, to the Maoist dictate.

For example, in his film *The House of Flying Daggers* (2004), Yimou found himself “in the midst of a bamboo forest in Sichuan” and that suddenly changed [his] mind. It was early morning and there was a thick mist lingering among the trees and rays of thin sunlight were just

beginning to shine down through the tree tops”. He realized, “why all those martial arts novels feature deals in a bamboo forest – it is the perfect world for the *xia*, those roaming martial arts heroes”.⁴⁵ Zhang Yimou says, regarding the reception of the films as martial arts action genre, that most Western audiences are more drawn to the films he made in this mould. They are attracted to the *beauty* of the images in these East-Asian action genre films. He says that he aspires to make an Asian-style science-fiction film - “People can imagine what a *real Chinese* science-fiction film would be like”.⁴⁶

It is understandable that nothing is related to unmediated tradition in his desire to cater the ‘real Chinese’ to the global audience. Yimou’s childhood memory or his political desire to represent the ‘traditional’ or his attempt to re-create the pre-modern China to have a good business in the global festival circuit – none functions outside the realm of modernity; neither this desire for the nostalgic is an archaizing vector. A much stronger globalizing force is operative in the 1990s in the form of the capitalist globalization whose take on tradition/local has already created a new dynamics, which is ideologically and functionally very different from the nationalistic framework. In order to understand the films, for example *The House of Flying Daggers*, linear history of China and the knowledge on Daoism and Confucianism can provide us with the explanation that might only satisfy the cinephiles. Not history in general but the study in historiography can enable us to map the changing landscape of culture and the changing lines of forces in representational politics.

The question is how to find out the location of ‘tradition’? Is it located territorially or is it located civilizationally? One answer, though not at all satisfactory, is usually agreed upon: tradition is located nationally as the latter’s heritage. This helps us but to lead the discourse to a more confusing alley. For instance, words ‘Chinese tradition’ must differ politically in the PRC and the RoC. The Nationalist Party’s long fifty-year-dominance in RoC and its defeat in the hands of the communists in PRC defined the notion of ‘tradition’ in different ways in two different Chinas. PRC claims its part as mainland China while Chiang Kai-shek’s government proclaimed RoC as ‘real China’. Both claim, though in two different ways, that their part of the land is the custodian of the ‘real Chinese tradition’.

In both countries cinema could not develop freely between 1949 and the early 1980s. But the take on tradition has been quite different in the two nations,. The PRC fourth generation filmmakers often tried to establish tradition as a continuity of the peasant struggle against the feudal rule, Kuomintang and imperialism, while official projects were assigned to the Taiwanese fourth generation filmmakers to make films which show the timeless flow of the tradition of nobility, ethnicity and iconic landscapes.⁴⁷ In the RoC, the ancient Chinese scripts are officially used, and the rural people who speak in old dialects have been ghettoized as ‘real’ Chinese ethnic-linguistic community. But the PRC has reformed the old Chinese script radically to give it a new form and has sought a revolutionary national identity for itself. Two Chinese nationalisms generate two different official and popular discourses of the histories of the traditional pasts as modern project.⁴⁸ The two films, Chen Kaige’s *Yellow Earth* (1984, PRC) and Hou Hsiao-

hsien's *City of Sadness* (1987, Taiwan), which heralded freedom from the iron curtains in the PRC and the RoC respectively, exemplify this by addressing two different political pasts.

But since late 1980s under the influence of the homogenizing forces of globalization we find the emergence of films of the martial arts genre both in the PRC and RoC, which apparently look very similar and often studied under the common rubric of 'Chinese martial art cinema'. They show some common features as they use some common generic traits and stylistic codes, yet the mythological contents of narratives produced by the filmmakers of two nations indicate allegories of two different kinds.

Fredric Jameson notes the 'epic ambitions' of the PRC's fifth generation filmmaking which is markedly different from its contemporary Taiwanese New Wave counterpart.⁴⁹ He observes distinct mannerism and style in their depiction of "landscapes below the mountain peaks and endless procession of moving figures like a cinematographic scroll" exposed in mid-shots, which reminds us the "traditional painterly story-telling, and at the same time that it defamiliarizes the conventional relationship of human bodies and their landscape contexts". Jameson says, "politically it claims to constitute some new way of appropriating tradition which is neither iconoclastic nor given over to Western individualism – with what truth one cannot say (save to register the claim as arrival form in competition with 'nostalgia film' as the current dominant Western or postmodern form of telling history)".⁵⁰ The tradition used by the Chinese fifth generation filmmakers, Jameson explains, must be understood in terms of contemporary politics and political history. It is the drive of the political and the ideological that makes the condition possible to (re)articulate tradition in a unique and distinguishable cinematic form. "This epic mid-shot is thus is a symbolic act", Jameson infers, "which promises some new utopian combination of what used to be the subject-object",.⁵¹

Here Jameson's position is distinctly different from that of the positions taken by either Willemen or Nick Browne. According to Jameson, 'nostalgia' is a certain trend in the postmodern western cinema which recreates a text or culture of earlier decades obliterating the markers of the time and the historical contexts. According to him the 'nostalgia industry' is part of the culture industry in the West which is fixated on postmodern pastiche that has nothing to do with the active politics the nation-state. In 'Remapping Taipei', Jameson theoretically locates subjectivity as opposed to identity, as Willemen does in 'Detouring Korean Cinema'. But Jameson's idea of subjectivity seems not very different from the Western notion of the individual subject. In Willemen's formulation it is not a question of single subject but it operates with more than one regime of subjectivation simultaneously. Willemen suggests, this is a composite of pre-modern (archaizing) and modern (modernizing) which are orchestrated by the narrative voice.

Jameson too shows how different subjective looks orchestrate to give rise to the narrative, but he restricts it to the analyses of film-form negotiated through political and ideological positions. Everything to him falls under different modernizing forces and vary with different modes of operation of the capital and its encounter with the nation-states. By traditional forces Jameson means not the pre-modern but the ethnic-national construction of the nation-state and the politics

related to the formation of identity. Jameson is more interested in the study of the emerging narrative forms in the East-Asian cinemas in the era of late capitalism.

Actually, the identification of the location of tradition is a well-known problem in Film Studies since the emergence of the concept of 'national cinemas'. There are three broad categories of knowledge related to national cinemas in Film Studies. First, national cinemas in the non-West are studied from the perspective of the World Cinema. The consequence of this is the appropriation of the knowledge of national cinemas by a Eurocentric world-view. This scholarship, following the official cultural manifestation of a national culture that Hobsbawm describes as 'symbolic nationalism'⁵², or following the humanist tradition of acquiring knowledge about the other, identifies the nation-state as the unproblematic location of culture. The second category is a refined and politically more correct version derived from the first, but filtered through structuralism and post-structuralism. This second category mainly uses 'difference' as the theoretical tool to approach non-Western cinemas. They understand national cinemas as structurally different modes of representation from Hollywood or the dominant form. Finally, they introduce the 'cultural difference' and 'difference in identity' as the theoretical tool to analyze cinema. The scholars of these categories find the location of tradition in national/ethnic *identity*. They understand film cultures in the non-West as a direct correlate of identity politics.

The inevitable question is: who speaks about Korean or Indian or Japanese past? How is a cultural force defined as modernizing and archaicizing? It is primarily a question of historical agency and secondarily a concern of cultural studies. Let us refer to Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* once again. In the second chapter of this book, 'The Two Histories of Capital', he addresses the 'aesthetic paradox' of the modern Indian life "living in several centuries at once".⁵³ According to Chakrabarty, the pre-modern should not be identified as traditional or archaicizing force. A particular social custom or behaviour, if to be marked as 'tradition' or 'modernity,' is a question of historiographic approach not subject to 'historicality' in general.

The final part of this article attempts to address the question: who speaks about Asian culture in what terms? And, how far is it possible to reach Comparative Film Studies negotiating the difficulties of 'cross-cultural analyses'?

3. From cross-cultural analysis to Comparative Film Studies

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's article 'The Difficulty of Being Radical: the Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order'⁵⁴ revisits the major theoretical positions and their critiques related to the third world as the possible object of the production of cross-cultural knowledge. He explains in his article the limitations of Western critiques in theorizing non-Western cinemas. He appreciates the fact that Bordwell, Burch, Desser, Willemsen & E. Anne Kaplan have been successful in shifting the production of knowledge of Japanese cinema from area studies to poststructuralist analyses. And they have engaged themselves in long debates

regarding Japanese cinema, often accusing each other of being 'Western' in their approaches.⁵⁵, Yoshimoto says, quoting Peter Lehman.

The debate related to the modernity in Ozu's films where Bordwell and Willemen participated was an intense one. Bordwell, based on the definition that *modernism*, having been emerged in the womb of the modern, is a critical attitude toward modernity, claims that the narrative mode and formal strategy in Ozu's films 'systematically' defies the rules established by Hollywood cinema; Ozu should be read, therefore, as a modernist. Willemen questions the very definition of modernism used by Bordwell. He argues that the definition framed with the West-European experiences in art and culture by the 19th and 20th century English and French scholars is inappropriate as far as the understanding of non-Western modernity is concerned. Willemen thinks, "to call Ozu modernist is not so much different from European modernists' questionable appropriation of African tribal sculpture in the early 20th century." Bordwell responded by saying Willemen's critique does not hold, since African sculptors never saw modernist art.⁵⁶

Yoshimoto observes, "the hermeneutics of the Other sought out in non-Western national cinemas scholarship is neither a simple identification with the Other nor an easy assimilation of the Other into the self. Instead it is a new position of knowledge through a careful negotiation between the Other and the Self."⁵⁷ Yoshimoto carefully observes the different positions taken by the Western critics on Japanese and Chinese cinemas in order to map the methodology of cross cultural analyses.

Ann Kaplan in her article on the representation of women in recent Chinese cinema addresses the problem of cross-cultural analyses. She remarks that there are two types of scholars working in this area: scholars like Chris Berry and Donald Richie who lived in China and Japan respectively, knew the Chinese and Japanese languages, observed the cultures closely and produced 'expert's knowledge'. But scholars like Fredric Jameson, David Bordwell and Paul Willemen who do not know the languages but studied their culture and cinema produce 'tentative knowledge'.⁵⁸

Both the kinds have their problems. For the first kind of knowledge which Kaplan identifies as 'formal', the Western critic reaches a little-known culture with a preconceived idea of the World Cinema and finally comes to interpret a non-Western national cinema based partly from her first-hand experience and partly from her preconceived ideas. In most of the cases it is either affected by the colonial method of acquiring the ethnographic information or mediated by the canonized framework of the World Cinema that presumes Hollywood and European cinemas as standard forms. Kaplan rightly remarks, "Cross-cultural analysis...is difficult –fraught with danger" since we "are forced to read works produced by the Other through the constraints of our frameworks/theories/ and ideologies".⁵⁹

The second kind of knowledge which is marked as 'tentative'. Kaplan says, "This tentativeness of informal knowledge can become formal knowledge if one goes to and lives in China [for example] and becomes an expert in things Chinese."⁶⁰ Yoshimoto criticizes her proposed model of understanding the other as a historicist attempt to explore the non-West. He

says that the model of cross-cultural exchange presented here is a classic example of what Gayatri Spivak calls the “arrogance of the radical European Humanist conscience, which will consolidate itself by imagining the other...through the collection of information.”⁶¹

In comparison with the modernist critics, postmodern scholars are more critical on the issue of the production of knowledge of the non-Western cultures. Yoshimoto takes Scott Nygren’s article on Japanese modernism and Japanese cinema as a leading example of postmodern approach towards a cross-cultural analysis. Nygren proposes a “discontinuous and reversible history” to conceptualize the West-Japan cultural relationship. Instead of believing in the linear historical model that Japan, like any other non-Western country, has ‘rich’ tradition and West provides it with modernity, Nygren argues that traditional Japanese culture radically inspired Western modernism (e.g. Eisenstein’s montage theory in late 1920s, still-life paintings of the late impressionist painters) as much as Western bourgeois humanism and scholarship had a “deconstructive impact on feudal Japanese society”.⁶² One can also address the Sino-West cultural relationship in the light of Nygren’s argument. The influence of Chinese theatrical form on Brechtian modernist theatre is a well-acknowledged fact.

So far Nygren’s argument holds good. But there remain two or three unaddressed areas. First, if it did not concern big and influential nations like Japan, China or India, and it was a non-Western culture that has very ‘insignificant’ contribution in Western modernism how can a critic identify the chiasmic cultural correspondence? And second, as Yoshimoto puts it, how Japanese culture (or any non-Western culture) can be treated on equal footings with the Western culture when “the relation between the two has always taken the form of political, economic and cultural domination of the non-West by the West”?

Nygren’s answer might take recourse to comparing the historiographies developed in two cultures (nations) to find a more politically correct solution. Cross-cultural analysis without the intervention of comparative historiography might lead to a failure. But as we carefully scan the constellation of cross-cultural analyses, the presumption of the Western critics is that the West is the locus of theory and the non-West is the location of practice. As a result in most of the academic studies of the non-West the Western critic volunteers her service in the role of the ‘theoretician’ who is supposed to be the agency of setting the paradigm and who will propose the theory based on the information collected on the non-Western practice. The non-Western intelligentsia functions here as a mediator or interlocutor who helps Western critic to prepare the theory for explaining the non-Western culture. That is, a native expert of Korean or Malaysian cinema only provides historical documents, hard facts, the ‘authentic’ meaning of cultural nuances and the critic, preferably Western, builds the theory upon it. In this process, Homi Bhaba observes, “the Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its desire, to split its ‘sign’ of identity, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourses.”⁶³

The development of Film Studies as a discipline and its negotiation with non-Western cinemas can be scrutinized keeping in mind the discourses regarding the political and cultural relationship between the West and the non-West. Film Studies as a discipline emerged in the 1970s equipped with the Lacanian and Althusserian poststructuralism and Metzian semiotics of

cinema. The British journal *Screen* was instrumental in hosting the new discourses regarding cinema that contributed to the establishment of the new discipline. Despite its conscious attempt to demystify the 'conventional' West as the 'locus of meaning and value', *Screen* theory showed its limitation regarding the study of non-Western cinemas; even though in many ways it has inspired the spread of Film Studies in the non-West. Yoshimoto says, "(It is enough to say that the success and demise of *Screen* theory came from its inability to critique the cultural assumptions that underpinned a certain fetishization of cinematic specificity)".⁶⁴ In the UK, USA and Canada *Screen* theory has played a pivotal role in the development of Film Studies as a discipline. In search of cinematic specificity and the relative autonomy of the text film theory and Film Studies lost sight of the political and historical dimensions of film culture to a great extent, which is reflected in Western Film Studies' huge failure in theorizing Latin American, African and Asian cinemas. In the case of Latin American cinemas, for example, a large number of Western film scholars contributed valuable insights, but their work has nothing really to do with Film Studies proper.

Asian cinemas were not really placed in the disciplinary canon of Film Studies, though critics often studied Asian auteurs sporadically. Only Japanese cinema has been studied rigorously as an 'alternative mode of representation'. But as Yoshimoto comments, "This search for alternative modes of address and concomitant subject-formations miserably failed because the terms of comparison remained the ones dictated by Hollywood films. Hollywood cinema's mode of narration silently continued to function as the classical and institutional mode of narration and representation".⁶⁵ He underlines the lack of presence of the 'terms of comparison' of non-Western national cinemas in Film Studies. The meteoric rise of Asian cinemas in last two decades indicates the end of the domination of Hollywood both in economy and representation. This opens up new theoretical possibilities in Film Studies in the form of Comparative Film Studies. But two odd questions come to mind. First, will the proposed Comparative Film Studies be able to encounter the power relations between the West and the non-West, Hollywood and Asian cinemas, global and the local/national? And second, how will Comparative Film Studies envisage its canon with regard to Asian cinema?

Three broad possibilities regarding which two are to be compared may arise. First, comparison of two Western cinemas, say French cinema and Hollywood. Second, the comparison of one Western cinema and one non-Western cinema. And third, it is a comparison of two Asian cinemas. The first one is not critical because there already exists formed canons to compare. The second one is dangerous as it involves a pre-existing power relation and hegemonic hierarchy related to the two cultures subject to comparison. The third would be the most radical one as there is no existing canon at all. But unless the second problem is resolved successfully one cannot enter into the third since the agency of the comparatist may carry the same danger from which the cross-cultural analysis suffered.

Then how can a Comparative Film Studies which is free from the inhibitions of World Cinema, be framed? "Comparative studies", Yoshimoto says, "does not necessarily mean that two or more national cinemas or types of cinema are compared to each other...comparative

studies can introduce in film scholarship a historically definable understanding of national cinema in its unique cultural specificity, that is to say, not as the 'other' of some other national cinema which, for its commercially dominant and aesthetically influential position on a global scale, is equated to 'the cinema'."⁶⁶ He suggests that Trans-Asian cinema studies can help highlight the necessity of introducing a genuine comparative perspective into Film Studies. As long as Film Studies as a discipline is dominated by the study of national cinemas with the 'comprehensive' knowledge of World Cinema which overlaps with the same theoretical paradigms used by either area studies or the transnational studies and cross-cultural analysis of acquisition of linguistic historical and cultural expertise, genuine comparative Film Studies is impossible.⁶⁷

The emergence of the trans-Asian frame in Asian cinema opens up some new radical possibilities of Comparative Film Studies. "And it is that", Yoshimoto says "a notion of trans-Asian cinemas of Asia – a comparative approach to the cinemas of Asia in relation to each other as constitutive players in the global cinemas – can, at last, begin to oppose, to the benefit of the study of any cinema, including that produced in Hollywood".⁶⁸

New Asian cinemas as both textual and extra-textual affairs help us surmise some points: one, it produces the post-Hollywood age of cinema, two; it initiates a large panorama of varied reception; and three, there emerges a trans-Asian frame that opposes the idea of the World Cinema as a comprehensive paradigm. The basic premise on which Willemen constructs his approach is cultures' encounter with capitalism. Capitalism is based on market, and market mobilizes people. As DVD culture appears as the dominant force of mobilization, it brings a milieu of new exhibition-reception relationship. It may be that pirated DVD circulation and copy (mechanical reproduction) culture disorient capitalist mode of marketing or maybe it is indulged by capitalism as a new strategy of operating culture industry. Whatever it is, desired or undesired in legal terms; DVD culture mobilizes the audience and consequently deterritorializes exhibition and circulation of films. But if film scholars over-emphasize their potential in the global dissemination of Asian cinema, following fashionable cultural studies discourses which invests much in reading a film text as autonomous entity without referring to the discourses related to historical development of cultural specificities, research on national cinemas in Asia and the small budget independent filmmakers' works, which often find themselves existing against the logic of global capitalism and global marketing, will suffer.

The research based on a trans-Asian frame, on the other hand, is able to address the international as well as the local/national discourses regarding Asian cinema. 'Trans-Asian cinema' is put forward as anti-thetical to both the categories 'Asian cinema' and 'transnational Asian cinema'. 'Asian cinema' is a much older category which tries to find 'Asianness' in the films read under the rubric of Asian cinema. 'Transnationalism in Asian cinema criticism focuses principally on the deployment of transnational capital in cinema, transnational circulation of DVDs and trans-border migration of people and culture. Transnationalism places transnational Asian cinema as the imaginary alternative to national cinema and in this way reaffirms the agenda of transnational capital. Chris Berry describes transnationalism's inability

to address the discourses regarding nation-state as “the frustration of the slippery quality of the ‘transnational’ On the other side trans-Asian criticism is a transformative, reflexive practice, in which the production of films and critical discourses are firmly intertwined.⁶⁹ Trans-Asian framework never places recently emerged transnational affairs in Asian cinema beyond nation-state but puts them in the multiplicity of other discourses, including the discourse related to reformulation of nation-state. I would give two examples. The dynamics of Taiwan cinema, for example, cannot be gauged without measuring the complexity of distribution-exhibition of Taiwan cinema within its territory and outside. Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh in her article ‘Taiwan: Popular Cinema’s Disappearing Act’, observes that domestic market has been dominated by Hollywood blockbusters and the distributors are extremely reluctant to release Taiwan-made films as Hollywood blockbusters have never flopped in the local market. Widely acclaimed directors from Taiwan therefore must depend on their film festival release and trans-territorial dissemination of DVD copies.⁷⁰ A great impetus of making so-called art cinema, as indicated by Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, in Taiwan is by and large coming from a particular market equation that forecloses the release of Taiwan filmmakers’ films in the domestic market. The way she explains the phenomenon of trans-territorial production and dissemination of Taiwan art-cinema follows the trans-Asian frame of criticism. She does not agree to contemporary transnationalist monolithic logic that trans-territorialism is an inevitable trend of the globalization. She derives her logic from the multiplicity of discourses in which cinema industry in Taiwan, censorship, national policy, global capital all contribute to the account.

Trans-Asian frame of criticism, as it believes in Asian cinemas and not in Asian cinema, addresses minor-modes in cinematic practices including trans-cinemas like amateur videos, personal videos shot in webcam and circulated in Youtube. Korean cinema, for instance, also has been undergoing a change over the last 20 years, which cannot be gauged without studying the massively growing cine-mania there. Kim Soyoung in her article ‘From Cine-mania to Blockbusters and Trans-cinema: Reflections on Recent South Korean Cinema’ argues that the phenomenal rise of cine-mania in South Korea, which unifies different groups with different positions under the rubric of the desire for cinema, creates a dynamics in which “the new political agency may be found in the topography of cultural studies”.⁷¹ And the rise of the new cinema of South Korea thus is profoundly related to the emergence of cine-mania. The proliferation of digital films made by the independent filmmakers, which Soyoung studied under the rubric of ‘trans-cinema’ is a decisive issue in the development of new Korean cinema. Soyoung says: “Trans-cinema proposes that digital and net cinema, LCD screens (installed in subways, taxis and buses) and gigantic electrified display boards should be seen as spaces into which cinema theories and criticism should intervene”.⁷²

I would suggest the meaning of new cinema is not generated only in the body of the film texts. The film scholarship with which one can read any film including Asian cinema as a part of ‘the cinema’ is rapidly losing its ground with more and more emphasis on Asian national cinemas, trans-Asian cinema and the trans-cinema in Asia. Janet Staiger observes that in cinema studies canons are formulated with the intentions of film criticism, politics of selection of representative

film texts and intervention of Film Studies as an academic discipline.⁷³ Critical emphasis on trans-Asian cinema and trans-cinema in Asia resist strict canonization of Asian cinema. This will facilitate the emergence of what Yoshimoto calls 'genuine' Comparative Film Studies⁷⁴ and what Yingjin Zhang suggests - a Comparative Film Studies that can address national culture, politics and regionalism along with cinema's ability to cross and bring together nations, cultures and languages.⁷⁵

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