Independent Filmmaking across Borders in Contemporary Asia

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1 The Art of the Disensual

Independent Border-Crossing Cinema in Asia¹

Abstract

I situate ‘independent border-crossing cinema’ at the conjuncture of inter-Asia culture and media productions and the new waves of independent film movements across Asia since the late 1980s/early 1990s. Building upon the concept of translocality, and engaging with Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s framing of ‘minor transnationalism’ in tandem with other discussions on cinematic transnationalism, I have developed a theoretical framework to examine the dissensual potentiality of border-crossing filmmaking, particularly from the perspective of authorship. Japanese film collective Nihon Documentarist Union and their 1973 documentary Asia is One are examined to illustrate how an inter-Asia independent border-crossing cinema can be realigned historically. I have also paid attention to the politics of the international film festival network.

Keywords: translocalism, minor transnationalism, film authorship, dissensus, politics of aesthetics

Police consists in saying: Here is the definition of subversive art. Politics, on the other hand, says: No, there is no subversive form of art in and of itself; there is a sort of permanent guerrilla war being waged to define the potentialities of forms of art and the political potentialities of anyone at all.

Jacques Rancière, 2007

Until the postwar period, the East China Sea had been a highly fluid space of human life, but as national borders became more highly demarcated, crossing them made you an ‘other’, creating the distinctions between zainichi Okinawans, fishermen, Japanese in Okinawa, Koreans, Taiwanese, and Taiwanese aborigines.

Nunokawa Tetsurō, 1973

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Chinese/Japanese to English translations are mine.

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Inter-Asia Transnational Cultural Productions

Rather than a brand new genre of transnational filmmaking that I am proposing here, ‘independent border-crossing cinema’ is leveraged as a critical heuristic to survey a breed of independent auteurs whose micro-practices and projects (‘border-crossing films’) are both locally situated and contingently embedded in the translocal (local-to-local), transnational network of production, circulation, and exhibition.

As one of the most fascinating socio-cultural phenomena in the region, transnational media and cinema flows, exchanges, and collaborations across Southeast Asia and East Asia have captured scholarly attention in recent decades (see Berry 2013; DeBoer 2014; also see Lamarre 2015). In his stimulating take that accounts for the ‘new transborder patterns’ emerging from the ‘transnational order’, Chris Berry argues that filmmakers working on transnational projects do not have to subscribe to the cultural logic of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have suggested as the ‘Empire’ (2000), proposing that the ‘principles of profit maximisation and accumulation’ are not necessarily the driving force for all filmmakers’ transborder moves. Also, Berry illustrates that the notion of ‘assemblage’, here grasped as ‘a contingent ensemble of diverse practices’, should be introduced as ‘an operating logic behind the superficially amorphous, chaotic and ever-changing characteristics of transnational cultural formations’ (Berry 2013: 468). Through the notion of ‘assemblage’, therefore, it is possible to envision transnational formations that have accommodated heterogeneous and contingent components, the logic of which at the same time shall problematize any illusionist idea about a ‘unified and coherent culture’ in the region of East Asia (ibid.: 469). Berry’s framing of ‘assemblage’ is instructive to grasp the inter-Asia media and cinema collaborations wherein, for instance, the ‘Homeland and Diaspora’ omnibus mentioned in the Introduction would be considered no less important in manifesting the dynamics of transnationalism than, say, epic costume blockbusters such as Legend of the Demon Cat (Yaomaozhuan / Kukai: Utsukushiohi no nazo, 2017) directed by the former fifth-generation Chinese filmmaker Chen Kaige, a mega-budget coproduction between Japanese media heavyweight Kadokawa Corp., the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC)’s Wanda Media Co., and Emperor Motion Pictures from Hong Kong.

My use of ‘inter-Asia’ both as an adjective and a noun relates to the understanding that ‘there is no unity to the imaginary entity called “Asia”’ (Chen & Chua 2007: 1). The term specifically seeks to ‘highlight the existence of a plurality of “Asias”, to emphasize the links, and to problematize the lines that are drawn between the local, national, regional and global’ (Burgess 2004: 131).
Nevertheless, if Berry has suggested a diverse, heterogeneous, and ever-shifting scenario to probe into inter-Asia cultural productions in the global age, much attention so far has been given to the market-driven film and media co-production projects and industrial collaborations that seem to be evidence of the trend towards and desire for Asian integration and regionalization (see Ben-Ari & Otmazgin 2012; Berry et al. 2009; Gates & Funnell 2012; also see Jin & Otmazgin 2014). Meanwhile, research into inter-Asia film exchanges often revolves around cinematic genres such as action cinema (see Morris et al. 2006; Szeto 2011), horror (see Jinhee Choi & Wada-Marciano 2009), and film noir (see Gallagher & Shin 2015). It is not difficult to see how these genre productions have also become useful sites to explore the ‘translingual filmmaking’ between East Asia and the West – particularly with Hollywood (Lim 2011). Studies have often turned to how viable ‘Asian’ genres have been reappropriated and remade in Hollywood (see K. Chan 2009; Marchetti & Tan 2007; Xu 2008). Moreover, surveys of the diasporic, migrant film auteurs (e.g. Ang Lee and John Woo), stardom (e.g. Jet Li and Zhang Ziyi, also see Leung & Willis 2014; Yu 2012), and film professionals (like the martial arts choreographer Yuen Woo-ping) from East Asia have been habitually situated between the mainstream industries across the Asia Pacific and again with the spotlight on Hollywood (see Hunt & Leung 2008). The practices of ‘remaking East Asia’, while seemingly having disturbed the unbalanced relations between Hollywood and East Asian film industries, also invite critique regarding the latter’s self-perpetuated secondary positioning that serves the purposes of ‘outsourcing Hollywood’ (Xu 2008).

In her topological study conducted almost a decade ago on the ubiquitous phenomenon of ‘cinematic transnationalism’, Mette Hjort optimistically suggested that ‘cinematic transnationalism is no doubt the future, but as such it is also an “open” phenomenon with the potential to develop in many different directions’ (2009: 30). The lensing of assemblage indeed helps to shed light on the rhizomatic connections between independent filmmakers/collectives across the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions. Departing from the narratives of Asian transnationality in the studies of media and cinema, my project seeks to respond to observations/concerns that ‘globalization has brought many others home but also sent many abroad, producing alternate circuits of transnationality that have been largely undertheorized’ (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 13). A refreshing framework is needed to rethink the cinematic transnationalism that the specific breed of border-crossing films have registered, embodied, and intersected at the level of both discourse and practice.
Towards the Art of the Dissensual

For Jacques Rancière, both politics and aesthetics can be interrogated as ‘forms of dissensus’ (Corcoran 2010: 2) in the sense that either the activity of politics or that of aesthetics could be conceptualized as a process of modifying the social arrangements governing knowledge-sharing and the hierarchical order underlying such arrangements. The perspective of dissensus allows us to better grasp what I have proposed as ‘independent border-crossing cinema’: not only do I pay attention to the ‘ways of doing and making’, i.e. in the multiplicities and variances of such artistic practices, I will also highlight the ways in which border-crossing filmmaking has redistributed the forms of visibility. In this study, I contend that the specific strand of border-crossing filmmaking configures an intervention in cinematic transnationalism at the level of text and form, and also extra-textually, across the interlinked realms of production, circulation, and exhibition.

Dissensus does not simply relate to ‘a conflict of interests, opinions or values’ (Rancière 2010: 80) apropos the reigning social order, an order that for Rancière constitutes a situation of consensus maintained by the ‘police’ (May 2010). Rather, dissensus is viewed as a disruption in ‘the perceptual and epistemic underpinnings of that order, the obviousness and naturalness that attaches [sic] to the order’; it concerns how the ‘conditions of sense perception’ may be challenged and reconfigured (Panagia 2014: 96). That is, dissensus essentially comprises a dispute over the partitioning and distributing of the sensible, namely what Rancière calls ‘le partage du sensible’ (the French word ‘partage’ meaning both division and sharing). As he affirms, politics ‘revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time’ (Rancière 2011b: 13). Therefore, the aesthetics of politics interconnects with the politics of aesthetics by working with the contingency of the partage du sensible, both of which then relate to the ‘mode of appearance’ regarding who can say and hear what, where, and when (see Demos 2013).

It is, however, noteworthy that Rancière’s discussion of dissensus leaves much room for ambiguity in order to accommodate the paradoxes he sees as

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3 Here, the use of ‘dissensus’ also relates to that of ‘disagreement’ (La Mésentente), the latter of which according to the translator Gabriel Rockhill is ‘a conflict over what is meant by “to speak” and “to understand” as well as over the horizons of perception that distinguish the audible from the inaudible, the comprehensible from the incomprehensible, the visible from the invisible’ (Rockhill quoted in Rancière 2011b: 84).
characterizing the project of art in the aesthetic regime.\(^4\) Dissensus, I argue, is not intended as a ready-made critical vocabulary for the close reading of specific texts and contexts of, say, twenty-first-century film works; nor should it be approached as a generic tag or imitative model to differentiate which work of art could (or could not) be recognized and categorized as dis-sensual. Nevertheless, it is crucial that Rancière has outlined how aesthetics can be grasped through the analytical nexus of *poiesis*, namely ‘a way of doing’, and *aisthesis*, or ‘a way of being’, which is ‘a horizon of affect’ resulting from *poiesis* (Rancière 2010: 15-16). Hence aesthetics for him refers to ‘a mode of articulation between ways of doing and making, their corresponding forms of visibility, and possible ways of thinking about their relationships (which presupposes a certain idea of thought’s effectivity)’ (Rancière 2011b: 10). Artistic practices and their politics can then be pinpointed in terms of “ways of doing and making” that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility’ (ibid.: 13).

I argue that dissensus comprises a refreshing framework for us to examine and envision the aesthetics and politics of contemporary image culture and cinema. At the same time, it is of crucial importance to use such a strand of ‘independent border-crossing cinema’ within/from the East Asian and Southeast Asian areas to exemplify and to further reconsider the art of the dis-sensual. Fully aware of the continental philosophical underpinnings of Rancière’s theories on dissensus as well as the euro-centred case studies and ‘sensibilities and texts’ he deploys when canvassing contemporary film and art scenes (Tolia-Kelly 2019: 124), I do not envision this study simply as a celebratory manifestation of the universal value apropos the grand Rancièrian edifice. For one thing, though often omitted in topographical surveys of Asian transnational cultural productions and less systematically discussed in Anglophone academia, independent filmmaking within/from Asia has proffered a crucial context as well as a vantage point from which to explore cinematic transnationalism in the global era. For another, as illustrated by Divya P. Tolia-Kelly’s analysis of the dialogues between Rancièrian thesis and postcolonial studies, Rancière’s dissensus can nevertheless be used to ‘create or refigure the very frameworks and sensibilities through which “Other”

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4 In what has been outlined by Rancière as the three regimes of art (the other two being the ethical regime of art and the representative regime of art), the aesthetic regime of art ‘abolishes the hierarchical distribution of the sensible characteristic of the representative regime of art, including the privilege of speech over visibility as well as the hierarchy of the arts, their subject matter, and their genres’ (Rockhill quoted in Rancière 2011b: 81).
cultures can determine the cultural grammars and vocabularies through which their nations are narrated’ (Tolia-Kelly 2019: 124). Focusing on the socio-political and historical complexities of East Asia and Southeast Asia and auteur-centred independent cinemas, this research constitutes a small experiment that seeks to recalibrate the consensual articulations about ‘Asia’, which is foregrounded here both as a crucial geopolitical and social context and a specific arrangement of knowledge, and to contest the dominant views about the ‘Other’, auteur-centred cinemas from within and outside of Asia.

Furthermore, I propose that disensus opens up horizons for us to see how, for instance, the social and democracy movements and transformations across East Asian and Southeast Asian societies, specifically those that have taken place since the region’s post-Cold War transformations in the late 1980s (e.g. the post-authoritarian transitions of Taiwan and South Korea since 1987; the Chinese Democracy Movement in 1989), have intricately intertwined with the multifarious, multi-sited local and national-level art-making and filmmaking undercurrents and movements. Here I am not highlighting the cause-and-effect connections between the social movements and the new waves of art-making and filmmaking, or simply emphasizing art activism and political filmmaking, although they are not irrelevant topics. Rancière hinted at the interconnections between modern democracy and revolution and the ‘new distribution of the sensible that delineates a specific space for art, a specific feeling called aesthetic feeling’ (2011a: 8). I thereby propose that when the partage du sensible of a specific society is disrupted, specific sphere(s) of experience might emerge, and a certain ‘aesthetic feeling’ might find its space and time of appearance in the avant-garde and independent art-making and filmmaking movements. An example from the PRC could be offered here. The ‘first wave’ of Chinese independent film works like Wu Wenguang’s documentary Bumming in Beijing – Last Dreamers (Liulang Beijing – zuihoude mengxiangzhe, 1990) and Zhang Yuan’s semi-fiction Mama (1990), produced in the aftermath of the 1989 Democracy Movement, may not have been directly responding to the 1989 movement per se. But it is my contention that they became possible because the seismic transformation of Chinese society brought about by the Reform and Opening-up (Gaige kaifang) since 1978, together with the emergence of various underground and alternative cultural genres in Chinese urban centres in the relatively liberalized 1980s, introduced a disensus to dispute and redistribute the sensible fabrics configured by the rigid, ideological-laden yet gradually weakening centralized cultural system and socialist visual regime. Therefore, the ‘birth’ of Chinese indie cinema indeed commented on and interlinked with (if not necessarily carried on) the political energies of the doomed Tian’anmen Movement.
To account for the art of the dissensual, it is necessary to explicate what I mean by ‘appearance’, which is not synonymous with ‘representation’. Rancière proposes that ‘appearance’ is not ‘an illusion that is opposed to the real. It is the introduction of a visible field of experience, which then modifies the regime of the visible. It is not opposed to reality. It splits reality and reconfigures it as its double’ (quoted in Maimon 2009: 96). In this vein, I grasp ‘appearance’ in terms of the potential acting-out of the dissensual, and I understand politics as ‘an event of appearance’ (Panagia 2014: 103). As an appearance is staged, it is when and where the boundaries between the visible and invisible, between speech and babble become disputable, which underscores the very dynamics of the ‘permanent guerrilla war’ apropos the sensible (Rancière et al. 2007: 266).

A Cinema of Translocalism

The critical lensing of translocality, which re-orient our attention toward questions of space, place, and scale, primarily underlines this study of border-crossing cinema. In recent decades, ‘translocality’ has provided refreshing insights into fields such as human geography and anthropology in foregrounding the dual dimensions of mobilities and localities. Translocality has provoked a rethinking of the politics of place that critically engages the territorialized notions of transnationalism, in emphasizing the ‘interconnectedness between places, institutions and actors’ in the age of globalization (Greiner & Sakdapolrak 2013: 375). In migration studies, for instance, Brickell and Datta have inspiringly proposed a ‘multiscalar approach to translocality’, which views the latter as ‘a situated mode of human agency and mobility through variegated spaces and places across nations, regions, cities, neighbourhoods, buildings and bodies’ (Brickell & Datta 2011: 7). Both authors suggest that instead of simply subsuming ‘translocality’ under a subset of transnationalism, the local-to-local connections indeed open up ‘the local’ to movement and linkages across a variety of scales (‘body, home, urban, regional or national’) and, as a result, diverse modes of mobilities – including all forms of migration (e.g. internal migration) as well as ‘immobile’, ‘parochial’ agents – could be taken into consideration (ibid.: 10).

In their anthology of ‘Translocal China’, Tim Oaks and Louisa Schein leveraged translocality to highlight ‘a simultaneous analytical focus on mobilities and localities’ (2006: 1; emphasis in original). For instance, the Reform and Opening-up launched since 1978 have made both external and
internal migrations (e.g. rural-urban migration) more accessible to ordinary PRC citizens. Although Oaks and Schein’s project was very much focused on case studies from the socio-economic realms, it would be intriguing to realize how *Bumming in Beijing – Last Dreamers* by Wu Wenguang, often celebrated as the inaugural work of Chinese independent documentary/cinema, also underlined a sensitivity towards translocality in capturing poignantly how the roaming artists and writers engaged with both modes of migration in choosing to come to Beijing from their regional hometowns, and/or to finally leave China behind and go abroad.

Taking a stance not too dissimilar from that of the geographers and anthropologists outlined above, here I consider ‘transnationalism’ a specific manifestation of translocality, not the other way around. For Rancière, the distribution of the sensible relies on ‘a temporary geography’ wherein its politics concerns ‘a disruption in the parcelling out of allocated space, time and sense’ (Highmore 2011: 98). When made relevant to our survey of inter-Asia cultural and cinema flows, I will argue, translocalism configures a different way to approach and manifest ‘place’ as ‘an evolving articulation of multiple flows and trajectories in space-time’, without necessarily essentializing and fixating its identity as such (Ambaras & McDonald 2019). It can be proposed that independent border-crossing filmmaking enacts dissensual aesthetics in redistributing how the subjects relate to various places, different modes of mobilities and senses of belonging so that the rigid arrangements upon their ‘given roles, possibilities, and competences’ could be reconfigured and imagined anew (Rancière et al. 2007: 263).

Despite their disparate filmic styles and aesthetic agendas, the film works analyzed throughout this book, including fictional ones, have been shot on location to ‘image’ – a term here used to describe the dynamics/practice of visualization and representation – Asian places that are connected to the becoming identities of the filmmakers and/or their filming subjects as well as their ‘detrerritorializing and reterritorializing journeys’ (Naficy 2001: 5). Therefore, what has undergirded my mapping of inter-Asia border-crossing cinema is the ‘place-based imagination’ that, according to Arif Dirlik, underwrites a project that seeks to ground the observation and articulation of social relations and categories at the local level, ‘from below’ and (with)in everyday life in order to generate new contexts ‘for thinking about politics and the production of knowledge’ (Dirlik 1999: 151-152). The emphasis on ‘place-based imagination’ also echoes what Mette Hjort has espoused as the ‘more valuable forms of cinematic transnationalism’, here understood as ‘a resistance to globalization as cultural homogenization’ and ‘a commitment to ensuring the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social, and political values’ (Hjort 2009: 15).
To grasp and engage the politics of place at both the textual and extra-textual levels, therefore, I turn to the filming location and particularly ‘location-shoot(ing)’. In his studies on location shooting, Dennis Hwa Lo has emphasized the dynamics of networking between human and non-human actors in ‘place-making’:

The site of location shooting is made into a place of production when the interactions between filmmakers, residents, and even non-human subjects – the material objects and landscapes within this production environment – produce new configurations of power and social relations. (2015: 24)

I propose that ‘location shoot(ing)’ constitutes, for the translocal auteurs, the material, epistemic basis and research/working milieu for the ‘filmic place-making’ in relation to their border-crossing imaginaries and discursive articulation of displaced subjectivities and diasporic, ethnic, and postcolonial experiences. Such a perspective has been partially informed by, yet also needs to be differentiated from, Stephanie DeBoer’s study of Sino-Japanese coproduction projects, where DeBoer underscores how ‘location’ configures the very material and epistemological site for national cinema and media actors, stakeholders, and entities to negotiate their industrial infrastructures, production (or co-production) edges and resources, as well as their sometimes competing cinematic visions/desires (see DeBoer 2014). Despite the overlapping concerns with DeBoer’s project on ‘co-producing Asia’, my study nonetheless shifts the focus onto the independent filmmaker’s auteurist agency and practice and pays more attention to Asian locations that are not necessarily mapped out and made visible in the transnational coproduction projects chronicled by scholars like DeBoer.

It is also in referring to the ‘place-based imagination’ that we can take a closer look at the ‘border’ in border-crossing cinema. Addressing the difficulties in grasping ‘border’, Étienne Balibar claims that

5 In her monograph project of ‘Coproducing Asia’, DeBoer has foregrounded film and media collaborations between Japan and Chinese-speaking regions like Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan since the Cold War era of 1960s into the new millennium, exemplifying efforts to address the question ‘How does Asia mean?’ (see Sun 2000) by framing regional cultural productions historically. Conceptualizing co-production as ‘a technology of assemblage’, DeBoer further illustrates that the ‘assemblage’ is in itself constitutive of ‘variously scaled production practices’ which are not confined to the ‘promotional and production practices’ but entail the desire, imaginaries, and aspirations unevenly pursued by regional film and cultural industries (DeBoer 2014: 5, 28). She specifically proposes that ‘Location…has come to be understood as ever “dynamic and changing”, produced as it is across competing powers, practices, and locales’ (ibid.: 7).
the idea of a simple definition of what constitutes a border is, by definition, absurd: to mark out a border is precisely, to define a territory, to delimit it, and so to register the identity of that territory, or confer one upon it [...] The theorist who attempts to define what a border is is in danger of going round in circles, as the very representation of the border is the precondition for any definition (2002: 76).

My aim here is not to propose a ‘better’ solution to the conundrum posed by Balibar. In relation to the analytic framing of translocalism as outlined earlier, ‘border’ is primarily approached as the ‘edges’ or ‘lines’ of a geopolitically demarcated territory or spatial entity, the scale of which is differentiated at the local, national, regional, and even global levels. Importantly, departing from an understanding of their ‘territorial boundedness’, one may at the same time grasp borders in relation to the practices and discourses from which they are ‘produced, reproduced, and transformed’ (Paasi 2012: 2305). Not only is the process of ‘bordering’ historically contingent and socio-politically specific, the dynamic process itself is significantly connected with key issues of mobility, locality, and identity in our study of border-crossing cinema, thus underwriting the survey of its aesthetics and politics. As rightly suggested by Kōichi Iwabuchi, ‘Border crossing does not necessarily bring about the transgression of borders. Transgression of borders requires one to fundamentally question how borders in their existing form have been sociohistorically constructed and also seek to displace their exclusionary power that unevenly divides “us” and “them” as well as “here” and “there”’ (Iwabuchi 2015: 3).

In this book, I foreground films telling stories about border-crossing journeys and/or subjects ‘who are on the move, or remaining sedentary, have borders cross them’ (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 6). Shot on location, the works discussed here as such map out and imagine places configuring the ever-shifting inter-Asia borderscape while shedding light on the entangled geographical/geopolitical, historical, and symbolic dimensions of the border(s). This project does not limit itself only to studies on border and border-crossing at the phenomenological level. What shall be illuminated here is the idea of ‘border as method’ that leverages border as ‘an epistemological viewpoint’ (ibid.: 18). Through such a critical lensing, we can catch a glimpse of the ways in which the filmmakers and their works constructively yet also contingently engage the ‘dialectic relationship’ between ‘mobility, connections, and circulations’ and ‘immobility, containment, gate-keeping, ghettoization, bordering, and so forth and so on’ (J. Kim 2017: 940). As such, we are able to make sense of ‘a deeply heterogeneous global space’ in its making (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 6).
The task of rethinking the border can be pushed a bit further. It is worth pointing out that, although translocalism could fruitfully dialogue with cosmopolitanism in film studies, here it is not my intention to frame the border-crossing works in terms of ‘cosmopolitan cinema’ and the filmmaker as the ‘cosmopolitan auteur’. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to thoroughly scrutinize the plurality and complexity of the critical spectrum of ‘cosmopolitan cinema’ (see F. Chan 2017; Mulvey et al. 2017). My aim here is not to negate the critical potentiality of cosmopolitanism but to rethink tendencies of ‘liberal romanticisation’ apropos of the modes and experiences of border-crossing. In her take theorizing different cinematic ‘cosmopolitan encounters’, Felicia Chan borrows insights from Galin Tihanov to warn us against valorizing the ‘enforced cosmopolitanism’ of the exilic experience and the “liberal consensus” which has chosen to see “the cross-border experience of migrant workers, worshippers or writers [as] always a source of cultural enrichment and a display of personal energy and endurance […] glosses over – or simply fails to see and acknowledge – the attendant manifestations of inequality and disempowerment” (quoted in F. Chan 2017: 5).

As I shall demonstrate, this study of mine is not oriented toward the overarching cosmopolitan ideal of engaging the world and the other at the representational level. Border-crossing imaginaries and movements in my case studies do not essentially testify to the ‘fluid, global, and liquid powers’ of globalism (Rancière et al. 2007: 264). Instead, I focus more on the itineraries and trajectories of border-crossing to fathom how, according to Rancière, ‘in this world, the borders are as solid as inequalities’ (ibid.: 264), which is to say not to take for granted the ‘porousness of borders, the hybridity of cultures, and nonessential identities’ but to always take into consideration the ‘contexts and practices’ that make such global flows possible (or impossible) (Paasi 2012: 2305).

Neither does this research seek to approach the filmmakers as cosmopolitan cultural producers and emphasize how they have smoothly negotiated

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6 In their ‘Editorial’ on Cosmopolitan Cinema, James Mulvey, Laura Rascaroli, and Humberto Saldanha have proposed that the discussion of cosmopolitanism in cinema studies could be located in four areas: the first area concerns the cinematic representation, with regard to stories that ‘have materialized and performed cosmopolitan outlooks’. A second area relates to the ‘mobile characteristics of creative and artistic crews’ (Mulvey et al. 2017: 3), including both filmmakers and stars. A third area surveys how cosmopolitanism is embodied and practiced in projects such as film festivals and other formats of film exhibition and consumption. A final area looks at certain cosmopolitan cinematic language and/or styles and aesthetics that engage the local and the global.
cultural differences and reconciled with different forms of belonging. For instance, this study does not highlight how they are associated with the ‘deep’ cosmopolitanism ‘characterized by [...] intimate knowledge of cultural trends and forms’, which arguably finds its fullest manifestation in the auteurship of Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul (see Ingawanij & MacDonald 2006). As I shall address later, although the transgenerational auteurs examined throughout this book have been endorsed and celebrated by global arthouse film institutions and prestigious European-American film festivals, some of them are self-educated filmmakers who have not gone through professional training and have not necessarily undergone any ‘educational pilgrimage’ in the West. Instead, I shift the focus onto how they have been nurtured by – and have grown out of – specific local, regional independent film cultures and traditions.

A good example is the Japanese independent film collective known as Kuzoku, which has emerged from the world of jishu eiga (literally translated as ‘autonomous’ or ‘do-it-yourself’ cinema), a type of ‘self-financed nonprofessional filmmaking’ (Tezuka 2013: 171), or, to be more exact, an amateur film culture whose origin could be traced back to Japan’s leftist filmmaking movement in the prewar period (see Sato 1981). Neither of the two core members of Kuzoku – Tomita Katsuya and Aizawa Toranosuke – were professionally trained in filmmaking. They started as cinephiles, amateur filmmakers, and scriptwriters with barely any connections to the mainstream film world (see Chapter Three). Okinawa-born auteur Takamine Gō, on the other hand, as one of the older generations of jishu eiga filmmakers, was part of the 8-mm amateur filmmaking scene in the early 1970s when he was studying in Kyoto as an overseas student sent to Japan, back when Okinawa was still under American occupation (see Chapter Five).

As far as ‘location shoot(ing)’ navigates us to examine translocalism throughout the book, my aim is not to propose an overarching idea to theorize the ‘filmic place-making’ in relation to cinematic spatiality. Rather, I contend that the filmmakers/collectives under examination have developed their own ‘ways of doing and making’ to engage the production environments and cinematic spaces and thus have inspired diverse possibilities for theory-building, which will be contextualized and historicized in the chapters to follow. Generally speaking, my analysis looks at how the directors have opted for disparate aesthetic interventions and politics when approaching the time-space configuration of the location. Hence, this study also seeks to test the critical potentiality of theories on spatiality and location shooting that have originated from and intersected with vernacular film and cultural movements as well as those rooted in the historical trends of intellectual
debates, such as the articulation of *fūkeiron* (the theory of landscape) apropos of Japanese cinema, and a discourse about *xianchang* (a Chinese term meaning ‘on the scene’ or ‘on the spot’) in Chinese independent filmmaking.7

**Theorizing Border-Crossing Authorship**8

**Accented Cinema Reconsidered**

Another crucial dimension underlining independent border-crossing cinema concerns film authorship, which connects with my earlier discussions on translocalism. In this chapter and those to follow, I also frame authorship by looking at the interrelated aspects of: 1) cinematic texts, regarding the form of content (e.g. discourses and themes) and the form of expression (e.g. style), with a specific emphasis on the intersecting questions of mobility, identity, and subjectivity; and 2) the sites and spaces of film production, circulation, and exhibition, particularly that of the film festival network.

I consider ‘border-crossing cinema’ to be one that makes visible a translocal Asia from an auteurist mode of minorness and transvergence, in envisioning rhizomatic socio-political and cultural interconnections across Southeast and East Asian places and societies since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, it constitutes an integral part of – and dialogues with – the irreversible, uneven processes of globalization experienced at different levels within and beyond the region. Filmmakers examined throughout this book are translocal subjects themselves given how they engage with multiple localities across different scales at the same time in

7 Film scholar Zhang Zhen not only associates *xianchang* (‘on the scene’) with the ‘quasi documentary and hyper realist aesthetic’ that characterizes the Urban Generation Chinese independent cinema. She also emphasizes how *xianchang* aesthetics has been facilitated by the development of video technology, capturing ‘the contemporary spirit (*dangxiaxing*) of the Urban Generation in general and the “amateur cinema” in particular’ (Z. Zhang 2007: 18-19). In his discussion of Chinese independent documentaries, Luke Robinson has examined the theory of *xianchang*, considering it ‘a product of the contingent “now” of shooting live, inflected by the particular interpretations of individual filmmakers at a given moment, and structured by the conditions of production under which they worked’ (Robinson 2013: 101). For instance, Robinson has specifically proposed that many Chinese independent filmmakers have pursued ‘on the scene’ aesthetics through the use of long takes.

8 Here ‘authorship’ is used interchangeably with ‘auteurship’. In particular, the former is grasped as a set of discourses as well as praxis foregrounding the central role of the filmmaker as the performative, creative agent in translocal/transnational filmmaking, while the ‘auteurist’ is used to describe the characteristics of such creative agency.
relation to various types of (im)mobilities as well as modes of identification. Agreeing with Thomas Elsaesser that ‘the author in the global context is both a construct and a person(ality)’ (2017: 23; emphasis in original), which stresses how the ‘rhizomatic’ tendencies nowadays have complicated any facile understanding of authorial autonomy, my study considers the auteur/author as an actor/agency working through and within the dynamic interplay and tensions between identities/subjectivities, mobilities, and localities, without losing sight of the institutional configuration of authorship. What has been proposed here is a critical authorship that hinges on the contingent interrelations between authorial positionals and translocality. Hence it is not only the cultural-historical context of authorship as a discourse that will be taken into consideration. It is also necessary to turn to how the authorship is at the same time placed within the horizontal, contemporaneous connections between the local, national, and regional cinema cultures and film industries.

It is important to foreground how this border-crossing cinema interlaces in significant ways with the auteurist mode of diasporic, minority, and postcolonial filmmaking and their evolving genealogies in this region, the study of which deserves a more thorough examination that cannot be achieved in this project. There have been plenty of studies exploring the auteur-centred ‘independent transnational film genre’ (Naficy 1994), ‘accented cinema’ (Naficy 2001), and ‘intercultural cinema’ (Marks 2000), the last of which according to Laura U. Marks also zooms in on auteurs who are ‘cultural minorities living in the West’, especially immigrants who produce their works in the US, Canada, and the UK (Marks 2000: 2). Premised upon his previous argument of ‘independent transnational cinema’, Hamid Naficy leverages the concept of ‘accented cinema’ to scrutinize works by the exilic, migrant, and diasporic filmmakers from the Third World (the Global South) working in Western cosmopolitan centres. He indicates that for an ‘accented cinema’, the ‘accent’ is not simply to be understood as a linguistic feature but is primarily contingent upon the auteur’s conditions of displacement (both as the empirical subjects and in terms of their performative authorship) and the ‘accented mode’ of production, circulation, and exhibition. The accent particularly manifests itself as prominent visual styles, narrative structures, subject matters, motifs, and structures of feeling.

I am fully aware of how my study of border-crossing cinema can benefit from Naficy’s conceptualization. For instance, although the examination of languages does not feature prominently in individual chapters, the linguistic and cultural-political connotations of ‘accent’ do apply to films scrutinized throughout this book, and not simply because these works tend to use
multiple languages, accents, and dialects. If I could draw on and modify Brian Bernards’ discussions on ‘translingual’ in *Nanyang* literary productions, the lensing of ‘accent’ interconnects with that of the ‘translingual’ in referring to ‘a creolizing language practice’ while relating to a body of inter-Asia border-crossing films that speak different languages ‘that partake of the same national culture’ (Bernards 2016: 27). Meanwhile, for instance, Shu-mei Shih also suggests that ‘The radical audioscape of Sinophone cinema, in all its audible differences and multiplicities, challenges the ways in which national communities are understood (heard, seen, etc.), and it is therefore transformative and possibly productive of not only a “different common world” but also “a different people”, which would be the ultimate aim of politics for Rancière’ (Shih 2014: xi). For example, shedding light on Sinophone languages, accents, and articulations, the translingual perspective can be also leveraged to critique the hegemonic, imperial Japanese-language sphere (as I shall address in the section on the Nihon Documentarist Union; also see Chapter Five regarding Okinawa-on-screen) and possibly that of the Korean language in relation to *Koryo saram* from a post-diaspora perspective.

**Minor Transnationalism**

It is, however, necessary to reflect upon how both Naficy’s theorization of ‘accented cinema’ and Marks’ ‘intercultural cinema’ risk essentializing the filmmaker’s positioning as the diasporic/exilic as well as their ‘national/ethnic origins or identities’ (also see Khorana 2013) or the geopolitical situatedness of the films as Third Cinema (see Suner 2006). To grasp

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9 In their introduction to the anthology, *Koryŏ Saram: Koreans in the Former USSR*, editors German N. Kim and Ross King have used *Koryŏ saram* (romanization in original text) to designate ‘Koreans who either personally experienced the forced deportation of 1937, or who are the descendants of Koreans who did’. They particularly focus their study on Central Asian republics like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, places to which ‘the Koreans were deported in 1937 and from which the Koreans in Russia today started moving in the 1950s’ (G.N. Kim & King 2001: R2). It has been pointed out how the research in *Koryŏ saram* language and linguistics could be divided into the tripartite areas of ‘dialect mapping’, ‘Korean language education’, and ‘sociolinguistics’ (ibid.: R11). While both authors did not specifically mention studies in visual culture and cinema, a symposium organized at the 2018 Busan International Film Festival is centred on *Koryo* cinema, which accordingly refers to ‘a series of films produced by directors of Koryo people (ethnic Koreans in Central Asia and Russia)’. It is stated that ‘Koryo cinema addresses the dire issues of language, religion, and ecology as well as ethnicity’ (‘Inter-Korea Archive and Research: “Koryo” Cinema’ 2018).

10 For example, Asuman Suner has usefully questioned the location of accented cinema and seeks to illuminate the ‘mutual entanglement between exilic/diasporic filmmaking and national cinema’. Working with a loosely defined category of ‘accented cinema at large’, Suner looks at
border-crossing authorship in terms of authorial identity and positionality, I want to switch the lensing to ‘minor transnationalism’, a concept proposed by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih as they sought to tackle the issue of transnationality in the twentieth century from a ‘minor’ perspective (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 4). Here, both authors have foregrounded a transversal and horizontal perspective in not only turning to ‘the minor cultural articulations in productive relationship with the major (in all its possible shapes, forms, and kinds)’ but also the ‘minor-to-minor networks that circumvent the major altogether’ (ibid.: 8).

Lionnet and Shih mainly attribute the minoritized cultures or perspectives as those related to minority and diasporic persons. However, viewing the minor and minor articulations as something already creolized, hybrid, and therefore transnational, they propose that the positionality of the minor(ity)/major(ity) should never be essentialized and fixed in dichotomous terms. For them, minor transnationality is contingent upon a cultural transversalism that ‘produces new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries’, which should be also differentiated from the conception of ‘postnational, nomadic, and “flexible” norms of citizenship’ that are considered ‘relatively unmoored from the control of the state and bounded territories’ (ibid.), reaffirming my previous take on cosmopolitan cinema. Arguing how minor transnational subjects ‘are inevitably invested in their respective geopolitical spaces’, Lionnet and Shih not only favour a politics of place, they also stress the importance of contextualizing and historicizing the ‘minority issues’ and their ‘expressive discourses’ (such as cinema) by extending critical perspectives horizontally and transversally (ibid.: 11).

It is important to see how Will Higbee’s thesis on the ‘cinema of transvergence’ echoes the conceptualization of minor transnationalism. Specifically, Higbee intersects Marcos Novak’s discussion on ‘transvergence’ with Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze’s concept of rhizome in constructing the ‘cinema of transvergence’ as a critical framing to survey the postcolonial, diasporic cinema in terms of a transcultural phenomenon that would ‘operate on both a transnational level – the relationship between the global and the local – and within the context of specific national cinemas and film cultures’.
(Higbee 2007: 87). For Higbee, such reframing offers ‘a clear understanding of the discontinuity, difference and imbalances of power that exist between various film-makers, film cultures and film industries, as well as the elements of interconnectedness that may bind a film-maker to a given film culture of national identity at a given time’. His cinema of transvergence specifically foregrounds an auteurship whose rhizomatic nature poses challenges to the rigid, dichotomous power structure of centre/margin in configuring ‘an engaged (politicized) site of resistance’ (ibid.).

For now, we can return to Lionnet and Shih’s concerns with the ‘others’ who are not ‘the Third World cosmopolitan and the flexible citizen’, and whose travels and movements do not necessarily follow the pattern of ‘migration and travelling between the West and the non-West’ (Lionnet & Shih, 2005: 13). I contend that the border-crossing filmmaking examined throughout my project disturbs the implied power relation featured in critical models such as ‘accented cinema’ in having shifted away from the Third World/West dichotomy and drawn attention to filmmakers as well as filming subjects whose experiential subjectivities have been embedded in the uneven, incoherent socio-political and cultural spheres in Asia and the multifarious translocal flows (e.g. of persons, objects, ideas, images, and affect) within and beyond the region.

On the one hand, delineating the transnational trajectories of East Asian cinema, Song Hwee Lim has addressed the issue of Eurocentrism and pointed out that ‘we should not pretend that an unequal power dynamic within East Asia that might impinge upon intra-Asian cinematic collaborations does not exist’ (Lim 2011: 25), into which Stephanie DeBoer’s project of ‘coproducing Asia’ has proffered crucial historical insights (see DeBoer 2014). Accordingly, we shall not turn a blind eye to how the border-crossing filmmakers featured here mostly base themselves in the ‘media capitals’ and Asian urban centres. For instance, Tan Chuimui decided to move to Beijing because of the better opportunities in Chinese-language filmmaking available on the Mainland, and Chinese-Burmese filmmakers such as Midi Z and Lee Yong-chao have chosen to base themselves in Taipei instead of Myanmar to pursue their filmmaking career (see M. M. Chan 2017; Lim 2018).

On the other hand, it has been well articulated by Lionnet and Shih that ‘not all minorities are minoritized by the same mechanisms in different places, there is no universal minority position as such’ (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 10-11). In the same vein, I argue that not every border crossing tells the same story. We can return to the ‘Homeland and Diaspora’ omnibus for clarification. It is important to see how, for instance, Tan’s journeying between Beijing and Kuala Lumpur/Malaysia and Midi Z’s trips between
Taipei and Lashio/Myanmar have contributed to exploring the ‘limiting imagination’ (Higson 2000) of independent film movement(s) that has often been theorized within a disparate, singular national space and socio-cultural context. For Midi Z, Tsai Ming-liang, and even Tan, their filmmaking practices can be better characterized as ‘transvergent’ in the sense that they alternate ‘at different times and in different contexts’ between different local/national film cultures and industries; the identity of the transvergent auteurs, therefore, is constantly evolving through ‘a process of “becoming”’, according to Higbee (2007: 88).

In 2010, Tan (b. 1978) relocated herself to Beijing partially to fulfil her ambition to work with Chinese arthouse filmmaker Jia Zhangke, by which time Tan was already internationally recognized as an arthouse filmmaker who played a key role in the emergence of a DV-initiated ‘Malaysian New Wave’.11 Through Jia’s independent cinema initiatives (such as his company Xstream Pictures/Xihexinghui), Tan was able to interlace herself with and witness the new waves of legitimization and institutionalization of Chinese independent cinema when Malaysian New Wave as a movement began to decelerate and fragment. Tan did not immediately translate her experiences of displacement into a film work. Rather, in her take for ‘Homeland and Diaspora’, made during the creative period that overlapped with her sojourn in Beijing, in the phantasmal reenactment of Chinese diasporic intellectual Yu Dafu’s diary about Malacca, it seems to be Tan (rather than the essayist) who laments, ‘I am a foreigner, no matter where I go’.

Meanwhile, Chinese-Burmese filmmaker Midi Z (b. 1982), whose oeuvre Chapter Six is dedicated to, went to Taiwan to study at the age of 16, following a migratory pattern that most Chinese-Burmese families that are struggling financially in the border town of Lashio would prefer. Through his internationally acclaimed ‘homecoming’ series, fictional works and documentaries included, Midi scrutinizes transborder subjects and their precarious lives across the Southeast Asian frontiers. It is intriguing how, while Midi’s work such as Ice Poison (Bingdu, 2014) has been celebrated as the gem of Taiwan’s national cinema and was entered into the 87th Academy

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11 Initiated by DaHuang, the so-called ‘Malaysian New Wave’ first remained obscure within their home country, principally because these films were not technically qualified as ‘Malaysian films’, and within the then existing national cultural-ideological system, such films potentially posed questions about the homogenous constructedness of Malay-ness, the national identity, and the official rhetoric of Malay-centric multiculturalism. On the other hand, the New Wave obtained legitimacy after a number of major European film festivals such as the International Film Festival Rotterdam programmed works by the emerging filmmakers in the competition category, where they drew worldwide attention.
Awards for ‘Best Foreign Film’ on behalf of Taiwan (Republic of China), his ‘homecoming’ films have indeed proffered more insights into the everyday struggles of underprivileged folks in contemporary Myanmar.

Crucially, as implied by Lionnet and Shih as well as Higbee, but perhaps not clarified, I propose that the ‘minor’ articulation or perspective in cultural/film production and circulation should not be easily equated with the expressions and praxis only specific to ethnic minorities, the socially marginalized, and their political struggles, despite significant overlaps between these categories. It is noteworthy that without necessarily disavowing the agenda of identity politics as such, Lionnet and Shih have nonetheless illustrated how the politics of recognition has fixated the position of minorities as one engaging ‘with and against majority cultures in a vertical relationship of opposition or assimilation’ and thus tend to ignore ‘other forms of participation in the transnational that may be more proactive and more creative’ available to minorities (2005: 7). Also, they have reminded us that we must pay attention to the ‘limited usage in changing contexts of application’ of a strategic essentialism or the politics of authenticity and ‘its exclusive tendencies even toward its internal members’ (ibid.: 10). Correlating with translocalism, cultural transversalism has been leveraged by Lionnet and Shih to disturb the vertical configuration of established parameters of transnationalism (ibid.: 11). Although Lionnet and Shih are not in favour of Deleuze and Guattari’s mapping of the ‘minor’ per se (ibid.: 2), I believe that the French philosophers’ conceptualization of minor literature and minor cinema has provided valuable insights for us to elucidate the ‘minor(ness)’ and therefore the politics underwriting independent border-crossing films.

Debating the Minor

A comprehensive survey of the Deleuzian philosophical edifice on difference, repetition, and becoming is out of the question here. Although it is not my focus here to offer a systematic review regarding Deleuze and Guattari’s thesis apropos a ‘minor literature’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1983) as well as Deleuze’s proposal for a modern political cinema, that is, a ‘minor cinema’, it would nevertheless be helpful to re-examine the minor so that we can envision how it contributes to renewing our understanding of dissensual art and its politics, and vice versa.

Elaborating on the rhizomatic work by Franz Kafka, the Czech-Jewish writer who wrote in German, Deleuze and Guattari have proposed the idea of a minor literature. As explicated by Claire Colebrook, a minor artist like Kafka does not have ‘a language or the culture that he could consider his own
or identical to his being’ (2001: 103), which echoes Nick Davis’s discussions that what Deleuze and Guattari are proposing with ‘minor art’ concerns how ‘culturally marginalized members of a “major” culture internally recalibrate its expressive forms and grammars’ (2013: 5).

Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari stress that ‘problem of immigrants and especially of their children’ and ‘problem of minorities’ have also become ‘the problem of us all’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 19); they have thus pinpointed that “minor” no longer characterizes certain literatures, but describes the revolutionary conditions of any literature within what we call the great (or established)’ (ibid.: 18). As Colebrook indicates, Kafka wrote ‘not as a being with an identity, but as a voice of what is not given, a “people to come”. And the identity of this ‘people to come’ is ‘always provisional, in the process of creation’ (Colebrook 2001: 118). That is, as is the case with all ‘great’ literature, ‘language seems foreign, open to mutation, and the vehicle for the creation of identity rather than the expression of identity’ (ibid.: 103-104; emphasis in original).

Deleuze was able to push further his interrogation of the relationship between the minor and minority vis-à-vis their cultural expressions in Cinema 2: The Time-Image. He revisited some of the ideas in ‘minor literature’ and modified them in his framing of modern political cinema as part of his reconsideration of the crisis of (classical) political cinema in the wake of World War II and the rise of fascism, Stalinism, and so forth, with an eye on the exhausted visions of political alliances and the absence of revolutionary agency and subjectivity, namely the situation whereby ‘the people are missing’ (Deleuze 1989: 216). Offering an illuminating interpretation of Deleuzian cinema theory, D.N. Rodowick points out that ‘minor cinema must produce collective utterances (énoncés collectifs) whose paradoxical property is to address a people who do not yet exist and, in so doing, urge them toward becoming’ (Rodowick 1997: 154).

This project of mine foregrounds minority, diasporic, and postcolonial subjects and interweaves discussions on ethnic and national identities. Nonetheless, by reconceptualizing the minor (with Deleuze and Guattari), my research contests the identity logics formulated upon ‘cultural essentialisms and mythical views of authenticity’ (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 9). As explicated by Vered Maimon, ‘minority is not a name for a marginalized social group but for a transformational group which, as Paul Patton explains, is defined by the

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12 The original French version of Cinema 2: The Time Image (Cinéma 2, l’Image-temps) was published in 1985, precisely a decade after the publication of Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure (Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature).
gap that separates its members from a standard model or norm in the same manner in which the simulacrum challenges representation' (Maimon 2010: 333). No matter how the ‘minor’ might meaningfully overlap in designating minority identities (e.g. in terms of ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) and social groups on the margin, it is not leveraged here to simply recognize, categorize, and express the already-constituted subjects, identities, and their pre-existing community. To conceptualize the authorship of border-crossing cinema is therefore also to liberate the filmmaker from any essentialized and reified identity constructs of cultural, ethnic, racial, and even gender differences. And what we need to underscore is how the auteur’s experiential subjectivity and identification may set forth transformations beyond the binarism of major/minor.

An inspiring example can be found in Olivia Khoo’s study exploring the minor transnationalism of Asian queer cinema, wherein she illustrates how productive it would be to interweave Deleuze and Guattari’s schema of ‘minor cinema’ with the idea of minor transnationalism. Khoo foregrounds the gendered dimension of the collective enunciations by women queer artists through their filmmaking despite ‘the absence of an active community’ (Khoo 2014: 38). Also, she points out how such a cinema would necessarily relates to the avant-gardist, independent filmmaking practices examined by Tom Gunning in his earlier formulation of a ‘minor cinema’ (see Gunning 1989), regarding their mode of production, circulation, and exhibition. Therefore, in reframing minor transnationalism, Khoo not only draws attention to the ‘major exhibition’ of the minor queer films at international film festivals, she also suggests that the ‘minor-to-minor transnational connections between women filmmakers and queer film cultures in Asia’ contributes to reimagining an authorship that is ‘minor’ (Khoo 2014: 41).

It can be further proposed that the politics of minor literature and minor cinema concerns the mode of appearance. This is not to make the facile assumption that the minor could easily be equated with dissensus conceptually. After all, Deleuze (and Guattari) and Rancière ‘approach different questions from different metaphysical standpoints’ (Phillips 2009: 2). Rather, I focus on how the minor artists and filmmakers have, through their image works, introduced ‘lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary and collective bodies’ to foreground ‘uncertain communities that contribute to the formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages’ (Rancière 2011b: 36). I grasp the uncertain community as such also as a ‘community of sense’, which as Rancière illuminates, is not ‘a collectivity shaped by some common feeling’ but rather ‘a certain cutting out of space and time that
binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility’ (Rancière 2009a: 31). Nick Davis thus characterizes the collective value for the work by ‘minor artists’ as ‘less on behalf of existing “minorities” than for new coalitions they catalyze among the oppressed and invisible, along previously unrecognizable lines’ (Davis 2013: 5).

In this book, therefore, my lineup of inter-Asia border-crossing auteurs is not confined to those who possess minority, diasporic, and postcolonial identities but extends to include other minor artists whose filmmaking intricately intersects the ‘oppressed and the invisible’ groups and their collective enunciations, and the independent mode of film production, exhibition, and circulation (Davis 2013: 5). Given that it is no longer simply upon the politics of recognition and authenticity that a minor filmmaker envisions and expresses a community of hers/his, I contend that what independent border-crossing filmmaking aspires to and engages with would be a ‘permanent guerrilla war’ in (re)creating an uncertain community, that is, a ‘community of sense’ that is also contingent upon an active yet indeterminate spectatorship, since it would be ‘up to the spectator’ to affectively interact and react to such a work of art (see Rancière et al. 2007: 263). This topic will be further examined throughout the book.

Realigning Independent Border-Crossing Cinema

Based on the discussions above, it is possible to proffer a brief periodization to tentatively frame border-crossing auteurs and their works in contemporary Asia. Hamid Naficy indicates that what he has examined under the umbrella term of ‘accented filmmakers’ – namely the exilic, diasporic filmmakers from the Global South who have based themselves in Western urban centres – could be roughly grouped into two categories. The first group are ‘displaced or lured to the West from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s’ in the waves of Third World decolonization, Cold War confrontation, and the First World’s own sociopolitical movements. And a second group ‘emerged in the 1980s and 1990s’ not only as a result of the erosion of nationalist, communist, and socialist ideals, in tandem with the disintegration of nation-states and the outbreak of wars triggered by ethnic and religious conflicts, but also due to ‘the emergence of postindustrial global economies’, which indirectly impacted the policies welcoming non-Western immigration (Naficy 2001: 10-11).

Keeping in mind the Nafician lineage, however, what I zero in on is a lineup of transgenerational Asian filmmakers whose experiences of
journeying and/or migration, while partially reminiscent of Naficy's second grouping of accented auteurs, should be situated within the historical context of ‘the disparity in the political-economic landscape in Asia, the aftermath of national and Cold War struggles, and the new economic realities since the 1980s’ (Y.W. Chan 2014: 4). Some of the filmmakers or their families are part of waves of intra-regional migration in Asia, the process of which is even expected to speed up ‘with the emergence of more advanced and rigorously developing economies’ into the future (Y.W. Chan 2014: 2). Nevertheless, neither the Cold War and its end nor the waves of globalization have impacted upon the individual trajectories of travel and migration equally, an issue that is further complicated if we turn to how the filmmakers’ diasporic, minority, and/or postcolonial identities relate to their border-crossing filmmaking across Asia.

Research into each set of independent filmmaking needs to be first placed within the socio-historical development of a specific national film culture and industrial infrastructure and to be examined in relation to the mainstream, commercial, and/or studio-oriented film industries (even when they are not necessarily playing active roles thereof), state socio-cultural apparatus and policies (including censorship), and so forth, in order to account for what independent cinema is ‘independent from’. Meanwhile, the dual perspectives of translocalism and the minor help to realign and reterritorialize contemporary Asian independent cinemas. Specifically, the trope of border-crossing filmmaking could be leveraged to reconsider the methodological nationalism that is often practiced in the study of independent cinema, especially if we consider how the national nowadays has become ‘a space increasingly populated by the diasporic, transnational, foreign, and global, in a similar way that it has become a battleground for various sub-national forces with heterogeneous ethnic, linguistic, religious, ideological, and class backgrounds’ (Choi 2011: 188).

In the case of Japanese independent cinema, I shall emphasize Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano’s approach to the ‘post-studio condition’ of Japanese cinema since the 1990s, wherein major Japanese film studios (e.g. studios like Shochiku, Nikkatsu, and Toho) already have their traditional vertical integration system dissected or transformed. She points out that ‘independent filmmakers are now major players, producing films with much tighter budgets

13 Wada-Marciano argues that within the ‘post-studio condition’, studios are no longer the ‘centers of production’ (Wada-Marciano 2012:15), with the production number of the majors only accounting for a small percentage (15%) (ibid.:14). But as she also points out in her note, the major three still outperformed the independents in terms of box-office revenues (ibid.:143).
and under more constraints due to their investors’ unwillingness to shoulder significant risks’ (Wada-Marciano 2012: 14). It would also be important to see how, while the discourse and practice of jishu eiga significantly interlace with post-studio Japanese independent cinema, as I shall illustrate in the discussions about Kuzoku, what this jishu eiga film collective has sought to pursue with its border-crossing filmmaking might be something drastically different from the cultural imagination of ‘Asia as a borderless region’ in some contemporary Japanese film works (ibid.: 23).

Chinese independent cinema may present a more complicated scenario. As mentioned earlier, in the aftermath of the 1989 Tian’anmen Square Incident, independent documentary and fictional filmmaking in the PRC emerged from the relatively liberalized socio-cultural terrain of the 1980s and productively intersected with the then emerging underground cultural genres and contemporary art. Meanwhile, the birth of ‘Chinese indie’ also testified to the erosion of the planned economy and specifically the fraught – if not forced – transition of the state-owned film studios and their cultural-economic apparatus towards a market economy (see Zhang 2007). Moreover, several former ‘underground’ filmmakers such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Lou Ye, previously blacklisted by the Chinese censor and banned from filmmaking or attending international film festivals, were allowed in 2004 to make their first aboveground features. However, even before their ‘collective’ legitimization by the state’s cultural authorities, Jia, Wang, and Lou had started to co-produce their films with overseas capital, even though it was not until later that they set their films in locations outside of China.14

But what is more significant for us to grasp the PRC’s independent filmmaking is the popularization of Digital Video cameras (DV) since the dawn of the new millennium and the multi-layered, multi-sited DV culture widespread in the country (see Zhang & Zito 2015). It is in the ever-shifting waves and currents of DV filmmaking that filmmakers of ethnic minority background such as Tibetan filmmakers Lhapal Gyal, Sonthar Gyal, and Pema Tseden (all of whom were trained at the prestigious Beijing Film Academy) have carved out a space for their own people to be seen and heard, 14 Since his second feature film Platform (Zhantai, 2000), Jia Zhangke already started to coproduce with Japanese filmmaker/comedian Kitano Takeshi’s Office Kitano. But it was not until Mountains May Depart (Shanhe guren, 2015) that Jia set his own work in Australia. Since his third feature film Suzhou River (2000), Lou Ye started to collaborate with French producers. For his film with the controversial title Summer Palace (Yiheyuan, 2006), the protagonists self-exiled themselves in Berlin. Lou’s seventh feature film Love and Bruises (Hua, 2011) is set in Paris, with most of its protagonists speaking French.
while contributing to ‘an alternative, transmediated DV culture whose significance amounts to an emerging regional cinema, critically amplifying and complicating the framework of a “DV-made China”’ (Zhang & Zito 2015: 15), connecting with Sinophone cultural articulations and productions in other Asian places.

As noted, there is no singular timeline or common criteria of valorization to outline and historicize the development of independent cinemas in the People’s Republic of China, Japan, South Korea, or across Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Nonetheless, I have shown elsewhere that during the region’s post-Cold War transformation in the late 1980s, Asian filmmakers did create an opportunity to gather together at the inaugural Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (YIDFF) in Japan in 1989, where many envisioned an ‘Asian’ independent film culture to come (see Ma 2018). 15

However idealist the 1989 Manifesto signed at Yamagata might appear, as the omnibus project ‘Homeland and Diaspora’ has attested, the introduction of affordable and accessible digital video technologies, editing software, and web-based platforms for the production, circulation, and exhibition of films since around the late 1990s and the early 2000s has powered up and renewed independent filmmaking movements across the region, the dynamics of which have been forcibly manifested in independent filmmaking across Southeast Asia (also see Ingawanij & McKay 2012). For instance, Tilman Baumgärtel associates independent cinema emerging in Southeast Asia since the early 2000s with the decisive arrival of digital cinema technologies in the region (Baumgärtel 2012: 6), while suggesting that probably only the Philippines can boast of an independent cinema of some sort prior to the arrival of DV to this region. 16 John Lent further proposes that to answer what Southeast Asian independent cinema is ‘independent of’, one could turn to ‘government regulation and censorship, big mainstream studios and traditional methods/styles of filmmaking’ (Lent 2012: 13). He discusses the

15 At the 1989 YIDFF, following a 5-hour-long ‘Asia Symposium’ in which filmmakers, curators, and other film professionals from East Asia and Southeast Asia, participated an ‘Asian Documentary Filmmaker’s Manifesto’ was drafted by a few participating filmmakers, initiated by Japanese documentarist Ogawa Shinsuke, one of YIDFF’s founders. The manifesto states: ‘We, the Asian filmmakers present here, at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival’89, call attention to the sad absence of any Asian film in the competition. While this is not the fault of this festival, it puts into focus the fact that major obstacles exist in the making of relevant and interesting documentary films in the Asian region’ (Teo et al. 2007: 63).
16 Lent reminds us that in the Philippines, there were filmmakers like Kidlat Tahimik who have worked ‘completely outside of the system’ since the 1970s (Lent 2012: 16). Tahimik made Perfumed Nightmare (Mababangong Bangungot) with his 16-mm camera in 1976.
tripartite aspects by navigating through several national cinemas in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysian, Thailand, and Singapore.

Whereas it is suggested that DV filmmaking can be leveraged as an entry point to probe into a possible inter-Asia independent cinema culture, I also share Ani Maitra and Rey Chow’s idea of ‘disaggregating Asia’, which seeks to contest the ethno-culturalist tendencies in viewing ‘Asia’ as ‘a homogeneous geopolitical entity’. For Maitra and Chow, ‘locality’ should be approached ‘through the material and infrastructural differences between digital multiplicities, differences that separate the urban from the rural, and the urban privileged from the urban underprivileged’ (Maitra & Chow 2016: 20-21; emphasis in original), the core argument of which indeed emphasizes the ‘digital disparity and heterogeneity between geographically proximate spaces and people’ (ibid.).

At the same time, I shall reiterate that within the transnational, translocal cultural assemblages across Southeast Asia and East Asia, an independent film auteur’s positionality should not be fixated ‘only in the interstitial and marginal spaces of national cinemas’, if one refers to Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim in their critique of Naficy’s accented cinema and Marks’ ‘intercultural cinema’ (Higbee & Lim 2010: 10). For one thing, we could argue that Asian independent cinema including border-crossing films are not at all cut off or isolated from the mainstream commercial film industries and their industrial models and formulas, given how ‘independent cinema’ as a set of practice and discourse itself has been realigned and has diversified in recent decades. For another, what needs to be pointed out but cannot be further expanded on here is how the regional-level collaborative initiatives and projects among independent filmmakers, stakeholders, and the variously scaled entities, institutions, and so forth need to be investigated in their present tense as complex, still-evolving assemblages. What I have in mind are the diverse schemes, programmes, and projects founded by and/or associated with the variously scaled film festival network that seek to accentuate and orchestrate the translocal, regional film exchanges and connections between independent filmmakers and producers from/based in Asia, so that the latter can better navigate through the uneven, power-laden global film festival economy and mediascape. A ready and recent example is the Southeast Asian Fiction Film Lab (SEAFIC) founded in 2016 by Thai film producer Raymond Phathanavirangoon and filmmaker Visra Vichit-Vadakan.  

SEAFIC aims ‘to strengthen the quality of feature-length films from Southeast Asian filmmakers by helping to advance their scripts and develop their projects’. In terms of eligibility for
Asia is One (1973): A Prehistory of Border-Crossing Asia

With the theoretical framings of translocalism and minor transnationalism clarified, I want to use a 1973 Japanese documentary titled Asia is One (Ajia wa hitotsu) as an example to probe into the pre-digital, pre-Internet dynamics and politics of border-crossing filmmaking in this region. I contend that Asia is One features importantly in the historical survey of Asian border-crossing films, although this section cannot provide a comprehensive genealogy of border-crossing filmmaking across the region, a topic that deserves to be explored in a further study. In turning to the underestimated, almost-forgotten Japanese independent film collective Nihon Documentarist Union (NDU, 1968-1973) together with their filmmaking and theories, I aim to foreground how NDU acutely switched its critical lensing at a time when political imagination and activist momentum within Japan started to decelerate and disintegrate. NDU scrutinized national borders and various types of underprivileged border-crossers (who are not unlike the filmmakers themselves) to envision new political horizons and alternatives. Their methodology is arguably one of translocalism and transcoloniality, with the latter relating to transversal connectivities ‘between subjects under different forces of empire, colonialism, and imperial legacy’ (Chiang & Wong 2016: 4).

For example, SEAFIC stipulates that: ‘Nationals of the following countries are eligible for SEAFIC participation: Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam and ‘Passports must be from Southeast Asia (cannot be the resident only)’. For more, refer to the SEAFIC official site <http://www.seaficlab.com/>.

18 According to one of the key members of NDU, Nunokawa Tetsuro, NDU ‘was a group formed of Waseda University dropouts’ (Nunokawa 2012: 11). Another member, Inoue Osamu, remarked that NDU ‘was a group of filmmakers who produced 16-mm documentary films and animated slide shows in addition to publishing issue-oriented newsletters. Most of the NDU’s members were part of the so-called “Zenkyoto Generation”, those who had lost any hope in a university education for their future or others who were kicked out of the university’ (Inoue 2012: 2). Their first feature film Onikko – A Record of the Struggle of Youth Laborers (Onikko: Tatakau seinen rodosha no kiroku, 1969) was planned by the Tokyo Headquarters of the Japanese Socialist Party. Inoue mentioned that the collective disbanded in 1974 (Inoue 2012: 6), with Asia is One its last work. Some of its members, like Nunokawa, continued to make independent films into the 2000s.

19 For instance, Nick Kapur points out that, in the aftermath of the massive social movements of the 1960s, ‘Japanese society was a dramatically different space in which massive extra-parliamentary street protests carried out by a broad-based popular movement would become less and less imaginable, and the styles and techniques of protest employed by the anti-treaty movement would be replaced by new forms now associated with the worldwide “New Left” and the global counterculture that emerged in the latter half of the 1960s’ (Kapur 2018: 10).
1.1 Group photo of Waseda University’s Camera Reportage Research Society (Kamera ruporutāju kenkyūkai), the predecessor of NDU. Photo was taken at a training camp in Hiroshima (August 1966). Middle row: second to the left (Nunokawa Tetsurō); fifth to the left (Inoue Osamu, also a NDU member)
Asia is One was the third documentary feature produced by NDU, a film collective of members that started out with university-club-based filmmaking activities in the late 1960s. Carrying along their 16-mm camera, NDU members hopped in between places within the so-called ‘Japanese-language sphere’ (Nihongo-ken) across the East China Sea in-between Yaeyama islands in Okinawa, which had only recently been ‘returned’ to Japan as one of its prefectures, and Taiwan’s northern port city of Keelung to meet and interview a transnational, multi-ethnic body of workers, fishermen, and labourers. The livelihood of these people was contingent upon their (enforced) border-crossing movement under the influence of Japanese imperial power and its aftermath (e.g. former coal miners who were recruited from the Korean peninsula and Taiwan to work in Okinawa). The NDU also turned to new generations of border-crossers whose migratory trajectory correlated with the reconfigured East Asian geopolitics and capitalist structures in the early 1970s (e.g. young Okinawan workers sent to the ‘mainland’ of Japan following Okinawa’s 1972 ‘reversion’ and Taiwanese migrants who came to Okinawa on short-term manual labour contracts). Somehow unexpectedly, toward the end of the film, the NDU was welcomed by one of Taiwan’s mountain villages (at Yilan County, Nan’ao Township) where senior members of the indigenous tribal community (the Atayal/Tayal people) shared memories, in fluent Japanese, about their experiences fighting as part of the Japanese imperial army toward the end of World War II.

Asia is One could be considered NDU’s cinematic manifestation of its ‘theory of national borders’, or kokkyō-ron (see NDU 1973). Whereas a comprehensive review of NDU’s universe of film theories (especially their theories on spectatorship) is beyond my focus here, it is necessary to grasp how kokkyō-ron intersects NDU’s practice of translocal location shooting with their persistent critique of Japanese imperialism and colonialism against the historical context of the phantasmal ‘East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere’. Also, kokkyō-ron interweaves with NDU’s rethinking of the so-called ‘space of management’ (kanri kūkan) of postwar capitalist society, the regulatory power of which had become more and more ‘dematerialized’ in their time.

Specifically, NDU sought to break away from the constraints imposed by the ‘national borderline (kokkyō-sen)’ that is ‘indispensable in outlining

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20 It is worth pointing out how the documentary title purposefully refers to and rethinks the core thesis of Japanese scholar Okakura Tenshin (Okakura Kakuzo) regarding ‘Asia is one’, proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century in envisioning how ‘the Orient’s view of Asia’ potentially poses ‘a challenge to the Eurocentric view of civilization’ but was nevertheless appropriated to buttress the Japanese empire’s discourse of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Sun 2000: 21).
1.2 A Tayal lady from a Piexau tribal village, Yilan County, Nan’ao Township (May 1972); from *Asia is One*

1.3 A Tayal lady from a Piexau tribal village (May 1972)
a country \( \textit{kokka} \). The collective aspired to transform the ‘border as \textit{lines}’ (\textit{sen}) into a ‘border as \textit{sphere}’ (\textit{men}) by foregrounding subjects who were the very ‘embodiment of the borderlines’ (NDU 1973: 32-33). The idea of the ‘border as sphere’ interlinks with translocalism: NDU transversally mapped out and scrutinized translocal subjects across multiple sites; thereby injecting the essentialist, imperialist ideology of ‘Asia is One’ with radically new connotations. Crucially, the translocal connections explored are also essentially transcolonial ones, which register the ‘shared, though differentiated, experience of colonialism and neocolonialism’ that ‘construct[s] the shadowy side of the transnational’ (Lionnet & Shih 2005: 11).

NDU’s gesture arguably illustrates the collective’s sensitivity toward the changing paradigm of Japanese politics as well as of engaged filmmaking; they sought to rejuvenate their political imagination by turning to displaced persons and forgotten places at the margin of the empire that bore the scars of Japanese imperialism and colonization, as well as marginalized groups who, in the wake of the collapsed empire, struggled to survive within the cracks of the quickly developing capitalist economy by means of border-crossing.

Even though NDU was most active in the decades prior to the disintegration of the Cold War order, by shedding light on and critically re-examining the political economy of national borders, its cinematic realization of \textit{kokkyō-ron} was already manifesting and predicting the ‘\textit{trans}’-force inherent in the border-crossing practice of a global age, as succinctly summarized by anthropologist Aihwa Ong:

\begin{quote}
Trans denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something [...] (it) also alludes to the transversal, the transactional, the translational, and the transgressive aspects of contemporary behaviour and imagination that are incited, enabled, and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism (1999: 4).
\end{quote}

The ‘\textit{trans}’ force explicated by Ong here also concerns how \textit{Asia is One} can be celebrated as a work of dissensual art. Through their border-crossing filmmaking, NDU modified the fabric of the sensible in carving out a space for the ‘\textit{zainichi Okinawans, fishermen, Japanese in Okinawa, Koreans, Taiwanese, and Taiwanese aborigines}’ to emerge and speak for themselves, as pointed out by NDU’s core member Nunokawa Testurō.

21 With an eye on NDU’s stylistic experimentation, meanwhile, one may propose that not only did its documentary intervention concern a documentation of the spatial, geographical
NDU also created an uncertain community that ‘call[s] into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages’ apropos a pre-given configuration of the sensible (Rancière 2011b: 40). As such, it intervened in and disrupted the imperialist and capitalist knowledge production about ‘Asian places’, ‘Asian peoples’, and their interrelations, so that ‘Asia as one’ could be envisaged anew.

Circulating and Exhibiting Border-Crossing Films

In this study, I map out the circulation and exhibition of border-crossing cinema by focusing on the international film festival network. Given the filmmaker’s multi-layered identities and the translocal, transnational nature of their filmmaking (even in cases without actual transborder movements), it would be important to see how the circulation, exhibition, and even production of border-crossing films on the variously scaled film festival sphere have pushed us to rethink the positionality of the auteur in relation to critical paradigms such as national cinema and transnational cinema. More straightforward questions to be asked when foregrounding film festivals as a point of entry would be: what might some of the refreshing perspectives be for us to approach the aesthetics and politics of border-crossing works on the festival circuit if not those drawn from the framing of ‘national cinema’? Alternatively, how can we benefit from emphasizing the film festival network and its affiliated entities as being integral to grasping the politics of independent border-crossing cinema?

In his thesis on global authorship, Thomas Elsaesser offers a provocative discussion on the ‘unsymmetrical but reciprocal dependencies’ between the international film festival institution and global auteurs. Leveraging the heuristic concept of ‘double occupancy’, Elsaesser suggests how the global auteur nowadays necessarily negotiates and performs her/his creative movement but also, as Nakamura Yōko has pointed out, the collective grasped the border-crossing movement in temporal terms, too. As she explains, it is illuminating that what has emerged from the incommensurability between the sound and image/space and time is actually the ‘different layers of history’ (kotonaru rekishi no chisō) (Nakamura 2013: 80).

22 The framework of the ‘international film festival network’ (Elsaesser 2005; Valck 2007) was developed from Bruno Latour’s ‘actor-network theory’ in tandem with other sociological theories on space and globalization; it has become one of the most important approaches for the interdisciplinary field of film festival studies. I have pointed out elsewhere that the film festival network highlights ‘a comparatively stable yet flexible template or benchmark outlining organizational structures and logistics, programming standards and ideals and so forth for individual festivals to follow and refer to’ (Ma 2017: 2).
autonomy, not without self-contradictions though, in a delicate condition that he describes as ‘serving at least two masters’ (Elsaesser 2017: 25-26). He pays specific attention to auteurs who ‘make films outside their home country, while still “representing” it by associating its national stereotypes’, as is the case with the Russian maestro Alexander Sokurov. According to Elsaesser, Sokurov is “performing” the radical free spirit and independent auteur, both on and off film sets, given how the filmmaker has become fully aware of the importance of the ‘non-commercial, “art cinema” funds and investors’, including international festivals (ibid.: 27-28).

In Elsaesser’s incisive (yet somehow less celebratory) analysis of the intricate relation between ‘the world’s films and filmmakers’ vis-à-vis film festivals, he has emphasized how the ‘openness’ of festivals can be highly deceptive:

It is an open invitation to self-conscious ethnicity and re-tribalization, it quickly shows its affinity or even collusion with cultural tourism, with fusion-food-world-music-ethnic-cuisine Third Worldism in the capitals of the first world, and more generally, with a post-colonial and subaltern sign-economy, covering over and effacing the new economy of downsizing, outsourcing, and the relentless search for cheap labor on the part of multi-national companies (ibid.: 25-26).

In other words, even though he does not necessarily view the filmmaker’s agency in a reductionist light, Elsaesser has voiced how global auteurs and their films have adopted strategies close to ‘a kind of “self-exoticizing” or “auto-orientalism”’ to engage the already indispensable film festival circuit. His critique of the ‘asymmetrical, but reciprocal dependencies’ between the non-Hollywood, arthouse, and independent cinema auteurs and the film festival circuit (26) arguably highlights the consensual underpinnings of the international film festival network. For one thing, the festival network is such a hierarchical configuration in itself (see Abé Nornes 2011, 2014), with the ‘currency’ of global auteur ‘stamped and certified at very few of the world’s many festivals’, such as the almighty Cannes in France (Elsaesser 2017: 24). Moreover, global festivals nowadays are mostly driven by the neoliberal imperatives and mechanisms of film markets (e.g. financing schemes for both finished and unfinished projects), pitching sessions and project labs, master classes, talent campuses, and so on and so forth.

Is it still possible to envision the politics of (international) film festivals? Would a film festival still constitute the space and time of appearance as far as dissensual art and minor artists/auteurs are concerned? If so, how?
These are tough questions that this current study can only address partially. As Rancière has suggested, we could approach film festivals as ‘specific distributions of space and time, of the visible and the invisible, that create specific forms of “commonsense”’ (Rancière 2010: 141); then the politics of film festivals would also concern how the dissensual may be introduced into the ‘distributions of space and the weaving of fabrics of perception’ (ibid.). T.J. Demos posits that Rancière’s reconceptualization of ‘art’s autonomy […] supersedes traditional associations with isolationist escapism and artistic essentialism’, which allows us to reconsider ‘how the conflicted, institutionalized, and sheltered space of the biennale exhibition […] might nonetheless offer moments of oppositional energy that are irreducible to the means-end logic of effectiveness’ (Demos 2013: 91-92). Demos’ observations about the world of contemporary art and biennales have inspired me to also grasp the film festival system in the light of ‘conflicted, institutionalized, and sheltered space’ wherein dissensus may occur, specifically concerning how a specific film festival arranges itself and orchestrates its heterogeneous actors, stakeholders, and components. Specifically, I argue that, however problematic the festival curation, selection, and programming might be in conforming to the consensus, disagreement might still be introduced into the public spheres of film festivals (the plurality of the ‘spheres’ has been emphasized by Cindy Wong in her survey, see Wong 2011) regarding how, for instance, the curatorial practices could include certain titles and auteurs and interrelate with film movements, making them a visible part of the global visual regime.

For instance, even with trend-setting, top-notch international festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, and Venice (known as the ‘Big Three’), which boast unparalleled cultural capital, artistic prestige, and prominent market and industry presence, it is not difficult to recall how the festivals, as a certain ‘pre-given sensible regime’ themselves, have historically experienced ‘moments of oppositional energy’ wherein the specific ‘commonsense’ arrangement correlating stakeholders such as filmmakers and film professionals, film works, audiences, institutions, and state power were disrupted and redistributed, with a new common stage created for new players wherein a new assemblage of actors, stakeholders, and entities emerged to take part.23

23 For instance, in her pivotal monograph on film festival network, Marijke de Valck has pointed out that in the 1950s and 1960s, despite the steady growth of European film festivals, ‘The growing attention given to economic and glamour considerations created especially strong feelings of dissatisfaction’ (De Valck 2007: 61). De Valck used the turmoil at the 1968 Cannes festival as an example where, in response to the leftist sentiments and social discontents prevalent in France, and particularly in protest against the dismissal of Henri Langlois, then the head of
In addition, I have demonstrated elsewhere that the framing of the ‘international film festival network’ itself needs to be reconfigured to allow us to theorize and contextualize festival networking and scale-making at the local, national, and regional levels. Therefore, festivals that do not necessarily conform to the ‘universal’ neoliberal paradigm in the current global hierarchical architecture (namely, not in being the ‘very few’ prestigious film festivals) can be taken into consideration and have their significance recognized and understood (Ma 2017). One good example would be the aforementioned YIDFF, a remotely located Asian-cinema-oriented international documentary festival that has been cultivating a network among Asian independent filmmakers since its foundation and has so far gone against the tide in not installing any film market or financing schemes. Or we can look at some of the short-lived independent film festivals in the PRC (e.g. the already defunct Yunnan Multicultural Visual Festival/Yunfest or the Beijing Independent Film Festival, which was forced to close down). Upon the landscape of the global film festival circuit, these less-discussed and often underestimated film festivals have indeed carved out a space for Asian independent filmmakers and films – including the border-crossing strand – to emerge and engage its spectatorship with their specific socio-political agendas.

Importantly, as if reverberating with Rancière’s point that escapism and unconstructive critique of the market only serve to ‘abandon all hope for emancipation’ (Rancière et al. 2007: 263), Demos boldly proposes that, within the setting of contemporary art, ‘the market can and does in certain cases reward politically conscious artistic practice – and not necessarily in ways that are immediately neutralizing’ (Demos 2013: 93). Therefore, he states, ‘viewing commercial institutions as complex, diverse, and at times contradictory does not mean capitulation. Rather, it entails acknowledging at present the inescapability of operating within a market-driven system, but not necessarily operating on its terms’ (ibid.). His argument connects with Rancière’s proposition that instead of simply denunciating the market and thus acknowledging our own powerlessness, ‘the fundamental question is
to explore the possibility of maintaining spaces of play’ (Rancière et al. 2007: 263). Returning to our discussion about the tension-filled space of the film festival network, first, there is no need for independent filmmakers (and producers) to escape from the neo-liberalized festival economy and its ever-expanding, diversifying project initiatives and market apparatus. Instead, the challenges concern how minor artists may learn about ways of carving out and maintaining ‘spaces of play’ while remaining part of the game, engaging with the neoliberal environment and its interconnected entities.

Hence, besides a re-examination of the film festival apparatus, our attention will shift back to filmmakers’ agency and their aesthetic practices, in order to tease out how the authorial practices may ‘produce forms for the presentation of objects, forms for the organization of spaces, that thwart expectations’ and contest the ‘inscription within given roles, possibilities, competences’ (Rancière et al. 2007: 263). Elsaesser’s take on the ‘self-exoticism’ reinforces the fact that the minor filmmakers have no choice but to subscribe to the ‘second-order performed nationalism’ in order to cater to the imagination of their cosmopolitan (festival) audiences. I propose that the perspective of ‘double occupancy’ has become nonetheless insufficient in addressing the politics of border-crossing cinema that deals with the issues of multi-layered identities and entangled national belongings, as is the case with Tibetan cinema vis-à-vis Chinese national/ethnic-minority cinema, or Okinawan cinema or zainichi Korean cinema vis-à-vis Japanese (ethnic) cinema.24 By means of Rancière and Demos, I also attempt to move away from Elsaesser’s framing of global auteurs’ performativity apropos of their creative constraints, where presumably the filmmakers are only left with assigned roles, scripts, capacities, or positions to fit into and play. Instead, I want to explore whether it is possible for minor transnational auteurs (based in Asia) to disturb the ‘a priori’ distribution of the positions and of the capacities or the incapacities attached to those positions’ that reaffirms the ‘allegories of inequality’ (Rancière 2009b: 12). That is to say, one needs to pay attention to how the inter-Asia border-crossing auteurs are performing their creative autonomy in a very complicated manner, especially when we consider the tension between their ethnic, diasporic, and postcolonial

24 In her observations on post-studio Japanese cinema, especially with films with zainichi theme/characters, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano proposes that, ‘The underlying formation throughout the contemporary ethnic films is that those appealing, energetic, and ethnically marked characters – being oppressed and unfairly segregated in Japanese society – act out within the diegetic ideological justification, a point-of-view that can be easily shared with the audiences through their identification with those attractive Japanese stars’ (Wada-Marciano 2012: 122-123; emphasis in original).
articulations vis-à-vis the paradigm of national cinema(s) on the film festival circuit. Tensions and incongruencies as such have potentially opened up border-crossing filmmakers to ‘spaces of play’ both at the level of aesthetic experimentation and across the interrelated spheres of film production, circulation, and exhibition.

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