
Japanese Manga, Hong Kong Films and the “Unity” of Asia

日本の漫画、香港映画、そして〈アジアの一体化〉

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Abstract:

Japanese manga and anime are popular and influential in East Asia. Politicians recently have attempted to use the cultural products as an ideological tool in order to advance the nation's political and economic interests. However, manga readers and anime audiences in Asia always take on Japanese culture without loving Japan. Manga actually gets localized in different regions of Asia. The intra-Asian popular culture flows is better expressed in the transnational sense. In Hong Kong, Japanese manga has undergone a dynamic domestication process. Although Hong Kong comic artists have borrowed and incorporated the elements of Japanese manga in their drawing style, the storyline dramatizes the struggle between the righteous Chinese heroes and the evil-doing Japanese villains. Adapting Japanese manga has become popular in Hong Kong film productions since the 1990s. This paper looks at some of these cinematic adaptations in order to examine how Japanese manga has been used to express Hong Kong's own cultural and political concerns. This denotes the multiple layers of the cultural inter-flows in East Asia, and indicates difference and tension themselves can establish the possible foundation of cultural unity in the future.

Keywords: manga, Hong Kong cinema, cultural unity, East Asia

キーワード：マンガ、香港シネマ、文化的統一、東アジア

The new Prime Minister of Japan, Aso Taro, known for his love of manga, considered the Japanese comics as the nation's "soft power"^{*1} to the world when he was still the nation's Foreign Minister. He single-handedly created the International Manga Award—what he see as the Nobel Prize in manga—to present to non-Japanese comic artists in order to make them have a positive feeling toward Japan. Though Japan is the world's biggest exporter of comics and animation, its influences are most visible in Asia.^{*2}

Most works of Asian comic artists carry the traits of Japanese manga (Ng 2002). Probably because of this, the International Manga Awards have been given to Hong Kong comic artists two consecutive years in a row since its establishment in 2007. Given Japan's fascination with Hong Kong hybrid pop culture (Iwabuchi 2002) and given the styles of the two Hong Kong winners (Lee Chi Ching for his *Sun Zi's Tactics* in 2007 and Lau Wan Kit for his *100% Feel* in 2008) are obviously under the influences of Japanese manga, there is no surprise why Hong Kong comics gain the favor of the Japanese adjudicators. However, if Japan under Aso's new leadership continues to pursue manga diplomacy, perhaps the award should be given to the comic artists in mainland China because the urgent task for Japan's diplomats nowadays is to bridge the rift with its biggest Asian neighbor.

China's Reaction to Aso's Manga Diplomacy

In his speech on cultural diplomacy given at Digital Hollywood University, Aso said he is aware of the influence of J-pop in China: "if you take a peek in any of the shops in China catering to the young otaku-type manga and anime fans. You will find the shops' walls lined with any and every sort of Japanese anime figurine you can imagine" (Aso 2006). Undoubtedly, Japanese manga and anime are becoming very popular in China. Many mainland Chinese popular comic magazines, such as *Beijing Comics* and *Comicfan*, have frequently published and serialized the Japanese manga. Japanese comic and animation companies have outsourced their production works in China.

As a result, many Chinese comic artists work under Japanese supervision and guidance (Ng 2002). But this does not necessarily mean the Chinese otaku would easily embrace the politically-motivated manga diplomacy and then will not join the anti-Japanese demonstrations whenever there is conflict between China and Japan. Even if Chinese comics industry is learning a lot from Japan, the Chinese artists have mixed feelings towards the Japanese comic culture since they are always urged by the official and mainstream discourses to create and develop their own national-style art forms. China's emphasis on cultural tradition and national style, other than being a historical reaction to Japanese imperialism, is actually an effect of global capitalism against which cultural tradition is now grasped as the source of national identity to resist the homogenization of capitalist production and consumption forces.

On the other hand, China's coverage of the news on Japan's International Manga Award reveals certain suspicion and contempt to its hidden political intention. As a Chinese reporter critically writes about the award:

Japan's Foreign Minister Aso's manga diplomacy has been gradually concretized: other than assigning some comic masters as his ambassadors, he now formally established International Manga Award, and he declared that it would become the Nobel Prize in the world of comics and Tokyo would become the capital of global comics...

There were only a few Japanese manga artists and editors on the selection committee, severely lacking adequate representatives and international components. In addition, their nomination and selection processes were not transparent... Japanese manga can only represent its own national characteristics. How can the award that relies only on the Japanese aesthetic be used as the criterion to judge the world comics? ("Tokyo=World Capital of Manga?" 2007).

Although the position of the reportage does not necessarily represent the general Chinese attitude towards the award, its distrust of the award's purpose by conflating Aso, manga and the entire Japanese culture as a unitary other, a perceptive mode that is typical in China's conventional approach to Japan, is quite obvious between the lines.

Generalization or essentialization is always the strategy appropriated by the Chinese nationals to deal with Japan in the contemporary era. By erasing Japan's historical complexities and internal differences, Chinese nationalists tend to reduce this Asian neighbor to a simplified, one-dimensional entity nothing more than a competitor, a rival, an aggressor and a victimizer in modern Chinese history.

Strategy of Packaging the Culture with a Unitary Image

Ironically, in the name of promoting the nation to the world, Aso himself also sees Japan as nothing but a stock image, a distinct brand or even a stereotype, though such image, as he perceives it, is full of positive and attractive contents:

What is the image that pops into someone's mind when they hear the name 'Japan'? Is it a bright and positive image? Warm? Cool? The more these kinds of positive images pop up in a person's mind, the easier it becomes for Japan to get its views across over the long term. In other words, Japanese diplomacy is able to keep edging forward, bit by bit, and bring about better and better outcomes as a result...Even if you have only a stereotypical, single-pattern image of Japan as being the land of Fujiyama and geisha, it is clear that there is nothing aggressive within that image at all--it is a very peaceful image...and we are very fortunate that in addition to the items of Noh drama and Bunraku, tea ceremony and flower arranging, Japan also boasts many newer forms of culture that have a high degree of appeal. This would be pop culture, including anime, music, and fashion among others, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is really going all out to 'market' this, so to speak (Aso 2006).

Aso is rather honest that cultural diplomacy for him is by no means a way to facilitate any mutual understanding between Japan and other nations but a sheer ideological tool for promoting and marketing Japan in order to advance its political and economic interests. All Aso can see is how the American cartoons like *Popeye* or *Blondie* were able to capture the Japanese hearts during the time when the country was under American occupation.

If, because of the appealing power of American cartoons, in his descriptions, "the people of post-war Japan had such a strong infatuation with the United States even though just a little while before Americans had been something akin to devils," then the Japanese manga and anime, such as *Astro Boy* or *Doraemon*, can have the similar influences to win the hearts of many Asians who

have once considered Japan an enemy. Can manga build a relation of trust between Japan and its neighboring countries? Does manga, as one of the prominent items of J-pop, help constitute a certain cultural “unity” in the region?

Domestication of Japanese Manga in Asia

Studies show that Asian manga readers and anime audiences can “take on Japanese culture without loving Japan” (Befu 2003: 9). Although the modernity model symbolized by J-pop is appealing to the Asian youths, the emergence of many Asian economies has deprived Japan of such privileged position while teenagers from Asia and the West are fascinated with Japan cool probably because it acts as a “signifier or a particular brand and blend of fantasy-ware: goods that inspire an imaginary space at once foreign and familiar” (Allison 2006: 18). Indeed, manga always gets localized in different locales of Asia. The intra-Asian popular culture flows, as Iwabuchi puts, is better expressed in the transnational term in the sense that the concept of culture is no longer confined to the national frame (2002:16).

Meanwhile, it is East Asia, more than any other parts of Asia, which consistently makes use of and reproduces the word “Asia” today though the region has been interconnected by hostile relations in recent history. Undeniably, the cultures of East Asia (not only the popular cultural domain) are historically tied and by no means self-sufficient. The region has become a community in economic as well as political senses in the past through the tribute system;³ but it does not mean that the “unity” of East Asia or Asia can be sought easily at the sheer level of culture. Actually, the credibility of this concept of “unity” immediately evaporates when concrete things are taken into consideration.

Although manga culture under Japanese influences does exist in various places in Asia, it does not necessarily play an identical role in the social and cultural set-up of those countries and cities. On the contrary, we may need to be very cautious with this seemingly homogeneous precondition of Asia’s cultural commons in order to understand the multiplicity, difference and even contradiction that lie within the supposed Asian cultural “unity.”

Like all foreign products imported to a different place, Japanese manga in Hong Kong has undergone a domestication or localization process. It is indeed far more dynamic and historically changing than being the timeless, static image as Aso assumed. Its Japanese elements (though there are arguments that the main characters of Japanese manga and anime do not look “Japanese”) that were imitated and accepted within the historical logic of Hong Kong as a particular place are compelled to go through transformations as a result of inconsistent and even conflicting interpretations and positioning.

Japanese manga including *Astro Boy* and *Ultraman* began to be imported to Hong Kong colony in the 1960s, but it became widely popular only in the 1970s when the animation series based on manga like *Jungle Emperor Leo*, *Mazinger* were broadcast on Hong Kong local TV channels. Hong Kong’s reception of Japanese manga was first mediated through Taiwan where these Japanese comics have been circulated and translated in Taiwanese-style Chinese language. Many pirated Taiwanese editions of manga were reprinted in Hong Kong without paying any royalties to the copyright owners. However, some Hong Kong otaku also began to introduce the latest manga from Japan with copyrights authorization in the 1970s.

Manga reached its climax in mid-1980s when these comic series from Japan are available on rental basis. The rental services make the manga more affordable to Hong Kong youths. *City*

Hunter and Crying Freeman with many adult materials were among the top of Japanese mangas well received by Hong Kong younger readers who were craving for explicit graphic sexual depictions in the comics (Chiu 1988).

Although local comics in Hong Kong are popular for their own kungfu tradition, many Hong Kong comic artists have borrowed and incorporated the elements of Japanese manga in terms of their drawing style, atmosphere portrayal, format making, plot development and even production system. However, in regards to their characterization and theme, these Hong Kong comics under the influence of Japanese manga continue to adopt the traditional formula by dramatizing the struggle between the righteous Chinese heroes and the evil-doing Japanese villains.

Back in the 1960s, the most best selling local comic in Hong Kong was *Uncle Choy* (which was made into a film entitled *The Raid* directed by Tsui Hark and Ching Siu Tung in 1991), an anti-Japanese spy story set in 1930s by the time of Sino-Japanese War. But ironically the story was believed to be inspired by Japanese spy comics as well as James Bond movies. Two other popular kungfu comics indebted to Japanese manga in the 1980s and 1990s were Wong Yuk Long's *Little Rascals* (later renamed as *School of Dragon and Tiger*) and Ma Wing Sing's *Chinese Hero* which both depict Japanese characters as the primal rivals to their Chinese protagonists (Wong 2002).

In the former, the leading characters who are Hong Kong martial artists, after defeating the local gangsters, go to Japan to fight against the right-wing yakuza organization and the ninjas. While the latter follows a similar story line by portraying how its lonesome Chinese hero combats the evil Japanese gang, though the comic artist Ma himself always enthusiastically introduced the techniques and characteristics of his favorite Japanese manga artists like Ikegami Ryoichi and Matsumori Tadashi to his readers in the columns of his comic book. While treating the evil Japanese characters as the Chinese heroes' most dangerous enemies in these kungfu comics, the Hong Kong artists could not help seeing the Japanese manga masters as their idols.

Such ambivalence and bifurcation characterize the general reception of Japanese popular culture in post-war Asia. In other words, Japanese manga is able to connect people of different racial origins and to create influences in the everyday life of various communities but it may not directly fulfill the "simple" diplomatic or political task in the way as the Foreign Minister Aso has imagined.

Appropriation of Manga in Hong Kong Cinema

From 1950s onward, Hong Kong film industries have developed a collaborative relation with the Japanese counterparts in terms of hiring Japanese crew and casts, and shooting on-location in Japan (Yau 2000). Adapting Japanese manga, borrowing and stealing ideas from those comics are also popular in Hong Kong film productions.*⁴ Capitalizing on the popularity of Japanese manga in Hong Kong, these films attempt to embody themselves in the imported entity in order to construct their own subjectivity.

Those Hong Kong films based on Japanese manga, such as Nam Nai Choi's *Peacock King* (1989), Wong Jing's *City Hunter* (1993), Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's *Initial D* (2005), Jacob Cheung's *A Battle of Wits* (2006) and Soi Cheang's *Shamo* (2007) are the examples that acknowledge their sources because they are Hong Kong and Japan's co-productions. However, there are many others like Clarence Fok's *The Dragon from Russia* (1990), Mak Tai Kit's *The Wicked City* (1992), Nam Nai Choi's *Story of Ricki* (1992), Stephen Chow and Lee Lik-Chi's *Love on Delivery* (1994), Alan Yuen Kam-Lun's *Let's Go Slam Dunk* (1994), Lee Chi Ngai's *Dr. Mack*

(1995), Frankie Chan Fan-Kei's *I.Q. Duettes* (2000), Andrew Lau's *Avenging Fist* (2001), etc. which are non-copyrighted adaptations and did not give credits to the original manga at all.

Since Japanese artists and companies only own the copyrights of the Japanese titles of the comics but not the translated ones (Ng 2002), Hong Kong filmmakers can simply take the advantage of using these mangas for their own free and loose appropriation. For the die-hard manga fans, many of these Hong Kong adaptations not only fail to pay homage to the original manga artists, they also have somewhat betrayed the original comics in various ways by emptying out the Japanese elements in order to refill them with the issues the majority of Hong Kong people concern.

While Ikegami Ryoichi's *Crying Freeman*, which is about a professional assassin shedding tears to his victims after every killing mission, was popular in Hong Kong in the late 1980s, there were two unauthorized adaptations of the comic from the film industry. Both were released in the same year 1990. Though many episodes of Ikegami's manga took place in Hong Kong which is a bizarre urban landscape for many Japanese cultural productions, its Hong Kong adaptations did not use the colonial city as their primary setting.

Clarence Fok Yiu-leung's *The Dragon from Russia* began its story in Moscow, while Philip Ko's *Killer's Romance* was set in London for the obvious reason that Hong Kong is not exotic enough for the local audience. Indeed, a lot of changes had been made in the Hong Kong adaptations. If *Crying Freeman* has mystified the Chinese by creating "108 Dragons," a powerful Chinese organized crime syndicate with numerous gangsters and unlimited resources, like holding extensive lands, possessing a nuclear submarine and several battleships, the low-budgeted Hong Kong productions are not able to render these imaginations into cinematic illusions.

A Different Perception of China in *Dragon from Russia*

The way how Hong Kong filmmakers in the early 1990, less than seven years away from the Hong Kong Handover, to think of China is not necessarily to associate it with the vast resources and military power but primarily with its intimating and unfamiliar communist image. Thus, when the *Crying Freeman* character in *The Dragon from Russia* is chased by his opponents, he has no choice but to cross the border of Russia to the communist China in order to continue the struggle. In fact, the "108 Dragons," that is renamed as "800 Dragons," in the Hong Kong adaptation is no longer a Chinese organization but a small and secret clique led by a Japanese samurai with his daughter and several disciples.

While the original manga has revealed to us that the China threat is already in Japan's psyche in the mid-1980s, the Hong Kong cinematic adaptation may share such anxiety of the rising China but also attempts to mediate itself between the sophisticated cosmopolitanism of Japan with which Hong Kong identifies and its ethnic/cultural affinity with China to which Hong Kong keeps a distance (such distance is revealed in the background of the film's protagonist who is a Manchu-Chinese orphan living in Moscow).

The Dragon from Russia may have used the Japanese manga to enhance its transnational exotic spectacles by inserting stock images of Japan (e.g. samurai, katana swords, sexy women in kimono, tattoo on the back, yakuza crime organization, etc.) as well as alluding to the ex-communist Russia that was undergoing drastic changes at the time. But it still closely follows the conventional storyline of Hong Kong films by conforming to the narrative of kungfu training (which is very common in many Hong Kong kungfu films), the romance that begins from

childhood (which greatly contrasts with the original manga in which the female protagonist falls for the assassin at her first sight of his intriguing tears after his murder assignment), and the unending action sequences and fight scenes.

Most of the interesting details about the characters in the manga have been deleted and replaced with silly jokes and laughs of Hong Kong style in the film. The scriptwriter seemingly wants to make the film more appealing to Hong Kong viewers by adding a scene that the male lead Sam Hui impersonates Bruce Lee and imitates how Lee plays with nunchaku against the Japanese samurai.

Yet, the irony is Bruce Lee has always been a symbol of Chinese nationalism against Japanese villains as evinced in his movies like *Fist of Fury* (1972). Apparently, the ideas and elements of the Japanese manga are only used as eye-catching symbols, stereotypical images and exotic mis-en-scenes for the well choreographed kungfu and action sequences that Hong Kong cinema was good at.

Hong Kong Cultural Particularity By Means of J-Pop

This obvious self-centered mode of consuming Japanese manga on Hong Kong screen may characterize how Japanese popular culture is generally received in the colonial city. While using Japan as a brand or backdrop as an appealing selling point, the film prioritizes the taste of the local market; overemphasizes its own concerns or own way of expression; absorbs or assimilates Japanese culture into one's dominant mode of consumption and reduces J-pop to a brand name. As some critics point out, Hong Kong productions no longer "look up" to Japanese film, as Shaw Brothers did in the 1960s, but only "looks across" to Japanese popular culture as part of Hong Kong entertainment (Yeh and Davis 2002).

Presumptuous may this Hong Kong mode of reception appear to be, it actually denotes the multiple layers of the cultural inter-flows in East Asia. At a first glance, although Japanese popular culture is ubiquitous in Hong Kong, such influence largely remains external, without deconstructing or negating Hong Kong cultural particularity and specific concern. However, this particularity cannot be manifested without the supplement of Japanese popular culture. What I mean is this particularity is always already contaminated or intertwined with the affects of the cultural others. If the elements of the others had been taken away, the specificity of Hong Kong could have immediately evaporated. In other words, Hong Kong culture actually indicates the impossibility of self-sufficient, autonomous subject. Such particularity, however, begins to transform and reshapes itself when Hong Kong tries to redefine its relation with China.

In a time when the notion of Hong Kong's own particular identity has been overshadowed, if not substituted, by the concept of China in Hong Kong film industry, the adaptation of Japanese manga produces different meanings to Hong Kong cinema. Repeating the formula of many Chinese big-budget historical period films (like Zhang Yimou's *Hero* [2002], *Curse of the Golden Flowers* [2006]; Chen Kaige's *The Promise* [2005] and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* [2006]) that utilize pan-Asian cast with transnational capital and target at international market, Jacob Cheung Chi-Leung's *Battle of Wits* (2006) attempts to differ itself slightly by appropriating Mori Hideki's manga *Bokuko* as its source of inspiration.

Based on the manga set during China's Warring States period (roughly from the 5th to 3rd century BC), *Battle of Wits* stars Andy Lau as the protagonist Ge Li, a brilliant military tactician from the Mozi tribe who has come to the small city-state of Liang in order to rescue its citizens

from the invasion of Zhao state. Having strong conviction in Mozi's concept of universal love (jian ai) and being skilled in the strategies of siege defense, Ge Li acts like an eloquent politician to rally the people at city Liang by boosting their morale to succeed in defending against the aggression of Zhao army which is overwhelming in numbers.

In order to differentiate itself from many other period films of the time that have overused the wireworks, aerial kinetics, martial arts acrobatics and other computer-generated special effects, *Battle of Wits* grounds all the battles on land and there are no elegant swordfights or grandiose duels but only collective combats in an old-fashioned epic mode. By emphasizing the idea of condemning offensive war (fei gong) in Mohism, the film uses the down-and-dirty approach to ancient warfare in order to highlight its violence, cruelty and the meaningless deaths.

The devotion and self-sacrifice of Ge Li to the people of Liang who are fundamentally stranger to him, however, have aroused suspicion within and without the film. The serious message of anti-war or pacifism and the idealist depiction of the Mohist figure Ge Li have created doubts in the minds of many Chinese and other Asian audiences. Given the Mozi tribe is anti-Confucian, self-sacrificing for their love of people, and a very organized and disciplined group, Chinese internet users associate the Mohist with the Chinese communists who also claim to uphold the principles of selflessness, devotion to the people, and the moral superiority of the socialist revolutionary.

An internet user exclaims that "Ge Li is actually more communist than the communists in the years of war!" Some South Korean viewers see the film as a political propaganda of communist China, while Ge Li is interpreted as the personification of the deified Chinese leader Mao Zedong since the Mohist's larger-than-life nobility and righteousness are comparable only to the quality of a God-like figure. As *Battle of Wits* is a Chinese-Korean co-production, Korean critics worry about the influence of Chinese communist's brainwashing propaganda hidden behind the moral message of the movie and they are also anxious about the future of Korean Wave if they continue to cooperate with their Chinese counterparts ("*Battle of Wits* accused of promoting political propaganda" 2007).

If Japan and China have always been considered as bitter rivals, the cooperation between South Korea and China (with the mediation of Hong Kong film industry) does not necessarily nurture a relation of trust. Hong Kong filmmaker gets himself into trouble when he endeavors to go beyond an entertainment film by conveying a rather serious though clichéd message of anti-war and humanism and giving much lip service to the notion of universal love derived from Mozi's philosophy.

The lofty ideas of Mohism that the film has greatly simplified from the manga are actually not very new to Asian audiences though Confucian values are far more common in the region. But apparently no one really takes it seriously to believe that the film has any intention to promote it as an alternative ideology to Asian community or even to the world. Rather, Mozi's philosophy is manipulated by the film as a tactic to outwit other competing period films of the time, such as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* that places much emphasis on the significance of political unity, even under a brutal emperor, for the sake of peace.

To directly engage in ideological warfare is by no means the strength of Hong Kong cinema. But in order to participate in China market and to seek recognition from the nationals, Hong Kong filmmakers have to learn new rules and play a new game that is not always to their own advantages. Hong Kong filmmaker like Jacob Cheung, in order to search for national belonging,

has to rely on the Japanese manga to generate a competent storyline to carry the epic scale production. If Mohism in the Japanese manga is used to challenge the Confucian hegemony and to question why a vast country like China cannot accommodate a philosophy clan (Ge Li at the end of the manga has gone to Japan for seeking a new world), the Hong Kong film (if we can still call the transnational product as such) appropriates Mozi’s philosophy, through the mediation of Japanese manga, not merely to get itself to be on the list of big-budget pan-Asian period movies made in China, but also to find its own voice which is mixed with the voices of the others.

Yet this process of finding one’s voice or position by losing and mixing oneself with others is something easy to be misunderstood or mis-identified. As *Chosun Daily* of South Korea comments, “*Battle of Wits* is a turning point for Andy Lau of Hong Kong to transform to Andy Lau of China”; “*Battle of Wits* is not an ordinary movie, it is a communist propaganda” (“*Battle of Wits* accused of promoting political propaganda”).

Coda: A Unity in Theory?

Perhaps the notion of Asia presented in the Hong Kong films based on Japanese manga designates a “failure” that indicates the impossibility of a unified image, as well as how contradiction and tension always pertains to the reality of Asia. What makes Asia somehow impossible is that the difference that separates one Asian from another Asian is not the same as this “same” difference perceived from another Asian’s perspective. There is no easy way to reconcile the difference because this difference is not an objective difference between two perspectives or positions. It is a pure difference without positive substance, that is to say, it is the unreconciled tension that constitutes the notion of Asia.

The synthesis of different perspectives or positions is not equivalent to the idea of Asia. Asserting a certain determinate position in opposition to another cannot give one a full grasp of Asia. The reality of Asia is constructed through not actual or objective but pure difference. There is no “what Asia essentially is.” Neither is there any ideal content to it. Asia is nothing but a reality of multiple, active, and antagonistic conceptions that those involved use to relate to one another. It is these relations, interactions and tensions that define the only effective content applied to Asia. However, the concept of Asia is still indispensable to the understanding of contradictions within Asia. Similar to the mode of Hong Kong filmic adaptation of Japanese manga, the concept of Asia is not something to be inherited from an origin, but rather is the one that has to be re-created. To quote Sun Ge, a Chinese Japanologist, “uniformity and resemblance are certainly not the basis of unity, but difference and tension themselves can become the foundation of unity.”

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Endnotes

- * 1 The term "soft power", as defined by Joseph Nye, is the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments" that "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (2004: x).
- * 2 Japanese television shows, like *Godzilla*, *Astro Boy*, have been broadcast on America's stations since the 1950s and 1960s. But many of them have not only been reinvented but also Americanized by the network (Allison 2006). Since Japanese manga enjoyed big local success, there was little incentive to develop international market while black marketeering of manga in Asia has been common. It was not until the domestic market for manga began to decline in the mid-1990s that Japanese publishers started searching for new market in Asia, Europe and North America (Wong 2006).
- * 3 It has been argued that the ancient tribute system was to establish a loose concept of Asia and the internal ties of the Asian region before the hegemonic presence of European powers colonized the area in the nineteenth century. The tribute system was more an inclusive, open, and non-nationalistic network of commerce and politics among different Asian countries than simply a homogenously political structure built around the Chinese center. As historian Hamashita Takeshi asserts, because the tribute system "involved several other lesser or satellite tribute relationships not directly concerning China, and forming a considerably more complex system of reciprocal relations. . . . [A]ll these countries maintained satellite tribute relations with each other and constituted links in a continuous chain" (1994: 92)
- * 4 The difference between borrowing and stealing lies in whether the filmmakers would acknowledge the sources of inspiration. As acknowledgement means paying copyright royalties to the copyrights owner, many Hong Kong filmmakers and investors simply abstain from doing so.