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**Incriminating Spaces:
Border Politics of *Mukokuseki* Asia**

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Incriminating Spaces: Border Politics of *Mukokuseki* Asia

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Abstract

Japan, the dominant economic and cultural power in East Asia, has always been fascinated with the West. Since the late 19th century, Japan began to position itself as a racial and cultural superior (the White race in Asia) to her Asian counterparts. Accordingly, Japanese propaganda films during WWII followed similar racial logic in terms of organizing the stories and the mode of representing non-Japanese Asians. Japanese modernity is usually upheld in these films to emphasize the importance of civilizing mission and to erase national and cultural borders between the Imperial Japan and the colonized East Asia. Japanese cinema of the 1990s, however, looks at East Asia in a more complicated manner. From copying Orientalist discourse to an attempt to forge positive images of the former colonies (Taiwan and Korea) or occupied territories (China), contemporary Japan's cine-Asia appears to be enthralled by a *mukokuseki*, borderless, sentimentality. Exotic Asian locations, peoples and cultures give these films a vivid transnationality, or statelessness *mukokuseki*. *Mukokuseki* refers to a cosmopolitan consumerism at the peak of Japan's bubble economy. But this transgressive transnationality also owes a debt to *mukokuseki* action, a type of genre picture of the 1950s known for its fusion of western popular genres--James Bond, Westerns and films noir. The paper asks where East Asia stands in this latest rendition of *mukokuseki* in recent Japanese films? A mirror of the underground black society? A postcolonial nostalgia? Or a manifestation of a destabilized, but still consumer-driven Japanese identity?

Keywords: *mukokuseki* akushon, borderless, Miike Takashi, Taiwan New Cinema

Introduction

Japanese cinema since 1980 has been noted for its apparent decline, and only recently was its gradual recovery recorded with the impressive performance of several popular films in the domestic market.¹ Japanese cinema's industrial significance might have waned; its artistic achievement nonetheless continued to thrive throughout the 1990s. Most noticeably, these artistic achievements came from independent filmmakers with extensive experience in the television and video sectors. Miike Takashi is one of these newcomers whose quick but

efficient work style helped him accumulate an impressive repertoire and a cult reputation outside of Japan. He is now the best-known Japanese director abroad, along with Kitano Takeshi and some others. Like Kitano, Miike successfully revived the Japanese gangster film in the 1990s. These two filmmakers, despite their many differences in directorial signatures and scale of production, share a common attribute in their rise to international prominence—both show a new engagement with the yakuza picture, Japan's unique contribution to world cinema since the 1950s. But this common trait does not lead to the conclusion that they are working with similar ambitions, such as the revival of an old Japanese genre for contemporary global audiences.

Kitano's productions clearly strive towards name-branding: a slick, sober and superb slate of films has been offered by Office Kitano. Compared with Kitano's self-conscious branding and workmanship, Miike Takashi's films are erratic, inconsistent and disconcerting. Unlike the *K* trademark that gives Kitano's films a self-assured poise, Miike Takashi's production is anything but stately. 'Lack and excess'² characteristically describe the chaotic, transient states of Miike's fictional world. If Kitano's films come out of the rational calculations of the ever-present master K, then films by Miike undoubtedly convey a shifting 'm,' (small case) standing for messy, master-less. Kitano's modern ronin are dignified men of action and conviction; Miike's characters are restless mongrels and deranged mobs of ridiculous losers. While Kitano's heroes are heterosexual—'big brothers' of physical prowess and romantic angst (Nishi, Zatoichi and Onegi, the Big Brother)—Miike paints his bizarre underdogs with a vivid homosexual perversity.

Like his characters, who have little or no affiliations, Miike avoids working with the same organizations or producers, and he does not commit himself to a single genre or style. He comfortably moves around and among genres, mixing yakuza, sci-fi, horror and action at will. And where Kitano's productions are aligned with media conglomerates (Shochiku, Bandai Visual Company, TV Asahi, Tokyo FM Broadcasting, etc) and boast rich production values, Miike's low-budget films are made by floating assemblies on shoot-on-the-fly schedules and attached to no specific brand name, apart from that of the director himself.

These brief comparisons reveal the underlying disparity between Kitano and Miike and explain why Miike occupies a rather different position to that of Kitano, both within and outside of Japan. Miike's reputation as a cult director associated with a trashy, over-the-top, camp style has to do with the conditions of his productions. As a V-cinema 'quick hand' and an international cult director, Miike travels widely and trespasses in geographical, financial and stylistic terms. In other words, Miike represents *mukokuseki*, the practice of crossing, hybridization and co-production. In contrast, Kitano's stately status is achieved by his *kokuseki* (citizenship), his 're-ignition of Japanese tradition,' especially in his 1997 breakthrough film, *Hanabi*.³

It is Miike's transnational, trans-generic consciousness that enables his films to be made quickly and cheaply. This consciousness also promotes the imprint of stylistic fluidity and promiscuity, which have contributed to his rise in international video markets. Global circulation, in this case, is mobilized by the *mukokuseki* style, which, in turn, is a product of the filmmaker's transitory, transnational mode of production and co-production. Miike's escape from the national style is illustrated in an interview with Mark Schilling:

Japanese film people have this very conservative idea of what a film should be—and that's what they make again and again. Everyone is trying to make 'film-like films'—they can't do anything else. There are enormously talented people outside the film industry who could challenge that way of thinking....⁴

Miike says that he is not interested in making the kind of cinema that simply repeats and recycles itself, alluding to films by major studio directors such as Yamada Yoji or Kitano Takeshi and to films such as *Poppoya* (dir. Furuhata Yasuo, 1999), *Bayside Shakedown* (dir. Motohiro Katsuyuki, 1998), *Twilight Samurai* (dir. Yamada Yoji, 2002) and *Zatoichi* (dir. Kitano Takeshi, 2003). Miike seems to imply that these works, which have been institutionalized as representative of Japanese cinema, can no longer satisfy audiences and young creators. The indelible imprints of Japaneseness that these films espouse have

become dead signs, signs with no energy or vitality. Clearly, Miike wants to break away from the traditions of Japanese cinema or, at least in his own practice, he wants to create a cinema that keeps its distance from national cinema *a la* Shochiku, Fuji Television, or even Office Kitano.

This disavowal in turn takes Miike onto a different terrain, both geographically and cinematically. Miike Takashi's films reveal an obsession with East Asia. Exotic Asian locations, peoples and cultures give Miike's films a vivid transnationality or statelessness—*mukokuseki*. In *Shinjuku Triad Society* and *Rainy Dog*, Taipei is a refuge for Japanese gangsters and a place for hideous transnational crimes. But this transgressive transnationality is indebted to *mukokuseki akushon*, a type of 1950s genre picture known for its fusion of James Bond films, westerns and film noir. Where does Taipei stand in the latest rendition of *mukokuseki* in the films of Miike Takashi? Does Taipei function as a mirror of underground society? As postcolonial nostalgia? Or as something else?

In her essay on Miike Takashi, Mika Ko makes the link between the prominence of non-Japanese characters and the breakdown of the homogeneous Japanese national identity in Miike's films of the late 1990s. Ko argues that to depict a broken and fragmented 'national body' in contemporary Japan, Miike has 'mobilized' tropes of multiculturalism as a 'narrative strategy' for his gangster films. But in the end, this strategy remains no more than a trope, a 'cosmetic' device. This is because Miike merely 'notes' the disruption that multiculturalism has brought to Japanese society, and fails to question 'the dominant structure' of racial discourse in Japan.⁵

Ko's essay provides some insight into Miike's inclusion of non-Japanese ethnicities, especially mixed-blood Japanese, and their awkward relations with mainstream society. Informed by critiques of multiculturalism, her reading is useful in understanding the rising interest in representing Asia as a cluster of criminalized scenes, echoing the dystopic sentiment of post-bubble-economy Japan. Does this nonetheless mean that Miike's films also represent an important diversification (or fragmentation) of Japanese cinema prompted by multiculturalism? Is (cosmetic) multicultural discourse useful in examining his fluid,

borderless film style? What is the connection between Miike's style and contemporary international film parlance? Given Japan's ambivalence towards other Asian cultures and nations, do Miike's pictures represent Asia and, specifically, Taiwan in a new light?

The following discussion revisits the concept of *mukokuseki* in the spatial imagination of recent Japanese gangster films, with a focus on the relations between *mukokuseki* and the representation of Taipei, the capital of Japan's former colony. The essay consists of three parts: *mukokuseki* as a mode of production, and representation; Taipei as an ambivalent site for *mukokuseki* ventures; and finally, Taiwan New Cinema scenes as desirable locations for the stylistic reorientation of contemporary Japanese cinema.

I. From *mukokuseki akushon* to *mukokuseki* Asia

In a 1999 Japanese publication entitled '*Made in Japan cinema*': ways of reading: 1980-1999, one of the contributors used '*mukokuseki*' as a keyword to describe Miike Takashi's works.⁶ It is telling that the writer would employ the term *mukokuseki*, stateless or borderless, as if to place gangster films alongside fashionable consumer goods or cuisine, such as *mukokuseki ryori*. According to Iwabuchi Koichi, the non-Japaneseness of Japanese computer games and animation is a manifestation of *mukokuseki*. By this, he means "the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristic or a context."⁷ On the other hand, in Japan's daily consumer culture, *mukokuseki* is ubiquitous on signs and refers to inexpensive restaurants where you can enjoy fusion cuisine with spicy Southeast Asian flavors and carouse until late. History does interesting things to popular culture here. *Mukokuseki* is not a recent arrival from the multicultural fusion of the 1980s nor is it a neologism derived from globalism. In fact, it has an etymological link to the cinema. In the 1950s when US military censorship was lifted, Japanese studios went full bore to develop a new type of movie targeting young audiences, who were crucial to the rise of the postwar consumer economy. That new style was called *mukokuseki akushon*.

Mukokuseki akushon (borderless action) was produced by the Nikkatsu studio in the 1950s as a type of action film modeled on a mixture of genres: James Bond films, spaghetti

westerns, film noir, gangster pictures and detective thrillers. For example, Inoue Umetsugu's *Eagle and Hawk* (*Washi to taka*, 1957) starring Ishihara Yujiro features this type of borderless blending in terms of style and narrative. The film begins with a film noir setup: a drunken sailor is murdered in a dark alleyway in a seaport. Low-key lighting for shadowy effects and fragmented views that restrict knowledge of the crime scene—these techniques are familiar film noir conventions used in American cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. A vivid marker of *mukokuseki* appears at the end of the opening sequence, just before the sailor is about to be killed. As he becomes aware of his stalker, the victim runs for his life but is stopped by the murderer waiting at the corner. Here we see a large silhouette on the wall, again, a film noir suspense device representing the invisible, fearsome murderer. Above the shadowy image, there are inscribed two words—'NO SMOKING.' Even though the second part of 'smoking' is kept outside of the frame, the audience has no trouble deciphering this sign—an English phrase now recognized as a universal language for fire prevention. But in the 1950s, the warning's appearance in English rather than in Japanese displaces the scene, making it seem as if it were on a base or in a restricted customs zone. Diegetically speaking, although the space is supposedly in Japan, the signage renders the Japanese setting *mukokuseki*.

After the sensational noir opening with a *mukokuseki* undertone, the film unfolds as a borderless action-adventure story at sea. This is *mukokuseki* at work: the hero on board sails out into the wide blue Pacific. During the journey, romance crisscrosses action and adventure while the murder mystery is eventually solved.

The film's romance subplot incorporates singing to further advance the mixed, but well-matched, quality. The music takes place under the blue moonlight to enhance the exotic, romantic atmosphere at sea. The male lead, Ishihara Yujiro, sits on the deck, facing the camera while playing a ukulele and singing to a young woman in a tight white dress, similar to Liz Taylor's sultry appearance in *Cat on Hot Tin Roof* (Richard Brooks, 1958). Ishihara Yujiro (1934-1987), Japan's Elvis Presley, was perhaps the biggest crossover star in contemporary Japan. Ishihara began his career as a Nikkatsu actor in the mid 1950s and quickly rose to remarkable stardom. Like Elvis, Ishihara was known as 'the King' in Japan,

but he was not just a pop singer crossing over to movies. Before his premature death in 1987, he made 45 films. Ishihara's star image as a rebellious but romantic heartthrob signified a new breed of Japanese youth during the post-occupation rebirth and resurgence of national awareness. Furthermore, it promoted a new explosion of masculinity that was assertive and pleasure-driven.⁸ With the occupation's end, masculine Japanese aggression was domesticated and became symbolized by a stylish, occasionally decadent male iconography fashioned by American and French youth culture. Ishihara Yujiro, for instance, was about six feet tall, with long legs, large eyes and a wicked, boyish grin. This new youth image was no longer a unifying *Japanese* imagery, but a cosmopolitan look whose Japaneseness was constructed through its 'un-Japaneseness' (*Nihon banare*).⁹

Mukokuseki as a stylistic mode might be an allegory for the Cold War political unconscious. It makes little sense to call a *mélange* of borrowed action genres 'stateless,' because during the Cold War *mukokuseki* as a practice was certainly fantasy. National borders in Japan were jealously guarded, and communist paranoia was used to police internal political conformity, as well as to project a strong outward resolve. In summary, we might say that cultural productions during this period were aimed at fostering and supporting a collective, national identity. The Japanese term should be read as a disguise for or a displacement of rampant Westernization, a sensuous carnival of foreign indulgence. The negative term 'no-nationality' was used to describe a Japanese culture in the grip of rapid but idiosyncratic Westernization, soon after the disastrous earlier attempt to manufacture and impose pan-Asian cultural and political ideals in the form of *Dai Towa Kyo-eiken*, the Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.

So, *mukokuseki* did not really embrace borderlessness at this time. It referred instead to the postwar domestication or synthesizing of foreign ingredients within a Japanese framework. Borderless here suggests a Japan confidently receiving and adapting exotic materials for her own use. More specifically, confronted by powerful institutions such as Hollywood and postwar European art cinema, Japanese cinema had to be inventive in order to compete. *Mukokuseki akushon* was a rational choice to produce popular culture through

differentiation from a Western other. These genre pictures seem cosmopolitan in characteristically Japanese ways, mixing and often mismatching imported generic styles. They express both mastery and insecurity, acknowledging the popularity of American (or Italian) westerns, James Bond films or films about juvenile delinquency, while also refashioning these ingredients in ways that often seem improbable or incongruous (such as the ‘funny English’ on Japanese clothing). Postwar cosmopolitanism through *mukokuseki akushon* thus appears fragmented, caught between gestures of admiration and ridicule. It is difficult to know how sincere these vehicles of postwar cosmopolitanism were meant to be, given the historical interval between *mukokuseki akushon* and contemporary *mukokuseki* consumption.

If *mukokuseki akushon* is now consigned to film history, Miike Takashi’s low-budget yakuza films revive borderless ventures with new interpretations and representations. Unlike *mukokuseki akushon*, synthesizing Western or faux-Western genres, Miike’s *mukokuseki* yakuza films move from generic, artificial sets to spaces with class, ethnic and geographical specificities. *Rainy Dog* (*Gokudo kuroshakai*, 1997), *The Bird People of China* (*Chugoku no chojin*, 1998), *The City of Lost Souls* (*Hyoryu-gai*, 2000), *DOA 2* (2000) and *DOA Final* (2002) can all be characterized as neo-*mukokuseki* in terms of their shift from pseudo-Western spatial settings to specific, East-Asian geographies and ethnicities. The story of *Rainy Dog* takes place entirely in Taiwan. The encounter between Japanese gangsters and Chinese ethnic minorities in *The Bird People of China* was shot in China’s remote Yunnan Province. In *DOA Final*, Hong Kong locations are supposed to pass for a futuristic Yokohoma populated with cyborgs and Chinese-speaking rebels. Yakuza characters in these films are all in identity limbo, baffled by who they are and what they might become. Lost in some kind of stateless, trans-generic space, they lack identity papers (*Rainy Dog* and *City of Lost Souls*), go native in a third world utopia (*Bird People*), or simply turn into androids (*DOA Final*).

As Yomota Inuhito suggests, Miike rewrites *mukokuseki akushon* in his reversion of unequivocal Japanese ethnicity and the exclusion of women as in the old-fashioned Japanese

chivalry pictures. Yomota argues that Miike's inclusion of hybrids, homosexuals and foreigners gives *mukokuseki* a distinct, contemporary currency and allows Japanese cinema to break the boundaries once policed by the Cold War mentality.¹⁰ In addition to specific locales in East Asia, Miike depicts *mukokuseki* within Japan by presenting Taiwanese, Brazilian, African, Filipino and Chinese outlaws residing in Tokyo, reminiscent of the standard association of *mukokuseki* fusion cuisine with Southeast Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Here, the notorious Kabukicho of Shinjuku is presented as an intra-Asian interior, nurturing varieties of transnational enterprise and crime. Miike's contemporary rendering of *mukokuseki* by way of the yakuza genre is a forceful representation of borderless Asia, a new regional imaginary precipitated, and enabled, by globalization. Like a fusion chef, Miike cooks his *mukokuseki* pictures by using scenes (flavors) and ingredients (sites, locations) from other Asian cinema. Unlike the Cold War *mukokuseki akushon*, which domesticated Western genres within images of postwar Japanese cosmopolitanism, Miike's *mukokuseki* Asia serves as a placeless stage where Japanese potency and purity is confronted and undermined.

Moreover, *mukokuseki* Asia allows immersion in the canons of East Asian art cinema and boldly exhibits cinematic debts to neighboring film styles. In *The Bird People of China*, Miike incorporates visual tropes from China's Fifth Generation, such as leading directors Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, to depict China's enthralling landscape and peasantry. When he made *Rainy Dog* in Taiwan, he paid tribute to Taiwanese New Cinema by citing Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang, two major internationally renowned Taiwanese directors. These canonical styles from Chinese-language films occupy potent sites in Miike's making of the *neo-mukokuseki* action pictures. The following section focuses on Taipei, a frequent destination in Miike's borderless adventures.

II. *Mukokuseki* Asia in Taipei

Primitivist Taipei

One critic proclaimed that there is little connection between *Shinjuku Triad Society* and

Rainy Dog, the first two installments of Miike Takashi's Triad Trilogy.¹¹ The critic forgets, however, that locales can forge a narrative link, just as characters and plots do. Moreover, locales, especially border crossings and shifting spaces, are core to the *mukokuseki* imagination. The locale that connects these two films is Taipei, one of the key spaces in Miike's evocation of *mukokuseki* Asia.

Taipei plays an important narrative and spatial transition in *Shinjuku Triad Society*. It is the homeland of Wang Chi-ming (Tomoro Taguchi), the head of the Taiwanese Dragon's Claw gang in Shinjuku. Wang is a psychopath, deviant and unpredictable. In the middle of a war between Dragon's Claw and another gang, a Shinjuku policeman travels to Taiwan to investigate Wang's background and discovers his trade: trafficking in human organs. An abandoned hospital from the colonial days is used to 'harvest' local drug addicts and poor Filipinos who have been smuggled onto the island. Their kidneys are removed and sold on the black market in Japan. More importantly, inspector Kiriya (Kippei Shiina) is able to understand Wang's dark psyche because he sees his origins: a typical third world backwater with colonial ruins, poverty and widespread drug addiction.

In fact, *Shinjuku Triad Society* opens with images related to Taipei. The opening scene depicts a naked man in bed babbling in garbled Taiwanese (a dialect from southern China). The film then cuts to a murder scene in Shinjuku alternating with a Taipei montage: a village boy, a pig's head being chopped off, a bloody washbasin and a disfigured beggar sprawled inside a wet market. It is not clear initially how these images relate to the story, but it later emerges that these are images linked to the ferocious Taiwanese-Japanese mobster Wang. Even though Wang speaks fluent Japanese and moves around Shinjuku as a native, his unconscious remains with the primitive, drug-addled Taipei. In this connection, it is not far-fetched for *Rainy Dog*, the sequel to *Shinjuku Triad Society*, to use Taipei as its only setting, given its criminalized representation in the earlier film.

Rainy Dog opens with two medium shots of slaughtered pigs crammed inside a moving truck. Inside the truck, the gutted pigs are photographed as if they are corpses—naked, raw and hanging grotesquely from both sides of the frame. Another medium shot introduces Yuji

(Aikawa Sho), the protagonist, as he walks through these body parts to reach the end of the truck. These packed-in carcasses foreground the environment. This is our introduction to the film's setting—Taipei—so powerfully encoded as a primitive refuge for a lone Japanese gangster.

Taipei as filthy hideout continues in the next scene in which Yuji drags a pig on his back, staggering inside the meat section of an old wet market. A butcher is in the near background, chopping pig parts while Yuji and his mates continue to discharge their cargo. There is a cutaway to a black cat, a regular scavenger at the scene, enjoying raw meat.

What does the opening of *Rainy Dog* signify, in terms of the relationship between the protagonist and his space? Yuji is a runaway yakuza, taking asylum in Taipei after the breakout of gang warfare in Shinjuku. Yuji's sojourn in Taipei is hardly glamorous. Unlike typical depictions of a runaway gangster enjoying a 'vacation' in pleasure spots such as Spain or Okinawa, Yuji is in exile. He works for a local boss (Li Li-chun) in exchange for protection while he awaits a passport to get home. The opening sequence sets the stage for exile—a vicinity of slaughterhouses, brutality, crime and decrepitude. Shadowy photography extends this primitive locale where the ex-yakuza makes his living as both a laborer and a professional hitman, blindly following orders like a dog. The second sequence takes us to Yuji's temporary home, a tiny upstairs room in a dismal city with substandard infrastructure and lots of rain.

Yuji is not the only wandering yakuza in Taipei. There is another Japanese man, a nameless hitman (Tomoro Taguchi) camped out in the city and waiting for the best opportunity to nail his target—Yuji. This assassin, too, is prohibited from returning home. To go home, he must complete his assignment to kill his fellow Japanese gangster. To these two exiles from Shinjuku, Taipei functions more like a doghouse than a holiday paradise, although they concede that Taipei has "good food and kind women." A typical morning for Taguchi: after he gets out of his sleeping bag on an anonymous rooftop, he stands, spits and urinates straight down from where he stands on the edge of the roof. The interesting thing about this scene is the deliberate shot of Taguchi's penis in medium close-up as he urinates.

Relieved, he shouts, “I love it, Taipei.” To this homeless Japanese man, Taipei is an open toilet, a filthy but relaxed place in which a man can undo his pants and reveal himself to the world. Following this logic, the rest of the film shows Yuji and Taguchi both trotting around Taipei with their outrageous acts as if the city were a silent, impassive backdrop in which the criminal presence of Japanese gangsters appears as routine rather than as an annoyance. In this sense, Yuji and Taguchi are likened to stray dogs wandering in the rain, just like Yuji’s illegitimate son whom he refuses to acknowledge and tolerates as a stray pup.

Rainy Dog shares with Miike’s other works similar characters, plots and gags; stylized action choreography; and cynical representations of heroism and homosexuality. But the Taipei setting makes the hero’s conundrum even less predictable. Taipei is not a refugee paradise, nor a safe shelter. It is full of deceit and false promises, aside from offering cheap food and sex. It double-crosses the Japanese man, manipulating his vulnerability and exploiting his expertise. On the other hand, Taipei seems to be a ‘natural’ choice, because its colonial history allows a somewhat comfortable familiarity and serves as a site for nostalgia. Thus, it is not surprising to see Yuji solicited by a pimp—in Japanese—even in a rural area. Taiwan nativist writers Huang Chun-ming and Wang Chen-ho have written remarkable works on Japanese sex tours to Taiwan, an indelible, bitter memory in Taiwan’s postcolonial literature.

Here we see Taipei’s double alterity, combining for Japan both horror and nostalgia. Taipei underlines Japan’s continuing fear and loathing of Chinese-speaking society and serves as a deprived and ludicrous location for eccentric Shinjuku outcasts. Yuji’s white raincoat works like a visual gag: a foreign hitman calling attention to himself and the ridiculous mismatch with his surroundings. Meanwhile, the same primitive setting mobilizes nostalgia on behalf of highly modernized, efficient and techno-centric Japan. As envisioned by Japanese filmmakers, Taipei’s duality makes it an alternative space for proscribed activity—border-crossing, rusticity, alternative cuisine and sex, lawlessness and drugs—and a convenient place to vanish. Taipei is *mukokuseki*’s perfect terrain.

Cinema Taiwan

The shooting of *Rainy Dog* was a strange experience for the director from Tokyo. Miike was alone, in that the production crew consisted mostly of Taiwanese. The only Japanese crew were the two actors, a soundman and Miike himself.¹² Chang Hua-kun, of City Film Company, was brought in to assist on location shooting in Taipei. Chang is a well-known producer, having produced Hou Hsiao-hsien's films in the early 1980s. Does Chang's production background have an effect on the style of the film? Aaron Gerow says that in *Rainy Dog*, Miike used actors who were "prominent in Hou's work."¹³ This is not completely wrong, but it may be based on misinformation circulated by the film's publicists. Chang Chih, the actor who plays the local gang member chasing Yuji, and Niu Cheng-cheh, who plays a flamboyant but untrustworthy gay artist, are the two leads in *The Boys from Fenggui* (1983). But they have not been in any of Hou's films since then. Gerow also indicates that Miike uses Li Yi-hsu, Edward Yang's cameraman for *Mahjong* (1996), as the cinematographer for *Rainy Dog*. But the cinematography in *Rainy Dog* is nothing like the brisk and upbeat photography of the booming, yuppie Taipei presented by Yang. To use these names to prove a link between *Rainy Dog* and Taiwan New Cinema would be difficult. But if we turn our attention to style, then we may find more tangible connections.

This brings us back to the opening sequence of the film. The shot that follows the wet market scene is a 'tunnel vision' setup showing Yuji being paid. Meanwhile, a fight breaks out nearby, as indicated by the off-screen sounds. Yuji checks it out, but keeps his distance. Like Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* (1993), this setup pushes violent confrontation to the edges or even off the screen altogether.¹⁴ Hou Hsiao-hsien also uses this technique in *City of Sadness* (1989) and *Puppetmaster* (1993) to create a sense of cosmic distancing and 'geometrization of the space.' According to Abe-Nornes and Yeh, Taiwan New Cinema is conscious of staging conflicts and violence as an integral part of the entire setting, not merely as a dramatic focus.¹⁵ It is important to note that such setups are rarely seen in Miike's other work, in which he avoids the use of establishing wide shots in scenes depicting explicit violence and explicit sexual expression. Instead, he favors medium close-ups to create the

effect of an abrupt, motional intensity. Miike's deviation here could be explained by the director's deliberate tribute to Taiwan New Cinema.

In the following sequence, a bird's eye view is employed to reveal the neighborhood where Yuji lives. Recall Wan Ren's *Super Citizen* (1984), a film that exposes Taipei's moral corruption. Even Yuji's tiny upstairs room is similar to the temporary housing in the notorious, red-light district occupied by the protagonist of *Super Citizen*. Immediately after the shot of the neighborhood, there is a wide shot of a narrow alleyway, into which an old man shambles against a yellowish, relaxing backlight. Here we see Yuji easily riding his bike into the alleyway, passing the old man and arriving at his shelter in Taipei. This comforting composition is intended not merely as a transitional shot, but as a depiction of the daily routine of the Japanese exile. We could argue that such a depiction comes from outside the regular, generic staging of gangster pictures in which a calming, slow moment is often followed by a shocking dramatic effect. It is worth noting that Miike's staging is known for its shock value and, sometimes, cheap thrills. Hence this staging, so alien to Miike's work, can only be interpreted as something borrowed, cited from outside his own repertoire. Early Hou Hsiao-hsien films, particularly *Boys from Fenggui*, *A Time to Live and A Time to Die* (1984) and *Dust in the Wind* (1986), which were embraced by Japanese critics,¹⁶ are pregnant with this kind of staging device in order to reveal a continuous space and a correspondingly wholesome way of life.

All of these examples appear to be citations of or an homage to the more established places and space of Taiwanese cinema. Not only are Miike's heroes displaced from their home turf, but it also seems that his film style is dislocated and reoriented, taking cues from echoes of East Asian cinematic voices. These voices haunt the *mise-en-scene* and cinematography of contemporary yakuza pictures such as Miike's, lending nostalgia, discovery and an East Asian reconfiguration of Tokyo stories.

III. Conclusion

From Nikkatsu studio's *mukokuseki akushon* to Miike Takashi's *mukokuseki yakuza*, a

major change occurred in content, style and mode of production, in response to a rise in the 'pluralization of ethnicity' in Japan and to scattered film cultures, as Yomota Inuhiko pointed out in the late 1990s.¹⁷ Multiculturalism and its critiques are useful as an entry to comprehending the countercultural world and its heteroglossia in the gangster films of Miike Takashi. But multiculturalism falls short as an account of the complexity of Japan's relations with Asia, especially the ways in which Asia is imagined as a post-bubble-economy dystopia and as a land for adventure and nostalgia. Here we find film language and its construction of the city space a useful, alternate entry to answering our question about *mukokuseki* cinema and its borrowed, mixed film space.

Not only must we consider the passage of nearly fifty years of film and social history: the idea of borderlessness itself has traversed several phases, from post-occupation synthesis of Western genres, to countercultural appropriations of Southeast Asian fashion, to a diffuse bohemian sensibility that may or may not connect with contemporary Japanese forms of multiculturalism. A more popularized, tantalizing version of *mukokuseki* yakuza is Iwai Shunji's *Swallowtail Butterfly* (2000), a move to synthesize cosmopolitan youth cultures with fantasies of urban homesteading and criminal syndication. 'Yen town,' is a cowboy haven for refugees and third culture people, where one's (white) color is belied by linguistic facility (in Japanese), which points to a carnivalesque pan-Asian fantasy, a melting pot for Japanese disillusion, as well as for non-Japanese settlement. This has less to do with real multiculturalism in Japan and more to do with an appreciation of other Asian film and popular cultures, imported to Japan from Taiwan, Korea and China.¹⁸ Young Japanese directors were aware of the rising aesthetic status of films from these areas, as well as their sensational cult values of explosive energy.

More relevant is the new spatial imaginaries of contemporary filmmaking and its attempts to challenge the conventional binarism of space imagination. Here Edward Soja's 'thirding-as-othering' is useful in theorizing the disjuncture between Taipei as a primitive third world city and Taiwanese cinema as desiring '*spaces of representations*' (italics, my emphasis):

Thirthing introduces a critical ‘other-than’ choice that speaks and critiques through its otherness. That is to say, it does not derive simply from an additive combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their resumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different...open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge.¹⁹

Thematically, Miike copies tropes of Orientalism by depicting Taipei as Japan’s destined, ‘other’ space, a playground to generate *mukokuseki* fantasies. Hence Taipei remains exoticized, trivialized and most often criminalized. But beyond the thematic level, Taipei as a primitive space is complicated by the insertion of familiar scenes from Taiwanese cinema, a distinctive contribution to world cinema from Japan’s former colony. These scenes virtually transform Miike’s visual style into something strange, something other than Miike. It seems at this point that *mukokuseki* has gone beyond a mere geographical crossing and entered a new, third terrain, an unpredicted and not entirely combined, synthesized space. Because of its place in Japanese colonial history, Taipei’s figuration as Shinjuku’s other remains tenaciously problematic and vividly attractive.

¹ Darrell William Davis, "Japanese Popular Cinema: Cause for Cautious Optimism" in *Contemporary Asian Cinema: Popular Culture in a Global Frame*. Ed. Ann Ciecko (London Berg Publications, 2006), pp. 193-206.

² Aaron Gerow, "The Sadness of the Impossible Dream: Lack and Access in the Transnational Cinema of Miike Takashi." <http://www.asianfilms.org/japan/gerow3.html>. Access December 15, 2005.

³ Darrell William Davis, "Re-igniting Japanese Tradition with *Hana-Bi*." *Cinema Journal* Vol. 40, 4(Summer 2001): 55-80.

⁴ Mark Schilling, *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films*. (Berkeley, CA, Stone Bridge press, 2003), p. 80.

⁵ Mike Ko, "The Break-up of the National Body: Cosmetic Multiculturalism and Films of Miike Takashi," *New Cinemas* 2.1 (2004): 29-39.

⁶ Kanazawa Makoto, "Miike Takashi" in '*Nihonsei eiga*' no yomikata 1980-1999, eds. Muto Kiichi, et al. (Tokyo: Film Atosha, 1999), p. 127.

⁷ Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 28.

⁸Raine, Michael. "Ishihara Yujiro: Youth, Celebrity and the Male Body in Late 1950s Japan" in Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh, eds., *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 202-225.

⁹ In addition to Ishihara, there were many other stars in the world of Nikkatsu action who were more or less modeled after American youth idols such as James Dean, Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, Liz Taylor and Natalie Wood: Kobayashi Akira, "Mr. Dynamite," Akagi "Tony" Keiichiro, "the Japanese James Dean," Shishido Jo and female stars like Asaoka Ruriko, Matsubara Chieko and Mari Annu. Titles were invariably sensational: *Pistol Rap Sheet: Quick-draw Ryu* (Noguchi Hiroshi), *Roughnecks from Shimizu* (Matsuo Akinori), *Pistol #0* (Yamazaki Tokujiro), *Storming Brotherhood* and *Sun in the Crowd* (both made by Inoue Umetsugu). More familiar today are the many experimental genre films by Suzuki

Seijun: *Branded to Kill*, *Tokyo Drifter*, *Elegy to Violence*, *Youth of the Beast*. For a comprehensive coverage on the stars of Nikkatsu action films, see online source: Nikkatsu Action Lounge:<http://shishido0.tripod.com>. See also, Mark Schilling's *The Yakuza Movie Book: A Guide to Japanese Gangster Films* (Berkeley, CA, Stone Bridge press, 2003), p. 31. For an introduction to Suzuki Seijun and his Nikkatsu films, see *Branded to Thrill: The Delirious Cinema of Suzuki Seijun*, Simon Field and Tony Raynes eds. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts and Japan Foundation, 1994).

¹⁰ Yomota Inuhito, "Miike Takashi DOA." Miike Takashi Retrospective, Torin International Film Festival, 2006.

¹¹ Tom Mes, *Agitator: the Cinema of Miike Takashi*. 2nd edition (New York: FAB Press, 2004), p. 114.

¹² DVD of *Rainy Dog*.

¹³ Gerow, "Lack of Access." See note 2.

¹⁴ For tunnel-vision composition, see Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, "Navigating the House of Yang" in *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 104-118.

¹⁵ See the section on "Style" in Markus Abe-Nornes's and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh's website on *City of Sadness, Narrating National Sadness* (Berkeley, California: University of California, Berkeley: Film Studies Program, 1998):

<http://cinemaspace.berkeley.edu/Papers/CityOfSadness/table.html>.

¹⁶ For Hou Hsiao-hsien's critical receptions in Japan, see Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, "Poetics and Politics of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Films" in Sheldon Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh eds., *Chinese-language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2005), pp. 169-172.

¹⁷ Yomota Inuhiko, *Nihon eiga no radikaru na ishi* (Radical will of Japanese cinema) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999), p. 145-228.

¹⁸ For the exuberant reception of East Asian cinema, see Yomota Inuhiko's *Eiga fuu'un* (Cinema turbulence) (Tokyo: Baishui sha, 1993).

¹⁹ Edward Soja, *ThirdSpace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Spaces* (Blackwell, 1996), p. 61.

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