

THE INDIGENIZATION OF JAPANESE ELEMENTS IN HONG KONG TV DRAMAS

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Nowadays, the practice of appropriation of foreign formats and imaginaries in producing local popular culture is a phenomenon commonly found in transnational cultural flows (Tomilinson 1997: 170-190). Replacing its US counterpart, Japanese popular culture has become a major source of inspiration for Asian media and cultural industries. Japan is selling its production formula as well as cultural products to East and South East Asian regions, creating a kind of cultural phenomenon that I would call “the flying geese pattern of popular culture production.” Japan is playing the leading role in exporting its production formula to South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. These three areas localize Japanese elements to make their own productions. Other Asian nations receive Japanese influence indirectly through South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, as well as directly from Japan.

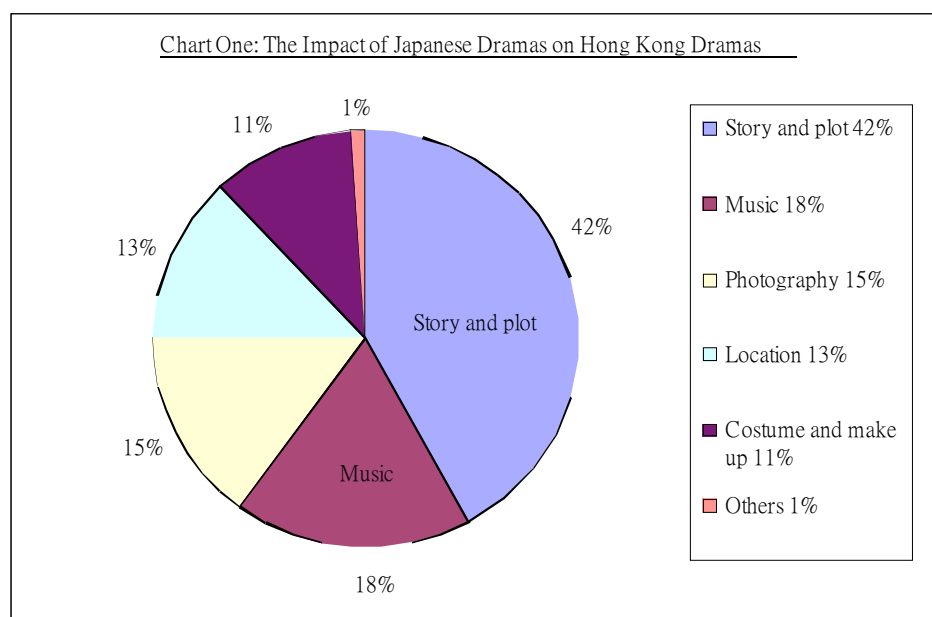
This paper is a case study of the indigenization of Japanese elements in Hong Kong dramas, a piece of the puzzle in the flying geese pattern of TV drama production in Asia. Japanese dramas have been well-received and revolutionized Asian dramas since the 1990s (Clements & Tamamuro 2003: xxvii-xxviii), and Japanese elements can be found in Korean (Lee 2004a: 251-274 & Lee 2004b: 1-18), Taiwanese, Hong Kong, Mainland Chinese and Singaporean (Ng 2001: 77-78) dramas. Japanese TV dramas have been popular and influential in Hong Kong for more than four decades. In particular, they created a craze in the early 1970s and the late 1990s. They have had a considerable impact on the Hong Kong entertainment industry and youth culture, stimulating the consumption of Japanese pop music, fashion

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and idol merchandize, influencing local TV dramas and movies, and shaping Hongkongers' perceptions of Japan. This paper focuses on the impact of Japanese dramas on Hong Kong dramas and discusses the cultural significance of this. Japanese TV dramas have provided important references for Hong Kong TV dramas in terms of story and plot, music, photography, dialogue and so on. Whether this cultural borrowing is a form of cultural imperialism, an act of plagiarism or a process of cultural domestication and hybridization will be discussed. Based mainly on primary sources (such as old newspapers and magazines), interviews, content analysis and surveys, this paper investigates the appropriation of Japanese formats and imaginaries in producing Hong Kong TV dramas from historical and cultural perspectives. Through this basic and empirical study, the paper aims to deepen our understanding of Japan-Hong Kong cultural interaction and the interplay of Japanization and domestication in the making of the discourse of Northeast Asian TV dramas.

Story and Plot

Hong Kong dramas are under the spell of Japanese dramas. The most important reference is perhaps the way the Japanese construct the story and plot. According to the survey I conducted on 500 Hong Kong young people aged between 13 and 29 in July 2004, 64% of the respondents agreed that Hong Kong dramas are influenced by Japanese dramas. When asked in which area Hong Kong dramas receive the strongest Japanese influence, the majority (42%) of the respondents chose story and plot (chart 1).



Hong Kong is not alone in this respect. TV dramas made in Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Mainland China have also borrowed the story and plot from Japanese dramas. Japanese elements have enriched Asian TV

dramas. For example, Taiwanese youth dramas produced in the past few years have incorporated elements from Japanese dramas and comics. They have received high ratings in Taiwan and East and Southeast Asian nations. Although the practice of appropriation of Japanese elements is under fire by the critics as a form of cultural imperialism or uncreative plagiarism, it should be understood in the context of transnational cultural interaction and hybridization in Asia. The combination of Japanese formats (such as narrative form, subject matter and audiovisual technologies) and local content (such as cast, setting, as well as moral and artistic preference) in Hong Kong and Asian TV dramas is indeed a good example of global hybridization (Pieterse 1995: 45-68) and localization (Robertson 1995: 25-44).

Hong Kong dramas are both local and global by nature. Usually their stories use Hong Kong as background but borrow ideas from all over the world. Globally and regionally popular novels, movies, comics and dramas have been frequently used as references. Japanese elements have been extensively but not exclusively incorporated. In developing new genres and constructing stories, Hong Kong dramas have been under the Japanese influence for a long time. Inspired by the success of Japanese dramas in Hong Kong in the 1970s, Hong Kong television produced a number of youth dramas, sports dramas and detective dramas in the Japanese fashion in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ng 2004). When the Japanese dramas became a boom in Hong Kong in the late 1990s, the Japanization of Hong Kong dramas (depending on the perspective, it can also be called the localization of Japanese elements in Hong Kong dramas) became salient. Usually in one or two years after the screening of a popular Japanese drama in Japan, a similar Hong Kong drama would be on Hong Kong television. There were more than twenty Hong Kong dramas (mostly about romance or professions) produced during this period belong to this category. These Hong Kong dramas enjoyed higher TV ratings than their Japanese originals in Hong Kong.²

The press has been critical of the Japanization of Hong Kong TV dramas. For example, one columnist wrote: “Japanese dramas have an impact not only on the audience but also local television production. This is another dramatic change in [our drama] production since the boom of Taiwanese dramas in Hong Kong three years ago. Small changes taken place on TVB [Television Broadcasts Limited, founded in 1967, is the leading TV network in Hong Kong,] can be seen. The scenarios of Japanese dramas are copied in local [TVB] romance dramas, the weakest part in Hong Kong dramas, without any acknowledgment” (*Mingpao*, 6 July 1998: C7). Chan Wing-hung, the head of the Controller-Program Acquisition Division of ATV (Asian Television, the oldest and second largest TV network in Hong Kong), in an open forum, admitted that some ATV dramas were indebted to Japanese dramas. He said: “People are saying a lot of things about us. For instance,

² In transnational cultural flows, localized versions usually outperform their originals (Iwabuchi 2002: 90-95). This rule of transnational cultural flows helps us understand the popularity of localized versions of Japanese dramas and pop songs in Hong Kong.

they point out that *Our Fat Elder Brother* (1997, ATV) has used *Under the Same Roof* (93 & 97, Fuji) as a reference. I think members of our production team must be faithful supporters of [pirated] VCDs sold at Sino Centre [a shopping center that is famous for selling pirated Japanese cultural products]. If you search our company to see how many pirated VCDs we have, then you will have a very large number. Undeniably these [Japanese dramas] have influenced us [ATV dramas]" (Shi and Chen 1999: 73). In defense, Tsang Kam-cheong, a TVB drama director and scriptwriter, held that the viewers are too sensitive that they misleadingly associate Hong Kong dramas with Japanese dramas. In an interview, he said: "Sometimes people accuse me of copying Japanese dramas before watching my drama [*Green Hope*, a 2000 TVB drama about mental disorder]. When they listen to the piano in my drama, they think I must get this idea from *Shine* [a 1996 Western film about mental disorder]. When they see handsome boys and beautiful girls in my drama, they say I am copying *The Last Song* (a 1998 Japanese drama about mental disorder). If I use a main actress who is older than the main actor in my drama, then they will accuse me for stealing this format from *Long Vacation* (96, Fuji). I feel bad before they accuse me before watching my drama. Do Hong Kong dramas look like Japanese dramas? I do not know. They are all television dramas. Must I get the permission to use "I love you?"³ However, the former TVB scriptwriter, Kwan Chung-ling, admitted that borrowing ideas from foreign dramas is common among Hong Kong scriptwriters, adding that when Japanese dramas were hot few years ago, many scriptwriters used them as references and now they turn more to Korean films and dramas for insights.⁴ Undoubtedly, Hong Kong dramas have learned from their Japanese counterparts. From the above-quoted opinions, it is interesting to see that many people see this development in a negative light and fails to understand the dynamic force of localization in absorbing Japanese elements.

Consciously or not, many Hong Kong dramas made in the late 1990s used Japanese dramas as references. However, they were not remakes of Japanese dramas. Korean TV stations acquired the copyrights to make their own editions of *101 Proposals* and *Yamato Nadeshik*, two very popular Japanese dramas in Asia. In addition, they co-produced several dramas with the Japanese. Korean dramas have been very popular in Japan in the past few years and have had an impact on Japanese dramas. Unlike their Korean counterparts, Hong Kong TV stations have never applied for the copyrights to make the Hong Kong editions of Japanese dramas. I have identified more than twenty Hong Kong dramas that to a certain extent have used Japanese dramas as references. It seems that complete plagiarism and sheer coincidence are few and many incorporate and localize some elements from Japanese dramas in terms of story and plot, music, photography, and dialogue within the Hong Kong drama tradition.

³ Tsang Kam-cheong, "Statement from the Director," Official Homepage of *Green Hopes* at <http://tvcity.tvb.com/drama/greenhope/producer/talk1a.html>

⁴ This is from an interview I conducted with her on 13 May 2004.

Till When Do Us Apart (98, TVB), the Hong Kong edition of *Narita Divorce* (97, Fuji), is used as an example for content analysis and comparison to demonstrate how influential Japanese dramas had been on Hong Kong dramas in the late 1990s and how these Japanese elements were fused with Hong Kong drama tradition. (fig.1).



Figure 1: *Till When Do Us Apart*, the Hong Kong edition of *Narita Divorce*

Wong Wai-keung, the scriptwriter of *Till When Do Us Apart*, is a big fan of Japanese TV dramas and Japanese popular culture and many of his works contain Japanese elements. He pays tribute to the Japanese drama *Narita Divorce* in *Till When Do Us Apart*. *Till When Do Us Apart* follows the story of *Narita Divorce* closely. In both dramas, a man and a woman encounter each other incidentally on the street when they are down and out. They become lovers and then marry within a very short period of time. In less than a week after marriage, they decide to have a divorce because they realize that they are not compatible. After divorcing, they live together for economic reasons and then gradually develop true love and remarry. In addition to the storyline, the personalities and background of the couple in two dramas are alike. The husband is career-oriented and male-chauvinistic. His father dies young and therefore he develops a kind of mother complex. The wife is

naive and emotional. Even some plots and details are very similar including the woman having a false pregnancy, both the man and woman having a new relationship after divorce, the woman setting the alarm clock wrong on purpose to upset her ex-husband, and the woman having an opportunity to go overseas. In some places, they are slightly different. For example, in *Narita Divorce*, the wife upsets her husband because she keeps her former boyfriend's CD. In the Hong Kong drama, it is the husband not the wife who keeps the former lover's CD (Fung 2002). The scriptwriter of *Till When Do Us Apart* seems to give his hidden acknowledgement to *Narita Divorce* in a riddle. The Chinese names of the husband and wife are Shing Tak-chung and Tin Mei-shiu. Putting their last names together is "Shing-tin", the Chinese name for Narita. This is obviously not a matter of coincidence. Another indicator of Japanese influence is that all major characters in the drama have either Japanese last names such as Karasawa or Japanese first names such as Miyuki, Mitsuru, Suzuka, Masae, Haruki and Makoto. It is interesting to note that although this Hong Kong drama borrows heavily from *Narita Divorce*, the audiences still think that it is a typical Hong Kong drama. Japanese elements do not destroy but enrich the Hong Kong drama tradition. The sense of humor, sensationalism, narrative mode, background, dialogue, photography and pace in *Till When Do Us Apart* basically follow the Hong Kong practice, whereas the story and plot are influenced by *Narita Divorce*.

In the late 1990s, a number of Hong Kong dramas on cuisine, brotherhood, love with the handicapped and OL were produced under Japanese influence. These genres are popular in Japan and are relatively new in Hong Kong. It seems that Japanese dramas have been used as major references to construct story and plot.

Hong Kong dramas about food are mostly lighthearted and encouraging comedies about how people improve their cooking skills to succeed in business, overcome psychological barriers and win a relationship. In the late 1990s, they were screened one after another and most received very high ratings. Hong Kong cuisine dramas such as *Food of Love* (96, TVB), *A Recipe for the Heart* (97, TVB), *Happy Ever After* (99, TVB) and *A Taste of Love* (2001, TVB) are in the shadow of their Japanese counterparts like *King's Restaurant* (95, Fuji), *Phantom Chef* (95, NTV), *Delicious Relationship* (96, Fuji), *Shota's Sushi* (96, Fuji) and *The Best Dinning Table* (97, Asahi). Most people pay more attention to their similarities, but differences are equally important. For example, like *King's Restaurant*, *A Taste of Love* is about how an illegitimate daughter (illegitimate son in *King's Restaurant*) takes over her father's restaurant and turns it to a business success. The change in the gender of the protagonist is significant, because it reflects the strong social status and personality of women in Hong Kong. Likewise, small but significant differences can be found in other Hong Kong dramas, showing that Hong Kong scriptwriters do not blindly copy from the Japanese, but try to fuse Japanese elements within the Hong Kong framework.

Japanese cuisine comics and animated series such as *Mr Ajikko*, *Shota's Sushi* and *Cooking Master Boy* also have some impact on Hong Kong cuisine dramas. For example, *A Recipe for the Heart* borrows heavily from *Mr Ajikko*. Like *Mr Ajikko*, its story is about food tournament and the competition between two cooking camps. The Hong Kong drama even uses the name Ajiyoshi and the character design of Ajo (The King of Taste) for its protagonist from *Mr Ajikko*. This presentational mode is called “kuso” in Japanese. “Kuso”, literally “shit”, is different from plagiarism. Plagiarism steals ideas secretly. “Kuso” means openly paying tribute to or cracking a joke over some classic scenes in popular works.

Japanese heartwarming and sensational dramas about brotherhood, such as *Under the Same Roof* (Part 1, 93; Part 2, 97, Fuji) and *Summer Snow* (2000, TBS) were very popular in Hong Kong. Two Hong Kong TV dramas about brotherhood, *My Big Elder Brother* (97, ATV) and *Reaching Out* (2001, TVB) were obviously under their influence. No wonder the Hong Kong media refer to these two Hong Kong dramas as the Hong Kong editions of *Under the Same Roof*. Like the Japanese drama, these two Hong Kong dramas are about the bonds between brothers and sisters in a poor family. For example, like *Under the Same Roof* and *Summer Snow*, *Reaching Out* is a touching story about brotherhood in an orphan family in which the elder brother sacrifices a lot in order to take care of his younger brothers and sisters (fig. 2). The ending of *Reaching Out* also resembles *Summer Snow*. In *Summer Snow*, the protagonist donates his heart to his loved one, whereas in *Reaching Out*, the elder brother donates his kidney to his younger sister. The similarities in these melodramas indicate that Japan and Hong Kong share similar Asian value regarding family and brotherhood.



Figure 2: *Reaching Out* resembles *Under the Same Roof* and *Summer Snow*

Romantic and touching Japanese dramas about the handicapped and their romantic relationship with normal persons such as *Tell Me You Love Me* (95, TBS), *Heaven's Coin* (Part 1, 95; Part 2, 96, NTV) and *Beautiful Life* (2000, TBS) did well in the VCD market as well as on television in Hong Kong.

Return of the Cuckoo (2000, TVB) and *Invisible Journey* (2001, TVB) are Hong Kong dramas about a dumb man and a blind woman respectively. Like *Tell Me You Love Me* and *Heaven's Coin*, the protagonist in *Return of the Cuckoo* uses sign language to communicate and is caught up in a love triangle. Compared with their Japanese counterparts, Hong Kong dramas about the handicapped are more encouraging and upbeat and the protagonist usually will become a normal person in the end, following Hong Kong dramas tradition to have happy ending. It serves as an example to show that in most cases Japanese elements are not blindly copied but carefully selected and domesticated.

Hong Kong dramas using companies as the background are usually about business competition in the men's world. Thanks to the popularity of *Power Office Ladies* (98, Fuji), Hong Kong TV stations began to produce lighthearted Hong Kong comedies about official girls (the Japanese call them OL or "official ladies"). *A Matter of Business* (99, TVB) and *In the Realm of Success* (2001, TVB) remind us of *Power Office Ladies*. *A Matter of Business* is similar to *Power Office Ladies* in its story and setting. At first, TVB even named it *Power Office Men*. Like *Power Office Ladies*, its story is about a group of female misfits assigned to the general affair section in the basement and the strong-willed female leader of the section helps the company to overcome crisis. The major difference between the Japanese and Hong Kong dramas is that the two Hong Kong OL dramas, following the Hong Kong drama tradition of genre hybridity, on the top of office politics, put a lot of emphasis on romance.

There are many more Hong Kong dramas produced in recent years (mostly in the late 1990s and some in the early 2000s) that might have been influenced by Japanese dramas in constructing story and plot. The following table lists some of the obvious ones:⁵

Table 1: Hong Kong Dramas with Similar Story & Plot to Japanese Dramas

Hong Kong Dramas	Japanese Dramas	Degree of Similarity
<i>Web of Love</i> (99, TVB)	<i>With Love</i> (98, Fuji)	[High] The storyline follows <i>With Love</i> closely. Both dramas are about a couple who do not like each other in real life but are spiritual friends on the web. When they find out the truth, they become lovers. Japanese

⁵ Hong Kong dramas that have borrowed from "old" Japanese dramas are not listed in this table. For example, *Apua Hero* (2003, TVB) is said to be the Hong Kong edition of *Gold Turn for the Metal*, a popular Japanese drama about women's swimming produced in the early 1970s. *Aiming High* (1999, TVB) has the shadow of *Sugata Sanshiro* (1970, NTV), mixing judo with romance.

<i>The Disappearance</i> (98, TVB)	<i>Dead Zone in Zeus</i> (96, NTV)	influence can also be found in minor places. For instance, the man and the woman use “Kindaichi” and “Oshin” as e-mail aliases. In addition, the Chinese titles of these two dramas are similar. [High] They have the same story as follows: A man becomes invisible after drinking an experimental drug. The invisible man tries to help people. However, the drug is not yet successful and at times not working. When the drug is not working, the naked man looks for clothes to cover his body.
<i>Broken Hearted Man</i> (94, TVB)	<i>101 Proposals</i> (91, Fuji)	[High] They are stories of “beauty and the beast”. An ugly and poor middle-aged bachelor has no luck in love and his marriage proposals are always turned down. He later meets a beautiful woman and later wins her heart by his sincerity and devotion.
<i>Detective Investigation Files</i> 1-3 (95-97, TVB)	<i>The File of Young Kindaichi</i> 1-2 (95 & 96, NTV)	[High] Some stories and plots are very similar. When people watch this Chinese drama, <i>The File of Young Kindaichi</i> (both the TV drama and comics) will come to their mind. Following the Kindaichi formula, when a murder case occurs, people tell different stories. The killer is always the most innocent-looking person. The detective at the end explains how he finds the clues to solve this case and then the killer comes out to tell his/her motives. A columnist condemned this TVB drama serial for plagiarizing. He said: “TVB is taking us for suckers! It just translates <i>The File of Young Kindaichi</i> and then shamelessly

- presents it as a local original script” (*Mingpao*, 11 October 1997: C6). Someone pointed out that “The Aiupui Island Serial Killing File” in *Detective Investigation Files 2* copies from the comic edition of *The File of Young Kindaichi*.
- A Place of One Own* (98, TVB) *Beach Boys* (97, Fuji)
Long Vacation (96, Fuji)
- [Medium] A part of its story is similar to *Beach Boys*. The protagonist is a high-flyer in the business circle but suffers from a temporary setback and then hides himself in the seaside in a remote island. The symbolic use of English banner reminds us of *Long Vacation* and *Love Generation*. For example, in *Long Vacation*, the “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” banner is often in the background when the lovers meet. In *Love Generation*, the ski resort has a large advertisement board in English and its content changes following the moods of the lovers. In *A Place of One Own*, a huge English banner saying “It Is Only You That I Care” is often in the background when the lovers meet. Besides, exactly like *Long Vacation*, the Hong Kong drama uses basketball as metaphor. In both dramas, after the lovers have an argument, they play basketball and reconcile. When their relationship is in trouble, the shot is the empty basketball court without the basketball (Fung 2000).
- Face to Face* (99, TVB) *The File of Young Kindaichi* 1-2 (95 & 96, NTV)
Gift (97, Fuji)
- [Medium] The newspapers and internet newsgroups criticized it for copying from *The File of Young Kindaichi*. For example, in its story, a detective tries to

Burning Flame (99, TVB)
The Fire Fighters (96, Asahi)

find out the past of the man who has lost his memory. It turns out to be a case of murder. The ways that he investigates and people reconstruct the story resemble *Kindaichi*. It also reminds us of *Gift*. In both dramas, the protagonist has lost his memory and is in a dilemma as to whether to face the past or to maintain the new life.

[Medium] *The Fire Fighters* was screened in Hong Kong. Both dramas are about the training of firefighters and their jobs. The Japanese comic, *Fire Fighter Daigo*, is the source of inspiration and a key reference for the Hong Kong drama. In both stories, the protagonist receives training and becomes a successful firefighter. Following the Hong Kong practice, the Hong Kong drama adds some romance into the story. Wong Sum-wai, the producer of *Burning Flame* said: "We looked for touching stories and then came across the comic, *Fire Fighter Daigo*. We realized that the topic of firefighters had never been made into our TV drama and we conducted survey and gathered many touching stories from newspapers and magazines. We wanted to share those stories with the audience on television. That was why we produced it."⁶ Kwan Chung-ling, the scriptwriter of the drama, also admitted that she was a big fan of *Fire Fighter Daigo* and used it as an important reference in

⁶ See TVB web at <http://www.tvb.com.cn/tv/review/2002-12-6,2,263,40378265.shtml>.

- In the Realm of Hero* (2001, Fuji) [Low] Copy the opening of *Hero* in its promotional video. The team members line up in a straight line and the character in the middle wears a yellow jacket.
- Success* (2001, TVB)
- As Sure as Fate* (98, TVB) *Long Vacation* (96, Fuji) [Low] They have a similar storyline. A female searches for her boyfriend who left her suddenly. A man later helps her and they fall in love.
- Instinct* (95, TVB) *Tokyo Love Story* (91, Fuji) [Low] It copies a scene that the lovers celebrating birthday and lightening up candles on a birthday cake.
- Witness to a Prosecution* (99, TVB) *The File of Young Kindaichi* 1-2 (95 & 96, NTV) [Low] Certain plot and atmosphere are similar.
- Healing Hands* (2001, TVB) *Emergency Unit 24 Hours* (1999, Fuji) [Low] They are also under the influence of the US drama, *ER*. One critic points out that *Healing Hands* is closer to Japanese dramas of similar topics than *ER*.⁸
- Survivor's Law* (2003, TVB) *Hero* (2001, Fuji) [Low] They have similar character design. The protagonist is an unorthodox lawyer. He has a love-hate romance with his female colleague. Even the Chinese titles for these two dramas are alike.
- Dream of Colors* (2004, TVB) *Love Generation* (97, Fuji) [Low] The Hong Kong drama copies one scene that the female protagonist gets drunk and has a sweet moment with a man.

The above-mentioned Hong Kong dramas have borrowed from Japanese dramas in terms of story and plot, but none of them have been criticized for being too Japanese because Japanese elements have been localized to the extent that they do not damage but enhance Hong Kong feelings.

⁷ This is from an interview I conducted with her on 13 May 2004.

⁸ Tong Ching-siu's homepage at http://www.geocities.com/tongsiu_hk/sun/sun0305/sun030529.htm

Music, Photography and Dialogue

Japanese music from TV dramas and animated series are frequently used in Hong Kong dramas. Hong Kong dramas, due to budget constraint, usually put less attention on the background music. For a long time, they have borrowed music from popular songs, light or classical music. TV stations have chosen a group of musical tones and apply them to different scenes in local dramas. This kind of music is called “canned music.” When Japanese dramas were hot in Hong Kong in the late 1990s, Hong Kong dramas, without the permission from the Japanese, frequently used music from Japanese dramas as background music.⁹ Some people do not like this practice. Lim Min-yin, a columnist, said: “Since Japanese dramas are becoming very popular these days, [our local television stations] should openly steal the music from *Tokyo Cinderella Story*, *Long Vacation* and *Love Generation*” (*Mingpao* 22 September 1998: C12). A reader wrote to a newspaper criticizing TVB as follows: “Shame on TVB! How dare it to steal the music from the entire original soundtrack of *Long Vacation* composed by Hinata Daisuke and use it in many different promotional videos? That album has sold 800,000 copies [in Japan]. How can TVB think no one can tell [that it is plagiarizing]?” (*Mingpao* 9 February 1998: C6) The following table lists some examples of borrowing music from Japanese dramas:

Table Two: HK Dramas that borrowing Music from Japanese Dramas

Hong Kong Dramas	Japanese Dramas	How to Borrow Music
<i>Burning Flame</i> (99, TVB)	<i>God! Please Give Me More Time</i> (98, Fuji)	Use its background music in the drama.
<i>A Place of One Own</i> (98, TVB)	<i>Long Vacation</i> (96, Fuji)	Use its background music in the promotional video.
<i>File of Justice 3</i> (2001, TVB)	<i>Love Generation</i> (96, Fuji)	Use its interlude, <i>Hear Me Cry</i> , frequently as background music.
<i>In the Realm of Hero</i> (2001, TVB)		Use <i>Hero's</i> opening music in its promotional video. The idea of the video is also from the opening of the Japanese drama.
<i>A Kindred Spirit</i> (98, TVB)	<i>With Love</i> (98, Fuji)	Use this background

⁹ Japanese drama music is used not only in Hong Kong dramas but also in imported dramas, documentaries, variety shows, TV commercials, promotional videos and even government programs. For example, ATV used the music of *High School Teacher* (93, TBS) in the promotional video of a Taiwanese drama, *The Legend of a Condor Hero*, in 1998.

TVB)		music, <i>Once in a Blue Moon</i> , in the drama.
<i>A Kindred Spirit</i> (98, TVB)	<i>High School Teacher</i> (93, TBS)	Use its background music in the drama.
<i>Detective Investigation Files 3</i> (97, TVB)	<i>The File of Young Kindaichi 1-2</i> (95 & 96, TVB)	Use its background music in the drama.

Critics dislike the idea of secretly borrowing music from Japanese dramas, but not the music itself. As a matter of fact, music for Japanese dramas has been very popular in Hong Kong. Japanese music is much more attractive and trendy than the “canned music.” It gives Hong Kong dramas a romantic touch and audiences an interlude to feel the atmosphere.

Even original songs composed for Hong Kong television dramas are not immune to Japanese influence. For example, *Seasons*, the background music in *Healing Hands* (2001, TVB), has a touch of Japanese drama music. Like many Japanese dramas such as *Long Vacation* and *With Love*, *Healing Hands* uses easy listening and romantic piano music in the background. A Hong Kong guitarist states: “This (*Seasons*) is a heartwarming piano music. I find it in the soundtrack of *Healing Heads*. When I listen to it, I have the feeling that it copies from Japanese dramas. As long as it is pleasant to our ears, who cares [whether it has copied or not]?”¹⁰ This reflects a prevalent attitude among the audiences. Another example of possible Japanese influence is the theme song (entitled *Shinning Friends*) of *Shinning Friends* (2003, TVB), which is a pleasant and simple song in English. Writing the theme song in English and sung by local singers is quite common in Japanese television dramas but is very new in Hong Kong. Hence, music of Japanese dramas have enriched and inspired Hong Kong dramas in many different ways.

The photography of Japanese dramas is very professional, beautiful, artistic and lively, providing a good reference for Hong Kong TV producers and cameramen to improve their artistic sense and shooting skills. In particular, the photography of some Hong Kong dramas about romance or young people has a feel of Japanese dramas. For example, the shooting of *Shinning Friends* is not typical Hong Kong and is closer to Japanese “trendy dramas” or Taiwanese youth dramas (such as *Meteor Garden*). Using different angles and speed in shooting and making green the main color, the photography of *Shinning Friends* gives the audience a very refreshing, delightful, upbeat and natural mood. *Feel 100%* (2004, TVB) is perhaps the most Japanese of all Hong Kong dramas in terms of photography. It employs all kind of angles and techniques (such as high and low angles, zooms, shaking shooting, soft and fuzzy lens, fade, moving camera, first person angle, montage, etc) that Japanese dramas usually use. For example, the use of crane in the high-angle shooting of this drama is a technique that Japanese

¹⁰ See Chung Chi-kit’s homepage at: <http://guitar.uhome.net/classicaltabsnchords.html>

dramas frequently employ. Besides, Japanese dramas are good at outdoor shooting, turning landmarks such as the Tokyo Tower and the Rainbow Bridge or ordinary locations such as the Aoyama Avenue and the Fuji Building into romantic sceneries. Perhaps inspired by the Japanese, in recent years Hong Kong romance dramas have paid more attention to outdoor shooting and locations. The Tsing Ma Bridge and the Victoria Harbor are used as the way the Rainbow Bridge and the Tokyo Bay function in Japanese dramas.

Japanese romance dramas have a lot of literary dialogues and self-talking. This practice has had an impact on Hong Kong dramas. For example, the last episode of *Hard Fate* (04, TVB) is filled with Japanese drama-like dialogues. Some Hong Kong dramas use Japanese drama-like dialogues and even copy certain dialogues from Japanese dramas. For instance, *Instinct* (94, TVB), copies the famous romantic scene that the lovers celebrating the birthday by placing candles on a birthday cake and even modifies the following dialogues from *Tokyo Love Story* (91, Fuji):

Table 3: Comparison of Tokyo Love Story & Instinct in a Scene of Placing Candles on a Birthday Cake

<i>Tokyo Love Story</i>	<i>Instinct</i>
Rika: 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. You entered the primary school. Congratulations! Did you know Mikawa around this time?	Lim Ching-lit at one year old. I learned how to walk.
Kanji: I guess so. Rika: 8, 9, 10, 11, & 12. You were in the secondary school. Congratulations! Did you have your first love around this time?	Lim Ching-lit at 5. My mother got a divorce. I followed her to live with my stepfather.
Kanji: No, earlier. Should be around here...	Lim Ching-lit at 10. My mother died. I lived with my stepfather.
Rika: 6? So early?	Lim Ching-lit at 15. I got a stepmother.
Rika: 14, 15 and 16. You were in high school. You met Satomi and loved her at first sight. Congratulations!	Lim Ching-lit at 20. I left my stepparents with Ching Ching [her dog]. I lived by myself and I was so lonely.
Rika: 17, 18, 19, & 20 You became an adult. What was your dream in your career?	Lim Ching-lit at 21. I knew you Bao Wan-lung.
Kanji: Soccer player. Rika: You did not make it. Did you?	Then, my past is no longer important.

Kanji: No, but I still want to be even now.

This candle [21 years old] has a very special meaning.

Rika: Really? 21, 22, & 23

You came to work in Tokyo.

In this special year, one important thing came to Nagao

Kanji's life. What was it?

Kanji: Knowing Akana Rika.

Rika: Then, you are 24.

In your life, is this the only candle [year] that I know?

Kanji: You will know more in the future

Rika: Let's blow the candle.

Some viewers may find the use of literary dialogues in Hong Kong dramas refreshing, poetic and romantic, whereas others think they are awkward and unnatural. Lim Ka-tung, a top Hong Kong TV drama actor, is reluctant to use Japanese drama-like dialogues. He said: "I am taking part in this historical drama because I want to act in real Hong Kong dramas and not dramas copying from Japanese dramas ... Nowadays, many [Hong Kong] dramas are copying from Japanese dramas. Their expressions are too exaggerating. I do not understand why we must follow the Japanese style? Must we throw originality away? ... I read some dialogues which are not smooth. They are like poor Chinese subtitles found in Japanese dramas. We would never use these dialogues in our daily conversation" (*Tai Kung Pao*, 18 June 2001). The divided opinions on the use of literary dialogue in the fashion of Japanese dramas shows that cultural appropriation can be creative or not and it is difficult to draw a conclusion applicable to all. In many cases, it may be uncreative in the beginning and becomes increasingly creative when local producers, artists and scriptwriters get used to foreign formats and imaginaries.

Concluding Analysis

I think incorporating elements from Japanese dramas into Hong Kong dramas represents a very common practice of transnational cultural adaptation in the age of globalization and is nothing particularly worrisome. Some critics warn that Hong Kong is becoming a Japanese cultural colony and is losing its creativity and characteristics due to extensive cultural borrowing from Japan, pointing out that Hong Kong dramas not only borrow story and music from Japanese dramas, but also go so far as to use Japanized names and dialogues. This view is one-sided and do not understand the dynamic and powerful forces of globalization and localization in transnational cultural flows. Through a study of the impact of Japanese dramas on Hong Kong dramas, we

understand that elements of Japanese dramas enrich and not replace Hong Kong dramas. Hong Kong producers, scriptwriters, actors and photographers are benefited from localizing Japanese elements. Being cosmopolitan and hybrid, Hong Kong TV dramas have their own traditions and characteristics. They have been incorporating and indigenizing elements from foreign television dramas (and films) for a long time. Not only Japanese dramas, but also American, Taiwanese, Korean and Mainland Chinese dramas are used as references. All these foreign elements enrich local elements. It is easy to accuse Hong Kong dramas for copying from Japanese dramas, but a careful examination shows that sheer plagiarism or complete transplant is very rare and Japanese elements are usually selectively chosen and creatively localized in Hong Kong dramas. Regardless of the presence of strong Japanese elements in some Hong Kong dramas, the viewers think that they are still very Hong Kong. In terms of storytelling, cast, acting, format and length, Hong Kong dramas are fundamentally different from Japanese dramas. Compared with Japanese dramas, Hong Kong dramas have longer and more complicated storyline. Main actors and actresses are usually not young idols and their acting is more theatrical. Hong Kong dramas are much longer (usually more than 20 episodes) and are screened every weekday. Nevertheless, Japanese dramas have stimulated artistic imagination and imaginary appropriation in Hong Kong. Nowadays, one-way cultural flow is rare and usually different cultures compete and interact with each other. The cultural flows between Japan and Hong Kong are getting increasingly busy. Forms of Hong Kong popular culture such as movies, pop music, and cuisine, have large followings in Japan (Iwabuchi 2004: 151-174). In the area of TV drama, Hong Kong dramas are indebted to Japanese dramas but Japanese dramas also add some Hong Kong and Asian dimensions in terms of the cast, story and location. Hong Kong artists such as Faye Wong and Kelly Chan have participated in Japanese dramas and Hong Kong has been used as locations in several Japanese dramas. Korean dramas have become very influential in Japan and have had an impact on Japanese dramas in photography, cast and music. The de-centering forces of globalization generated by transnational cultural flows are contributing to the making of a "Northeast Asian TV drama." TV dramas of different Asian nations are getting similar due to international collaboration and cultural appropriation. Hence, the impact of Japanese dramas on Hong Kong dramas should be understood in the context of transnational cultural flows and cultural hybridization in the age of globalization.

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