
Globalizing the Regional, Regionalizing the Global: Mass Culture and Asianism in the Age of Late Capital

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Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and the Universal, which is the common thought-inheritance of every Asiatic race, enabling them to produce all the great religions of the world, and distinguishing them from those maritime peoples of the Mediterranean and the Baltic, who love to dwell on the Particular, and to search out the means, not the end, of life. . . . Arab chivalry, Persian poetry, Chinese ethics, and Indian thought, all speak of a single ancient Asiatic peace, in which there grew up a common life, bearing in different regions different characteristics blossoms, but nowhere capable of a hard and fast dividing-line.

Okakura Kakuzô, *The Ideals of the East* (1904)

From a few years ago, as I traveled to the countries in Southeast Asia, I began to hear increasingly a unique rock rhythm here and there. It is a rhythm distinct from the American beat, clearly a Japanese-made or indigenous rhythm. That is to say, although it is the same eight-beat, it is a somewhat different rock music with different feelings than that of the Euro-American. . . . It is estimated that two million people watched [the melodrama] Oshin in China. It was also tremendously popular in Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam. . . . the children's animated serial Doraemon is popularized throughout Thailand,

Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and China. . . . What can be gleaned from these phenomena is the invisible and yet unmistakable commonality flowing within the blood of the same Asians.

Ishihara Shintarô, “No” to ieru ajia [*The Asia That Can Say “No”*] (1994)

Although nearly a century separates these two accounts of what could be called a supranational regionalist imaginary, there are similarities between them. Both describe a regionalist unity (Asia), and in each case it is a unity accomplished through the play of identity and difference. The putative unity of Asia is imaginable only through its distinction from some other putative unity (the Mediterranean, the Baltic, Euro-America). That is to say, difference is identity’s constitutive limit, or, Asia is not the West. Both of the above accounts are also deeply embedded within a Japanese nationalist ideology and share subtextually a celebration of the Japanese nation as the historical agent responsible for rejecting Western universalism, asserting Eastern particularism, and thwarting an expansionist modernity. Such an ideology, however, is endemic not to Japanese national monology but to a larger interrelational structure that ambiguously situates Japan *with* the West and *within* Asia, a relationality that arguably has persisted since the late nineteenth century.

The parallels between the discursive contents of these Asianisms, however, should not distract us from the different historical forms of their respective conditions of possibility.¹ Okakura’s historical moment—one of emerging nationalism and nascent capitalism—generated and was generated by the specific aesthetico-cultural formations of diverging religions, philosophies, and high arts. These “ideals of the East” must be revitalized, restored, and reinforced, he argues, “for the scorching drought of modern vulgarity is parching the throat of life and art [in Asia].”² If so-called high culture girded the unity of Asia in the era of high imperialism, it is mass culture in its intraregional formation, according to Ishihara, that substantiates Asianism in the postcolonial present: The popularity of “Japanese” mass culture (melodrama, animation, pop music, etc.) signals “commonality” and “resonance” within Asia today. This shift from high culture to mass culture is salient to mapping the continu-

1. For historical perspectives on Asianism, see J. Victor Koschmann, “Asianism’s Ambivalent Legacy,” in *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Takashi Shiraishi (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 83–110; and the seminal article published in 1963 by Takeuchi Yoshimi, collected in *Nihon to ajia* [Japan and Asia] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1993).

2. Kakuzo Okakura, *The Ideals of the East: With Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1970), 244.

ities and ruptures between the changing geopolitical configurations of Asia, and it is vital to delineating the organizational and conceptual frameworks that make the regionalist imaginary thinkable in the first place. In fact, I would like to suggest that, instead of construing this shift as reflecting an evolution in the material base of production, it should be understood as an ideological formation that in the last instance signals the impossibility of the thing (the Asia of Asianism) itself. That is to say, as soon as the commodity-image-sound of mass culture becomes the fundamental form in which the putative unity of Asia is imagined and regulated, the internal contradictions of Asianism are suppressed for the sake of commensurability and compatibility within the global distribution of cultural power.

This is not to suggest that, in contrast, high culture articulates a more genuine Asianism; the articulation of high culture itself relies on the operation of the very binary structure (artistic sensibility versus scientific rationality, spirituality versus materiality) that a regionalist deployment of high culture seeks to dismantle. Nonetheless, as long as Asia is defined through its shared experience of exploitation and colonization, this aesthetics—situated as it is within the specific geopolitical condition that marked the global extension of Western imperialism—remains a powerful trope for regional solidarity. Furthermore, as long as high culture is defined in the forms of cultural mutation and hybridization that preceded the consolidation of national culture, it remains a conceptual means by which to momentarily transcend the historical predicament of Western imperialism. However, from the moment Japan establishes itself as the only non-Western colonial power (an identification process that I have elsewhere termed “not-white, not-quite, yet alike”), the radical discourse of emancipation is inverted and reorganized as a justification for Japanese imperialism in Asia.³

In what follows, I am concerned with the tendency to “regionalist thinking” in both economic production and symbolic reproduction under global capitalism. Why does the increasingly globalized world engender multiple regionalist associations? Are regionalisms the effects of or responses to global capitalism? How is a regionalist culture, or the conceptualization of such a culture, possible in the circuit of global culture? As a preliminary attempt to answer some of these questions, I heuristically employ the concepts of *globalization* and *regionalization* as tropes with which to articulate the cultural-economic contradictions of late capitalism. The body of the essay is thus composed of two halves that illustrate how

3. See my “Yellow Skin White Mask: Class and Identification in Japanese Colonial Discourse,” in *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1998).

each term modifies the other (“Globalizing Regional Economy” and “Regionalizing Global Culture”), the purpose of this organization being to convey the notion that the categories of the economic and the cultural are best apprehended not as mechanically determinate of each other, but as dialectically constituted and complementary in form.

It is my contention that, first of all, regionalism represents a mediatory attempt to come to terms with the immanent transnationalization of capital and the historical territorialization of national economies. Rather than being a corrective to global capitalism, regionalist reterritorializations underscore an invariable contradiction within capitalism itself. Secondly, I argue that mass cultural Asianism is a symptom of deeper structural and historical changes in the ways Asia is perceived as both a mode of production and a regime of discursive practice in the Japanese imaginary. If the earlier Asianism was conditioned on the unequivocal difference between Asia and the West, where Asia existed as the absolute other to the increasingly colonized world system—its exterior—in today’s Asianism that difference itself exists only as a commodity, a spectacle to be consumed in a globalized capitalist system precisely at the moment when exteriority is no longer imaginable.

Theorizing Late Capitalism: Globalizing Regional Economy

The latest phase of capitalist development has been theorized in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, it is argued that capitalism has attained its globalized stage, as signaled by a number of events, such as the arrival of a social and technical international division of labor, the dematerialization of commodity production by spatial extension and temporal reduction, the rise of an international debt economy, the modulation of capital into the structures of transnational enterprise, the growth of decentralized and informal economies, the internationalization of commodities and financial markets, and the spread of standardized markets and consumption patterns. Many agree that capitalism is now a globalized algorithm or an operational axiomatic that functions like an immense machine, a machine that, in Marx’s words, “creates a world after its own image.” It is speculated that under these conditions traditional binary models of social analysis and political struggle—simple models of colonizer/colonized, First/Third Worlds, metropolitan/periphery, center/margin—are inapplicable to a spatial economy of power irreducible to geographical dichotomies.

On the other hand, it is also argued that the late-capitalist world system is the product of a spatial displacement of capitalist epicenters. From Western Europe

since the sixteenth century to North America in the twentieth century, to East Asia as we approach the next millennium, this “developmentalist” scheme takes on a pseudo-Hegelian movement from west to east, unlike the model of a totalized and dispersed globality. As Giovanni Arrighi has suggested, following Fernand Braudel, each change of command in the capitalist world economy reflects the “victory” of a “new” region over an “old” region. Whether a fresh change of command and a new stage of capitalist development are imminent remains unclear, but the displacement of an “old” region (North America) by a “new” region (East Asia) as the most dynamic concentration of processes of capital accumulation is already a reality.⁴

Rather than bifurcating globalism and regionalism as separate explanations for the late-capitalist world condition, Arif Dirlik has argued that unprecedented unity (homogenization) and fragmentation (differentiation) are byproducts of the transnationalization of production. In other words, one of the most significant consequences of the transnationalization of capital is that “for the first time in the history of capitalism, the capitalist mode of production appears as an authentically global abstraction, divorced from its historically specific origins in Europe. . . . The narrative of capitalism is no longer a narrative of the history of Europe.”⁵ While I will not speculate at this point on the relationship between the diffusionist (globalizing) and the developmentalist (regionalizing) theories of late capitalism, I will concur with Dirlik and add that regionalism is an essential constituent of globalization rather than a systemic effect. Although regionalism may at times appear to oppose globalism, the regionalist imaginary is fundamentally complicit with the globalist project. More specifically, regionalism in the late twentieth century—in both its sub- and supranational manifestations—emphasizes the inescapable contradiction between the immanent logic of capital and the historical formation of nationalized economies.

The constitutive relationship between globalization and regionalization may seem self-evident, but it begs a number of questions: Why does globalization necessarily entail regionalist formations? Or, put differently, Why is regionalism essential to globalism? Even if it seems intuitive that the erosion of nation-states and national identities should stimulate cravings for fixity and locality within the transience of globalization, how is the regionalist formation to be understood? If globalization is to be taken as a process in space, and localization is to be under-

4. Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of our Times* (New York: Verso, 1994), 322.

5. Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 51.

stood as a specificity in place, the regional appears to be a terrain “in between,” a geographic reality and a constructed discursivity that is both spatialized in its transnational deterritorialization and yet reterritorialized in a specific configuration bounded by historically invented geography.

In an edited volume on the recent development of regional economic blocs in the world economy, Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne argue against the “hegemonic stability thesis,” which suggests that in the absence of an effective hegemon to keep order, the world will degenerate into conflict, which in the present era is most likely to be manifested between regional blocs of states.⁶ Gamble and Payne instead conceive regionalism as a state-led or states-led project designed to reorganize a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines. Their argument rests against a specific background that highlights the economic and political pressures that increasingly induce globalization, unifying the world by dismantling barriers to trade and financial and cultural flows. For Gamble and Payne, these two apparently competing tendencies in the contemporary world political economy—regionalism as a statist project and globalization as a set of social processes—appear still to be in balance; indeed there seems no reason to assume that one must eventually triumph over the other. Gamble and Payne go on to situate the emergence of the new regionalist projects in North America, Western Europe, and East and Southeast Asia against the decline of U.S. hegemony and the recession of the world economy since the 1970s. The turn to regionalism at the end of the 1980s, they argue, coincided with the collapse of the preceding regionalist division of the global economy—that is, the division of capitalist and socialist alliances that followed the Russian Revolution.

While I agree with Gamble and Payne’s theorization of regionalism within the political economy of the post-Cold War, their indifference to cultural and ideological forces crucial to constructing regional identities and associations prevents their accounting for the globalization of symbolic flows and exchanges and the diversity of regionalist projects. If the new global phase of capitalism (or the postmodern) is distinguished, as some theorists have argued, by the elevation of the significance of space over that of time, then it is arguable that it is symbolic exchanges, rather than economic or political exchanges, that are more elemental to the process of globalization—a process that some have called “the culturalization of economic life” or the “cultural economy.”⁷ Whereas material

6. Andrew Gamble and Anthony Payne, eds., *Regionalism and World Order* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

7. Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London: Routledge, 1995).

exchanges tend to foster ties to localities, and political exchanges tend to foster ties to territory, symbolic exchanges liberate relationships from spatial referents. Symbols can be produced anywhere at any time, and their production and reproduction entail comparatively few material requirements. In today's media society, these images and ideologemes are powerful objective political and economic forces that demand to be addressed rather than neglected as merely cultural or derivative.⁸

To conceive regionalist projects as ideological formations is to understand regionalism as a set of contending discourses. In other words, regionalist discourse does not operate independently; it is always directed against another territorial discourse (the world system, nationalism, or other regionalisms). Without distinguishing the ideological implications of the regionalist project, it is difficult to ascertain why people opt to think regionally in the first place and what the social contradictions are that regionalist thinking tries to resolve. In consequence, conceiving regionalism as a discursive construct instead of an empirical reality serves better to explain the differing constructions of regionalist projects within late capitalism. Political and economic rationalism alone cannot explain why Asian regionalism has been, more often than not, articulated on cultural grounds rather than on grounds that are economic (as in North America) or political (as in Western Europe).⁹

In an attempt to understand the relationship between transnational capitalism and regionalism, the Japanese critic Karatani Kôjin suggests that transnational capitalism is "borderless," but precisely because of its borderlessness, it produces other kinds of borders. The European Community may abolish borders within,

8. Fredric Jameson, for instance, has identified the increasingly interpenetrating relationship between the economic and the cultural—what he calls "the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural"—as the primary features that characterize what is now widely known as postmodernity. See Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 54–77.

9. The resort to "culturalist" explanations for the rise of Asia is, needless to say, the working of both Eurocentrism and self-Orientalism, which are two sides of the same essentialist coin. The various "miracles" attributed to the Asian "tigers," "dragons," and "flying geese" only serve to accentuate the "natural" development of capitalism in the West. The recent collapse of some Asian economies is explained as the fall of "crony capitalisms" that are merely bad copies of the original Euro-American model. Interestingly, the various revivals of Confucianism that have explained the rise of Asian economies on cultural and philosophical grounds are, in the midst of the worsening economic condition, completely silent. Here, "Eurocentrism" and "self-Orientalism" are understood as intellectual positions and not ontological or geographical entities.

but as a regional entity, it creates borders without, in relation to other bounded entities.¹⁰ In other words, even as transnationalism disrupts, if not eliminates, the nation form, it perpetuates a new “imagined community,” or what Karatani calls an “imagined transnational community.” So why does the transnational process, by superseding the nation-state, produce a regionalist reconfiguration such as the European Union? Because, Karatani argues, the modern nation-state took shape as a means of separating from the Western European empire. Furthermore, European imperialism fomented the division (and formation) of modern nation-states within other empires of the world, such as the Chinese sphere of influence. Today, Europe, the precursor of modern nation-states, has culminated in a “community” spread over the very ground (*chi*) of the erstwhile Western European empire; this exposes the grounds of other ex-empires in other regions. Thus, according to Karatani, we are witnessing a strange reversal here: In apparently moving beyond the nation-state, new blocs are approximating—seemingly reverting into—the empires of the pre-nation-states.

Karatani, however, is quick to distinguish the pre-nation-states empire (*teikoku*) from the modern imperialism (*teikokushugi*) that inaugurated the nation-form. This subtle distinction between *teikoku* and *teikokushugi* is crucial to avoiding readings of regional bloc scenarios that today stoke fears of interbloc trade wars leading to real war through alarmist allusions to the 1930s, when regionalist clusterings climaxed in world war. In other words, today’s regionalist formations may resemble those of the 1930s in form, but their content is radically different in the sense that it is no longer imperialistic but imperial, with each nation maintaining its own identity while striving for some loose regional unity.

This uncanny historical “reversal” is echoed in economist Iwai Katsuhito’s theory of the latest phase of capitalism.¹¹ Iwai attempts to distinguish “old” principles of capitalism in the “newness” attributed to today’s global capitalism. In seeking out the old within the new, or the “universal” principles within the “specific” forms of capitalism, Iwai begins by analyzing the workings of the pre-modern form of capitalism, that of mercantile capitalism. Whereas the later industrial capital extracts profit (relative surplus value) *temporally*, by an incessant differentiation of the value system organized by technology, merchant capital gained surplus value *spatially*, extracting it from the discrepancies between vari-

10. Karatani Kôjin, “*Senzen*” *no shikô* [Considering “prewar”] (Tokyo: Bungei shunshû, 1994), 14.

11. Iwai Katsuhiko, *Shihonshugi wo kataru* [Talking about capitalism] (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1994).

ous systems of values.¹² In short, as evidenced by the carrying trade conducted by the Venetians, Genoans, Dutch, and others, merchant capital develops “in between” communities, mediated and fertilized by the differences between various systems of values. It is this “principle of difference” between two spatially separated communities that constitutes the fundamental form of mercantile capitalism.

Iwai argues that, ironically, it is upon the erasure of this “principle of difference” that the modern discipline of economics was established. From Adam Smith onward, the wealth of nations is not determined by the gold or silver stored in the treasury, but derives from the production of consumable and vendible commodities. Labor, as the primary agent of production, becomes not only the measure, but also the source of value of these commodities. Iwai writes: “This is to say, it is here [that] the thought that human labor constitutes the ultimate source for national wealth has been proclaimed. It inaugurates the appearance of the ‘human.’ As the science of national wealth, [the discipline of] economics started by eliminating the principle of difference and placed the laboring human in the center of capitalist society.”¹³ Writing under the glare of the ensuing industrial revolution, both David Ricardo and Marx, although of very different political persuasions, have substantiated Smith’s thesis with the labor theory of value, which further consolidated the notion of “human-centrism” (*ningen chûshinshugi*) in thinking about the source of value in capitalism.

In the so-called postindustrial stage of capitalism, however, the increasing dematerialization of production and the commodification of symbolic reproduction have made it increasingly difficult to recognize the “human” as the sole constituent of the wealth of nations. Instead, the principle of difference that characterized the workings of mercantile capitalism has reemerged as the operational axiomatic of the latest phase of capitalism. This reversal, however, as with Karatani’s, is one with a profound difference. Iwai writes: “In the case of mercantile capitalism, profit was extracted through the difference between two or more systems of values (a difference in exchange ratio). In postindustrial capitalism, however, profit is gained through the commodification of difference itself and the conscious production of that difference. But they are similar in structure

12. Marx writes: “The trading peoples of old existed like the gods of Epicurus in the *intermundia*, or like the Jews in the pores of Polish society. The trade of the first independent and highly developed trading cities and peoples, as a pure carrying trade, rested on the barbarism of the producing peoples between whom they acted as intermediaries.” *Capital*, vol. 3 (New York: Penguin Books in association with New Left Review, 1981), 447–48.

13. Iwai, *Shihonshugi wo kataru*, 20.

in the sense it is ‘difference’ rather than ‘human,’ that constitutes the pivotal form [of their operations].”¹⁴

Both Karatani’s recollection of the empires of the pre-nation-states and Iwai’s reclamation of the principle of difference in contemporary capitalism are instructive to thinking about the various regionalist tendencies of our historical present. On one level, a particular regionalism could be interpreted as a defense against other regional integrations. One can easily make the argument that the fortress integrations of Europe and North America are responses to rapid economic growth in East and South Asia. Yet alongside these major regional associations are other transregional or subregional attempts at economic integration: APEC (the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, comprising the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, the Pacific Islands, and the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] countries), the Southern China Economic Zone (*Kanankeizaiken*, with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southern China), and the Japan Sea Economic Cooperative Initiative (Siberia, North Korea, and Hokkaido and Niigata of Japan) are just a few examples. Thus regionalism as a counterforce against other regionalisms remains trapped in its own tautology: Regionalism begets regionalism. But how do we account for the diversity of regionalisms? And why did regionalism materialize in the first place?

Karatani and Iwai’s “reversions” point to a fundamental aporia within capitalist modernity that, in the present moment, has grown more pronounced. Examined from their perspective, the prevalence of regionalist discourse is intelligible as a temporary mediation of an ineluctable contradiction within capitalist development: the contradiction between the transnational nature of capital and its historical formation within a nationalized economy; in short, the contradiction between the immanent logic of capital and its historical manifestations that, because of the processes of imperialism, colonialism, and decolonization, circumscribed it within the nation form. In Marx’s formulation ($M-C-M'$, where $M' = M + \Delta EM$), capital is a process of the expansion of value, a “self-expanding value” or “self-valorization [*Selbstverwertung*] of value.”¹⁵ And as Marx emphasizes, capital is the objective movement of value expansion rather than a subjective motion for profit. It is in this sense that regardless of the particular form capital assumes, all capitals are identical, or what Marx calls “capital in general.” We

14. Iwai, *Shihonshugi wo kataru*, 29.

15. See Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), chap. 4, “The General Formula for Capital.”

are so accustomed to associate capital with nationality (Chinese capital invading southern California, the export of American capital, etc.) that we forget that capital itself is, or has always been, potentially transnational. As long as surplus value can be extracted, theoretically there is no reason why capital needs to remain national or even multinational. Historically, however, capitalist development, especially that of industrial capitalism in conjunction with imperialism, colonialism, and the formation of nation-states, had to take root in a nationalized economy.

The relationship between capitalist development and its appearance in the nation form is a historically contingent one. As Etienne Balibar has suggested, it is “quite impossible to ‘deduce’ the nation form from capitalist relations of production.”¹⁶ Not only do monetary circulation and the exploitation of wage labor not logically entail a single determinate form of state, the spatial realization of capitalist accumulation “has within it an intrinsic tendency to transcend any national limitations that might be instituted by determinate fractions of social capital or imposed by ‘extra-economic’ means.”¹⁷ Instead, Balibar, following Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein, sees “the constitutions of nations as being bound up not with the abstraction of the capitalist market, but with its concrete historical form: that of a ‘world-economy’ which is always already hierarchically organized into a ‘core’ and a ‘periphery,’ each of which have different methods of accumulation and exploitation of labour power, and between which relations of unequal exchange and domination are established.”¹⁸ It is now more glaringly clear than at any previous moment of capitalist development that regionalisms constitute a temporary mediation between the abstract logic of capital and the work of nation-states in the world economy, and that this mediation suggests a means by which nationalist/capitalist ideologues may reposition themselves in the transnational economic arena.

In the present historical juncture, regionalisms intercede between the eroding of national autonomy and the deterritorializing of capitalism to reterritorialize transnational capital. However, due precisely to the temporary and mediatory status of regionalisms, they must establish relationships to the larger international system of which they are a part and to the different national systems that constitute them. Within this intermediary relationality, regionalism can neither conceive nor consolidate itself as a dominant discourse within the economic and

16. Etienne Balibar, “The Nation Form: History and Ideology” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, by Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1991), 89.

17. Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 89.

18. Balibar, “The Nation Form,” 89.

political coordinates of the world system, as globalism and nationalism have. Instead, regionalisms articulate themselves as “emergent” or “residual” formations (to borrow Raymond Williams’s analytic categories) of contingent affiliations and shifting associations.¹⁹ Any attempt to empirically ground and define regionalism would only confirm the changeable and indefinable nature of regionalism as an organizing concept. The Asia-Pacific region, for instance, is given its form by the current euphoria over the rapid growth of the “Pacific Rim” as an economic region and political concept that by its inclusivity is made more open and conducive to global forces. The region is lauded as a convergence of new relationships and cooperation presaging the dawning of a “Pacific Century.”²⁰ The more exclusively circumscribed East Asian regionalism attributes its recent economic “miracles” to versions of traditional and indigenous communitarianism and Confucianism that amplify inherent cultural differences between the East and the West.²¹

What is important in thinking about these two seemingly antagonistic visions of regionalist identities is neither the arbitrary ways in which regionalist categories are constructed nor their differing ideological underpinnings. Rather, the effectiveness of regionalist imaginaries lies precisely in the coexistence and overlap of supposedly distinct regional designations. It goes without saying that regional units are discursively constructed and politically contested categories embedded in the history of changing power relationships. It is also a truism that different nations involved in regionalist projects enact divergent and at times conflicting agendas in formulating their regional identity. But the overt emphasis on the particularities of different regionalist subsystems and the varying national interests underlying them serve only to obfuscate, rather than clarify, the specific historicity of the regionalist form under global capitalism.

Globalization and regionalization are complementary processes. As I have suggested, regions are important sites where the contending forces of global integration and local autonomy converge. Therefore, despite their antagonistic posturing and combative rhetoric, different regionalizations are essentially similar processes of integration and collaboration. For example, despite Japan’s growing economic presence in Asia and the region’s increasing integration, alarmist fears of regionalist conflict between Asia, Europe, and the Americas are misguided

19. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 121–27.

20. For a cogent analysis and critique of the Asia-Pacific idea see Arif Dirlik, ed., *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993).

21. Ironically, once deemed inconsistent with capitalist modernization, Confucianism has been recast as a prime mover of capitalist development.

given the integratedness and interdependence of the world economy. Bruce Cumings writes specifically about Asia:

All this regional activity is grist for the mill of those who find a developing tendency toward regional economic blocs. But this is unlikely short of a major world depression; a trilateral regime of cooperation and free trade linking Europe with East Asia and the Americas is much more likely, with the three great markets of each region underpinning and stabilizing inter-capitalist rivalry in the world system, and encouraging interdependence rather than go-it-alone strategies that would be deleterious to all. Japan's regional investment hedges against exclusion from the European Community after 1992, but it has other hedges in the form of direct investment in manufacturing in Great Britain and East Europe. The United States is strongly pressuring its European allies not to exclude Japan from the post-1992 arrangements, in favor of trilateral cooperation.²²

The true conflict, then, resides not so much within what Samir Amin has called "trilateralization"—the new interpenetration of the center economies: the United States, Japan, and the Europe of the European Economic Community—but rather between these economies and the "differentiations within the periphery," that is, the emergence of the semi-industrialized countries at one pole and the destitute countries that comprise the Fourth World at the other.²³ Despite the very real tendencies toward regional crystallization in the world system, peripheral nations are still exposed and vulnerable to competition among the central economies vying for a place for their goods and financial markets.

Theorizing Mass Culture: Regionalizing Global Culture

It is widely agreed that while there is no such thing as a global culture, there is indeed a globalization of culture. Theorists regard the latter to signify the simultaneous "cultural integration and cultural disintegration processes which take place not only on an inter-state level but . . . which transcend the state-society unit and can therefore be held to occur on a trans-national or trans-societal level."²⁴ The globalization of culture is obviously part of the immense expansion and extension of global communications and world markets. In fact, one can

22. Bruce Cumings, "Rimspeak; or, The Discourse of the 'Pacific Rim,'" in Dirlik, *What Is in a Rim?*, 42.

23. Samir Amin, *Empire of Chaos* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992).

24. Mike Featherstone, "Global Culture: An Introduction," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization, and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 1.

make the argument that globalization proceeds most rapidly and visibly in contexts where relationships are mediated through symbols instead of material products. Yet, despite the intrinsic (and dialectic) relationship between the economic and the cultural under globalization, the theoretical underpinning of the cultural process, at first glance, seems to be at odds with the spatialization of economic development.

As we have seen earlier, one theory of economic globalization (or the deterritorialization of capital) narrates a shift of capitalist centers, first from Europe to America, and then to Asia. The contemporary transnationalization of capitalism, by creating nodes of capitalist development around the globe, has decentered capitalism, put an end to Euro-American economic domination of the world, and for the first time abstracted capitalism from its Eurocentrism.²⁵ However, while Euro-American hegemony may have declined relatively in the economic realm, it is far from evident that its cultural influence, especially that of American mass culture, is diminishing. Analogously, despite the extraordinary economic growth (at least up until the recent “crisis”) in Asia, there is no corresponding extension of Asian culture on a global scale. Fredric Jameson puts this incongruity between economic prowess and cultural dominance explicitly:

It does seem to me that fresh cultural production and innovation—and this means in the area of mass-consumed culture—are the crucial index of the centrality of a given area and not its wealth or productive power. This is why it was extraordinarily significant when the ultimate Japanese moves to incorporate the U.S. Entertainment industry—Sony’s acquisition of Columbia Pictures and Matsushita’s buyout of MCA—both failed: it meant that despite immense wealth and technological and industrial production, even despite ownership itself and private property, the Japanese were unable to master the essentially cultural productivity required to secure the globalization process for any given competitor. Whoever says the production of culture says the production of everyday life—and without that, your economic system can scarcely continue to expand and implant itself.²⁶

Japan is not alone in its inability to generate its own forms of globalized cultural production. Neither Europe nor the former socialist countries present alternatives to the global dominance of Americanization.

25. Dirlik, *After the Revolution*, 62.

26. Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” 67.

If Japan, despite its economic ascendancy, remains unable to articulate a system of cultural capital on a global scale, how do we account for its prevailing “soft power” in the Asian region?²⁷ Today, four in five comic books sold in South Korea are Japanese, and in early April 1999, six of the top ten music singles in Taiwan were by Japanese artists. Could Japan’s regionalist cultural productivity be explained intrinsically in terms of geographic proximity and cultural affinity? Or can it be translated back into materialist terms as an extension of Japan’s regional economic domination? Furthermore, what is the specificity of “Japanese” mass culture in relation to present-day Asianism? In short, what imparts to today’s Asianism its form?

The specifically regionalist manifestation of Japanese cultural imperialism seems to demand a kind of economic-cultural analysis sensitive to the decentered, the polymorphous, and the antisystemic. In his seminal essay “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” Arjun Appadurai theorizes a comprehensive and complex global interactive system that is by definition untotalizable and nondeterministic, one that is bewilderingly heterogeneous and heterogenizing at a multitude of sites.²⁸ Appadurai proposes to explore the fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture, and politics in the relationships among five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, and ideoscaples. Under globalization, these flows are anything but centered or unified. For Appadurai, arguments about Americanization and commodification in terms of a singular and all-encompassing cultural homogenization have failed to account for the dynamics of local indigenizations of metropolitan forces. More importantly for the discussion at hand, Appadurai argues that the polycentric dispersion of the contemporary world has progressed so much that Americanization cannot be the only embodiment and carrier of cultural power. The articulation of cultural domination is site- and region-specific: “For the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for the Cambodians, and Russianization for the people of Soviet Armenia and the Baltic republics.”²⁹ Therefore, “the new global cultural economy” has to be seen as “a

27. The phrase is taken from Saya S. Shiraishi, “Japan’s Soft Power: Doraemon Goes Overseas,” in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, 234–72.

28. Collected in Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47.

29. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 32.

complex, overlapping, disjunctive order,” defying analysis by existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries), the migration theory of push and pull, the consumer and producer relationships in neo-Marxist theories of development, and the flexible theories of global development.

Appadurai’s decentered and fragmented global cultural system goes a long way in particularizing the universalistic pretension of Americanization and revealing the pluralistic, distinct, and disjunct disunities of cultural formations. Once Americanization is relativized, Japanization or Russianization, despite their spatially circumscribed spheres of influence, can also be apprehended and analyzed as integral parts of a fundamentally nonobjective and fractal world. However, this radical emphasis on dispersion and decenteredness relativizes domination and masks the persisting geopolitical inequalities between and across regions, nations, and localities.³⁰ While we should obviously be wary of the totalizing formulation of the globalization of culture, we should also not be content with simply displacing the process of homogenization onto a differentiation of cultural power. The problem with the latter proposition is that, in flatly diffusing cultural hegemony onto different sites, it fails to recognize that there can be structural similarities and strategic alliances among the various operations of cultural power. For instance, it would be an insult to the intelligence of an average Korean to say that Japanization has replaced Americanization as the primary threat to the sociocultural fabric of her country. In fact, American hegemony is still the predominant constitutive force in Asia despite the growing influence of Japan and, more recently, China. Bruce Cumings writes, “If today it were a Japanese Prime Minister bailing out the Mexican peso or choosing the new head of the World Bank or holding a summit in Moscow instead of Bill Clinton, we would know that U.S. Hegemony had ended. Of course it hasn’t: Japan is still a piker in the system of states and the regime of resources, a comer in the regime of technology, and a cipher in the global regime of culture.”³¹ But if Japan is truly a “cipher in the global regime of culture,” how, again, do we account for its recent dominance in the specific region of Asia? And what is its relationship to the globally and universally successful American system?

In suggesting that certain Japanese mass cultural forms generate or produce the concept of a regionalism, or in this case Asianism, I am not positing Japanese

30. See, for example, Paul Smith, *Millennial Dreams: Contemporary Culture and Capital in the North* (New York: Verso, 1997).

31. Bruce Cumings, “Japan and Northeast Asia,” in Katzenstein and Shiraishi, *Network Power: Japan and Asia*, 138.

cultural productions as merely a specific ensemble of material practices in a particular region of the capitalist world system. As Kenneth Surin has suggested, a theory of culture is something which is produced or created no less than its putative object. It is a practice, just as cultures are multilinear ensembles of practices. A theory of culture, in this case regional culture, is not “about” culture/regional culture per se, but about the concepts that culture generates, concepts that are themselves related in more or less complex ways to other concepts associated with other practices.³² Put differently, what I am interested in here is not an ethnographic analysis of the presence of Japanese mass culture in Asia; rather, I am concerned with the discursive construction of the relationship between the concept of mass culture and regional identity. That is, I am interested in how and why certain Japanese mass cultural forms generate the possibility of imagining a regional identity or make this imagined regional community thinkable.

Let me cite two well-known examples: the NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) morning drama *Oshin* and the children-oriented animated series *Doraemon*.³³ The tremendous popularity in Asia of both programs has been attributed to a certain commonality, a certain structure of feeling that has rearticulated something that is invariably “Japanese” (as far as the site of production and the manifested cultural codes are concerned) into something that one might call an “Asian consciousness” or “Asiatic imaginary.” This culturalist regionalism sets itself against the background of a specific regional economic development under late capitalism. *Oshin* chronicles the life of its eponymous heroine, born into a poor family of tenant farmers at the turn of the century. At the age of seven, Oshin was sent by her father to work as a servant girl. Upon returning to her family at the age of eighteen, she discovers that her father wants her to work as a barmaid. This time, Oshin defies her father and sets out alone for Tokyo. The drama follows Oshin through the years up to the present (1983), detailing her life and struggles: her marriage, her daughter’s death, her husband’s deep commitment to Japan’s war effort and his suicide at the end of the war. By the drama’s end, Oshin is the successful founder and owner of a supermarket chain.

32. For a discussion of the theory of culture in late capitalism see Kenneth Surin, “On Producing the Concept of a Global Culture,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94 (1995): 1179–99.

33. *Oshin* was first aired in Japan from April 1983 to March 1984 and commanded a staggering 60 percent of the daytime television audience. It was first broadcast in Singapore in 1984, again with tremendous success. Over the subsequent ten years, it was shown in more than forty countries including Belgium, Australia, and Mexico. In Indonesia, it is estimated that 65 percent of the population watched the broadcast of *Oshin*, and it garnered astonishing 89.9 and 82 percent audience ratings in Beijing and Iran respectively. In Taiwan, with the removal of the ban on Japanese music and television programming in 1994, *Oshin* became an instant hit. *Doraemon* was created as a children’s comic

It has been argued that Oshin's life/work cycle itself embodies the ethics and cultural traits of an earlier moment of Japanese capitalist development, that Oshin's story is the allegory of a growing Japan with the corresponding work ethics and cultural values of perseverance and industriousness. Through the drama's regional distribution, this national allegory is then narrated into a regional story that dramatizes the parallel but belated economic development of Asian countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and more lately, China and Vietnam. As one of the advocates of Asianism put it recently, *Oshin* has gained tremendous popularity in Asia because it reflects the many attributes of "Asian" values (perseverance, diligence, stick-to-it-ness, patriotism, etc.) that bind the various nations together on a developmentalist progression in the postcolonial, post-Cold War world order.³⁴

If *Oshin* is a melodrama that enables a psychic investment in rendering visible a regional economic story, *Doraemon* is an animated fantasy that makes the painfulness of economic success more bearable, at least for the children of Asia. The popularity of *Doraemon* among Asian youth has been attributed to a similar allegorization from the national to the regional. Sakurai Tetsuo, for instance, argues that *Doraemon* has provided for children a haven from the increasing "storm of [the] controlled education and examination system," a storm that has engulfed even the youngest of Japanese children since the 1970s.³⁵ The narrative of the serial requires *Doraemon*, a bear-cat robot with a magic pocket, to solve the numerous daily problems and conflicts of Nobita, the unintelligent and clumsy, yet good-natured protagonist. Sakurai argues that *Doraemon*, which he erroneously claims is shown only in Asia, has tremendous appeal to children in Asia precisely because these countries are going through rapid economic industrialization and facing immense social competition reminiscent of conditions prevalent in Japan two decades ago. Thus *Doraemon* as a sociocultural allegory is not relevant only to Japan, but applies well throughout the Asian region, providing a refuge for children who feel buffeted by the educational demands of accelerated Asian economies.

Their different politics notwithstanding, these two interpretations of Japanese popular culture in Asia share two underlying assumptions. Firstly, despite the

book character in 1970 by Hiroshi Fujimoto and Motoo Abiko, who shared the penname Fujio Fujiko. The comic was animated for television in 1978 and began broadcasting outside of Japan in the 1980s, mainly in Asian countries but also in Italy, Spain, Russia, Brazil and other Latin American countries, and in the Middle East.

34. Tsubouchi Takahiko, "Look East Policy and *Oshin*," http://www.ijnet.or.jp/asia/database/mw_9510_1txt (1997).

35. Sakurai Tetsuo, "Doraemon toiu 'hinanjô'" [Doraemon as "refuge"], *Ryûkyû Shimpô*, 29 September 1996, 17.

radical heterogeneity within the discursive space called *Asia* (in terms of religion, ethnicity, daily practices, etc.), both explanations insist on a nebulous association or identification common to all the countries in Asia, whether deriving from similar phases of economic development or cultural embeddedness. Secondly, despite their articulations of Asianness, both seem to insist that Japan be recognized as the forerunner in a developmentalist scheme of social and economic progress and that all other Asian countries are “alike, but not quite.” This interpretation of the popularity of Japanese mass culture has its economic counterpart in the so-called flying geese model, initially advanced in the 1930s and revived in the 1970s. In this model, Japan is the lead goose heading a flying-V pattern of Asian economic geese. The other Asian countries, maintaining their respective and relative positions in the formation, are to follow and replicate the developmental experience of the Japanese and other “geese” in front of them. Over time, the Asian nations would proceed collectively toward mutually beneficial advances in industrialization and manufacturing and eventually achieve prosperity, with Japan remaining the undisputed development leader in the region.

This seemingly contradictory interpretive arrangement, on the one hand assuming commonality within a heterogeneous region, and on the other asserting an advanced, if not unique, position for Japan within the overall configuration, appears to have its historical precedent in the discourse of Asianism, especially with its wartime colonial vision of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. However, despite this apparent similarity with wartime Asianism, especially in its most nationalistic and colonialist guises, I would like to suggest that today’s Asiatic imaginary necessarily embodies different rhetorical and ideological strategies, particularly due to the global reach of capitalism in the contemporary moment.

Especially given the common and facile equation of today’s Japanese mass cultural imperialism with wartime colonization, it is important to recall the operation of colonialism in its specific historical context. The Japanese empire was consolidated through two related but distinguishable colonial ideologies of “assimilation” (*dōka*) and “imperialization” (*kōminka*) that, to varying degrees of intensity, functioned to incorporate the colonized into the Japanese empire. In the 1920s the ideology of *dōka* replaced colonial particularism as the dominant cultural policy. Whereas the earlier colonial regime had shunned extreme intervention into the sociocultural fabric of the colonized, *dōka* described the responsibility of the colonial regime and the possibility of integrating the colonized into Japanese national and cultural polity. The second shift of Japanese colonial ideology is visible in the amplification of *dōka* into *kōminka*, or the making of an imperial subject, in the late 1930s. Under the directives of *kōminka*, the colonized were to transform

themselves from servile colonial people into loyal imperial subjects through a process of total “Japanization,” which included speaking the national (Japanese) language, assuming Japanese names, living in Japanese-styled houses, dressing in Japanese kimonos, and most importantly, worshipping the emperor as the highest authority of the empire. The ideology of equality under *dōka* and *kōminka* only served to conceal the hypocrisy that Ozaki Hotsuki has properly phrased as “to live not as Japanese, but to die as Japanese,” especially when those colonized were mobilized for Japan’s entry into the Pacific war.³⁶

In terms of colonial coercion and its explicit inscription of nationalist ideology, today’s mass culture–mediated Asianism is not exactly the same as the colonial version of the Co-Prosperity Sphere. Rather, there is a sense in today’s culture of Asianism of “reversion” to the amorphous and overlapping regionalist imaginary of earlier advocates of Asianism, a move similar to the “reversions” in political and economic spheres that we have noted earlier. This reversion to high culture Asianism, like other reversions, is a reversion with a difference. The apparent continuity in geopolitical configuration conceals a radical rupture in the way cultural Asianism has positioned itself in the so-called postcolonial present. Further consideration of Okakura’s “high culture” and its contrast with today’s mass cultural Asianism will reveal the different historical positionalities of regionalist thinking vis-à-vis Japan and the West.

It is crude but perhaps instructive preliminarily to characterize and differentiate Asianism during the period of high imperialism and during the postcolonial era as prenational and postnational, respectively. For Okakura, the “ideals of the East” offer the only counterattack against what was perceived as an onslaught of “Western” material forces and scientific rationality. “The single mighty web” of Asian consciousness formed through the historical and geographical intercourse among the peoples of Asia before specific national communities were imaginable. “Civilizations” rather than particular “nations” informed and characterized Okakura’s Asiatic imaginary. One should remember also that Okakura wrote *The Ideal of the East* in English for an exclusively Western audience, and that it was not intended to incite the Japanese. As long as it was directed externally and not internally, “Okakura’s beauty/spirit/Asia existed as an absolute transcendent exteriority” within Japan.³⁷ With the advent

36. Ozaki Hotsuki, *Kindai bungaku no shōkōn* [The scar of modern literature] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991), 139.

37. Karatani, “The Discursive Space of Modern Japan,” in *Japan in the World*, ed. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, a special issue of *boundary 2*, 18(3): 204.

of Japanese imperialism, however, Okakura's regionalist vision was directed internally, at Asia, and Japan's privileging role was taken quite literally.³⁸ *The Ideal of the East* was translated into Japanese in the early 1930s, and "Asia is one" became the shibboleth for Japanese aggression toward Asia. Similarly, novelist Natsume Sôseki's *Theory of Literature* was premised on the radical difference between Eastern literature and Western literature, not the difference between *Japanese* and Western literatures. Following the Taishô period, however, "these two were completely reversed; as Japan and the West began to be seen on the same level, the differences between them were emphasized. *The West* became only an image, as did *the East*."³⁹ It is in this sense that Asiatic aesthetics, a self-contained and interdependent multiplicity of cultural forms, can "resist" Western imperialism, because it is a radical alterity that is unrepresentable in the Japanese consciousness. This Asiatic imaginary maintained both a practical identity and an irreducible tension between anti-imperialism and Japanese nationalism. Asianism's radical otherness, however, was soon subsumed under the single representation of the Japanese nation. Given this contradiction between its absolute unrepresentability to the Japanese and its actual representability through only the Japanese nation, the radical possibility of pre-national Asianism became its own impossibility.

If Asianism in the period of high imperialism was ultimately domesticated and internalized within the nation-form, Asianism in the era of mass culture appears to have been generated out of, and outside of, the formation of the nation-state. Whereas high culture represented an absolute exteriority of Asianism to the Japanese nation, the direct export of mass culture outside of the Japanese nation characterizes today's cultural Asianism. If Japan has been the "repository of Asiatic thought and culture," and the "museum of Asiatic civilization," it has now become the factory where alternative (Asian) capitalist development can be reproduced, as well as the amusement park where developmentalist ills are rehabilitated through comic relief.

The allegorization from the national to the regional has the potential of challenging the delimitation and the vanity of the nationalist formation: "Miracles" are no longer the achievement of a particular economy; cultural practices are no longer "unique." The regionalism constructed here, however, is different from the

38. Okakura writes of Japan's privileged status: "The history of Japanese art becomes thus the history of Asiatic ideals—the beach where each successive wave of Eastern thought has left its sand-ripple as it beat against the national consciousness" (*The Ideals of the East*, 8).

39. Karatani, "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan," 204.

preparation form of Asianism in the sense that it is a regionalism constituted at the moment when the notion of national formation, of a national economy, which could be represented through a national cultural identity, is under pressures of which regionalization is only a symptom. It is worth noting that despite the empirical evidence of the popularity beyond the Asian region of both *Oshin* and *Doraemon* (not to mention other assorted mass cultural commodities like Japanese animation and karaoke), there is a persistent desire not only to Japanize Asia but also to Asianize Japan, a desire both to see Japan as the embodiment of Asia and to construct Asia as a reflection of Japan's past—in short, to place Asian countries along a spatial continuum, but at the same time to deny them temporal coevalness.

The concomitant processes of regional homogenization and temporal distanciation reflect a structural and historical shift in Japan's position in the global capitalist system and its specific relationship to Asia. I believe we can get at this from two different but dialectically related perspectives. On the one hand, we can quite easily make the argument that this represents a new kind of Japanese hegemony in the region made possible by the deterritorialization of capitalist centers and the transnationalization of capital itself. The regional hierarchy prescribed here may not be the same as the colonial designation of the Co-Prosperty Sphere, but it is not entirely different either. On the other hand, we may understand this imperialist other as an anxiety about national formations in the development of Japanese capitalism in the world system. The allegorization of the national to the regional in today's Asianism is also embedded in the Japanese desire for Asia. As Iwabuchi Kôichi has argued in his analysis of "pop Asianism" in Japan, there are two contradictory desires for Asia in Japan today: a nostalgia for the premodern Asia and a nostalgia for a modern Asia that reminds Japan of its immediate past. The rapidly developing Asian countries thus represent the kind of vibrant and modernizing vigor reminiscent of Japan's rise to industrial power in the 1950s and 60s.⁴⁰

Japan's "nostalgia for a modern Asia" must be apprehended in the context and pattern of economic development in the region since 1945. With the defeat of Japan in World War II and the subsequent American occupation, demilitarization and economic reconstruction replaced and dispelled Asia from the consciousness of postwar Japan.⁴¹ For most of the three decades following the war, Japan was

40. Iwabuchi Kôichi, "In Dialogue with 'Pop Asia': Japan's Consumption of 'Asian' Popular Culture" (paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Boston, 1999).

41. Yoon Keun-cha, *Nihon kokuminron: kindai nihon no aidentiti* [On Japan and citizenship: The identity of modern Japan] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1997).

linked primarily to the United States and only secondarily to Asia. Even as Japan emerged as an economic power in the 1950s and 60s, Asia was principally a source of raw material for Japan and of markets for manufactured goods. In the 1970s, with the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the subsequent oil crisis, along with mounting trade surpluses against the United States and Western Europe, Japanese capitalism began to redirect Asian economic strategies, mostly in terms of foreign direct investment. Japanese investment in Asia surged following the Plaza Accord of 1985, as the Japanese established plants in Asian countries to produce manufactured goods for export to Japan and elsewhere. Subsequently Japan, previously a provider of capital and intermediate goods, emerged as a leading market for manufactured goods from Asian countries as intraregional trade began to surpass regional trade with the United States.

With Japan following the dictates of capital and moving from an industrializing and manufacturing economy to a more service-oriented and consumerist society, the optimism and energy of ascendant industrialization—now diminished and felt as a “loss”—is reconfigured and replayed in the mass images of today’s Asianism. The bursting of the “bubble” economy and a worsening recession have the Japanese questioning both the merits of unchecked economic growth and the problem of national identity itself. The regionalization of Asia as an image of its past performs a strategy of containment through which Japan can come to terms with the uncertain future of its economic development. In this sense mass cultural Asianism mediates between the process of the globalization of capital and the anxiety over the erosion of the nation form.

Another way to think about the regionalist imaginary as a symptom of rather than a corrective to the contradiction between globalization and nationalism is to explore the disseminating mechanism of its mass cultural form. It is important to note that this postnational Asianism is mediated through the image-commodity-sound of mass culture, a transnational form of cultural production and consumption very different from cultural forms heretofore associated with nation-states. Stuart Hall characterizes this new form of globalization as follows:

Global mass culture is dominated by the modern means of cultural production, dominated by the image which crosses and re-crosses linguistic frontiers much more rapidly and more easily, and which speaks across languages in a much more immediate way. It is dominated by all the ways in which the visual and graphic arts have entered directly into the reconstitution of popular life, of entertainment and of leisure. It is domi-

nated by television and by film, and by the image, imagery, and styles of mass advertising.⁴²

Hall, however, describes this “global mass culture” as primarily “American” and “Western,” obviously indifferent to the regional and, to a different extent, global extension of “Japanese” mass culture.

One of the ways in which we might consider the dissemination of a Japanese-produced commodity-image-sound is to conceive it as a regionalist project that is not merely an effect but a very necessary constituent of global capitalist culture. By global culture here I mean the site where capital organizes and distributes the kind of generative desire or fantasy that enables production and accumulation to take place. One of the major disseminators of Japanese-produced mass-images in Asia is STAR TV (Satellite Television Asian Region), which broadcasts from Hong Kong using a satellite launched from China. From Japan in the east to Israel in the west, from Mongolia in the north to Papua New Guinea in the south, STAR TV broadcasts to thirty-eight countries in Asia with a potential audience of 2.7 billion, the largest regional television market in the world. More importantly, STAR TV has made possible for the first time in the region’s history a synchronic dissemination, and thus reception, of images in Asia. It is not clear whether STAR TV has the capability of generating an imagined regional identity, but it is clear that various notions of “Asianness” have been constructed through this media regionalism, whether it is Japanese melodrama allegorized as a regionalist economic development or MTV Asia introducing rock bands from South Korea and India.

These integrated assemblages, which make possible the grouping of whole ranges of events, processes, peoples, and identities within Asia, despite the latter’s purported heterogeneity in relation to other imagined cultures, express the same space of capitalist accumulation. MTV Asia is broadcast alongside MTV Europe; newspaper columns of Japanese *aidoru* (idol) celebrity news reports run next to the latest gossip from Hollywood, and Mandarin soap operas from Taiwan follow the never-ending episodes of *Beverly Hills 90210*. In other words, what were once rendered incompatible or incommensurable now, within the workings of late capitalism, harmonize into compatible and commensurable zones of accumulation and production. Ironically, it is this possibility of a regional mode of cultural dissemination that renders any coherent notion of “Asia” an impossibility. Such notions of Asian generality are constantly frag-

42. Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 27.

mented by STAR TV's "culturally specific programming." From Cantonese soap opera to Japanese films, from music videos featuring Indian, Mandarin, and Korean performers to sporting events ranging from cricket to soccer to sumo, the consistent differentiation of mass cultural forms continues to deny a formative regionalist identity as it simultaneously works to standardize media products. It is in this sense that Asianism in its mass cultural formulation emerges at the very moment when regionalist association is no longer imaginable.

The critical valence of Asianism that the Japanese critic Takeuchi Yoshimi didn't want to abandon because its common colonial legacy and anti-Eurocentrism held a radical potential for resistance is today nowhere to be found. Asianism no longer represents the kind of transcendental otherness required to produce a practical identity and tension between the East and the West. Today, "Asia" itself is neither a misrepresentation of the Orientalist nor the collective representation of the anti-imperialists. "Asia" has become a market, and "Asianness" has become a commodity circulating globally through late capitalism. Perhaps this constitutive relationality between the regional and the global is audible in the Asian and perhaps global ambitions recently articulated by Japan's biggest pop star, Komuro Tetsuya (whose techno group is ambitiously named Globe): "I want to create an entertainment complex for Asians. It will be a place not just for Japanese or Chinese, but for Asians as a whole. I foresee music as a way to hold the continent together."⁴³

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43. Quoted in Hannah Beech, "Will Japan's Top Hit Maker Become Asia's Too?," *Time*, 3 May 1999, 33