ERIA Discussion Paper Series

No. 299

# Exporting 'Content' in the Face of Indifference

Markus NORNES[#§]
*University of Michigan, United States*

September 2019

**Abstract:** *Attempts by Japanese producers to 'crack' the North American entertainment market date back to the 1910s, and were driven by both profit motive and ideological desires to have one's own cinema recognised by the hegemonic other. This paper considers the historical difficulties of exporting Japanese films to the most desirable markets in the West. In this context, it examines recent Chinese attempts to enter American cinema production and distribution, and contemplates the implications of the failure of these efforts for the regional export of Japanese films.*

**Keywords:** cinema, China, Japan, film festivals, export, co-production

[#]Markus Nornes: Department of Asian Languages and Cultures, Department of Film, Television and Media Studies, University of Michigan, 6330 North Quad, 105 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285, USA; phone 734-764-0147; fax: 734-936-1846; nornes@umich.edu.
[§]This research was conducted as a part of a project of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). The author is deeply indebted to Nakajima Seio of Waseda University for the support of this and other research projects and collaboration opportunities. Portions of this research were accomplished with the general support of the Waseda Institute for Advanced Study and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. An earlier version appeared in the *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema.* The opinions expressed in this paper are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not reflect the views of ERIA.

# 1. Introduction

The export of Japanese films to the world has been a vexing problem for Japanese filmmakers since the 1910s. When World War I wiped out Europe's great film industries, American cinema, backed by the Department of Commerce of the Government of the United States (US), stepped in to fill the void and dominated the theatres of the continent. Backed by America's growing economic might and large population, this young film industry – newly installed in Hollywood – was able to hegemonise both screens and minds, first across Europe and then around the globe. This essay takes a historical approach to the problem of 'exporting content' to consider two of the main stumbling blocks on a given film's path from production to projection: (i) the unequal terrain of the international film festival circuit, and (ii) Europe's basic indifference to non-Western cinema outside the narrow art house scene.

The 'discovery' of Japanese cinema is a hallowed story in film history. A programmer for the Venice International Film Festival saw *Rashomon* (1950), was stunned, selected it against the wishes of studio head Nagata Masaichi, and screened it unbeknownst to the director. The film won the Golden Lion, and suddenly every festival wanted a Japanese film in its lineup. This initiated a steady exploration of the riches on offer from Japanese cinema, a movement that is ongoing. Although film scholars would like to take credit for much of this work, the credit must first go to programmers like the one from Venice. As an alternative distribution network devoted to enriching film culture that is relatively sheltered from market pressures, film festivals have been the main interface between Japanese cinema and its world audience.[1]

In fact, the Japanese had been yearning for foreign distribution since the mid-1910s, when an elite coterie of film critics noticed fundamental differences in aesthetics, narrative, and technique between foreign and domestic films. These critics were appalled by their domestic product, and loosely banded together to agitate for change, taking the name the Pure Film Movement (*Jun Eigageki Undo*). As intellectuals coming of age in Meiji, they immediately positioned Hollywood as the

[1]A number of people have written about the festival as an alternative distribution route, most notably Turan (2002), Elsaesser (2005), and Stringer (2006).

avant-garde, relegating local films to – as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it – the 'waiting room of history.' Today, when we look at the local differences between *kyugeki* and *shinpa*, we see choices being made outside the logic of Enlightenment thinking and the developing codes of 'continuity style' cinema. Yet, the Pure Film Movement intellectuals called for the purging of the *oyama* and *benshi*, arguing that filmmakers should shoot off of scenarios and adopt cinematic techniques that would make it possible for films to tell stories without the crutch of the *benshi.* In his brilliant book *Visions of Modernity,* Aaron Gerow points out that these efforts were buttressed by a deep desire for recognition by the other – the other in this case being Hollywood. Japanese cinema would only be cinematic – would only be cinema – when it was recognised as such by distribution in the West. To this end, Japanese film magazines even included English-language tables of contents.

Needless to say, these efforts were for naught. Japanese films circulated in immigrant communities, but rarely beyond and into the mainstream. However, the desire for recognition by the foreign other (especially Hollywood) continues to the present, and has been rearticulated depending on the historical moment. During the war, these anxieties led to the flipping of the equation; inter-Asian distribution that put Japan's colonies and newly captured territories in the waiting room of Japanese-led history was the order of the day. However, this may be seen as another form of continuity. One is reminded of Ozu's impression of Walt Disney's *Fantasia* after seeing a captured print in Singapore: 'Watching *Fantasia* made me suspect that we were going to lose the war. These guys look like trouble, I thought' (Bordwell, 1988: 8).

After the war, the desire for foreign distribution surged back with Kurosawa's surprise win at the Venice Film Festival. Japanese film studios began making prestige pictures explicitly designed to appeal to foreign taste. While it unclear how much actual foreign revenue these successes led to, there is no question that the stamp of approval by Cannes, Venice, and other festivals boosted a film's domestic distribution. Selection by major festivals came to build careers and shape the canon, a dynamic that remains to the present day.

However, the film festival landscape is radically uneven terrain. On the face of it, film festivals involve a simple local–global interchange; however, they

occasionally operate in something akin to a regional feedback loop, which can be remarkably productive. This essay explores this dynamic to think about the situation today, in which the film industry in China is swiftly reaching an industrial scale that rivals that of American cinema. This development has profound implications for Japan due to its geographic proximity to this growing giant of world cinema.

We begin with a deceptively simple question: Which festivals *matter*?

This inspires several follow-up questions: what constitutes a so-called A-festival? What qualities prevent an aspiring B, C, or Z festival from rising up the ranks? Perhaps someone, somewhere is maintaining a neatly ordered list, but in any case there is something so automatic about it all.[2] Sites like Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Sundance, and Toronto are naturally the most important venues, as are Amsterdam, Nyon, Margaret Mead, and the venerable Flaherty for documentaries. These are the toughest festivals to enter, and feature the most premières. Their competitions are where careers are made, and their markets are where deals are made. *Of course*, they are the most important festivals in the world. The ones that *matter*.

At the same time, from a certain perspective on that same world, there is something glaringly obvious about the geography of that list. Does this mean that festivals in other parts of the world do not matter as much, or in the same way? As someone who frequents Asian film festivals (and has even worked on one, called Yamagata), I have always been struck by the indifference to – not to mention ignorance of – Asian venues amongst European and North American filmmakers and critics (programmers are another matter altogether, as it is their job to know more than anyone about what is going on in the film world). Even amid the cosmopolitan glitter of the international film festival, these citizens of the film world can, from a certain perspective, appear quite provincial.

[2] For the purposes of this essay, I am referring to the more informal sense that most people invoke when they call an event an 'A-festival.' Actually, there is a formal list: Berlin, Mar del Plata, Locarno, Karlovy Vary, Cannes, Shanghai, Moscow, Tokyo, Cairo, San Sebastian, Montreal, and Venice. It is administered by an organisation called the International Federation of Film Producers Association. Joining this select list requires 14 world premières per festival and a bankroll to pay for the hefty accreditation fee. Since the world premières need not be difficult-to-acquire 'A' films, this means the accreditation is essentially for sale. This explains why festivals like Cairo and Tokyo are listed as 'A', but not Rotterdam, Sundance, or Toronto. For a short but splendid critique of the A-festival system, see Cousins (2009).

This should hardly be surprising, because the international film festival world is embedded in geopolitical structures and epistemologies that grant Europe the status of subject. It is true that, at one very material level, this is about money. Prestige in this arena is deeply linked to a festival's market. However, the marketplaces in regions like Asia are woefully undeveloped and typically hobbled by governmental restrictions, in contrast to the private and public subsidies that many European film cultures enjoy. At the same time, decades of critique from orthodox Marxism teaches us that the order and make-up of that A-list cannot be adequately accounted for by the market alone. In fact, we must look to Enlightenment thought itself, with its 'first Europe, then elsewhere' structuring that discounts the relevance of non-Western film cultures – not non-Western 'festival films,' which are highly valued, but rather popular cinema, star systems, local criticism, and film theories, not to mention exhibition sites like festivals.

This is related to the fundamental dynamic underlying the historiographic problem that film studies enduringly exhibits, a problematic we might reframe as 'first Hollywood, then elsewhere.' However, in a discussion of the international film festival circuit, we cannot help noticing that Los Angeles has never managed to stage a festival for the A-grade. The tempering of Hollywood's considerable power is clearly one of the film festival's deep attractions; festivals and their audiences may love visits by glamorous stars, but no festival is complete without a panoply of films from across the world. One reason for this is that, starting from the art cinema of the 1950s era, film festivals were conceptualised as sites of discovery and rejuvenation. In an eloquent, compact, yet magisterial essay describing the sweep of world cinema history, Dudley Andrew writes about this dynamic:

> Cinematic modernity thus moved forward as a series of waves in a wide ocean of activity, but progress or development was measured in and by the West…. A tired Europe would soon depend on the energy of ideas coming from or involving its former colonies. But how could European intellectuals credit the 'peripheral' without rehearsing the centrism that produces colonial thinking in the first place? [European festivals invited] nations from beyond the West's periphery to submit films that might have something essential to contribute, something

> unavailable to those in the center…. And yet value could properly be assessed only at Western festivals, and only by Western, specifically Parisian critics. European festivals thus served as a stock market where producers and critics bought and sold ideas of cinema sometimes investing in futures and trading on the margin, with the quotations registered at *Cahiers du Cinéma*. (Andrew, 2009)

Asian filmmakers may make great films, but they must ultimately linger in their own national cinemas until the programmers of Europe 'discover' them. Make no mistake, the programmers of North American and European film festivals have done an astounding job of selecting and promoting Asian films, especially since the 1980s; however, my point is that a given film or filmmaker achieves an international profile only through the good work of these programmers from Europe and their festivals. As for festivals outside of Europe, their fate resides in 'history's waiting room.' This reality invites us to think about the nature of the ground upon which they operate: the (film) world in which they travel.

Even if festivals outside of Europe adopt all the traditional trappings of the A-list – stars, premières, markets – they will never quite measure up. A cringe-worthy example is the Tokyo International Film Festival. Despite a flush bankroll and an abundance of stars on carpets (promoting films that are already slated for release in subsequent months), Tokyo's festival was never taken terribly seriously. Particularly in its formative years, this left the embarrassing spectacle of an ambitious Asian film festival with the means to compete, desperately seeking recognition from our imaginary Europe. One may want to fault anything from the management to the sky-high price of local hotels, but even the patently successful festival in Busan feels regional in the face of Berlin's global prestige. It is as if 'A' means something different in countries that do not write with Roman letters.

More fascinating are the subtle inflections of Europe's dominance – and by extension indifference – on the ground. Consider a typical party at a festival in the heart of Europe. Amid the flux of networking filmmakers, distributors, critics, and programmers, it is hard not to notice the Asian visitors forming isolated groups. Language difference is one issue here, but it is also symptomatic of the indifference they meet with in Europe. Even at Asian festivals with competitions – spaces the

programmers explore with abandon – the competition filmmakers tend to stick together, warily eyeing each other's work, and rarely stray too far into other programmes. They tend to learn little to nothing about their host festival, the local filmmakers and their scene.

It is actually this last dynamic that I wish to focus on in the remainder of this chapter – the energies, *the fireworks*, often occurring in the international film festival circuit's 'peripheries' (those places relegated to the status of marginality by Europe). As we saw, the dilemma of Asian film cultures – desiring recognition from the European other and being greeted by indifference – is an old and enduring dynamic that harks back to the Pure Film Movement. The reaction of Asian film cultures to Europe's fundamental indifference can be remarkably productive. In the case of the international film festival circuit, one ends up with a local or regional *short circuit* that transforms an event of even modest scale into a festival that matters.

## 2. A Brief History of the Asia–Europe Conduit

In exploring this dynamic, I argue that the festival landscape is actually structured by many regional nodes. First, let us briefly consider how the international circuit has historically measured the quality of Asian film festivals. Typically, value has been determined by a harsh utilitarian measure: a festival mattered to the degree that it served the programmers of Europe in the process described by Andrew, above.[3] The very first international festival in Asia was an attempt to foster regional synergies, distribution routes, and technology exchanges in the face of European indifference. This was the Southeast Asian Film Festival, which was established in 1954. It continues to the present day as the Asian Film Festival, making it one of the oldest festivals in the world; it is certainly the oldest festival no one has ever heard of.[4] This has always been a rather clubby affair, run mainly by government film offices and major studios; and it is a failure, if its reality is judged against its lofty goals. It was probably hobbled by being the pet project of too few people. Yet,

[3]A caveat: in this chapter I am primarily concerned with those festivals Mark Peranson has called 'audience festivals,' in contrast to 'business festivals,' which serve first and foremost as nodes where producers and distributors make contact and contracts (see Peranson, 2008).
[4]Information about the festival is hard to come by, although this has been remedied by a newly published dissertation by Lee (2011).

throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, it was one of the few international film events in Asia and the Pacific region.

It would have had a very different stature if European programmers had had a use for it. However, back then festivals were content to rely on the suggestions of government agencies and key local informants on the ground. After all, they only needed a few films from a handful of (usually Indian or Japanese) auteurs. Programmers had no need for the mediation of an Asian film festival. Their modest slates could be satisfied through the recommendations of a select few intermediaries. In the case of Japanese film, the two most important figures would certainly be Kawakita Kashiko and Donald Richie. Kawakita began her career in the 1930s as the spouse of producer Kawakita Nagamasa. Together they forged ties with China and Germany in the wartime era, and after her husband's death Kawakita founded the Kawakita Memorial Film Institute. Throughout the postwar era, she was a fixture on the European and North American film festival circuit, buying films for domestic distribution and advising festivals on the latest developments in Japanese cinema. Her institute was (and still is) the most important stop for any foreign programmer, as it not only offers advice but also secures prints for private screenings. Richie was equally visible at the film festivals, and was also a mandatory stop for any visiting programmers; however, instead of a personal institute and screening room, he wielded the powerful platform of his critical and academic writings. Between these two powerful figures, the circuit's modest appetite for Japanese film was suitably satiated.

The situation changed in the 1980s when Western festivals felt compelled to strive for better coverage of Asian cinema. This corresponds to an epochal transition, which Andrew describes as a shift from the 'federated phase' to the 'world cinema phase.' Programmers from the exhausted modernist cinemas of Europe began to look far beyond Japan and India to discover vibrant film cultures in the most unexpected places, from the Republic of Korea, to the New Taiwan Cinema, to the Fifth Generation in the PRC. For the first time, programmers in the West began to value non-Western film festivals because it was there that they could find a more heterogeneous selection than they received from previous informants. It should come

as no surprise that this process began on an American outpost halfway to Asia, where the local language was English and no intermediaries were necessary.

By the mid-1980s, the Hawai'i International Film Festival became an important conduit for information about the situation across the breadth of Asia. It was perfectly suited to the role. The festival was established in 1981 by the East–West Center, a research and teaching facility of the American government (the half joke amongst its students and researchers was that it was essentially a training facility for the Central Intelligence Agency). Under the indefatigable leadership of Jeannette Paulson, the festival grew swiftly and took to specialising in Asian cinema. It enjoyed the expertise of scholars in the East–West Center such as Paul Clarke and Wimal Dissanayake. The Hawai'i programmers traveled to Asian film centres to create a network of informants and learn the situations on the ground. They also published unusually thick catalogues, grey with informative essays about individual filmmakers, movements, and national cinemas that had rarely been addressed in English-language print. The festival brought together a fair representation of Asia's annual output every December. Many of the festival's key informants were regular visitors to the festival, such as Donald Richie (Japan), Kawakita Kashiko (Japan), Chiao Hsiung-ping (Taiwan), Wong Ain-ling (Hong Kong), Tony Rayns (United Kingdom), and Aruna Vasudev (India); and they brought in many directors to talk about their films and meet foreign programmers. The East–West Center even held an academic conference in conjunction with the festival, promoting research into Asian cinema while giving scholars access to the latest crop of films. By the late 1980s, when I served on the festival as an intern, the Hawai'i International Film Festival was an important site for the programmers of Europe to see the best of new Asian cinema, network, and select films for their own festivals.

Yet, 'waxing and waning' is another structure of the international film festival circuit, and Hawai'i was soon displaced by Hong Kong. This process probably began with the sensational splash made by *Yellow Earth* (*Huang tudi*, 1984) at the 1985 Hong Kong International Film Festival, which was founded in 1976. Word spread swiftly that an amazing new generation of filmmakers had emerged in China. Hong Kong was the epicenter of the discovery of the Fifth Generation, but it was still a 'discovery' by Western critics and festivals that put them on the map. At

Hong Kong, programmers found a much larger selection of Chinese-language films on top of a smart selection of Asian cinema, thanks to programmers like Roger Garcia, Wang Ain-ling, Li Cheuk-to, Stephen Teo, and others. Hong Kong also published a running series of thick, meaty catalogues for their retrospectives on local cinema; it is no exaggeration to say they were, through programming and publication, writing the history of Hong Kong film. It is also largely through Hong Kong that New Taiwan Cinema and then Hong Kong popular cinema found its global audience.

In the first years of the new century, however, most of the foreign programmers fled Hong Kong for the well-endowed Busan (Pusan) International Film Festival.[5] This remains the most prestigious festival in Asia. At the same time, as the film festival world has radically changed, Busan's place in the system is substantially different in kind from that of its predecessors. Its importance is arguably established by its sheer scale and the success of its market, but not necessarily by its usefulness as a site for European programmers to see as many Asian films as possible in as short a time as possible, and as a space to network and study. This is to say that the film festival circuit underwent a fundamental transformation at the turn of the century. Before this, Hawai'i and Hong Kong served as *conduits* for Asian films on their way to Europe, because virtually none of the programmers of Europe could speak Asian languages, and few could actually invest in extended trips to the region. Most were dependent on the festivals specialising in Asian fare. Today, however, there are far more programmers with Asian-language skills that can access information and meet people without intermediaries. Major festivals like Rotterdam and Udine have reputations for sophisticated programming of Asian films. Furthermore, in the age of the Internet, it can be easy to forget how the Hawai'i and Hong Kong catalogues were treasure troves of information that could be found nowhere else; now, the catalogues of every festival in the world are a click away. Thanks to all these factors, once 'important' festivals like Hawai'i, Hong

[5]At about this time, the Hong Kong International Film Festival lost most of its public support and underwent a process of corporatisation. It is unclear if the dislodging of the festival from its perch is connected to this privatisation. For a strong description of this situation, see Cheung (2009) and Cheung (2011).

Kong, and Busan – festivals that mattered – appear more like regional or even local affairs.

However, the scenes at these Asian festivals feel quite different from the major festivals of Europe. When Asian filmmakers go to the West, they are guests; when they participate in Asian film festivals they are members of a community. This is, naturally, a bit of an exaggeration, but it does arise from the fact that, while a small minority of filmmakers travel to the faraway festivals that 'matter,' geographic proximity within Asia means that there is constant, year-round circulation of artists, programmers, producers, and executives both to major filmmaker centres and beyond. In this context, the competition filmmakers from Europe are the guests and often mistakenly assume that they are the center of attention, while remaining oblivious to the sparks flying in these communities of Asian filmmakers.

## 3. The International Film Festival Short Circuit

The metaphor of sparks in that last sentence brings me to the original image generated this essay: the short circuit. The international film festival 'circuit' – a phrase that came into parlance in the late 1950s[6] – always struck me as misleading. Its root implies a kind of free circulation, an open system of film prints moving effortlessly around the earth. They alight at one node or another for projection and enjoyment, before returning on their circuitous path home. Indeed, festival organisers are privy to a palpable sense for this circulation because they must manage the shipping in and out of every print (prints often hop from one festival to another without returning to their distributor).

At the same time, the circuit metaphor is deeply inaccurate. As I asserted at the beginning of this chapter, the international film festival system is anything but open and free. It is more like a playing field on an incline. Programmers at the top of the hill, the A-festivals of Europe and North America, work hard to spread out across the world and push up heavy prints of great film art to their prestigious festivals – events with elaborate systems of passes that restrict access to the inner sanctums to a select few. After they are over, the films are launched down the hill, hitting other lesser festivals as they roll their way back home.

[6] This phrase begins appearing in Google Books and other database searches in 1959.

This image of the incline is also dissatisfying, even if it highlights the power that characterises this global system of film festivals. For one thing, it does not leave room for the intense pleasures offered by film festivals, particularly the opportunity to see films with their makers present in the theatre. Nor does it recognise the productive contributions that festivals can make to the promotion of and access to great films that would otherwise never leave their domestic markets, a remarkably important role before the age of home video. The proliferation of film festivals is also making the trope of the incline also increasingly inadequate. While the smaller festivals may not compete with the A-list for prestige, they can excel spectacularly in programming niches. In the case of Asian film, one thinks of the undeniable importance of post-2000 events like the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Frankfurt's Nippon Connection, or Udine's Far East Film Festival. In fact, Venice and Cannes show far fewer Asian films; thus, if we extract public relations value from the equation, it becomes impossible to place all of these festivals on an incline representing the world of international film festivals.

No, I think 'circuit' works quite well, providing it is playfully finessed with some other tropes. I have already done this above by suggesting that the routes of the film festival circuit run through a *conduit*. There is no such thing as free, nondirectional circulation. While this may not apply for a festival's home base, where information circulates effortlessly thanks to media saturation in a single language, when geographical distance and linguistic difference come into play, programmers inevitably find themselves dependent on informants. In the case of Asian cinema, figures like Kawakita Kashiko, Donald Richie, and Tony Rayns wielded enormous power over what Asian films were inserted into the festival circuit before the year 2000. They were the conduits through which films left Asia and moved to Europe and beyond. Thankfully, in the case of Asian cinema, those informants had wonderfully eclectic taste.

The trope of the conduit can still accommodate the present situation, where figures like Rayns or festivals like Hawai'i have become diminutive due to the proliferation of information sources. Before the turn of the century, the schematic of the circuit's conduit was clear and simple:

filmmakers→informant→programmer→festival (→distributor→audience). Today, the situation is exceedingly complex. Filmmakers can apply to festivals with the click of a button on a website instead of shipping a heavy, expensive 35 millimetre film print (thus swamping festivals with entries). When I worked on the Hawai'i International Film Festival in the late 1980s, the festival's catalogues were treasure troves of information, and we marveled at the speed of communication made possible by fax machines. However, I glimpsed the future there as well. As a federal institution, the East–West Center enjoyed access to the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network, the precursor to the Internet. I used it to write to my scientist father across the Pacific, wishing all the while I could use it to communicate with filmmakers and distributors. It was clearly the future tool of film festivals, I thought, though I could hardly imagine the astounding resources enjoyed by today's programmers, including e-mail, websites, blogs, online-zines, the Internet Movie Database, Film Business Asia, digital press kits, YouTube, Vimeo, bit-torrents, and Dropbox, not to mention the online catalogues of every film festival on the planet.

Thanks to this, the conduits of the international film festival circuit have elaborated themselves into a bewildering capillary-like system. Berlin may feature two or three major films from a place like Japan, but the singularity of those works looks different from the days of *Rashomon* at Venice. Today, a few months later and only 300 miles away, Frankfurt's Nippon Connection shows those films, plus 150 others. In contrast to the art cinema of the 1950s, every kind of Japanese moving image circulates through the capillaries of the global distribution system.

This brings me to the last crucial tweak of the circuit trope, the phenomenon of the *short*. We typically think of a short circuit as an abnormality or a malfunction. Strictly speaking, it merely refers to an unintended connection between two nodes of an electrical circuit, usually with differing voltages; it is a pathway that current follows swiftly and unimpeded. A simple example of this kind of high circuit with no resistance would be a wire connecting the positive and negative terminals on a car battery. Anyone who has jumped a dead car knows what happens when the black clip accidentally touches the red: sparks fly. This is the by-product of the short circuit: heat, sparks, and sometimes fire. I ran this playful trope past Fujioka Asoka, the

force behind the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival who is now an independent programmer and distributor. She responded,

> The metaphor is beautiful. I do like to think of Yamagata as being the source of leaping flames and flying sparks jumping to other locations. After all, the Taiwan documentary festival modeled themselves after us, and Yunfest's first catalogs and programs were modeled after ours, too. And, of course, we've watched the filmmakers go back to their respective countries with renewed vigor and courage. This short-circuiting is unpredictable, and that's its beauty – I suspect it is something the official conduits don't allow.[7]

The festival circuit was built by Europe, and, on the face of it, the circuit serves the select roll of festivals enjoying the status of the Roman letter *A*. Yet, since the elaboration of the film festival circuit in the 1960s, there have always been short circuits in the system. For some early, spectacular examples, recall that an Italian Film Week in Spain led directly to the proclamation 'Spanish cinema is dead; long live Spanish cinema' at the 1955 Salamanca Congress, which in turn inspired an efflorescence of great Spanish neorealist films. Or think of the chant 'Papa's cinema is dead' and the delivery of the Oberhausen Manifesto ('The old cinema is dead. We believe in the new cinema') at the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen in 1962, an important forerunner to the New German Cinema. We may also think of the continental short circuiting between Les Journés Cinématographiques de Carthage and Panafricain du cinéma et de la Télévision de Ougadougou, which take place in alternating years. In these instances, some of the current in the festival circuit forms a short, disregarding the pathways between the prestige festivals and the rest of the world. Sometimes these shorts burn out fast; other times they heat up, spark, and start durable fires.

This is precisely what seems to be happening in Asia on the tails of the explosive growth in the Chinese film industry. I am arguing for the recognition of a regionalisation of Asian cinema that is entering a new phase. Although I concentrate

[7] Correspondence with Fujioka Asako, 5 May 2011. Yunfest is the documentary film festival in Yunnan, China.

on the present day here, it is important that there were (at least) two previous configurations of 'Asian cinema.' First, there was the imperial imagining and constructing of an Asian cinema under Japanese hegemony. This was followed by the postwar, post-Bandung efforts of the Cold War, where any regional energies fell into conflict with centripetal conceptions of national cinema and the power of bilateral relationships with the US or Soviet Union (this was Asian cinema being engineered by Nagata and the Asian Film Festival). Now, with the end of the Cold War, we are experiencing a shift to a new regionalisation in Asia based on, as Prasenjit Duara would say, 'interreferentiality, interconnection, and encounter.' At this precise time, the Chinese film industry is so incredibly supercharged that it is reconfiguring the business of world cinema. I would like to step back and think about Chinese cinema not as 'transnational' or 'global,' but as regional – *as Asian*. First, we should take a look at what is going on (this is going to be a remarkably superficial sketch).

I am in agreement with Prasenjit Duara, whose essay 'Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times' positions a reconfigured regionalism as 'an intermediate zone between the deterritorializing impulses of capitalism and the territorial limits of nationalism' (Duara, 2010). Duara points to a situation after a long 20th century of national identifications bound by hard borders – a new conception of space where the nation-state itself acknowledges both regional and global interdependence, softening or sloughing off pedagogical homogenisations of putative national culture. Of Asian regionalisation, he writes,

> [A]s I have argued, actual interdependence has increased dramatically, and so has cultural contact. Interdependence, however, is being managed by ad hoc arrangements and specialized transnational institutions with little possibility of large-scale state-like coordination and control.… Moreover, the region has no external limits or territorial boundaries and does not seek to homogenize itself within… (Duara, 2010: 17)

Two decades of vigorous critique have shown the durability of the national cinema paradigm for film history. At the same time, and through this critique, the

paradigm has substantially transformed since the end of the Cold War. We attend to regional, global, and local dimensions of national cinema study, rejecting categories of absorption, rejection, and hierarchisation. In other words, 'national cinema' is not going anywhere, and the most productive way to approach it now is as part and parcel of a regional cinema. This is what I am trying to do here, starting with a sketch of China's rise on the international film festival circuit.

## 4. China Rises and Stumbles

As I explained above, Chinese cinema captured the attention of the (quite provincial) European film scene with the appearance of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou's *Yellow Earth* in 1984. There was an explosion of festival screenings, international awards, criticism, and scholarship. This marked the beginning of the new era, although it has taken several decades for the sparks really to fly.

However, it is a situation that Hollywood anticipated from early on. Executives in Los Angeles and New York had their collective eyes on the massive and undeveloped market on the mainland. The first opening was in 1994, when *The Fugitive*, the first American film allowed in in 45 years, was distributed on a cost-sharing basis. China subsequently installed a quota system of 20 foreign films a year, to protect their market. However, Hollywood's dreams started coming true after China joined the World Trade Organization and Joe Biden and Xi Jinping signed a trade agreement that bumped the quota to 34, beginning a process of relaxing censorship and edging China toward a market-based, entertainment cinema.

New methods were developed for China to use its new economic muscle to invest in foreign cinema – usually Hollywood – by revenue sharing, flat-fee purchases, and co-productions. The latter have become increasingly important because they offer a way for foreign films to bypass the quota system. As local films, they keep 43% of ticket sales instead of 25% (Southerland, 2017). The real turning point seems to have occurred in 2010 with *Avatar*, which made $204 million in China (triple the previous record) (Schwartzel, 2016). Since then, the box office has expanded along with an astounding explosion in theatre construction (up to 25 new theatres are being built *every day*), and China's ticket sales have tripled since 2011. In November 2016, China passed the US in terms of number of movie theatres. The

same year's box office was $6.6 billion (up 3.73% year on year) from 1.4 billion tickets – the second largest in the world (the US comes first at $11.4 billion). As an example of China's box office power, the seventh *Fast and Furious* (2015) film opened to $99 million in the US and Canada, and $192 million in China (Schwartzel, 2016). At the time the former Paramount president Adam Goodman told the *Wall Street Journal*, 'We never thought about China 10 years ago. Now, we're at a point where Hollywood can't *exist* without China' (Schwartzel, 2017). Likewise, when former Senator Christopher Dodd stepped down from his position as president of the Motion Picture Association of America, he said that Hollywood studio executives' three major goals were: 'China, China, and China' (Southerland, 2017).

For their part, Chinese film executives and filmmakers increasingly turned outside during this build-up, looking for co-productions as well as opportunities for investment. The most important example is Wanda, both for the scale of its ambition and for its spectacular stumbles as exhibited in its acquisition of Legendary Entertainment and its 2016 production of *The Great Wall*. It is a good, if spectacular barometer of the China–US relationship that has interesting implications for Japanese cinema.

Legendary Entertainment was originally formed by major private equity firm and hedge fund investors in 2000, and began co-producing films with Warner Bros. in 2005, and with Universal in 2014. Their biggest films up to this point had been *Batman Returns* (1992), *Superman Begins* (2006), *The Hangover* (2009), *Jurassic World* (2015), *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), and *Inception* (2010). In total, they brought in $14.5 billion dollars of revenue when Wanda began looking at them; the company was clearly on its way to becoming one of Hollywood's major studios.

Legendary already had China connections in 2010, when Orange Sky Golden Harvest invested $25 million in the company during a buyout that consolidated Legendary in a small number of hands. The following year, they established Legendary East Ltd. in Hong Kong along with film distributor Huayi Brothers International. This was essentially a strategy to bypass the mainland's quota system. In the end, they paired instead with China Film Group in 2013 to co-produce films. It is worth noting how Japanese cinema remains on the sidelines of this story. It is true that Softbank bought a 10% share of Legendary for $250 million in 2014. However,

it is notable that the investor is a digital media company, not one of the major Japanese studios or, for that matter, a hardware company like Sony (which began investing in Hollywood in the previous bubble era).

Then along comes Wanda, which is seen as a major player in the globalisation of media business with its investments in soccer teams, theatre chains, shopping malls, hotels, theme parks, publishing, television, and film production. At the time it was also scheduled to open a massive, 408-acre studio – Qingdao Movie Metropolis – in 2018, which was paired with incentives from Wanda and the Qingdao municipal government of up to 40% of production cost to attract productions (Maddaus, 2018). Chief Executive Officer Wang Jianlin called this 'the Hollywood of the east' in just the latest example of Asian filmmakers' desire for recognition by the other. Wanda went on a breathtaking shopping spree in Hollywood. It purchased the AMC Theater chain, and then became the world's largest exhibitor with a $921 million purchase of the Odeon chain, the oldest and largest theatre chain in Europe (which goes back to 1928). It even bought a gallery at the new film museum being created by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Wanda delved into film production with the acquisition of Legendary in 2016 for $3.5 billion dollars. Some in Hollywood scratched their heads; it seemed like too high a price for a studio that had posted a $346 million loss in 2014 and a $560 million loss in 2015 (Maddaus, 2016). However, there was more than money on the mind of Wang Jianlin. This is clear from a speech he gave at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in which he boldly criticised Hollywood productions and said that they would have to improve by adding 'Chinese elements' to succeed in the Chinese marketplace. This is completely different from the attitude of executives from Sony when they bought Columbia in the bubble era; indeed, it hints at an attitude from the earlier eras of imperialism and Cold War nationalisms.

This attitude was the engine behind the spectacular failure of *The Great Wall*. This was *the* test case for the high concept, China–Hollywood co-produced blockbuster, teaming Zhang Yimou with Matt Damon, and backed by a massive $150 million budget. The supporting actors were clearly chosen by committee: for the domestic crowd it featured boy band TFBoys' Wang Junkai and actress Jing Tian.

Andy Lau, from Hong Kong, played a sage. Lu Han, from the Republic of Korea, was a weak, low-ranking soldier. Looking under the hood, you see that the film was produced by four American Hollywood executives, with a screenplay by three Americans from a story by three other Americans. On the set were two cinematographers, one American and other Chinese. Hollywood provided editors, the production designer, music composition, sound editors, and the costume designer. The ten minutes of special effects credits show it was partly shot in China but processed all over the world.

The story attempts to combine two kinds of cookie-cutter filmmaking: Chinese main melody propaganda and the Hollywood effects-driven blockbuster. Set in the distant past, it turns out the Great Wall was built to keep out hordes of Taotie monsters. A couple of Europeans come to steal the great Chinese invention of gunpowder only to help color-coded warriors beat back the monsters and save *the entire world*. It's that simple. Now you need not watch the film.

This seems to be what Wang Jianlin mean by 'Chinese elements'; however, it was a spectacular failure. *The Great Wall* reported $334,933,831 in the box office, with only $45.5 million in the US and $171 in China. It is estimated that the film lost $75 million (McClintock and Galloway, 2017).[8] The *Hollywood Reporter* wrote,

> The crumbling of this *Wall* has toppled much hope for major Sino-American pictures. Among the lessons insiders have learned are the difficulties of offering stories that meld Eastern and Western characters and the challenges of blending crews, which in *Wall's* case meant hiring 100 interpreters and solving conflicts that allegedly took place among some below-the-line workers (Schwartzel, 2016).

This last bit referred to Hollywood union workers who were shocked at the lack of safety precautions on the Chinese sets. These are also the reasons that *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) and *Ironman 3* (2013) were both supposed to be similar kinds of co-productions – until American producers got scared off by

[8] Universal supplied 25% of the budget, but organised this in such a way that it would recoup its contribution before other entities dipped in.

Chinese official involvement, tight script controls, and myriad production culture problems.

This *does* indicate some of the practical difficulties that make cinema difficult to globalise. However, there is something else going on here that my focus on the business and material side does not capture. I believe it points to how Chinese cinema, despite its global aspirations, it is well on the way to regionalising – turning into 'Asian cinema.' The example of *The Great Wall* is paradigmatic in a number of ways.

First, although Wanda and Legendary spared no expense in making the film, it was met with an indifferent shrug in the main market they aspired to: North America. Zhang should have known from experience what he was getting into; after all, he made *The Flowers of War* (2011), the Christian Bale film that cost $94 million and earned only $96 million in China…and an embarrassing $311,000 in North America (McClintock and Galloway, 2017).

Indeed, there is a great, historical indifference for Asian cinema in North America (and basically Europe as well). Open your ears to history and you will hear the echoes. Japan learned this when it tried opening Hollywood branches and theatres in the 1950s and 1960s, before essentially giving up on Western distribution. It is also notable that Japanese corporations went on a similar shopping spree in Hollywood during the bubble, but never bothered to bring Kurosawa over to make a film with Tom Cruise. Asian capital moves easily; directors and actors do not. Thus, Zhang Yimou falls into a long line of Asian directors who travel to Hollywood in this era of flexible citizenship only to get homogenised, neutralised, or destroyed – and they either fade from view (King Hu or Wu Tianming) or make a U-turn and return to Asia (Kurosawa Akira, John Woo, Chen Kaige, Shimizu Takashi, Kitano Takeshi, and Park Chan-wook). The same goes for actors. A few action stars have parlayed their moving bodies into modest success (like Jackie Chan, Sammo Hung, and Jet Li), but outside of genre film and television most actors languish and maintain far more successful careers back home (Momoi Kaori, Watanabe Ken, Michelle Yeoh, Kitano Takeshi, Zhang Zhiyi, and a parade of others).

I would like to suggest that linguistic and racial differences play a crucial role in the indifference that these directors and actors face. This begins with the words

that come out of their mouths. As I argue in *Cinema Babel*, film is a product unusually dependent on translation (Nornes, 2008). When it comes to toys, chemicals, auto parts, and the like, you can manufacture them anywhere and distribute them globally through the easy translation of labels and packaging, effectively domesticating a given product. The desires of Asian actors to crack cinema's largest market is compromised by what Koichi Iwabuchi has called the 'cultural odor' of their origin (Iwabuchi, 2002: 245). These actors can adjust their language and read the foreign tongues of Hollywood scripts, but none of them can erase their accents, which are always obvious and often heavy. They also cannot erase the visual spectacle of their racial difference. In the context of white hegemony over cultural norms in North America, this marks actors with a 'cultural odor' that of course can be either nice or off-putting. However, at the mass, 3,000-screen level at which Chinese cinema aspires to play, this Asian cultural odour is regrettably pungent for many Western audiences.

Although the remarkable paucity of Asian film distribution in the North American market is symptomatic of this, the problem is more readily apparent in front of the camera. This is why, of the top 100 films in 2015, 49 had no speaking parts for Asians or Asian-Americans and there was not a single lead (Smith et al., 2016). The Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative at the University of Southern California examined the top 800 films from 2007 to 2015 (not 2011) – a total of 35,205 works – for gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) status. Just 3.9% of roles were Asians or Asian-Americans, and the vast majority of that 4%, of course, go to Asian-American actors (this in addition to the scandalous phenomenon of 'whitewashing').[9] This does not leave much screen space for talent from Asia.

This has led to the tokenisation of Chinese actresses in Hollywood film, including *The Great Wall's* Jing Tian. Today, Hollywood deploys her, Fan Bingbing, and others to appeal to the Chinese market. However, in terms of narrative they are

[9] 'Whitewashing' is the legacy of 'yellowface,' where Asian roles go to Caucasian actors. Examples include Emma Stone playing a woman of Hawai'ian-Asian heritage in *Aloha* (2015), or the Tibetan mystic in *Doctor Strange* (2016) who is whitewashed as Celtic and played by Tilda Swinton. There is also the cyborg Major Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), where the soul of Momoi Kaori's daughter is transplanted into Scarlett Johansson's body. In television, Netflix's *Deathnote* (2017) has all white actors (but Asian-American producers).

always marginalised; even the cinematography relegates them literally to the margins of the screen. Clearly, their 'odor' generates resistance or indifference in the North American mass audience.

It is in the face of this indifference that regional energies are more interesting and productive, and this is why regional interconnection in the independent and underground scenes is particularly strong. Indeed, within Asia these cultural odours are far more complicated, and can easily lean towards the fragrant end of the spectrum. For example, while Jackie Chan is a minor action film star in America, he is one of the towering figures across Asia. There is no question that in the last several decades we have seen a steady process of integration of music, dance, television, and film in Asia. Never before has it looked so much like 'Asian cinema.'

So where does this leave us with China? Although it is early to tell, the failure of Legendary's first big Hollywood co-production might be a turning point in the aspirations to make Chinese films for the globe – and particularly for the massive mainstream market in North America. Thus, in 2017, Wang Jianlin told *The Financial Times,* 'The development of domestic business is certainly our main focus because China's entertainment market, tourism market, and sports market have just begun. These 'domestic' areas must be the focus of our investment' (Barber and Clover, 2017).

Spoken like a man who has just been burned. To make matters worse for Wanda, the Chinese government has become concerned about both corruption in the film industry and the outward flow of capital. When Wanda tried to purchase Dick Clarke Productions, a television production company best known for award shows and beauty pageants, the Chinese government blocked the $1 billion sale. However, Wang also hinted at US pressures against the sale, perhaps the letter from 18 congress members to the Government Accountability Office complaining about outsider investment in domestic media. In short order, the company has scaled back its ambitions to compete with Hollywood. It opened its Qingdao studios in April 2018 with little fanfare, this after a glamorous fete announcing construction featuring Leonardo DiCaprio, John Travolta, and Nicole Kidman. By the end of the year, it had offloaded operations of the studio, and was reportedly in negotiations to sell off at least part of Legendary and AMC Theaters (Frater, 2018).

When we look at the relationship of Chinese film and media to the West it feels simultaneously like an archaic and a new thing. Here you have two of the key nation-states of the Cold War in a bilateral dance of capital and culture – the massive flow of capital accompanied by the ambition to inject Chinese 'elements' into Hollywood. Furthermore, on the face of it, China's efforts at inter-Asian integration appear focused on Chinese-speaking territorial claims – Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (and look at how Hong Kong cinema has been dominated by China in the last decade). It all looks so 20th century.

At the same time, this is occurring at the level of official film culture and business. When you look at independent film, both documentary and independent, mainland cinema is filled with *contact* and even *integration* with its Asian neighbors. This is even more true of the reception context, thanks to uncontrollable piracy made possible by digital technologies.

Earlier I noted how language poses a barrier to the easy transnational circulation of texts, both practically and through the creation of cultural odour. Today, Chinese fan subbing collectives are so well organised that they can release subtitled versions of television shows from around Asia within hours of the original broadcast! The business world has taken notice, and there are now quasi-official subtitling websites, such as Viki, which interface the fan subbing world with official media culture.

This is to say, the shift to a regionalisation of Asian cinema is well underway, in festivals, in theatres across the region, and on television and computer monitors. We have come a long way since *Rashomon*. Today, as film migrates to a multitude of screens, we are witnessing a new imagining and constructing of Asian cinema, the contours of which we are only now beginning to see, but are most definitely 'weakly bounded, network-oriented, pluralistic, and multitemporal.' Things are hot. Sparks are flying. The question is, how can Japanese filmmakers harness those unpredictable sparks, and exploit their geographic and cultural proximity to start a fire that will benefit their domestic film industry.

## References


Andrew, D. (2009), 'Time Zones and Jet Lag – the Flows and Phases of World Cinema', in N. Durovicová and K.E. Newman (eds.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge. pp.59–89.

Barber, L. and C. Clover (2017), '"The Chairman" Who Always Abides by the Rules: Interview: Wang Jianlin', *Financial Times*, 20 April.

Bordwell, D. (1988), *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cheung, R. (2009), 'Corporatising a Film Festival: Hong Kong', in D. Iordanova (ed.), *Film Festival Yearbook* 1, pp.99–115.

Cheung, R. (2011), 'We Believe in "Film as Art": An Interview with Li Cheuk-to, Artistic Director of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF)', in D. Iordanova and R. Cheung (eds.), *Film Festival Yearbook 3: Film Festivals and East Asia*. St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, pp.196–207.

Duara, P. (2010), 'Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69(4), pp.963–83.

Cousins, M. (2009), 'Widescreen on Film Festivals', in D. Iordanova with R. Rhyne (ed.), *Film Festival Yearbook 1: The Festival Circuit*. St. Andrews: St. Andrews Film Studies, pp.155–58.

Elsaesser, T. (2005), 'Film Festival Networks: The New Topographies of Cinema in Europe', *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: pp.82–107.

Frater, P. (2018), 'China's Wanda Completes Exit from Film Studios and Theme Parks', *Variety*, October 31. https://variety.com/2018/film/asia/wanda-completes-exit-from-film-studios-and-theme-parks-1203015923/ (accessed 5 September 2019).

Gerow, A.A. (2010), *Visions of Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Iwabuchi, K. (2002), *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lee, S. (2011), 'The Transnational Asian Studio System: Cinema, Nation-State, and Globalization in Cold War Asia', PhD diss., New York University.

Maddaus, G. (2016), 'Election Casts Doubt on China Relations', *Variety*, 334(10), pp.74–77.

Maddaus, G. and P. Frater (2018), 'Wanda Beats Retreat as Fiscal Woes Mount', *Variety*, 339(12), p.18.

McClintock, P. and S. Galloway (2017), 'Matt Damon's "The Great Wall" to Lose $75 Million; Future US–China Productions in Doubt', *The Hollywood Reporter*: 2.

Nornes, A.M. (2008), *Cinema Babel: Translating Global Cinema*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Nornes, A.M. (2014), 'Yamagata-Asia-Europe: The International Film Festival Short Circuit', *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, pp.245–62.

Peranson, M. (2008), 'First You Get the Power, Then You Get the Money: Two Models for Film Festivals', *Cineaste*, 33(3), pp.37–43.

Schwartzel, E. (2016), 'Hollywood Leans on "Great Wall" – Movie Industry Sees $150 Million Film as Harbinger for Future U.S.-China Co-Productions', *Wall Street Journal*, B1.

Schwartzel, E. (2017), 'Hollywood Doesn't Work Without China: The U.S. Movie Industry Relies on China's Investors and Its Mass Audience', *Wall Street Journal*, A1.

Smith, S.L., M. Choueiti, K. Pieper, T. Gillig, C. Lee, and D. DeLuca (2016), *Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative*. Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California.

Southerland, D. (2017), 'China Soft Power Part II: Beijing Turns to Hollywood to Win Hearts and Minds', *Radio Free Asia*, May 22. https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/china-hollywood-05222017154615.html (accessed 13 September 2019).

Stringer, J. (2006), 'Neither One Thing nor the Other: Blockbusters at Film Festivals', in J. Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters*. New York, NY: Routledge, pp.202–13.

Turan, K. (2002), *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

# ERIA Discussion Paper Series

| No. | Author(s) | Title | Year |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2019-12 (no. 298) | Trinh W. LONG, Matthias HELBLE, and Le T. TRANG | Global Value Chains and Formal Employment in Viet Nam | September 2019 |
| 2019-11 (no. 297) | Makoto TOBA, Atul KUMAR, Nuwong CHOLLACOOP, Soranan NOPPORNPRASITH, Adhika WIDYAPARAGA, Ruby B. de GUZMAN and Shoichi ICHIKAWA | Evaluation of $CO_2$ Emissions Reduction through Mobility Electification | September 2019 |
| 2019-10 (no.296) | Anne McKnight | Words and Their Silos: Commercial, Governmental, and Academic Support for Japanese Literature and Writing Overseas | August 2019 |
| 2019-09 (no.295) | Shinji OYAMA | In the Closet: Japanese Creative Industries and their Reluctance to Forge Global and Transnational Linkages in ASEAN and East Asia | August 2019 |
| 2019-08 (no.294) | David LEHENY | The Contents of Power: Narrative and Soft Power in the Olympic Games Opening Ceremonies | August 2019 |
| 2019-07 (no.293) | DUC Anh Dang | Value Added Exports and the Local Labour Market: Evidence from Vietnamese Manufacturing | August 2019 |
| 2019-06 (no.292) | Prema-chandra ATHUKORALA and Arianto A. PATUNRU | Domestic Value Added, Exports, and Employment: An Input-Output Analysis of Indonesian Manufacturing | August 2019 |
| 2019-05 (no.291) | Sasiwimon W. PAWEENAWAT | The Impact of Global Value Chain Integration on Wages: Evidence from Matched Worker-Industry Data in Thailand | August 2019 |
| 2019-04 (no.290) | Tamako AKIYAMA | A Spark Beyond Time and Place: Ogawa Shinsuke and Asia | August 2019 |
| 2019-03 (no.289) | Naoyuki YOSHINO and Farhad TAGHIZADEH-HESARY | Navigating Low-Carbon Finance Management at Banks and Non-Banking Financial Institutions | August 2019 |
| 2019-02 (no.288) | Seio NAKAJIMA | The Next Generation Automobile Industry as a Creative Industry | June 2019 |
| 2019-01 (no.287) | Koichi IWABUCHI | Cool Japan, Creative Industries and Diversity | June 2019 |

Previous year of ERIA Discussion Paper, can be found at:
http://www.eria.org/publications/category/discussion-papers