

EAST ASIAN CINEMAS

*Exploring Transnational
Connections on Film*

Edited by

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Published in 2008 by I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
6 Salem Road, London W2 4BU
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010
www.ibtauris.com

In the United States of America and Canada distributed by
Palgrave Macmillan, a division of St. Martin's Press,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York NY 10010

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ISBN: (PB) 978 1 84511 615 6
ISBN: (HB) 978 1 84511 614 9

A full CIP record for this book is available from the British Library
A full CIP record is available from the Library of Congress

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: available

Designed and typeset by 4word Ltd, Bristol, UK
Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall, UK

I.B. TAURIS
LONDON · NEW YORK

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Transnational Noir: Style and Substance in Hayashi Kaizo's *The Most Terrible Time in My Life*

On the cover of the recently released *Kino* DVD of Hayashi Kaizo's film, *The Most Terrible Time in My Life* (1994), is a black and white photograph of Japanese star Nagase Masatoshi standing in front of a movie theatre, with a hand covering one eye and above him a neon sign attached to the theatre that beams 'CinemaScope' high over his head. Filmed in glossy black and white, the movie is both a homage to and critical revision of the American film noir of the 1940s as well as a tribute to its epigone, the French New Wave. This appropriation of noir sensibilities moves beyond surface encoding to naming its detective protagonist Hama Maiku; 'my real name', as the character states in each instalment of the Hama trilogy. This parodic citation of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer sets in motion a simulacral world where the style and substance of 'B' movies have gone global. The political impulse to recast noir motifs, such as the hard-boiled detective, corrupt police and the chaotic underworld of crime that eludes the law, in contemporary Yokohama grounds the narrative in the wake of cultural and economic changes wrought by the Second World War. This undercurrent of social nihilism, from the loss of the war, the West's enforced reconstructions of Japanese society, and the traumatising impact of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki haunts Hayashi's noir sensibility. Yet, by centring the narrative on the ultimately doomed friendship between the Japanese detective and the Taiwanese 'gangster', a complex history of cultural affinities, colonial antagonisms and shifting international power relations are set in motion that are anything but black and white.

Its focus on the bond between the hip detective Hama and the Taiwanese 'illegal' immigrant and gang member, Yang Hai Ping, whom he befriends, translates the couple of 1940s noir into an allegory of postmodern geopolitical tension. The film's citational practices – significantly placing Hama's office in a movie theatre – underscore cinema as a privileged forum for the aesthetic mediation of epistemological crisis in modern Japan, a Japan, as the commentary on the DVD package makes plain, 'with vanishing borders'. The fascination with American style – not just in Hollywood's glossy, wide-screen genre films, but the generalised Westernisation of Japanese culture that followed the loss of the war – becomes inseparable from the substance of transnational violence and loss of 'brotherhood' the film represents. Such contradictions resonate in the image of the neon 'CinemaScope' sign, signalling a moment in Hollywood history when films were meant to be 'larger than life', that is dwarfed by the giant red title, 'The Most Terrible Time in My Life'. Nagase Masatoshi's covered eye, then, suggests a monocular vision that characterises Japan's ambivalent modes of national and cultural representation. Film noir's stylistic elements of oblique lines, chiaroscuro lighting, compositional tension, and obtuse framing and point-of-view, highlight the irreducible tensions and conflicts that are the stuff of contemporary transnationalism.

Despite their bleak and increasingly surreal themes, Hayashi's films were quite popular in Japan, and led to a television series. The trilogy's popularity, however, is less surprising when compared to the fame of other Japanese films, exemplified by the unsurpassed success of Miyazaki Hayao's *Princess Mononoke* (1997), which refuse to 'provide a happy form of closure'.¹ Hayashi's Hama series falls in line with other films that reject a conventional approach to Japanese history and stand as 'contrast to the idealized myths of harmony, progress, and unproblematic homogeneous Japanese people (*minzoku*) ruled by a patriarchal elite that held sway in Japanese textbooks and postwar Japanese history'.² Hayashi's films, though a very different type of genre film from the animated quest-romance of *Mononoke*, echo its 'vision of cultural dissonance ... (b)y confronting and even subverting traditional notions of the past ... to provide a provocative, heterogeneous, and often bleaker view than the conventional vision of Japanese history and identity'.³ Although set in Yokohama's historical present, *Terrible Time's* stylisation evokes the past to stress the historical underpinnings that inform the present day scenario, a scenario of explicit cultural dissonance in which the history of Japanese colonisation is confronted. *Terrible Time* centres on the belated return of the postcolonial, which exposes the limits of Japan's post-war cultural mythologies. Indeed, the film presents

several Taiwanese characters: Yang, his brother De Jian, and Hama's first and unrelated client Kim. The proliferation of the nation's 'Others' implies the endless 'repetition or return of the postcolonial migrant', whose very presence works 'to alienate the holism of history'.⁴ In that the substance of Hayashi's film concerns Japan's own 'history that happened elsewhere, overseas', the presence of Taiwanese immigrants in Japan 'does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye'.⁵

At first, the film appears as a celebration of style – a hip nostalgia for the 'cool' aesthetic of noir. The Hama trilogy has in fact been explicitly marketed as simple postmodern pastiche, as the back of the second DVD puts it: 'a dazzling crime film dripping with retro gloss and irreverent post-modern cheek'. Yet, each film's unique affective intensity quickly unseats the cool detachment the films, at first, seem to exhibit. In other words, these films move from (and through) both parody and pastiche to *refiguration*:

refiguration takes formal elements of past styles and brings them forward into a contemporary context, resulting in a sometimes disquieting synthesis of past form and present context. At work is a process of refiguration, or conversion: the past form is converted into a sign of the present, while the present is historicized through its containment within a formal element taken from the past.⁶

Terrible Time refigures post-war cinema's 'world of existential, epistemological, and axiological uncertainty' to reflect on the disorientation of contemporary geopolitics.⁷

The film begins above and behind a man, who is walking through the 'Western Japanese Cinema Center', the sign for which is framed in the establishing shot as he passes beneath it. This spatial designation takes on deeper meaning than simple geographical demarcation, as the conjunction of 'Western' and 'Japanese' names the fungible boundary between the East and West that the film examines. This boundary is ironically signalled as the man passes Hama's Nash Rambler parked in front of the theatre. Further underscoring the hybridisation between the West and the East, the man – who we now see to be a nervous Chinese man – is told by the ticket taker: 'Today's movie is an American film.' He enters the chiaroscuro-lit office abutting the projectionist's booth, introducing himself as 'Kim'. Kim explains that he has turned to Hama because 'the police are cold to foreigners'. In response, Hama enters the frame in a two-shot, which appears to be lit from a single

source except for the strobe effect of the projector bleeding into Hama's office, and offers Kim a cigarette, leaning in close to light both cigarettes. This intimate gesture recalls heightened film noir moments in which the protagonist is drawn in by the femme fatale. Because their intimacy is based on an economic exchange that grants the detective a cool detachment, the scene is citational rather than critical. Hama's position as a paid detective defines 'his role as cultural go-between, of an individual willing to bridge the ideological chasm between the civilized and the criminal for whoever can pay his [fifty thousand yen a day]'.⁸ However, the film juxtaposes this scene to the relationship with Yang to stress that Hama's 'role as cultural go-between' is not founded on economic exchange, but rather is in the tradition of 'the hard-boiled detective [who] ... solves his cases with the personal commitment of somebody fulfilling an ethical mission'.⁹ Significantly, this act of intimacy with Kim becomes a placeholder for the ethical commitments Hama will come to represent.

As Tom Conley has suggested: 'When neo-noir alludes to the past, whether innocuously or obsequiously, unlike commemorative genres, it invites a critical and interpretive relation.'¹⁰ It is this critical or interpretive relation that motivates transnational noir. *Terrible Time* at first appears to be obsequious in its self-conscious engagement with film noir, replicating 'the clearest manifestation of American Expressionism ... the successful marriage of the *film noir* style and the widely popular hard-boiled detective story'.¹¹ Indeed, the film's debt to both generic and stylistic elements is overtly acknowledged in the photos hanging in Hama's office. As Kim enters Hama's office, which is too darkly lit to make out the decor, much less its period, the single source light that encircles Kim also lights three framed pictures on Hama's wall: an image of Humphrey Bogart, signed 'Sam Spade'; a sketch of Shishido Jô (who himself uses the symbol of the spade as a character for his anglicised name); and a still of Jeanne Moreau from *Elevator to the Gallows* (France, 1957). Although each image indexes a noir form – American Expressionism, French New Wave and Japanese crime drama – taken together, they suggest the pre-existing internationalism of noir's generic and visual language. The film exploits the implicit hybridity of noir to establish a critical relation to it.

The film restages film noir's classic scenario of the client engaging the detective to set this historical relation against the determinants of the present. That this scene with Kim in the office is a prologue is underscored by the fact that it precedes the title and its single credit. Opposed to the winking, self-reflexive tone of the prologue, what follows the title sequence is a critical revision of film noir to reflect

contemporary transnational politics. The scene following Kim's office visit is in effect the start of the plot – at the mah-jong parlour set clearly in today's Yokohama. Hama is gambling with his friends when he meets Yang Hai Ping, who is a waiter there. Yang takes their order, having trouble with the Japanese. The kindness of Hama's friends in simplifying their order, and encouraging applause when Yang eventually gets the order correct, is inversely reflected in the other occupied table's response to Yang's trouble with the language. As Hama's table looks on, the Japanese man (who is later revealed to be a yakuza member) at the other table stands up from his table to confront Yang, threatening him, demanding: 'You're in Japan; learn Japanese.' Hama's friends comment that 'things are heating up ... better stay out of it', as the yakuza slaps Yang. When Hama catches a glimpse of a hidden gun in Yang's waistband for which he appears to be reaching in response to the yakuza's escalating threats, he immediately jumps in between the men to stop Yang from using the gun, only to turn around and have his pinky finger sliced off. The quick-paced editing stops, brought to a halt by the stilled shot of the fallen finger lying on the floor, which is followed by what appears to be a jump cut to a shot of a panting but unmoving dog. Following the dog who has ran off with the finger down to street level, the friends are filmed from the dog's perspective as they coax the dog to drop the finger with a piece of meat. The scene ends with the sound of the dog barking.

This scene sets the tone of the film as one which pinballs between tense violence and black humour, between homage and parody. Indeed, the castration metaphor of the cut-off finger has such blatant psychosexual implications that they seem to invite a level of parodic self-mocking. However, there is a notable resignification of psychosexual imagery inherited from film noir, in which the circuit of desire initiated by the appearance of the femme fatale is reworked as transnational Otherness. The scene in the parlour plays on fundamental noir tropes; Yang is to all appearances the victim in need of rescuing by the detective hero. Yet, Yang, like so many gun-toting femmes fatales before him, is 'armed', his demureness and subservience a screen for his phallic power. The hard-boiled detective is in turn castrated in the attempt to 'rescue' the supposed victim. The sexual anxieties manifest in film noir are tied to the ideological wake of the war: 'whether considered a genre or a style, the films circumscribed as noir are seen as playing out negative dramas of postwar masculine trauma and gender anxiety brought on by wartime destabilization of the culture's domestic economy'.¹² By invoking these, *Terrible Time* traces contemporary anxieties about Japan's porous borders to the traumatic impact of the Second World

War that continues to haunt Japan and its 'friends'. Central to the film's critical noir strategies is this reworking of the femme noire as post-colonial Other, in relation to the detective as a culturally-coded dyad; replacing the gender anxieties of classical noir is the Otherness of cultural and national difference.

The relationship between Yang and Hama is overdetermined by the relationship between Taiwan and Japan, a relationship acknowledged throughout the film. The historical affinity between the two countries is grounded in 'a shared history, which began when Taiwan became the first colony of Japan; common values; economic ties; strategic alignment; and political and social networks'.¹³ The film's narrative arc is built around the characters' burgeoning friendship against the wishes of those aligned with the national interests, either the corrupt Japanese police or the Chinese gang members who warn Yang, 'friendship ... can be dangerous'. Throughout the film, Hama's closest companions ask 'why do you care so much?' and 'why are you so taken with this Taiwan guy?', to which Hama responds: 'there's something about him'. Indeed, this bond at the centre of the film reflects a strengthening of transnational ties, particularly in the 1990s; the 'friendship associations ... between Japanese and Taiwanese parliamentarians strengthened despite protest from Beijing'.¹⁴ That this film was made in cooperation with the government of Taiwan lends some credence to the film as political allegory. Although the film is set in the 1990s, its noir style links its narrative to the years between 1945 and 1958, in which a dramatic restructuring of Asia took place.

Situating this friendship in the bleak and fatalistic tones of film noir, particularly as a refiguration of the desire and ambivalence that draw the hard-boiled detective to the femme fatale, suggests the complicated and troubled relationship between the two countries. By transposing sexual anxieties with transnational tensions in its neo-noir context, *Terrible Time* does not simply reflect but rewrites the historical past in the present. Homi Bhabha argues:

the enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is a problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic.¹⁵

This artifice is highlighted in the film's noir stylisations, while the substance of its narrative is set in the present. What I am suggesting is that the structure of noir symbolisation appropriated by the film works to translate and rehistoricise its signs in order to fit the contours of cultural difference. Specifically, the film refuses to be faithful to the power relations that gird classic film noir by rearranging the subjective qualities associated with noir's cast of characters and, in doing so, subvert the ideological assumptions on which the genre relies. The detective is no longer so hard-boiled and his constitutive partner is no longer his Other as much as his *brother*, whose criminal transgressions are seen from a much more sympathetic standpoint.

Yang is both narratively and visually coded in ways quite similar to noir's original femme fatale. Hama officially meets Yang outside the doctor's office, after having his finger reattached. They are filmed close together while Hama reassures Yang that it was not his fault, but warns him against using his 'little toy' and taps Yang's gun, still hidden under his belt. By brushing off the danger of Yang's little toy, he is placed in a feminised relation to Hama. This is underscored by the closing shots: when Yang asks his name, Hama looks directly into the camera in a shot-return-shot sequence that sutures the audience into Yang's position, strengthening the empathy already established from his victimisation in the previous scene. The return shot frames Yang's smiling face in close-up and soft key lighting. The perfectly symmetrical framing of Yang is used only one other time, significantly in the narrative flashback of De Jian's meeting of his wife, Huang Bai Lan, at the brothel. In his relationship with Yang, Hama 'loses the distance that would enable him to analyze the false scene and to dispel its charm; he becomes the active hero confronted with the chaotic, corrupt world, the more he intervenes in it, the more involved in its wicked ways he becomes'.¹⁶ But what makes the film a critical revision of the noir form is its indictment of the historical origins of the 'corrupt world' rather than personify it in an individual.

Neither brother is demonised, despite the fact that the film shows their violence, because Hayashi's film places their actions in a larger context. It does so by setting two of film noir's genres in dialogic relation – the hard-boiled detective and the gangster film. Because the film utilises most, if not all, of the features of film noir, from flashback and voice over, to investigative structure and femme fatale, we are provided a proliferation of points of view that indicate a complex social context that is both cross-cultural and trans-historical.¹⁷ The film implements multiple framing devices to refigure noir thematics in terms of the post-war restructuring of East Asia. In fact, the

chronological and ideological middle of the film speaks to this directly. In Hama's search, a story of 'yakuza', 'illegal aliens' and violent crime is articulated, reflecting the ideological terminology of the nation state. Against this is the brothers' narrative, which is literally cast as the negative of the official story. When Yang meets with his contacts and is told to kill his brother, De Jian, there is a close-up on his face and the film image fades to a negative still, reversing the black and white contrast. This cuts to an image of the countryside of Taiwan, where two young boys are shown hungrily eating food that they apparently stole. This is followed by another silent scene of the adult brothers, returning from a clearly more violent crime, fading out with an image of Yang remorsefully washing blood from his hands. This flashback aligns the brothers with Taiwan itself in contrast to Hama's own synecdochic relationship to Yokohama. The fusion of the Yakuza gangster film with the hard-boiled detective genre articulates the ways in which global monetary circuits have deterritorialised national and cultural borders.

Yet, it is for love and not money that De Jian switches gang allegiances, allowing him to become Yamamoto-san, 'the family man'. De Jian's doubled name, one Taiwanese, one Japanese, is one of the several signifiers of hybridity the film presents. Although De Jian's gang is referred to as the 'Black Dogs', they call themselves the 'New Japs', because it is made up of Chinese and South Korean immigrants naturalised as Japanese citizens. Unknown to Hama, Yang is a member of the Dragon Union, come to assassinate his own brother for 'turning his back on China', as his contact describes it. After Hama is brutally beaten by the 'New Japs', he is lectured by his 'mentor', Shishido Jô (the famous Japanese actor who goes by his real name in the film). Shishido informs him that Kano, the South Korean leader of the 'New Japs', has ordered the hit on their own assassin, De Jian, in order to 'restructure Asia', in effect starting a gang war between the Black Dogs and the Dragon Union. This intricate plot structure suggests the equally complex historical restructuring of Asia following the war. Underscoring the historical underpinnings of the film's conceit, the scene in which Shishido provides the central exposition frames the concern with the 'restructuring of Asia' as a generational issue. Shishido, himself an icon of early post-war Japanese crime films, tells Hama that 'I am too old to play Dad', and warns Hama not to get involved. Hama angrily replies that he does not 'need permission'. The two embody Japanese generational positions with regards to Taiwan. The scene ends with Shishido taking his leave, with a military salute with his cane. He represents the post-war position informed by the pacifism institutionalised in the country's 1947 Fundamental Law of Education, and

influences Japan's position of non-interference between Taipei and Beijing, a relationship implied when De Jian mentions he would like to visit Beijing, and a fellow gang member tells him he can now visit as a naturalised Japanese citizen.

It is the concept of citizenship that underpins Hama's relationship to Yang, making the detective and the gangster 'brothers'. The detective's ethical mission reflects Japan's ethical debt to its former colony. In the bar scene, Yang tells Hama that his only family is De Jian, and Hama says that all he has is his sister: 'parents dead, same as you'. Yang corrects him: 'No not the same', proceeding to tell him that his parents are not dead but rather abandoned the brothers because of poverty, insinuating the traumatic history of compounded colonialisms. Yang's abandonment is not so much a metaphor for Japan's decolonisation as it is metonymic of the colonial effects of Japan's occupation, which aimed at providing an 'agricultural surplus', but did so 'in ways that destroyed traditional social bonds'.¹⁸ That noir does not simply 'reflect' historical material, but articulates its affective impact on a cultural psyche, begins to explain its appropriateness to cross-cultural translation. The parodic and pastiche returns to film noir in the form of neo-noir has made it all too clear that noir was never simply a reflection of historical events, and that history's impact on the genre was never direct as once thought. Rather, 'film noir's relations to its historical and social context can be best described not as metaphoric but as synecdochic and hyperbolic'.¹⁹ The film utilises the synecdochic qualities of noir to suggest the war's long-term effects in rearranging geographical and political space.

Hama is metonymic of Yokohama itself – his name literally part of the whole – which is expressed in the first voice-over, as he states 'I am a Yokohama detective', and reinforced through continual deep-focus shots that place Hama within, and equal to, the urban cityscape.²⁰ At first, Hama is aligned with Japan generally, as in the mah-jong parlour, in which his comment on 'changed' behaviour – i.e. hesitance to fight – reflects Japan's own former aggressive behaviour, of which its colonisation of Taiwan was a part. Yet, he is referred to more than once as a 'stray dog' – the same term used to describe both Yang brothers – and, outside the immigration office, Lt. Nakayama scoffs at Hama referring to himself as a 'citizen'. His metonymic relationship to Yokohama connects him to its own hybrid history of occupation as far back as the nineteenth century when American warships arrived there, demanding that Japan open several ports for commerce. Yokohama's historical internationalism, though, is the history of invasion and occupation, exemplified by its massive destruction in the Great Yokohama Air Raid, and its subsequent

American occupation after the loss of the war. The history of the city does not require explicit reference but rather haunts the narrative, implied in the film's visuals of the city against which Hama takes his meaning. As Vivian Sobchack argues: 'the baroque qualities of noir's visual style, the particularities of its narrative thematics and structure, emerge as an intensified form of selection, foregrounding, and consequent exaggeration of actual cultural spaces charged with contingent temporal experience'.²¹ The cultural space of the city is particularly charged in classic film noir because it spatially operates as the alienating Other to the idea of home for which America supposedly fought, a dichotomy particularly acute for the hard-boiled detective: 'For the detective, the ideal social order is denied by the urban reality around him. The ideal represents not simply a promise, but a broken promise.'²²

The broken promise of classic noir, underscored by the city setting and the non-reproductive couple of the detective and femme fatale, is the (denied) myth of home. *Terrible Time* returns to noir to comment upon this broken promise, translating it to fit 'the perplexity of the unhomey, intrapersonal world'.²³ *Terrible Time* transnationalises noir by revisiting this central conceit of the loss of home: 'both wartime and the home front together come to form a remembered idyllic national time-space of phenomenological integrity and plenitude', forming a 'mythological chronotope' within the national imaginary.²⁴ Hayashi's film summons noir's time-space or chronotope to interrogate the continuing geo-political affects of this mythology. Notably, the film returns to noir's chronotope dialogically from the present to connect the *time* of the noir to an altogether different *space*, i.e. to the space of Asia/Pacific: 'the space of Asia/Pacific cinema is the space of translation ... In ... the queer [sic] sights, the anachronistic temporality, and the inconclusive visions of the past and the present, films from the Asia/Pacific continue to disturb specularity'.²⁵ The disturbing translation of American film noir's chronotope 'captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations'.²⁶ Asian/Pacific spaces such as the serially colonised Taiwan and the forcibly internationalised Yokohama exemplify such unhomey initiations.

Hayashi's film references noir's mythological chronotope only to reverse it, exposing its underside. Although the film is set in the present day, it is intertextually presented as, literally, the flipside of *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), William Wyler's Oscar-winning social realist depiction of post-war life for the returning US soldiers.²⁷ The title sequence consists of a close-up on the movie theatre's sign

displaying *The Best Years of Our Lives*, but after a beat, the sign flips over to reveal the title of the film we are actually watching. Hayashi's film is literally and figuratively the underside of *Best Years*: 'the United States emerged from World War II with its industry intact, its political influence paramount in every corner of the world, and its economic weight felt in shattered nations from Japan to France. The sense of nearly limitless opportunity runs through *Best Years* and serves as a balance to the otherwise bleak tone of the film'.²⁸ *Best Years* works as a counterpoint to and historical frame of reference for *Terrible Time*, presenting a dialogic relation between the films that turn on the transnational and transhistorical effects of the war on Asia/Pacific – the obverse of 'limitless opportunity'.

In *Terrible Time*'s postmodern return to noir in general, and specifically referencing *Best Years*, in which 'the atomic theme appears several times', Hayashi's film cites the stylised effects of noir to confront what the original form would not confront – that the dropping of the bombs on Japan were *the* broken promise of an ideal global order.²⁹ In this way, transnational noir is not defined by taking noir abroad, but rather by the excavation of the form's own global unconscious: 'in the background, underlining each of the world's political and economic troubles, was the new force that had been released over Hiroshima in August 1945'.³⁰ Although never articulated in the substance of its content, the horror of atomic devastation is the historical undertow of film noir. Indeed, it has been argued that the film noir cycle ends with *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), what Paul Schrader has argued to be 'the masterpiece of film noir', a film that comes closest to facing 'the inhumanity and meaninglessness of the [American] hero', notably Mike Hammer, who, in the end, is himself destroyed by the 'great whatsit': the return of noir's repressed.³¹ Spillane's Hammer personifies the ambivalence that troubles the authoritative history of the West and the violent ends to which it went to consolidate its power against the East. *Terrible Time* is less homage than 'mimicry' of American noir; it speaks back to the West, exposing 'the mote in the eye of history', the blind spot of classic post-war film noir that informed its bleak fatalism and hopeless mood, though never directly addressed.³²

The atom's threat of annihilation begins to explain why 'a certain mode of hysteria and overwroughtness becomes the norm of ... noir's everyday life'.³³ Yet, it too is synecdochic of a larger social thematic that makes the film style of noir a popularly revisited form. Historically, the stylistic qualities of noir emerged before the atom was split; Thomas Schatz acknowledges film noir as 'American Expressionism', to reference the direct influence of the German Expressionism of the

1920s on the cinematic style of the 1940s in the US. Generally speaking, cinematic expressionism emerged as an aesthetic response to the German national crisis following the devastation of the First World War, then American Expressionism appeared in the wake of the Second World War, French New Wave came to fruition, and openly referenced, international conflicts with Indochina and Algiers, and the neo-noir of the 1970s has been perceived as a nihilistic reaction to the Vietnam War. Film expressionism, in other words, surfaces in the history of a nation when it is forced to confront its own liminality. The style and substance of expressionism in film, like world literature, as Goethe once suggested, 'arises from the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts'.³⁴

It is this very cultural confusion that is revisited in neo-noir, arising in the 1970s but coming to fruition in the 1990s. However, discussions of neo-noir have been marked by a Euro-American bias that has neglected to comment on neo-noir's profound transnationalism. Hayashi Kaizo is among the school of neo-noir directors, including John Woo and Quentin Tarantino (with whom Hayashi shares not only film references, such as Suzuki Seijun, but actors as well), who were 'cognizant of the noir heritage, but utilized it in new and revealing ways'.³⁵ I want to conclude by sketching out a different approach to neo-noir that provides a 'new way' to conceptualise it as a transnational aesthetic, based on an interpretive model for world literature that reflects the fact that 'the very concepts of homogeneous national cultures, the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions, or "organic" ethnic communities – as the grounds for a cultural comparativism – are in a profound process of redefinition'.³⁶ Contemporary film studies need to come to terms with this redefinition, rethinking its categorisations restricted by national borderlines. I would suggest that neo-noir's historical roots as a form that dealt with the anxieties produced by newly emancipated others, women specifically, makes it an ideal forum for the articulation of decolonisation and other shifting terrains of power and identity. For this reason, neo-noir can be framed as a stylistic category of world cinema, 'concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma. The study of world [cinema] might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of "otherness"'.³⁷ By centring my analysis on a non-Western text, the implicit hybridity of neo-noir is foregrounded, yet this hybridity is eminent to the postmodern return that is itself a translation of (and intervention into) a historically situated transnational form of aesthetic refiguration.

Like other noirs that deal explicitly with 'cultural confusion' such as *Chinatown* (US, 1974) and *Touch of Evil* (US, 1958), *Terrible Time* ends tragically, with consequences outside the detective's control: his client-brother, in the place of the lover, 'finally is killed and the villain [Kano] gains control over the community' in the role of leader of the 'New Japs'.³⁸ Yet, unlike Polanski's neo-noir, Hayashi's film refuses to turn its back on the alterity China(town) represents. Cawelti makes the argument that 'The present significance of generic transformation as a creative mode reflects the feeling that not only the traditional genres but the cultural myths they once embodied are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time.'³⁹ *Terrible Time* critiques the very cultural myths that inform it by framing Hama's last interaction with Yang against the backdrop of cinema itself. Played out in Hama's office as the sounds of an American western movie play in the background, he draws a gun on Yang to stop him from killing his brother. The two friends end up with guns aimed at each other as the recognisable sounds of a 'cowboy and Indian' shoot-out bleeds into the office from the film being projected. The intertextual framing presents a critical distancing from the inherited mythologies of the West that mystify its imperialist history of violent conflict in the face of cultural difference. By acknowledging the cinematic transformation of this (film) mythology, the movie theatre becomes 'the split-space of enunciation ... conceptualizing an international culture, based not on exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity'.⁴⁰ The film stresses this hybridity by emphasising its status as a film, particularly at the climax when Yang is finally killed by his 'countryman' (if not his brother), and the glossy black and white image is washed over with red in a non-diegetic visual effect that arrests the flow of the narrative.

This effect is one of several the film uses in its self-aware neo-noir repertoire: 'symptomatic of neo-noir ... is a Baroque self-consciousness imbuing it with an allusive force of citation ... As a consequence the evocative force of the new movement can be said to depend on its capacity to sift out degrees of cinematic consciousness among the viewing public'.⁴¹ We know we are watching a film to which we purchased a ticket; the film's prologue has told us so – as Kim leaves the theatre, the ticket taker says to no one in particular: 'to come to a movie and not watch it ... if you can't take the time to watch a movie, why bother?'. This metatextual commentary is echoed in Hama's voice-over following the title in which he breaks the fourth wall, addressing the audience directly. By self-consciously referencing the movie as a movie, *Terrible Time* substitutes film noir's master chronotope, what Sobchack names

'lounge time', with the chronotope of 'cinema time'. Lounge time is 'the spatial and temporal phenomeno-logic that, in the 1940s, grounds the meaning of the world for the uprooted, the unemployed, the loose, the existentially paralyzed'.⁴² As a master chronotope of film noir, lounge time is the obverse of the mythological chronotope of the home discussed above. Yet, if 'chronotopes are not merely descriptive but rather constitutive of what we apprehend as genre', then I suggest that 'cinema time' names neo-noir's generic chronotope.⁴³ In its cinematic self-awareness, neo-noir displaces 'lounge time' with 'cinema time', but in doing so, reverses the meanings ascribed to noir's dialectic – lounge/home.

The home is still absent in neo-noir, but it has taken on larger meanings – to be unhomed in the world. Cinema time can be understood as the concretisation of the 'unhomely moment': 'the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history [*my life*] to the wider disjunctions of political existence'.⁴⁴ In the postmodern return to film noir, the felicitous chronotope of home is now conflated with the alienating temporality of the nation-state, that 'strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past: the violence involved in the nation's writ ... the anteriority of the nation, signified in the will to forget'.⁴⁵ In Japan's will to forget the past is the makings of the 'most terrible time', emblemised in the violent and tragic deaths of the 'uprooted' Taiwanese brothers. Opposed to this is cinema time, that spatiotemporal structure which allows for incommensurable narratives and a hybridity of histories. Cinema time 'speaks to the "unhomely" condition of the modern world' through narratives of identification and images of cultural translation.⁴⁶ In this way, the film ends with a crane shot through the Western Japanese Cinema Center, book-ending the opening, to dolly in once again on the movie theatre. Significantly, lounge time once named the 'dark and perverse' spaces of the 'unfamiliar, unfamiliar, and anonymous' city of film noir.⁴⁷ In transnational noir's shift from lounge time to cinema time, the city and its representative spaces, such as the movie theatre and the mah-jong parlour, are no longer 'cold to foreigners'; rather, 'it is the city which provides the space [and spaces] in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out'.⁴⁸ To this end, the plot of *Terrible Time* concludes with cuts between images of the movie theatre, Hama's empty office, and Hama himself walking through the city streets of Taiwan to the brothers' 'home', where he looks out over Taiwan and across the ocean. Cinema, the film suggests, allows us to see through the other's eyes, to 'un-home' ourselves through the process of 'taking the time to watch a movie'.

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- 13 Lam, Peng-er and Ja, Ian Chong, 'Japan-Taiwan relations: between affinity and reality', *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 30/4 (Winter 2004), p.250.
- 14 Lam and Chong: 'Japan-Taiwan relations', pp.256, 253. Notably, the deregulation of Japanese imports that occurred in the 1990s created an influx of Japanese movies and television melodramas to Taiwan.
- 15 Bhabha: *Location*, p.35.
- 16 Žizek: *Looking Awry*, p.60.
- 17 Schatz: *Hollywood Genres*, p.114: 'that sultry seductress who ... functioned to manipulate ... the male lead'.
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- 45 Bhabha: *Location*, p.160.
- 46 Bhabha: *Location*, p.11.
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