

Towards a theory of transcultural fandom

Bertha Chin,
Independent Scholar

Lori Hitchcock Morimoto,
Independent Scholar

Abstract:

In this discussion, we advocate for a broad(er) model of transcultural fandom studies that, in shifting focus to the affective affinities that spark fan interest in transcultural fan objects, is intended as a corrective to nation-centred analyses of border-crossing fandoms. It is our contention that the binary approach to transnational fandom maintained by media globalisation scholars such as Koichi Iwabuchi, writing in the East Asian context, does little to advance our understanding of both why fans engage in cross-border fandoms, and the implications of fannish activity on how we understand the global flow of media texts. In this essay, we consider an alternative approach to transcultural fandoms that is concerned less with nations than with fans themselves. We seek here neither to redeem nor condemn fans, but rather to situate them within their myriad contexts – not only sociopolitical and economic, but equally popular and fan cultural, sexual, gender, and so on.

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English-language scholarship of border-crossing fandoms, whether in the geographical or cultural sense, historically have fallen into one of two broad categories: those studies that centre on discrete phenomena¹ which seek to understand them in of themselves, and those which begin from the question that has come to characterise ‘transnational’ fandom studies in the inter-East Asian context: namely, does cross-border fandom have the ability to transcend historical, cultural, and social differences, and to foster greater transnational awareness? Fabienne Darling-Wolf argues that ‘few analyses have focused on texts produced and/or consumed outside the US. Even fewer have considered the significance of fan culture on an increasingly global scene, fostered in particular by the advent of the

internet as a tool for intercultural, and potentially worldwide, fan activity' (2004: 507). Where such analyses do occur, it is the nation that (over-)determines fan appropriation and engagement, with the effect of both severely limiting the kinds of questions that are asked, and effectively ghettoising (or even exoticising) cross-border fandoms. In this way, border-crossing fandoms are relegated to the periphery of fandom studies, and with them the unique insights they offer about the ways that fans interpret and interact with both media and one another in an ever-intensifying global media marketplace.

Indeed, questions of both how and why different border-crossing media capture the imaginations of fans, as well as how fans incorporate cross-border media into their own popular cultural contexts and what meanings they attribute to them, have the potential to complexify and contribute nuance to a discipline that, in its English-language iteration, has remained steadfastly Anglo-American in orientation (albeit relatively undifferentiated for all that). Thus, in this essay we advocate a broad framework for the exploration and interrogation of border-crossing fandoms in which the nation is but one in a constellation of contexts that inflect and influence their rise and spread. We argue that, while national identity and transnational historical and socio-political contexts *may* inform fannish pursuits, this is neither necessarily the case nor the only possible mode of transcultural fan engagement. Based both on our own subjective fan experiences and our research of border-crossing fandoms, we are convinced of the need to take seriously not just the national, but also – especially – the gender, sexual, popular, and fan cultural contexts within which fans consume and create, if we are to comprehend how and why fandoms arise almost regardless of borders both geographical and cultural.

Work in English-language fan studies over the course of the past two decades has increasingly and vocally advocated for a nuanced understanding of how fans' affective investments in media produce and inform fan culture, and we contend that this is a lens we must train on cross-border fandoms as well. We argue that transcultural fans become fans because of affinities of affect between the fan, in his/her various contexts, and the border-crossing object. In so doing, we eschew the term 'transnational,' with its implicit privileging of a national orientation that supersedes other – arguably more salient – subject positions. Rather, we favour the term 'transcultural,' which at once is flexible enough to allow for a transnational orientation, yet leaves open the possibility of other orientations that may inform, or even drive, cross-border fandom.

We both arrive at fandom studies by way of an 'aca-fan' orientation (the ongoing contestation of the term notwithstanding²) that is informed as much by East Asian as Anglo-American popular and fan cultures, and it is our separate – but not disparate – experiences of transcultural fandom in this context from which our dissatisfaction with the state of transcultural fandom studies derives. Born and raised in Malaysia, Chin grew up on equal amounts of Hong Kong and North American popular television and films that were shown on Malaysia's multi-lingual public and commercial TV channels. When she relocated to Australia, her interest in Hong Kong popular culture – an interest which informs and shapes her ethnic cultural identity – was sustained through music, VHS rentals of drama serials and

weekend Chinese movie marathons in an art house cinema, from which comes her sensitivity to the in-betweenness of transcultural fandom. Similarly, Hitchcock Morimoto, born in Texas and raised in Hong Kong, draws on a lifetime of being a fan of the wrong thing (Hollywood blockbusters, Japanese anime, Hong Kong stars) in the wrong place (Hong Kong, the United States, Japan, respectively) for her own understanding of how transcultural fandoms are born and experienced 'on the ground,' so to speak.

Thus, we have a personal, as well as academic, stake in the ways that transcultural fandom is theorised and discussed, and it is here that we locate the value of an aca-fannish sensibility. We have seen ourselves repeatedly misinterpreted and misrepresented in transcultural fan scholarship and are frankly frustrated that work seeking to explain such phenomena fails to comprehend what it is that ignites them in the first place. In response, we outline below a theoretical framework for the consideration of both how and why fandoms of border-crossing media arise; one that, first and foremost, is popular cultural in orientation. Through this essay, we hope to better define the object of a broadly writ transcultural fandom studies, in order to bring the transcultural fan, often relegated to the periphery into closer conversation with mainstream fan studies as a specific mode of fannish engagement that is yet interrelated with fandom as it is understood in the English-language context.³

Transcultural Fandom Studies in Context

Studies of border-crossing fandoms are as diverse as the phenomena they examine, and they derive from a range of scholarly concerns that have cumulatively made it difficult to generalise what 'transcultural fandom studies' might and should encompass. Thus, while much English-language research of anime and manga *otaku* (and derivative phenomena) is indebted to, and consistent with the concerns of, mainstream fandom studies, research of more discrete phenomena – Brian Larkin's exemplary work on Nigerian fans of Indian films (2008), for example – often are more anthropological in orientation. In the inter-East Asian context, Koichi Iwabuchi's⁴ seminal research of Japanese transnational popular culture flows and fandoms aligns closely with critical cultural studies and media globalisation scholarship that is grounded in the critique of consumer capitalism.

Given our own East Asian orientation, we are particularly attuned to certain problems stemming from the enormous influence of Iwabuchi's scholarship of pan-East Asian media circulation and consumption within a still-young body of English language research of East Asian transcultural audiences.⁵ Particularly insofar as his work reflects the fundamentally oppositional orientation of critical cultural studies that continues to haunt the edges of mainstream fan scholarship, we first want to take the time to interrogate the implications of its resolutely socio-political orientation on transcultural fandom studies.

Over twenty years ago, Tania Modleski described critical antipathy towards feminised mass culture as one in which women, 'denied access to pleasure, while simultaneously being scapegoated for seeming to represent it' (1986: 163-4), have no recourse within a critical framework but to accept an 'adversarial position' (1986: 162)

towards popular culture. Indeed, particularly insofar as women 'too have been oppressed by the specious good' (1986: 163) with which we are associated, much research on female fandoms in the intervening years has tacitly accepted this position, ascribing fannish resistances to prescribed sexual identities, gender expectations, and the machinations of increasingly transnational, profit-driven media conglomerates as a prerequisite to taking them seriously. The result is that we are left without a discourse through which to take seriously female fandoms that evince *no* explicit oppositionality, with the effect that such fandoms are left open to critique primarily on the basis of their perceived complicity with hegemonic state and corporate institutions.

It is this attitude that characterises Iwabuchi's seminal work on the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars in the 1990s. As interpreted by him, these women's unreflexive, and even deluded, consumption of male Hong Kong stars was 'patently mediated', arising not from authentic engagement with Hong Kong culture, but rather 'from their desire to prove their modish and sophisticated taste' (2002b: 558). Within this calculus, fans might 'wish to differentiate themselves from otherwise mass-mediated cultural 'dupes' ... [But] for all their attempts to distance themselves from the 'mindless' consumers of the mainstream, such fans are themselves a product of that very media' (2002b: 559). Here, resistance to the logics of late capitalism constitutes a kind of 'good' fandom, which these women patently fail to embody.

Yet, Iwabuchi inadvertently reveals Modleski's '*limits of an adversarial position*' (1986: 162, emphasis in original) in his own equivocal analysis of the broader implications of fandom for how we understand the transnational flow and consumption of media. Observing that 'these Japanese fans seem less concerned with transforming their lives by actually leaving Japan or encountering cultural others in the form of non-Japanese men in real situations' (2002b: 565), he nonetheless notes that women's fandom of Hong Kong stars has 'encouraged some of these women to become more critically aware of Japan's experience of modernity and its imperialist history. A self-reflexive praxis thus marks fans' appreciation of Hong Kong's distinctive cultural modernity' (2002b: 565). In the end, however, constrained by the very framework of resistance through which he seeks to understand this phenomenon, Iwabuchi concludes that 'even if the nostalgic gaze on Hong Kong is replaced and fans see that 'they' are just as modern as 'us,' just in a different way, it still cannot be denied that fans are reducing Hong Kong to a convenient and desirable Asian other in the process' (2002b: 567).

We raise Iwabuchi's work on the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong stars for two reasons: first, it is representative of issues of the conceptualisation of women's popular culture consumption that continue to haunt fandom studies, notwithstanding recent work on the pivotal role of affect in the cultivation and pursuit of fannish activity. As argued by Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen (2012: 228) in their recent book, *Fandom at the Crossroads*, there is a persistent absence of emotion in fan theory. They observe that, as both scholars and fans, we are hardly immune to the pleasures of the fan object, and yet there remains a level of shame attached to the notion of being a fan, particularly if one is

female, that we must contend with in our scholarship.

In the East Asian context, the strength of this shame is such that Chin, declaring her intentions to explore East Asian fandom to Asian academic peers, has been met with trepidation and numerous declarations that fandom is little more than the realm of 'Japanese otakus' and 'Western fangirls,' and thus, by extension, emotional and uncontrollable. Furthermore, this also implies that consideration of East Asian fan phenomena from a fan cultural perspective sullies the seriousness of East Asian critical cultural studies, depoliticising it to an unacceptable degree. Thus, this shame extends to aca-fannish subjectivity, compelling us to apologise for attempting to engage intellectually with a subject matter that is seen to be trivial and frivolous: '[We] theorise and politicise our pleasures in order to make them more palatable to a cultural elite that does not need any more encouragement to dismiss what we study as frivolous and meaningless. The very act of justification is of course an indication that we are uncomfortable with the position' (Zubernis and Larsen, 2012: 46).

Second, Iwabuchi's analysis of this fandom, as part of his broader research of pan-East Asian media circulation and consumption, has been enormously influential in the context of both East Asian transnational and global media studies, thus warranting close attention. One example of this is found in Sun Jung's work on what she terms the pan-East Asian 'soft masculinity' (2011: 35) of South Korean stars of the *Hanryū* (Korean wave) phenomenon in Japan and East Asia. Identifying its origins in the Japanese *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) aesthetic that circulated in South Korea through manga and anime, she argues that its 'transformability or fluidity and its feminine appeal to consumers' (2010: 8.1) is at the heart of its regional (and, increasingly, global) reach. The transcultural appeal of 'soft masculinity' identified by Jung seems a particularly fruitful avenue for the further examination of global female fandoms of such 'soft' male stars as Bollywood's Shahrukh Khan or Hollywood icon Leonardo DiCaprio, in addition to South Korea's Bae Yong Joon or Hong Kong's Leslie Cheung. Yet, Jung forgoes such considerations in favour of an argument based on Iwabuchi's critique of the cultural 'odourlessness' (2010: 8.2) of products circulated transnationally by media conglomerates and governments seeking to capitalise on their 'soft power'. Similarly, her analysis of Bae's popularity in the Japanese context is equally indebted to Iwabuchi's critique of Japanese fans' nostalgic desire for Hong Kong (stars), through which she argues that, in the same way, 'BYJ's polite body exemplifies the nostalgia of the fans where counter-coevality is evident' (2011: 64).

Indeed, this socio-political perspective characterises much of the existing English language scholarship of inter-East Asian fandoms. Writing on the rise of the Korean Wave of the late 90s in Japan and other parts of East Asia, Kaori Hayashi and Eun-Jeung Lee examine how its popularity was politicised in the discursive struggle to rationalise the popularity of South Korean popular culture (represented in Hayashi and Lee's essay by the Korean drama, *Winter Sonata*) against a backdrop of historical antagonisms between Japan and South Korea. This is a much-needed discussion, particularly insofar as it begins to isolate the many strands of discourse (political, societal, individual, etc.) and consider each within its own

contexts. Yet, despite the authors' recognition that there is a 'messy and confusing social world of actual audiences' (Ien Ang, quoted in Hayashi and Lee, 1991, 6-7), the socio-political framework of this discussion precludes their consideration of the *pleasure* fans derive from watching *Winter Sonata*. In so doing, the authors miss a critical opportunity to examine the complex intersection of affective investment and national subjectivity, in favour of a discussion that never quite exceeds discussion of the political agendas of Korean-Japanese relations as they play out in subjective media fandom.

Cumulatively, such scholarship reinforces the fundamentally trans/national and socio-political orientation of academic research of transcultural fandoms. While arguably satisfying at the level of critique, and absolutely relevant in our understanding of the political implications of transnationally circulating media, the trans/national overdetermination of this perspective ultimately tells us little about what actually attracts and motivates fans; an understanding that, we argue, is absolutely critical to any nuanced discussion of how fandom works across borders. Indeed, as evinced in the ambivalence of Iwabuchi's critique of Japanese fans of Hong Kong stars, as well as in Hayashi and Lee's observation that 'on discussion boards and homepages, the walls between nationalities - all nationalities - vanish' (2007: 210), neat socio-political critique of trans/national fandom is fundamentally haunted by the 'messy' world of affect.

Towards a (Working) Theory of Transcultural Fandom

In his recent (2010: 89) critique of the state of transnational fandom studies, Iwabuchi argues that 'what is at stake is not the degradation or romanticisation of fans, but a disregard for the complicated processes of people's media culture consumption'. Addressing the very real sociopolitical issues that undergird state and corporate deployment of 'soft power' to advance their own interests both domestically and abroad, he stresses the need for a research agenda that takes seriously fans' and scholars' overt and covert collusion in this dynamic, observing that 'as we are now entering the age when states are getting deeply involved in the neoliberal circulation of media and popular culture by collaborating with media culture industries, nothing will be politically neutral' (92). Yet, in making this claim, Iwabuchi continues to replicate the very dichotomy of good/bad that has plagued fandom studies for decades, contrasting 'good' scholarship of the sociopolitical implications of fandom with 'bad' scholarship of its affective meanings and pleasures for fans.

Iwabuchi's argument is based in part on his understanding and rejection of what Henry Jenkins has termed 'pop cosmopolitanism': namely, the ability of cross-border fan activity to engender and advance cross-cultural awareness and understanding (2004: 124-130). Yet, Jenkins himself, along with the mainstream of fandom scholars, has moved away from this early attempt to theorise transcultural media flows in favour of looking at how collaborations between the media industry, specifically producers, and fans have complexified the relationships between them, leading away from Jenkins's initial concept of fans as 'poachers' to fans as activists.⁶ For instance, Jenkins and Shresthova (2012) have

remarked how social organisations such as the Harry Potter Alliance and Racebending mobilise young people – fans – by deploying the same strategies fans use in letter-writing and ‘Save the Show’ campaigns, thus ‘inspiring their supporters to move from engagement within participatory culture to involvement in political life’ (2012: n.p.).

This goes beyond merely acknowledging that fans are active producers who collaboratively produce transformative works, be they fan fiction, fan videos, or providing subtitling or translation services to foreign texts. Fans are mobilised as active participants in social and political movements because they are united by a common factor: their (consumption of) popular culture. At the same time, they equally ‘have become part-time collaborators with official producers seeking to incite and retain dedicated fan audiences, and part-time co-opted word-of-mouth marketers for beloved brands’ (Hills, 2010: 58), resulting in the ‘curious co-existence within fan cultures of both anti-commercial ideologies and commodity-completist practices’ (Hills, 2002: 28) that has come to characterise contemporary fan cultures. An insistence on seeing these seemingly contradictory tendencies not as two sides of the same (fannish) coin, but as two separate coins altogether, effectively pitches us into the ‘moral dualism’ (Hills, 2002: 8) of ‘resistance’ discourse, within which fans and fan activities are divided into good/bad practices.

The call for the greater contextualisation of studies of transnationally circulating media, in which researchers are exhorted to be more closely attuned to the socio-historical and political economic backdrop of popular culture consumption and consumerism, is a valuable contribution to our attempts to grasp the complexity of such media flows and fandoms. Yet, we would argue that any consideration of the ways in which the contradictory, chaotic forces of globalisation play out in fandom should proceed not only from such contexts, but equally from our informed understanding of fan behaviours, motivations, and processes of meaning-making as driven by affective pleasures and investments. As Aswin Punathambekar observes of Indian film culture, ‘fan communities that cohere around various aspects of Indian cinema...tell us that we need to think beyond the ‘national’ as the most important scale of imagination and identity construction’ (2007: 209). Thus, in appropriating Iwabuchi’s call for more contextualised and sophisticated research of transcultural fans, we would expand the contexts in play to encompass all those that inform, define, and produce its fan subjectivities. Rather than shying away from fan knowledges and taxonomies, we embrace them, not as uncritical reproduction, but as an essential means of comprehending their complexity and implications for the ways we understand both the transnational circulation and consumption of media, as well as fans’ multivalent relationship to it.

Specifically, allowing for idiosyncratic differences among individual fandoms, we contend that transcultural fandoms have their genesis in affinities of industrial and/or semiotic practice between two or more popular cultural contexts. In studies of transcultural media, ‘affinity’ typically has been understood in terms of geographical proximities that, as Joseph Straubhaar argues, foster ‘distinct regional cultural patterns’ (1991: 55). Yet, it is in Straubhaar’s own (elided) acknowledgement of the increasingly dispersed flow of

transnational media outside of regional zones that the limitations of this perspective are discerned, begging the question of how we might account for such phenomena.

One possibility is Matt Hills's notion of 'transcultural homology,' which builds on Paul Willis's (1978) theory of cultural homology as means of discussing 'the symbolic fit between the values and lifestyles of a group' (Hebdige 1979: 113). Hills uses the idea of this symbolic fit to analyse the border-crossing cultural affinities of self-identified Western and Japanese *otaku* who share, among other things, a common devaluation as fans within their own popular cultural contexts that both operates through and exceeds the intentions of media industries and nation-states (2002: 13). He suggests that homological structures may interpellate fans across cultures in ways that both operate through and exceed the intentions of media industries, arguing that fans' embrace of an *otaku* identity is an acknowledgment that the term is 'hegemonically devalued both in Japan and the 'West.' The Japanese fan is therefore linked to the non-Japanese fan: fan identity is prioritised over national identity' (2002: 12). Which is to say, within the *otaku* identity, devalued like meets like and a common – albeit somewhat differently realised – subjectivity is born, foregrounding the possibility that a fannish orientation may (at times) supersede national, regional and/or geographical boundaries.

Writ large, this concept frees fandom from the constraints of national belonging, reinforcing our contention that fans become fans of border-crossing texts or objects not necessarily because of *where* they are produced, but because they may recognise a subjective moment of affinity regardless of origin. This is not to say that the nation is unimportant, but rather that it is but one of a constellation of possible points of affinity upon which transcultural fandom may be predicated. Nation-based differences or similarities may well appeal to people across borders; but so, too, might affective investments in characters, stories, and even fan subjectivities that exceed any national orientation.

Locating Transcultural Fandom

What, then, does such a fandom look like? How might we deploy a theory of transcultural homology in the study of transcultural fan phenomena? In what follows, we look at several phenomena that, we believe, suggest the broad applicability of Hills's notion of transcultural homology to the study of transcultural fandoms. The first offers a close textual analysis of a Japanese fan text centring on Hong Kong star Leslie Cheung,⁷ in which Cheung's seeming 'Japanisation' within fan-produced art and fiction overlays a deceptively nuanced juxtaposition of his film roles and star persona with the artist/author's own (Japanese) popular cultural context. The second gives a brief overview of ways in which transnational film culture and local reading practices combine to produce a *yaoi*⁸ iteration of *Harry Potter* fanwork that is at once 'Japanese' and, increasingly, transcultural. Through these and other brief examples, we hope to demonstrate some of the ways in which attention to the fan cultural contexts of transcultural media circulation and consumption gives us a fuller

understanding of both how and why media texts are adopted and assimilated across cultures.

The 2002 Japanese *yaoi* fan fiction, ‘Yaemugura’, was featured in a fan-produced *dōjinshi* [fanzine] centred on Hong Kong star Leslie Cheung, who enjoyed particular popularity among a subsection of Japanese female fans from the late 1980s through his death in 2003. The story is loosely adapted from the mainstream manga *Onmyōji*, based on the adventures of a 10th Century diviner and exorcist, Abe no Seimei. In it, Cheung was ‘cast’ in the role of a Heian Period (794-1192) Japanese courtier-cum-demon, his character, Sakurabe no Kokuei, pictured in the frontispiece to the story in Heian robes, peeking slyly from under a cloak, his lips drawn full and characteristically ‘pouty’ (*Oh! My God*, 2002: 27). On the surface, this drawing resembles nothing so much as a kind of empty auto-exoticism, on par with photo shoots of kimono-clad non-Japanese stars for the pages of popular movie magazines *Roadshow* and *Screen*⁹ and paradoxically intended to foreground difference under the pretext of making ‘them’ more like ‘us’ in an explicitly (and overdetermined) national sense.



Cheung, as Sakurabe no Kokuei in the fan-produced *dōjinshi*.



Leslie Cheung as Cheng Dieyi in *Farewell, My Concubine*.

Yet here author/artist Azuri Amane translates Cheung not to a ‘Japanese’ cultural context, but specifically to a Japanese *fan* cultural context. *Onmyōji*, the manga series from which ‘Yaemugura’ derives, is itself a representative *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) text; as Laura Miller observes of the title character, Seimei (who features prominently in ‘Yaemugura’),

In medieval folktales, statues, and paintings, Seimei is presented as a grave middle-aged man exemplary of Heian-era masculinity. He has a chubby face, thin eyes, and a pale complexion. But in the Heisei era (1989-), Seimei has

been re-imagined as a *bishōnen*, a beautiful young man with huge eyes, flowing locks, and a sculpted face. One cultural change this indicates is the importance of what we might term the ‘girl gaze’ in popular consumption. (2008: 31)

No random characterisation, the depiction of Cheung as classical male siren drew from film performances that foregrounded what popular kabuki *onnagata* (female impersonator) Bandō Tamasaburō described, in a Japanese-produced volume about Cheung, as the star’s ‘delicate presence’ (*Resurī*, 1999: 119). Specifically, accompanying art for the story suggests that the character is inspired by Cheung’s portrayal of the androgynously sensual Cheng Dieyi in Chen Kaige’s 1994 *Farewell, My Concubine*; yet, in a playful twist, the text of the story itself equally evokes the female ghost of *Rouge* (Stanley Kwan, 1988), positioning Cheung in the role of the betrayed Fleur (Anita Mui), who has preceded Cheung’s own aged 12th Young Master in death. Yet, where the eternally young, ghostly Fleur turns sadly away from the decrepit Young Master, ‘Yaemugura’ finds a way for its star-crossed lovers to achieve reunion:

The bamboo blind rose. Behind it sat an old man, his body supported by a young girl. ‘Kokuei...’ the old man murmured, holding out his hand. The hand trembled in the air.

‘Tsu-Tsurutoku!’ the demon cried out in a low voice.

‘Ah, there’s no mistaking your voice! Meeting like this again – even though my eyes no longer see – even though my body no longer moves – I’ve never, ever forgotten you...wonderful!’ The old man’s unseeing eyes were awash in tears.

‘You...came...back.’

‘I wanted to see you, so much. I sailed back on a fast ship one year, but it was shipwrecked and I was set adrift on the sun-soaked seas.’

‘Oh, Tsurutoku! Why didn’t you return here?’ The demon’s body trembled violently.

‘For a long time, Lord Tsururoku was without memory,’ explained Seimei.

The old man turned his face in the direction of the demon’s voice. ‘Kokuei... when I remembered you, I was no longer young. Even so, I went to the capital in hopes of seeing you. But I caught wind of a rumor that you had died.’

‘Ahhh...’

‘I, I never forgot you, even to the point that I could not die. If I had died, who would have been left to remember you? Your lovely face...your beautiful body...the beloved person you were...who would remember? So I have lived, until I’ve grown ugly, I’ve lived, always, always remembering you, Kokuei!’

‘Ahh...Tsurutoku...’

Timidly, the demon’s hand reached out in the empty space and grasped that of the old man. In that moment, a cold, blue fire enveloped them both. Inside the

brightly burning blue fire, the demon's body returned to the beautiful form of Kokuei. The old man's body transformed to that of a faithful young man. From within the gentle strum of the *biwa* and the brightly burning fire, the two young, beautiful men held tight to one another as their bodies ascended to the heavens. (Amane, 2002: 25)

Star-centred fan fiction, like that of character-based stories, is pleasurable in part for the inherent challenge of writing true-to-persona while simultaneously imagining scenarios that fall outside a star's usual habitus. In this case, Amane's familiarity with Cheung's onscreen personae – his sensuality and androgyny, in particular – afforded her the discursive materials through which to read him against a backdrop of popular film, manga, and *dōjinshi* re-imaginings of Japanese historical homoeroticism (Miller, 2008: 33-43), recognising in the one a homological affinity with the other. Thus understood from the perspective of popular, contemporary representations of classical Japanese culture informed by a specific 'girl gaze,' 'Yaemugura' constitutes an articulation of Japanese and Chinese popular cultures in which the nation is ancillary to the pleasures of the fan cultural.

Japanese *dōjinshi* set within the *Harry Potter* universe similarly reveal an orientation that is neither Anglophilic, per se, nor homoerotic in the 'traditional' Japanese sense, but rather grounded in Japanese iterations of transnationally circulating narratives of European boarding school culture. Initial research of English and Japanese language fan works (fan fiction and *dōjinshi*) based on *Harry Potter* suggests that while there are notable points of affinity between them, there remain critical differences that cannot be accounted for within a simple 'national' calculus. In contrast with English language slash fan fiction, in which the two most popular *Harry Potter* pairings have been Harry/Draco (230k+ stories on fanfiction.net; 4k+ stories on AO3) and Harry/Snape (200k+ stories on fanfiction.net; 2.5k+ stories on AO3), and in which stories are broadly split between Hogwarts-era and post-Hogwarts timelines, a small sampling of thirty *Harry Potter dōjinshi* suggests that the vast majority of stories take place within a Hogwarts-era context. Here, however, 'Hogwarts-era' refers both to the timeline of J. K. Rowling's books, as well as to the earlier, alluded-to timeline of Snape and the Marauders (James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, and Peter Pettigrew) over twenty years prior to the events of the books. Notably, the James/Snape pairing, which is all but non-existent in the English language fan fiction context, enjoys particular popularity among Japanese fans (Noppe, 2010: 119-121), thus begging the question of why such differences exist between seemingly congruent fandoms?

In its most homoerotic iteration, *Harry Potter* reflects nothing so much as the fantasies – and nightmares – of British public school pederasty and fagging, and this plays out both in English language fan fiction and in *yaoi dōjinshi* through stories of non-consensual and forbidden sex that draw on the characters' complex canonical backstories. Secret relationships, cruel pranks designed to cut to the emotional quick, and fleeting moments of empathy and understanding between ostensible enemies form the broad backdrop of such stories, which seem to draw as much from the schoolyard Anglophilia of

such films as *Another Country* (Marek Kaniévski, 1984) and *Maurice* (James Ivory, 1987) as the *Harry Potter* series itself. At the same time, Hogwarts-era *Harry Potter dōjinshi*, as Sharalyn Orbaugh writes, equally exhibit many of the tropes of *yaoi* manga (2012: 179-180), and it is here that we can locate at least one critical difference between English language slash fan fiction and Japanese *yaoi dōjinshi* within the broader context of *Harry Potter* fandom. Specifically, while both *Harry Potter* fan fiction and *dōjinshi* share a common familiarity with the above-mentioned tropes of boarding school sexual liaisons, in the Japanese context these specifically derive from certain seminal works of early commercial *yaoi* manga.

One such example is Moto Hagio's 1974-5 serialised manga, *Tōma no shinjō* (Thomas's heart), set in a German boy's boarding school and centring on the *Sturm und Drang* of (male) adolescent romance, which itself was penned after Hagio saw Jean Delannoy's 1964 French boarding school romance, *Les Amités particulières* (Thorn, 2007: n.p.). Here, the European boy's boarding school is the ideal setting for a story that is, first and foremost, focussed on the kinds of 'boy's love' relationships that were just beginning to gain traction within the commercial manga market at the time that *Tōma no shinjō* was being published. In the same way, *Harry Potter dōjinshi* use Hogwarts as the backdrop for stories that have played out between teenaged boys in the Japanese popular cultural context through countless commercial and amateur manga that draw from such early works. *Harry Potter's* preponderance of pivotal male characters, and particularly their wide-ranging interpersonal melodrama, aligns the story so closely with pre-existing manga narratives of homoerotic adolescent angst that amateur artists frequently slip into 'Japanese' versions of Hogwarts, complete with attractive, 'emo' Snape (a frequent feature of Marauder-era *dōjinshi*) and Japanese Pocky snacks (KCP, 2011: 26). In this sense, what we find in *Harry Potter yaoi dōjinshi* is less an Anglophilic fetishisation of public school tropes than a *mélange* of texts ranging from the European art cinematic to the Japanese feminine popular cultural that, together, form the backdrop against which the *Harry Potter* novels resonate with Japanese fans engaged in transformative fan practices.

In the above-mentioned examples of transcultural fandom, fans understand and deploy the objects or texts of another culture through the means they have at their disposal within their own popular cultural contexts. Yet, as media - and, increasingly, fan - texts become implicated in intensifying patterns of distribution and dissemination through both mainstream channels and Internet-based forums such as deviantART and Pixiv, on which fan art features prominently, we find that these 'native' fan cultural contexts are becoming increasingly global in scope. It is no coincidence that Japanese terminology (i.e. *seme/uke*, referring to specific iterations of top/bottom sexual positions, or 'lemon,' deriving originally from the 1980s adult anime series *Cream Lemon* and used in reference to sexually explicit fan fiction) is used in the English language fan fiction by young authors whose own popular cultural contexts have been significantly impacted by the plethora of English-language translations - and Internet-based fan scanlations - of Japanese *yaoi* manga over the past

decade. Which is to say, what goes around comes around, and in ever-tightening circles of influence within an increasingly convergent transcultural context.

Similarly, shorter lag time between domestic and international distribution of popular cultural texts, as well as relatively easy access to overseas fan culture afforded by the Internet translates in some cases to transcultural fandoms that are predicated on the same kinds of homological affinities that exist between fan cultures within a homologous national/linguistic context. As Paul Booth argues, '[fans] use digital technology not only to create, to change, to appropriate, to poach, or to write, but also to share [across national borders], to experience together, to become alive with community' (2010: 39). In the fan art of self-described Mainland Chinese fan Zjackt, she discerns specific points of affinity between the slash pairings of Harry/Snape and John Watson/Sherlock Holmes ('Johnlock') of the BBC's *Sherlock* series; specifically, Harry/John's acts of bravery on behalf of Snape/Sherlock (Harry's spirited defence of Snape in his final confrontation with Voldemort and John's shooting of the taxi driver who threatens Sherlock's life), and Snape/Sherlock's protection of Harry/John from the machinations of evildoers (Zjackt, 2012: n.p.). This is an affinity that, speaking anecdotally (and, in Hitchcock Morimoto's case, wholly subjectively), seems both obvious and unequivocal, and which 'works' for fans whose affective investment in fictional pairings runs to the romanticisation or sexualisation of the tension between the intuitive and the intellectual, the open and the repressed (cf. Kirk/Spock, Mulder/Scully, etc.). Put differently, through her fan art, exhibited on her personal, China-based website, on Japan-based Pixiv.net, and on Tumblr, Zjackt becomes part of a fan discourse with nearly global reach almost independent of her Chinese popular cultural context; one that is 'transcultural' more for the ways it spans specific fandoms through a given point of homological affinity than for its non-Western habitus.

Conclusion

We began this essay by suggesting that there is a far-reaching approach to fan cultural research that only inadequately offers us a way of conducting English-language research of border-crossing fandoms, particular at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult to map out clearly national and/or regional boundaries within the digital world that many fans seem to inhabit; a world that facilitates both fan activity and the dissemination of popular texts across borders. We chose to focus on East Asia-centred transcultural fandoms in part because of our own affinities with it, and in part because it informs our own aca-fannish familiarity with the ways in which such fans are portrayed within English-language scholarly work of East Asian transcultural fandoms.

In advocating for an alternative framework within which to better understand how and why fandoms cross borders, we first emphasised the better suitability of the term 'transcultural' over 'transnational' when talking about border-crossing fandoms, arguing that the genesis of transcultural fandom lies in the affinities of industry and/or semiotic practice between two or more popular cultural contexts. In other words, fans become fans not (necessarily) because of any cultural or national differences or similarities, but because

of a moment of affinity between the fan and transcultural object. Further, we employed Matt Hills's theory of 'transcultural homology' to begin exploring this concept of transcultural fandom, given that, as the field currently stands, neither Iwabuchi's nor Jenkins, et. al.'s initial approaches to cross-border fandoms satisfactorily enable us to engage with transcultural fandom without falling into the trappings of transnational media theories that allow us to comprehend only one narrow aspect of transcultural fandom at the expense of the more salient popular cultural contexts that inform it.

Our own transcultural backgrounds have attuned us to the present inability of fandom scholarship to produce a thriving fan cultural theory that consistently complexifies fan identity, as well as effectively engages emerging popular cultural content that is becoming more easily accessible via digital modes of dissemination. Franchised brands and popular cultural genres like *Harry Potter* and anime today have global reach, and texts flow between cultures as they are exchanged by fans in various creative formats, sanctioned or otherwise. Within this popular cultural context, we need a more effective means of accounting for social and cultural differences in fan practices across borders both geographical and cultural. We believe that Hills's notion of transcultural homology better attunes us to the ways in which fans themselves both discern and create meaning from globally circulating fan texts and objects.

Moreover, this concept brings non-Western consumption of such popular cultural texts such as *Harry Potter*, superhero comics, or BBC's *Sherlock*, as well as Western and regional consumption of such East Asian popular cultural texts as anime, Hong Kong cinema or K-pop, into closer conversation with ongoing English-language scholarship of media fandom. Enabling a dialogue between the fan cultural theory we are familiar with and transcultural fandom reminds us that these non-English (often non-Western) fandoms are not peripheral to 'mainstream' fan culture. Rather they are part of the transcultural interplay of fandom as much as any other, separated only by barriers of language, distribution and availability that have become eminently surmountable as fandoms have migrated online.

Biographical notes:

Bertha Chin is an independent scholar who teaches part time at London Metropolitan University, UK. She graduated from Cardiff University with a PhD exploring the notion of community boundaries and construction of the fan celebrity in cult and scifi television fandom. Her research interests also include fan marketing, transcultural fandom and East Asian cinema. Her works appear in the *Journal of Science Fiction Film and Television*, *Social Semiotics and Intensities*, with forthcoming pieces in *M/C Journal* and *Celebrity Studies*. Contact: bertha.chin@gmail.com.

Lori Hitchcock Morimoto received her PhD from the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University, and she currently teaches film studies at Northern Virginia Community College. Her dissertation, entitled "Some of Us Are Looking at the Stars:

Japanese Women, Hong Kong Film, and Transcultural Fandom,” examines the social, popular cultural, and historical contexts of the Japanese female fandom of Hong Kong cinema and stars in the 1980s and 1990s. She has also published essays on East Asian transnational co-productions and multiculturalism in Japanese cinema in *Scope and Asian Cinema*, and she is presently conducting research on the Japanese reception and fandom of BBC's *Sherlock*. Contact: lmorimoto@nvcc.edu.

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Notes:

¹ See, for example, Susan Napier (2001), 'Anime: From Akira to Princess Mononoke'; Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (2008), 'East Asian cinemas: Exploring transnational connections on film'; Tejaswini Ganti (2012) 'Producing Bollywood: Inside the contemporary Hindi film industry'.

² See, for example, FlowTV's special issue on 'Revisiting Aca-Fandom' (2010); Ian Bogost (2010), 'Against Aca-Fandom'; Louisa Stein (2011), 'On (Not) Hosting the Session that Killed the Term 'Acafan'' and a discussion among a group of scholars on 'Acafandom and Beyond' (2011) hosted by Henry Jenkins on his 'Confessions of an Acafan' blog.

³ Having said that, we want to reiterate we are not suggesting that transcultural fandom across its various cross-regional encounters is either necessarily similar or homogeneous. Rather, we are proposing that it derives from a common moment of affinity between the cultural text/product and the fan, one that is more likely affixed to affective pleasures than transnational or regional contexts. For instance, the rise of the popularity of Korean pop music (K-Pop) in the UK and Europe, has been attributed to its ‘fun music, with a fusion of many genres’ (n. pag) distributed by the global reach of YouTube, according to Mukasa (2011) in an article for the *Guardian* newspaper, suggesting that it is pleasure and affect that attract fans across the world to a phenomenon like K-Pop.

⁴ East Asian names are traditionally given in the order of surname, given name (e.g. Iwabuchi Koichi) but for ease of understanding in English-language works, many names are Anglicised, and therefore written as given name, surname. For Japanese names, macrons are used except in the case where a non-macron precedent exists.

⁵ In the recent edited volume, *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* (2012), Mizuko Ito draws heavily on Iwabuchi’s work on transnational East Asian fandoms in establishing the object(s) and parameters of discussion featured in the book (‘Introduction,’ 2012: xi-xxxi). See also, Yiman Wang (2007), ‘A Star is Dead: A Legend is Born: Practising Leslie Cheung’s Posthumous Fandom’; Eva Tsai (2007), ‘Caught in the terrains: an inter-referential inquiry of trans-border stardom and fandom’; Keehyung Lee (2008), ‘Mapping out the cultural politics of ‘the Korean Wave’ in contemporary South Korea’; Rowan Pease (2008), ‘Korean pop music in China: Nationalism, authenticity, and gender’; Youna Kim (2008), *Media consumption and everyday life in Asia*; Colette Balmain (2009), *Introduction to Japanese horror film*; Sun Jung (2011), *Korean masculinities and transcultural consumption*.

⁶ See, for example, Matt Hills (2002), *Fan Cultures*; Christine Scodari (2003), ‘Resistance re-examined’; Henry Jenkins (2006), *Convergence Culture*; Derek Johnson (2007), ‘Fan-tagonism: Factions, institutions, and constitutive hegemonies of fandom’; Chin (2013), ‘The fan-media producer collaboration: How fan relationships are managed in a post-series X-Files fandom’, as well as an entire special issue dedicated to the theme of ‘fan activism’ in the journal *Transformative Works and Culture*.

⁷ Leslie Cheung Kwok-wing began his career as an entertainer when he placed second in the 1977 Asian Music Contest. His subsequent work in music, television, and film catapulted him to regional stardom, and by the 1990s he was a fixture within Hong Kong cinema, starring in works by such filmmakers as John Woo, Wong Kar-wai, and Peter Chan. Cheung committed suicide on April 1, 2003 after a long struggle with depression.

⁸ Yaoi is an acronym of the phrase ‘*Yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi*’ (no buildup, no climax, no meaning), signifying works by both professional and amateur female manga artists and writers that centre on male/male romantic and sexual relationships.

⁹ *Entertainment Weekly* in the US, and *Empire* in the UK would be a general equivalent to these magazines.