

“NOSTALGIA FOR ‘ASIAN’ TRADITIONS AND ENERGY – ENCOUNTERS WITH  
CHINESE AND KOREANS IN JAPANESE TV DRAMAS”

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INTRODUCTION—TELEVISION DRAMAS AND THE MYTH OF JAPANESE  
HOMOGENEITY

Since 1953, when Japanese television went on air for the first time, television dramas have played a central role in affecting and reflecting on Japanese society, its identity, and its relationship with others.<sup>1</sup> Japanese television drama traditionally concentrated on the everyday life of “everyday” (urban) middle class families, Japanese minorities and foreigners remaining very much outside its focus. This lack of focus on the diversity inherent within Japanese society can, in turn, be seen to have contributed to a variety of other reflections on the nature of Japanese society as a homogeneous cultural zone. Indeed, it could be suggested that Japanese television dramas have helped to underpin and reinforce a ‘myth of homogeneity’ of the Japanese people—a myth also propagated by the *nihonjinron*<sup>2</sup> (theories on the uniqueness of the Japanese) writing of the 70s and 80s.

The 1990s, however, saw an increase in foreigners from other Asian countries entering Japan.<sup>3</sup> Other events, such as the end of the Cold War, have served to change the nature of the three-way inter-dependant relationship between Japan, the West and Japan’s Asian neighbors. With the West ceasing to be the main point of reference for Japan’s self-image, Japan’s Asian neighbours have expanded their economic and political relevance, potentially challenging the ‘self-reference other’ position of Japan in the world. With ‘Asian’<sup>4</sup> artefacts and travel destinations becoming gradually more popular, Japan can now be seen to have

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<sup>1</sup> Although initially American series were broadcast, in due course, Japanese productions came to be much more popular and successful than their American counterparts. On the early history of Japanese television drama see especially Hirahara (1991).

<sup>2</sup> On a critical discussion of *nihonjinron* and the ‘myth of homogeneity’ see Befu (2001).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Statistical Yearbook of Japan (available online), the number of foreigner in Japan has more than doubled between 1980 and 2002. Even though the number of foreigners in general has increased, the figures for other Asian countries are especially eye-catching. For example, in 1980 about 53,000 individuals from the People’s Republic of China were registered in Japan, in 2002 the number had risen to about 425,000. For further reference see <[http://www.stat.go.jp/English/data/nenkan./](http://www.stat.go.jp/English/data/nenkan/)>, accessed October 8, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> To simplify the reading of this paper, we have used ‘Asia’ or ‘Asian’ in reference to all other Asian regions except Japan.

entered an ‘Asia boom’ era in terms of its popular culture.<sup>5</sup> This reorientation of the ‘Asian Other’ has, we will argue here, begun to challenge the construction of Japan as a homogeneous country. This trend is perhaps first visible in Japanese cinema which has, since the late 1980s, featured growing numbers of ‘Asian’ characters, taking up the problems of a more regionally relativized society.<sup>6</sup> Japanese television dramas<sup>7</sup>, the subject of this chapter, followed suit approximately a decade later. The aggregative effect of such changes in the reflections on the nature of Japanese society in popular culture, may, we argue, present a possible future where this notion of homogeneity becomes not merely questioned, but potentially almost completely overthrown.

Japanese television dramas are often praised for their (perceived) closeness to reality—they are seen to be much more than just mere ‘products of entertainment’ within Japanese society. As Penn<sup>8</sup> points out: “TV dramas provide a window into Japanese society that can be more revealing than a sociology textbook” (Penn 2003: 14). Thus, as Japanese television dramas began to show more characters from other Asian countries, and a more heterogeneous image of society seems to have come gradually accepted within that genre, the appeal for acknowledgement and acceptance of such an image has gone out to the very ‘grass roots’ of Japanese society.

While from 1954<sup>9</sup> until 1994 only five television series featured characters from other Asian countries in leading roles,<sup>10</sup> between 2000 and 2002 it took only two years to achieve the same number of television series<sup>11</sup>, while at the same time, many television films dealing with ‘Asian’ encounters were broadcast. The rise in the number of foreign, especially ‘Asian’, characters is therefore highly visible, powerfully reflecting the entry into the recent ‘Asia boom’. The Football World Championship co-hosted by Japan and South Korea in 2002

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<sup>5</sup> This ‘Asia boom’ within Japanese media is one of the topics of a research project sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) entitled “Japan’s Turn toward Asia in Japanese Literature, Media and Popular Culture. A Factor in the Creation of an ‘Asian Identity’?” conducted at the Department of Japanese Studies at the University of Trier.

<sup>6</sup> On the ‘Asia boom’ in Japanese cinema see Yomota (2001) and Schilling (1999: p. 43-50).

<sup>7</sup> Japanese television dramas are commonly divided into television films (*tanpatsu dorama*) and television series (*renzoku dorama*).

<sup>8</sup> Wm. (Wilhelmina) Penn is the pen name of Daily Yomiuri columnist Kathleen Morikawa.

<sup>9</sup> The year 1954 is commonly given as the advent of Japanese television drama as it is known until today. In the first year of Japanese television, the dramas were mainly drama-like life broadcasts.

<sup>10</sup> These data are based on the statistical analysis of *Terebi dorama zenshi 1954-1994*. (A Complete History of Japanese Television Drama 1954-1994) (Tokyo News Mook (ed.) (1994)). This book lists every drama aired in the history of Japanese television drama, along with a short overview of the contents.

<sup>11</sup> These data are based on our own research conducted in conjunction with the above-mentioned research project. For the contents of the dramas analysed see the appendix.

furthered the interest in South Korea, a region also growing in popularity in (Japanese) TV dramas. In 2003, the Korean TV drama “Winter Sonata”, one of the first ever on Japanese small screens, became enormously successful and sparked of a ‘Korea Boom’ (*hanliu*)<sup>12</sup> in Japanese popular culture which continues today.<sup>13</sup>

As the ‘Asia boom’ in Japanese television dramas mainly concentrates on characters from ‘China’<sup>14</sup> and South Korea, the focus of this article will be on dramas featuring characters from these two countries/regions. Before analysing several television dramas depicting encounters with Korean or Chinese characters, we will give a short overview of common patterns used in the creation of the imagery of these two other Asian countries. We will hope to illustrate how the way in which ‘Asian’ characters are constructed and given meaning within these dramas reveals a great deal about Japan’s present and possible future cultural, national and regional identities. More specifically, we shall be analysing the way in which these small screen encounters with other Asian characters illustrate how ideas of Japanese culture, identity, and self-image are in a phase of significant renegotiation, and again may come to help re-define immediate and long-term possible Japanese futures.<sup>15</sup>

#### ASIAN ESSENTIALISMS: CONTEMPORARY JAPAN’S SEARCH FOR “SALVATION”

According to the analysis of media researcher Werner Faulstich, the ‘Other’ in international film is constructed around notions of “exoticism”, “salvation” and “horror”.<sup>16</sup> While *exoticism* represents “the unknown to be discovered” (Faulstich 1996: 414), *salvation*

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<sup>12</sup> The ‘Korea Boom’, or ‘Korean Wave’ is not just a Japanese phenomenon, but also visible across the whole of Asia and it is often referred to by its Chinese term (see also Lee Eun-Jeung (2004)).

<sup>13</sup> While in 2001 and 2002, only Korean women played the main parts in Japanese characters, three Japanese-Korean co-productions in 2002 featured Korean men (see Lee Dong-Hoo (2004)). But only in 2003, the broadcasting of “Winter Sonata” brought a breakthrough for Korean male actors in Japan (on this development and its gender implications see Gössmann (2008)). The fandom for male Korean actors is mainly carried out by women and has led to an increased interest in Korean culture among these fans (On these fandom and the Korea boom in Japan, see Mōri (ed.) (2004) as well as Hayashi (2005)). In June 2005, one of the major Japanese newspapers, the Asahi Shinbun ran an issue about a new ‘China boom’ (*hualiu*) in Japanese popular culture, while also stating that the ‘Korea boom’ has by no means diminished (see “‘Taiwan dorama’ shizuka na ninki” 2005).

<sup>14</sup> In this paper the term ‘China’ represents Greater China, that is the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of China on Taiwan and the SAA of Hong Kong.

<sup>15</sup> The notion that television dramas can in fact be read as *nihonjinron* is also conveyed by Matsu Yōichi who entitled his book: “Terebi dorama o yomu. Eizō no naka no nihonjinron” (Reading Television Dramas. *Nihonjinron* within Visual Media) (Matsuo 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Faulstich illustrates his analysis with examples from German, Hollywood and Hong Kong cinema from the 1950s up to the late 1980s.

positions the ‘Other’ as something to be desired and to seek out for salvation of the self (Faulstich 1996: 417). Lastly, *Horror* literally portrays the other as “sinister, threatening, even frightening” (Faulstich 1996: 418, English translations by the authors). These patterns of appropriation and othering are very much in existence in portrayals of Asians in Japanese television dramas as well as in other popular genres. However, the degree to which “exoticism” “salvation” and “horror” are respectively employed has changed over time. While in earlier television dramas the patterns of *exoticism* and *horror* prevailed,<sup>17</sup> in more recent productions the pattern of *salvation* has gradually become more dominant—often assuming the shape of Japanese ‘nostalgia for Asian modernising energy’ (see Gatzen and Gössmann 2003: 247).

“Nostalgia for Asia [...] was now an attempt to regain the energy and vitality Japan had lost by identifying itself with the promising land of ‘Asia’” (Iwabuchi 2002: 176). This theme of salvation becomes most salient in the notion that Japan must save itself from losing precious cultural traditions, attitudes to life, and spiritual resources (energy)—elements that Asia is seen to embody. So, for example, Japanese television dramas involving only Japanese characters often revolve around a common theme of fulfilling a life dream or ambition. Japanese dramas involving other Asian characters, however, apply this genre convention to the ‘Asian’ characters, while the Japanese characters are portrayed as ‘aimless’. We see this construction of Japanese salvation through the Asian other as revolving around three key paradigms of struggle:

1. *Modern individual vs. Traditional familial*. Japanese are constructed as individualist and ‘modern’ in contrast to family-oriented and thus ‘traditional’ ‘Asian’ characters.
2. *Displaced unmotivated vs. Grounded empowered*. The ‘Asian’ characters are constructed as pursuing their (often creative) life dreams, whereas the Japanese seem to have few goals. In the course of cross-cultural encounters, the Japanese are shown to be inspired to define a goal in life as well.
3. *Metaphysically and emotionally under-resourced vs. Spiritually endowed*. The ‘Asian’ characters – with an energy and vitality to overcome difficulties and achieve life success – serve as role models, even saviours, to Japanese presented as lethargic and

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, in the 2000 drama “Nisennen no koi” (Love in the Year 2000), terrorists from a fictitious Asian nation were planning a terrorist attack on a Japanese theme park, therefore killing many innocent people. See Fujimoto, Asano et al. (2000).

unmotivated. They are thus being utilised in order to provide a vital impulse for the development of the Japanese characters.<sup>18</sup>

We would now like to analyse the small screen encounters with Korean and Chinese characters, illustrating how these constructions of ‘Asian’ characters represents an attempt to overcome, or to speak about, struggle in each paradigm. The most predominant struggle, which weaves its way through many of the portrayals and storylines, is the first in the list above—the need to portray ‘Asian traditions’ and family values in Korea/China in a particular way in order to illuminate the need for Japan’s salvation in this area. Analysis of the *modern individual vs. traditional familial* will thus take up the majority of our discussion. The second two paradigms, one involving the degree to which individuals are able to find a sense of place and motivation in society, the other gesturing to a spiritual and emotional capacity to face-up to and overcome problems, have obvious overlaps. We therefore propose to deal with these two points of struggle under one heading: “Nostalgia for Asian Energy”.

### *Modern individual vs. Traditional familial*

The notion of Asia as sharing common ‘traditions’ is one popularised by several Asian politicians and controversially discussed by scholars throughout the past decade. Be it Ishihara Shintarō or Mohamad Mahathir<sup>19</sup>, these so-called ‘Asian values’ have frequently been referred to in order to distinguish Asia from a fundamentally different West. In this context, ‘Asian values’ are often reduced to ‘Confucian values’ which in turn are understood as placing greater value on the benefit of the group or the family than on that of the individual. This is perceived as the main distinction between a homogenized Asia and its (equally homogenized) ‘Other’—a degenerating West. The construction of this clear-cut opposition sparked a lengthy debate and fuelled the production of countless publications in the fields of journalism and scholarship—both in Asian *and* Western countries.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On these patterns see also Gatzen, Gössmann (2003), Gössmann, Kirsch (2003), as well as Iwata-Weickgenannt (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Ishihara Shintarō, governor of Tokyo since 1999, is (in)famous for his right-wing populist exclamations, in which he mostly praises Japan’s qualities, sometimes in accordance with ‘Asian values’. Mohamad Mahathir was between 1981 and 2003 prime minister of Malaysia and one of the key figures within the ‘Asian values debate’.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Ishihara, Mahathir (1994) and for a discussion concerning these widely debated books, see Antoni (2003).

Although it can be said that contemporary Japanese television dramas do raise socially relevant questions,<sup>21</sup> they in fact tend to avoid politically controversial topics—the ‘Asian values’ debate is therefore not referred to explicitly. In this section, however, we intend to illustrate that the portrayal of ‘Asian’ characters as family-oriented can in fact be regarded as a contribution to this debate. As we will hope to reveal, the Japanese and other Asian characters are constructed in deliberate opposition to one another for the purposes of contributing to the themes of this debate. Indeed, we often see that the Japanese assume a part hitherto reserved for ‘individualist Westerners’, implicating Japanese society in a Westerner-like devaluation of the family (the frequent occurrence of divorce being one of the signifiers). In contrast, non-Japanese Asian characters are – almost without exemption – constructed as clearly family-oriented and presented as living according to the so-called ‘Asian traditions’.

Indeed, nowhere does the representation of family values find greater issue within Japanese television dramas than the small-screen encounters with Korean characters. This attitude might not seem surprising when one considers the common stereotype that it is in Korea, rather than China, that Confucianism still plays an important role in structuring familial relations.<sup>22</sup> However, it is also obvious in these dramas that the comparison with Korea underscores the construction of Japan as being particularly ‘modern’ and therefore ‘Western’ in its emphasis on individual freedom and choice. All dramas portraying Korean characters are characterised by the Japanese side consisting of ‘modern’ families with an independent and successful working mother.

The two hour television film “Kankoku no obachan wa erai” (Korean Aunties Are Wonderful, No. 3) broadcast on New Year 2002 also by NHK, centres around one such ‘modern’ Japanese family. The story starts with Rie, a Japanese woman, who, with her Japanese family, move to Seoul because her husband is transferred there from Japan by his company. In Seoul, Rie intends to continue her work as an illustrator on a freelance basis. However, her professional ambitions are countered by a lack of understanding that she, as a woman and mother, intends to continue working. This notion is especially expressed by an elderly Korean lady called “Omoni”<sup>23</sup> who constantly insists on Rie taking her duties as mother and

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<sup>21</sup> For example, on the constructions of gender in Japanese television dramas see Muramatsu (1979, 1986), and of disabled persons in relation to their gender see Stibbe (2004).

<sup>22</sup> An opinion poll conducted in 2000 within Japan, Korea and the People’s Republic of China on the images the people in these three countries have about each other yielded, that 40% of all Japanese interviewees considered Korea to be ‘traditional’ and another 26% considered it to be conservative. (Hara, Shioda 2000: 11, 14).

<sup>23</sup> ‘Omoni’ is the Japanese transcription of the Korean word ‘ōmōni’ which means ‘mother’.

wife more seriously. Rie suffers because she feels she is only perceived as wife and mother and not as a working woman. Thus, she concludes that “Korea is a country of Confucianism.”

As a result of these reprimands, Rie withdraws herself from her Korean surroundings, which in turn becomes one of the main sources of criticism of Omoni and other Korean neighbours. They claim that she “does not open her heart to Korea” (*kokoro o hiraiteinai*). From a gender point of view her withdrawal can be seen as a kind of (conscious or unconscious) self-protection of her identity as a working woman.<sup>24</sup> To continue working, she guards herself against the country which seems to threaten her own self-fulfilment—important for her, but seemingly worthless in Korea. Gender issues thus become a central pivot on which the intercultural encounter between Korea and Japan is explored and commented upon.

After professional failure – one of her sketches is rejected – Rie’s role as wife and mother is brought entirely to the foreground. Likewise, when her mother visits her in Seoul, Rie becomes aware of her duties as a daughter and realises that she has neglected her mother – and her own family – for a long time.

In addition to its emphasis on gender roles and family values across cultures, “Kankoku no obachan wa erai” is one of only a very few dramas to broach the issue of the Japanese colonisation of Korea. When Rie’s mother brings up this subject in a conversation with Omoni by saying: “Japan once did bad things to Korea”, Omoni who is fluent in Japanese due to her education during the colonial time, replies: “It is difficult between nations. But you cannot hate people you know and cherish since we are all like a family.”<sup>25</sup>

The construction of a dichotomy of Japan and Korea concerning gender and family roles is complimented by a subsequent presentation of the idea that inter-generational conflict can unite the generations across cultural borders. Rie’s *mother* and Omoni understand each other’s values and worldviews well, and Rie and Omoni’s daughter – both of about the same age – are united by their wish for professional self-fulfilment. However, even though these changes within the younger generation in Korea are observed – personified by Omoni’s daughter – Korea is presented as a country in which women have to dedicate themselves first

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<sup>24</sup> On a more detailed account of the gender aspects in this drama see Gössmann (2008).

<sup>25</sup> This argument bears allusions to Japan’s policy during the colonial time. Korea was constructed as the bride for the Japanese bridegroom, thus the symbol of family gaining relevance on another, politically more controversial base.

and foremost to their families. Significantly, the only woman with professional ambitions is Omoni's daughter who is divorced and without children—a source of constant reproach from Omoni who can be seen as a representative of the elder generation.

The Japanese-Korean television film “Friends”<sup>26</sup> (in two episodes,<sup>27</sup> *TBS 2002, No. 4*), despite being a co-production, also draws heavily on the stereotype of Korea as a Confucian country by emphasising the same (perceived) difference in family values. Here, the emphasis of family values in Korea can be seen as not only a construct of the Japanese producers, but can also be seen to have become part of Korea's self-image. “Friends” is a love story between the male Korean character Jihun and the female Japanese character Tomoko. According to the producer at the Japanese private station TBS, the Japanese production team aimed to “emphasise the difference between Japanese and Korean families.”<sup>28</sup> For this reason, the Japanese and Korean characters were provided with entirely different backgrounds: the Korean, Jihun, has been born and raised in a rural province which is – even in Korea – considered to be exceptionally ‘traditional’; while the Japanese, Tomoko, is the daughter of a single mother from the Tokyo megalopolis. Therefore, by juxtaposing the heir of a ‘traditional’ Korean family with a girl from Tokyo, the perceived distinction is much more obvious than if the two main characters were chosen from a similar environment.

This difference in backgrounds and upbringing eventually lead to a clash between the two main characters. Although Jihun dreams of making films, his father wants him to take over the family business. Tomoko, on the other hand, has no concept of obligation to the family in terms of her career directions. Her mother has been constantly concerned whether Tomoko had dreams or ambitions she wanted to fulfil that her mother could help her accomplish. As she always had to reply that she did not have a ‘dream’ for herself, Tomoko puts high esteem in people that, in contrast to herself, do have dreams in life. When she urges Jihun not to deny his film-making dream for the sake of his family's business, Jihun defends his father's position. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Tomoko's Japaneseness plays a part here—in identifying Korean culture as an underdog to the Japanese, Jihun seeks to defend and uphold his own country's culture in the face of the Japanese other. Towards his Korean friends, however, Jihun is much more critical of his father and the family traditions. Such

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<sup>26</sup> On this drama see also Iwata-Weickgenannt (2008).

<sup>27</sup> This drama is the first and only real Japanese-Korean co-production. Unlike other co-productions all important positions had a Japanese and a Korean in charge, i.e. there were Japanese and Korean cameramen, scriptwriters, directors and producers.

<sup>28</sup> Statement during an interview with Hilaria Gössmann in August 2002.



intimate disagreements thus represent the negotiation of power balance on large cultural and national canvases (Iwata-Weickgenannt 2008).

Although they remain together, Tomoko withdraws emotionally from Jihun who eventually continues to realise his dream to work in film. In “Friends” the common patterns are reversed—even though the Japanese character is able to find a new job in which she can be more at ease with herself, it is not she who is encouraged to live her own dreams, but the Korean character. When Jihun wins a prize for one of his films, his father finally accepts his professional ambitions. When his father then goes on to give him permission to marry Tomoko, the film is brought to a happy ending. Yet, even though differences between the younger and the older generation are emphasised, it is much more important for Jihun than for Tomoko to live in accordance with his family’s wishes.

Like in “Kankoku no obachan wa erai”, the world view of the younger generation differs from that of the elder. However, in the argument with Tomoko, the Korean character describes it as given that he should seek to fulfil his father’s expectations. Even though – encouraged by Tomoko – he decides in favour of his own professional dreams, the harmony with his family is vital for him. By contrast, Tomoko’s relationship with her mother is based on friendship rather than obligation. Her mother even encourages her to find and eventually realise her own dreams. Thus, the contrast between Jihun and Tomoko’s familial worlds is a powerful signifier for the construction of Japanese and Korean cultural difference and identity within the drama.

The television series “Faitingu gāru”<sup>29</sup> (Fighting Girl, Fuji TV 2001, No.5) which consists of eleven episodes, portrays a friendship between the 19-year old Japanese Sayoko and the 24-year old Korean Ami whose attitudes differ diametrically. Ami’s moral concepts match those of Sayoko’s father who owns a small manual workshop and thus personifies a more ‘traditional’ Japan. When Sayoko for a short time enters the fashion business, her father strictly opposes her plans to work in such a fast-moving branch. His own small family business, however, seems to be associated with a ‘not-quite-as-modern’ Japan. Therefore, through this representative of the elder generation, a more critical stance toward Japan’s modernity is put forward. Due to her friendship with Ami, Sayoko eventually realises that the

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<sup>29</sup> On this drama see also Gatzel, Gössmann (2003).

‘traditions’ upheld through her father’s small business are in fact something valuable to be respected.

Japanese and Korean families in Japanese television dramas are almost always constructed along the ‘tradition versus modernity’ dichotomy, even when internal inter-generational differences and cross-cultural generational symmetry can be detected and convincingly rendered. The comparison with Korea serves as a means to present the situation in Japan as being far from any Confucian, shared Asian, family traditions. Even though it is made clear that the younger generation in Korea seem to suffer from the limits set by these traditions, family values in general are presented as something positive, something that relate to Japan’s own ‘traditions’—traditions diluted or even destroyed in part by the effects of ‘modernisation’.<sup>30</sup>

As the previous focus on Korean characters makes clear, Koreans are nearly almost presented as upholding a ‘traditional’ lifestyle by placing emphasis on family values. Unlike those dramas portraying Japanese-Korean encounters, however, the dichotomy of ‘traditional’ versus ‘modern family life’ seems to be of lesser importance for the construction of ‘Japan’ and ‘China’. Although only two dramas deal with the issue of tradition and modernity between China and Japan, this dichotomy is conveyed in a very fascinating and revealing way.

In *Sakuranbo no minoru tani*, (The Valley where the Cherries Bear Fruit, NHK 2000, No. 6), a young Japanese salary man encounters life in a minority village in a remote Chinese province. This particular minority, especially the family he befriends, is presented as having led a life far from the benefits and losses of ‘modernity’ which is posed as spreading throughout China and about to reach the secluded village. This ‘modernity’ is represented by two Japanese characters who are planning to bring tourists into this area and therefore need to prepare the village according to the needs of visitors from a ‘modern’ society while at the same time trying to preserve the village’s ‘primeval flair’.

The drama sets out to convey the notion that the contact with this kind of ‘modernity’ will slowly degenerate the ‘original traditions’ of the villagers. This is personified in the character

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<sup>30</sup> Ironically, in condemning the ‘effects’ of modernisation, these dramas assume quite a ‘modern’ position themselves by taking the existence of so-called ‘original cultures’ for granted.

of one of the Chinese family's sons who works in a Japanese company. Even though the 'traditional' codes of honour demand that all family members stand together in a moment of desperate need, he refuses to help his family by saying: "There's no need for traditions. We live in modern times now." His sister, on the other hand, sees the necessity to preserve the minority's lifestyle. She considers it her duty to remain in the village and teach the children the true value of 'traditions'.<sup>31</sup> Through her efforts, her brother is eventually able to reconsider the significance of these 'traditions' and finally even turns to help his family.

Interestingly, in "Sakuranbo no minoru tani", the boundaries between a supposed 'original tradition' and a 'newly intruding modernity' are not drawn exactly along the lines of 'traditional Chinese' versus 'modern Japanese'. 'Modernity' rather seems to be something 'infectious' and threatening for, (although somewhat nostalgically distorted and woolly defined), 'traditions' in general. Whereas the small village in the mountains is presented as having preserved its 'traditions' and continually struggling to uphold its codes of honour, the two Japanese businessmen and the son of the Chinese family apparently represent (Western) 'modernity' in the sense of thinking only about profit and themselves. Nevertheless, the message of the drama seems to be that this development can be stopped if the 'modernizers', be they Chinese or Japanese, are able to find a way back to their own 'traditions' again. This is also illustrated by the Japanese main character's catharsis: The high esteem given to family values within this minority group leads this character to a healing experience such that he is even able to forgive a grudge against his father which has thwarted him throughout his life.

Here the approach of the Japanese characters toward 'tradition' is clearly visible. Whereas the two Japanese businessmen seek to exploit the perceived 'traditional' lifestyle of the minority (economically), the Japanese main character who belongs to the younger generation is able to turn his positive experiences into profit for his personal development, profit on a monetary base becomes unimportant for him. The drama thus conveys the notion that Japan's younger generation is, or at least should be able to, communicate with China and its inhabitants on a more personal basis, without the 'corrupting' influence of economic greed or betterment.

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<sup>31</sup> Again, like in the dramas depicting Korean encounters, the Chinese assume 'modern' positions in acknowledging and preserving these alleged 'original traditions.'

“Sakuranbo no minoru tani” can be read as a plea to uphold and cherish a ‘nostalgic-traditional’ lifestyle within a strongly tied family bound by codes of honour as well as by affection. The Chinese characters portrayed as being ‘traditionally-oriented’ serve as role models for the ‘modern’ characters, regardless of their origin.<sup>32</sup> Referring back to the ‘Asian values debate’, Japan thus takes on the part of the individualised and modern West, whereas rural China is – uncritically – connoted with ‘Asian’ values. “Sakuranbo no minoru tani” thus sports a very essentialist argumentation, as the ‘Western’ qualities of Japan – individualism and a profit-oriented way of thinking – are presented as something acquired (from outside?) and thus easily disposed of in the same stroke.

Unlike “Sakuranbo no minoru tani” which shows a construction of China along the conventional pattern of ‘tradition versus modernity’, the ten episode television series “Honke no yome”<sup>33</sup> (Nihon Terebi 2001, No. 7) aired by the private broadcasting station Nihon Terebi, however, takes on a different stance within this dichotomy.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the other examples we have mentioned have portrayed ‘Asia’ as the ‘traditional’ other to Japan’s modernity, in “Honke no yome” this pattern is reversed by constructing a ‘traditional’ Japan in contrast to a ‘modern’ and international Taiwan. The young female main character of “Honke no yome” – Nozomi – is of Japanese and Taiwanese descent, but was raised in the USA. She thus seems to embody ‘Asian’ as well as ‘Western’ values which are presented in a more positive way than in “Sakuranbo no minoru tani”.

So far, Nozomi has led a ‘modern’ lifestyle pursuing a career as a journalist. Her husband is Japanese and the second son of a *honke*. When the actual heir leaves the family, her husband is asked to fill the role and Nozomi is put under pressure to divorce, because as a working woman she does not fit in the pattern of a usual *honke no yome*. Instead of submitting to his

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<sup>32</sup> However, this positive image is blurred by some of the characters representing ‘modernity,’ who obviously cannot be turned back to ‘tradition’ as they seem to be already too much infected by the ‘errors’ of modernity. A possible healing thus seems to depend on the readiness to open oneself for ‘traditions’ rather than exploiting them.

<sup>33</sup> The homepage of the producing station translates the title of the drama as “The Family Bride”. This is not only a very clumsy translation, but rather misses the connotations innate to the original. The title is, however, not easily translated into English, so instead of giving a (probably quite as clumsy) literal translation, a short explanation of the meaning seems to be more appropriate. A *honke* is a so-called main family, and is usually referred to as being a traditional Japanese family consisting of several generations living under one roof. Although it is often compared to European nobility or 19<sup>th</sup> century gentry, it is a much more symbolic term. One of the tasks of such a *honke* is, however, to uphold the family name. Thus a male heir is absolutely necessary. The term ‘*yome*’ refers to the bride entering her husband’s family. A ‘*honke no yome*’ thus is a bride of the heir of a ‘*honke*’, who is mostly expected to live according to traditional gender roles within the household. For more information on the Japanese family system see Nakane (1985) and for a critical discussion see Ochiai (2000).

<sup>34</sup> On this drama see also Kirsch (2008).

family's wishes, however, she decides to stay and fight for her place in the *honke*. When she discovers that the traditional lifestyle of her husband's family deprives the members of the family of their innermost wishes, she decides to put a little 'fresh air' into the old ways of life.

Unlike 'tradition' in "Sakuranbo no minoru tani", 'tradition' here is somehow jammed, preventing people from realising their own dreams. "Honke no yome" thus explicitly refers to Japan's own 'traditions' and even though their 'Asian' background is never mentioned, they are presented along the usual patterns of 'Asian familiarism'—therefore implicitly portraying Japan as being part of Asia or at least having the same background. In stark contrast to the dramas featuring Korea, it seems that in "Honke no yome", 'Japan' is constructed as needing an impulse from outside to make its own 'traditions' liveable again

This central point is played out through the role of the Japanese-Taiwanese-American character in contrast to that of her Japanese counterpart—the family matriarch whose task it is to "protect the house" (*ie o mamoru*). Both are functionalised according to the pattern of 'tradition versus modernity'. However, as these two women develop deep bonds despite their different attitudes, the 'traditional' lifestyle of the husband's family is gradually changed, allowing the members of the family to experience more personal freedom and the advantages of an extended family at the same time.<sup>35</sup> Unlike other dramas, here both sides profit from the changes: whereas the family matriarch acknowledges the younger character's wish to modernise the family traditions and gradually finds out for herself, that "protecting a house" does include the (emotional) welfare of those who live in it, the protagonist comes to respect a traditional way of living.

Yet, however progressive this drama may seem in its representation of 'China', it is important that the main character is of Japanese descent. She is therefore 'close' enough to Japan to at least understand these 'traditions', but also educated in the West, thus individualistic enough to question the perceived 'errors' of these 'traditions' more directly.<sup>36</sup> The message of the series thus seems obvious: By inverting the common patterns, it is not a yearning for 'Asian

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<sup>35</sup> The protagonist prevents her husband's eldest sister from an undesired arranged marriage. She also helps the actual heir to fulfil his dream of becoming a professional boxer. Most importantly, she is even able to console the family matriarch with her twin sister who had left the family to live her own life.

<sup>36</sup> The protagonist was actually played by the Taiwanese actress Vivian Xu, who has, except from being fluent in Japanese, no roots in Japan. Although her character is part Japanese, due to her popularity in Japan as a so-called 'Asian Star', she gives the character a more 'alien' or 'Chinese' flair than a Japanese actress would have done, thus moving her character into a more detached position from these Japanese 'traditions'. On this tendency see also Kirsch (2002).

traditions' that is expressed here, but much rather a wish to cherish Japan's *own* traditions (again). Yet it remains significant that common ascriptions of 'tradition' and 'modernity' are questioned, and an amalgam between 'old' and 'new' is shown as the most appropriate way of life.

Family values, be they 'traditionally Chinese/Asian' or 'originally Japanese' are in both cases presented as holding relevant ideals and are therefore strengthened as legitimate models. However, the messages are achieved under different preliminaries: Whereas in "Sakuranbo no minoru tani" specifically 'Asian' values are portrayed and utilised for the Japanese, the family system presented in "Honke no yome" is entirely Japanese—therefore, a 'healing process' can be also found within Japan itself if its own 'traditions' are 'readjusted'.

In the genre of Japanese television drama, a certain tendency to describe or construct Chinese as not entirely 'traditional' can be observed.<sup>37</sup> Rather, they seem to oscillate between tradition and modernity. Even in "Sakuranbo no minoru tani", the ascriptions of 'tradition versus modernity' are not drawn along the lines of nationalities. In "Honke no yome", eventually, this pattern is entirely dissolved. A reason for these divergent representations of 'China' may be found in its intense economic diversity—it might be difficult to ascribe 'tradition' to the 'modern' parts of the People's Republic – such as Shanghai – as well as to Taiwan which has one of the highest standards of life in Asia.

#### NOSTALGIA FOR 'ASIAN ENERGY'

In most dramas depicting encounters between Japan and other Asian countries, the Japanese are portrayed as lethargic and unable to find their own way in life, whereas the 'Asian' characters are energetic and full of determination. They usually have a certain dream they aim to fulfil, whereas the Japanese characters are seem to aimlessly wander through their lives. The contact with this 'Asian energy' always results in a positive experience for the Japanese, who then are able to define a dream for themselves and consequently become more fulfilled in their new vigor.

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<sup>37</sup> In other popular genres, the ascription of China as being a 'traditional' country seems to be a much more relevant pattern than in television dramas. On the representations of China in Japanese television Gatzert, Gössmann (2003) and on documentaries see Gatzert (2002).

This ‘Asian energy’ can be seen to manifest itself in different ways. It can either be a determination to work for the betterment of the country or, on a more individual basis, to fulfil one’s personal dreams. This ‘Asian fortitude’ can also be extended to the well-being of the characters’ – mostly Japanese – social/environmental surroundings, therefore obtaining a more altruistic connotation. The pattern of ‘Asian energy and determination’, therefore, illustrates a wide divergence of struggle and application which is best analyzed by looking, in turn, at how ‘dreams of Asian modernisation’, ‘fulfilling personal dreams’, and ‘altruism’ are key sub-themes of this portrayals of energy, motivation and salvation.

*“Asia’s Dream Will Surely Come True” – Dreams of Modernisation and Industrialisation*

In the television drama “Doku” aired in 1996, the main character, a Vietnamese exchange student named Doku, comes to Japan in order to fulfil his dream of studying architecture. However, Doku’s own dream was not only to become an architect to have a better life for himself, but to help his own country in its modernisation. The catchphrase of this drama – Asia’s dream will surely come true (*Ajia no yume wa kanarazu kanau*) – hints that ‘Asia’s’ dream supposedly is one of modernisation and industrialisation, which is reflected in the Vietnamese main character’s own dream. In accordance, the Vietnamese are constructed as more energetic and vigorous than the Japanese who, from their already-modernised position, are fascinated by this power.<sup>38</sup> For the first time, in 1996, the notion that other Asians were more energetic than the Japanese was expressed—a pattern which came to be used more often in the future. It is perhaps important to note that in constructing the ‘Asian Dream’ narrative, it is the progress of a whole state or even the whole region that is emphasised. This is in contrast to the ‘American Dream’ narrative, which usually implies a rise ‘from rags to riches’ focusing on the rise of individuals, and thus in this distinction the ‘Asian values debate’ is again highlighted.

In “Sakuranbo no minoru tani” (No. 6), China appears as a country on the verge of modernisation and industrialisation. But unlike in “Doku”, ‘modernity’ is constructed as something that cannot be helped, not necessarily as something desirable. Yet all characters accept the necessity of modernisation by not opposing the intention of the Japanese businessmen to bring in tourists. The most important stance – not raised in “Doku” – is how

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<sup>38</sup> On this drama see also Gössmann, Jaschke and Mrugalla (1998) as well as Iwabuchi (2002): pp. 178-179.

modernity can be admitted without destroying 'traditional' values at the same time. Even though the drama focuses on the hazards of a too rash a modernisation, it acknowledges at the same time China's 'energy' which is described as being that of a 'modernising country'.

The approach towards China in the television film "Honkonmyōjōmei" (Fan of a Hong Kong Star, No. 8)<sup>39</sup> also conveys an image of a 'modernising China', though only implicitly. The female Japanese main character works as the Asian marketing director of the Japanese branch of a French shoe brand. Her dream is, however, to get rid of the Western fashion dictate and create something 'exquisitely Asian' by establishing an Asian label. The creative energy for this she finds in the works of a young female Chinese designer. In this, both the Japanese and the Chinese represent certain abilities: whereas the Chinese assumes the creative part, the Japanese possesses the international competence and entrepreneurial skills necessary to make the product a success. Although this drama never mentions a 'modernisation' of China, the 'Asian Dream' is extended to the co-operation between China and Japan within Asia—therefore representing a more thorough emancipation of this region.

### *Energy to Fulfil Personal Dreams*

These 'dreams' and the 'energy' necessary to fulfil them cannot only be found on the national level, as has been briefly highlighted above, but also on a personal level by presenting seemingly lethargic and aimless Japanese characters in opposition to their more vigorous 'Asian' counterparts. This is especially visible in television dramas dealing with Korea. These dramas usually contrast a lethargic Japanese character with an energetic Korean determinately working to fulfil his or her dream. Here, the dramas "Mō ichido kisu" (No. 1) and "Faitingu gāru" (No. 5) and the Japanese-Korean co-production "Friends" (No. 4) may serve to illustrate this notion well. Each of these dramas features Japanese characters who at the beginning do not know what to do with their lives. In both "Mō ichido kisu" and "Faitingu gāru" the Japanese main characters have left university before graduating, whereas in "Friends" the main character is unsatisfied with her job as a shop assistant.

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<sup>39</sup> On this drama see also Gössmann, Kirsch (2003), and for a detailed analysis of gender relations in this drama see Kirsch (2008).



In all three cases, the encounter with Korean characters give the Japanese the energy to develop an individual dream or to at least reorganise their lives: through the contact with the Korean pop singer, the male Japanese main character in “Mō ichido kisu” is indirectly encouraged to write songs by himself instead of copying others. The Japanese girl in “Faitingu gāru” discovers her talent in fashion design, whereas the Japanese character in “Friends” starts learning Korean, quits her job and starts organising trips to Korea instead: “the passive administrator of consumption thus becomes an active administrator of culture” (Iwata-Weickgenannt 2008, translation by the authors). It is, however, important to note, that in this particular drama the Japanese is as vital to the Korean as vice versa. Only through her doing, the male Korean main character is encouraged to realise his own dream—therefore her ‘female’ energy seems to be as important for him as his ‘Korean’ energy for her.<sup>40</sup>

A special form of ‘give and take’ is also visible in the triangular love story “Uso koi” (False Love, No. 9),<sup>41</sup> a series in eleven episodes evolving around the lives of two Japanese and one Chinese character. The young Chinese designer-to-be dreams of becoming one of the pupils of a renowned Japanese designer. For this, she needs a visa, which she obtains by secretly entering the family register of the male Japanese main character as his wife. Although the Chinese character at first glance seems to be a selfish and egocentric person for whom the end seems to justify the means, she is not presented as unsympathetic, but rather as being in a powerless position, a victim of a rigorous Japanese immigration law.

The Japanese main character – a photographer – is a creative person himself, and thus understands the Chinese’s motives better than he would actually admit. He gradually gets to admire her determination and begins to support her dream while at the same time receiving inspiration from her. Here, although the Chinese character seems to be the more determined, her Japanese counterpart(s) are by no means lethargic. All of the characters possess a certain creative energy through which they are ultimately able to articulate through encountering each other. In the end, all main characters have found a way to live their own dreams.<sup>42</sup>

### *Altruistic ‘Asian’ Characters*

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<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this aspect see Iwata-Weickgenannt (2008).

<sup>41</sup> On this drama see Gössmann, Gatzel (2003) as well as Gössmann, Kirsch (2003).

<sup>42</sup> In course of the series, the dream of every persona seems to be threatened once in a while in order to evoke suspense.

Within this overall category of ‘nostalgia for Asian Energy’, a certain kind of determination to improve a (seemingly hopeless) situation appears as a common sub-theme. Whereas the Japanese characters presented in these dramas seem to be lethargic and submissive in situations they feel unable to change themselves, the ‘Asian’ characters seem to possess the vitality necessary to initiate change. Strongly related to the sub-theme of fulfilling personal dreams described above, the ‘Asian’ characters here go further in the pursuit of dreams—not just pursuing individual dreams but dreams which may lead to a better life for all. Again, the main arguments of the ‘Asian values debate’ can be found here, as this pattern depends on a more group-oriented, selfless behaviour of the ‘Asian’ characters. In most cases, however, this kind of energy is transmitted to the Japanese characters, whom, after this outside impulse, become more energetic and vigorous themselves.

One of the most prominent examples is the main character of the series “Honke no yome”. As already noted, the Japanese-Taiwanese-American main character is functionalised according to the dichotomy of ‘tradition versus modernity’. She therefore does not only represent modernity, but a certain kind of modernising spirit within the traditional *honke*. Corresponding to her telling name ‘Nozomi’ (literally ‘wish’ or ‘hope’), she strives to help others realise their deepest wishes. In this, she does not seem to have a dream for herself – having realised most of them already – but constantly encourages the Japanese characters to believe and stand for their dreams. Her vitality thus seems infectious, as through her doing, the situation of the family does in fact improve. She becomes the driving force within the household, characterised as altruistic and helpful. The truly idealised character of Nozomi is therefore utilised according to the pattern of the ‘Others’ being ‘saviours’ for the Japanese.

Again, however, it is important that she is of Japanese descent, thus rendering the energy not as something exquisitely ‘Asian’ or ‘Western’. This is also underlined by the fact that her Japanese husband in fact shares her determination. Like in “Kankoku no obachan wa erai”, however, the generation gap gains importance, as both Nozomi and her husband symbolise the younger generation, whereas the family matriarch of course represents the values of the elder generation. Though the two worldviews constantly clash, these differences can be consoled by Nozomi’s determination.

Another purely altruistic character can be found in the Japanese-Korean co-production “Sonagi—Ameagari no satsui” (Sonagi<sup>43</sup>—Murderous Intentions after the Rain, No. 10). The Korean main character is a CID officer who puts all his energy in investigating a case which actually has already been closed. A Japanese businessman in Seoul has apparently committed suicide, yet his sister insists that he has been murdered. Becoming witness to her pleading, he decides to believe her rather than his superiors and starts investigating. Owing to his determination, the truth finally comes to light.

The Korean officer is portrayed as a ‘lonesome cowboy’, who neither respects traditions nor superior officers. Although he gives “promotion and ambition” as the main reasons for his actions, it becomes clear throughout the drama that he actually helps the Japanese because of her assurance that her brother is the only family she has – their parents died in an accident when they were still young – and that he promised never to leave her alone. Even though he is by far the most individualist ‘Asian’ character, the Korean seems to have at least a certain understanding of family values. In this drama, the discussion of ‘family’ concerning encounters with Koreans is only implicitly present and strongly reduced in its dominance.

“Sonagi” probably goes furthest into the realm of political debate by explicitly mentioning problems between South Korea and Japan. However, it is also made clear that other possibilities for communication beyond politics are possible. In a moment of conflict, the Korean main character states: “The elder generation was right, you cannot trust the Japanese.” In due course however, it is elucidated, that the elder generation was wrong and consequently, the younger generation should be able to understand each other on a different level.

The Chinese and Korean characters are in most cases presented as the more energetic, determinate part within the plot, although in “Uso koi” – and, to a lesser extent, in “Friends” – the Japanese seem equally energetic. However, the contact with the ‘Asian’ characters is in all cases vital to the development of the Japanese character(s). The other Asians are therefore being utilised according to their relevance for the Japanese. Here, it becomes obvious that portrayals of Asian characters do not show Japan and ‘Asia’ as assuming an equal position. Nevertheless, despite the continuance of notions of ranked economic or cultural power, the

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<sup>43</sup> The Korean word ‘sonagi’ (literally: cloudburst) refers to the title of a Korean short story, which is commonly read in Korean schools. This short story is important within the plot, as the plot carries allusions to the actual short story.

‘Asian’ characters remain as role models for the Japanese. Through a nostalgia for ‘Asian energy’, problems in the Japanese society are addressed and the audiences therefore encouraged to define for themselves goals in life.

## CONCLUSION—YOUTH, POPULAR CULTURE, AND A COMING ASIAN AGE?

The Japanese construction of the Asian ‘other’ has been through some important changes. While established patterns and stereotypes do remain, there are efforts at wholly new representations which tap into highly contemporary questions of regional and world place and internal struggles and identities. The ability to blend tradition and modernity, to approach and live life and to embody positivism and energy in one’s pursuit of happiness and success—these are the qualities offered by the Asian characters today.

As we have mentioned in various examples, there are also important generational factors at work here too. By conveying closeness between Japan and ‘Asia’ through the relationships of the characters, the ‘rediscovering’ of Japan’s ‘lost’ traditions and qualities is ‘pitched’ to a younger generation. Indeed, almost all ‘Asian’ main characters are young people who represent a young and vigorous ‘Asia’ that has – in various degrees – managed to hold on to its traditions. These young people are carefully constructed and presented as role models for the younger generation in Japan who are seen to be aligned with ‘the West’—their individualism and disregard for ‘family values’ acting as markers for this. Picking up on the antithesis of these Western qualities, elements picked up from the *nihonjinron* literature and wider ‘Asian values debate’ are utilised to chastise this younger ‘Westernised and passive’<sup>44</sup> Japanese generation, presenting alternative worldviews and identities, seemingly valued as superior by the older producers. As one producer of a television drama featuring a Korean character put it: the ‘Asian’ characters are there to “tell the younger generation off”.<sup>45</sup>

If this strategy should work and the younger generation in Japan is indeed encouraged to be ‘saved’ in the ways that the producers intend, it is interesting to note that their ‘lost qualities’ are also being simultaneously ‘rediscovered’ in the younger generation of their Asian

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<sup>44</sup> On the perceived passiveness of the Japanese youth see Kotani (2004).

<sup>45</sup> This statement was made during a discussion at the international conference “Feeling Asian Modernities. TV Drama Consumption on East / Southeast Asia” at the International Christian University in Tokyo in November 2001 in response to a question by Hilaria Gössmann (for a protocol of the discussion see Ōta 2004: 79-86).

neighbors. This is because these dramas are very much part of a region-wide popular culture, increasingly shared among Korea (since lifting of import controls on Japanese popular culture in 1998), Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong (Kondo 2004: 39), to name only the largest markets of Japan-produce popular culture. The role of popular culture itself thus also contributes to this kind of interregional and intergenerational understanding. The younger generation within Asia is presented as consuming basically the same popular culture, one 'different' from 'Western' and/or American popular culture. The popularity of Korean productions in Japan since the year 2003 underlines this, as Korean dramas and actors seem to have become an inseparable part of Japanese popular culture.

While most dramas achieve a happy ending for the (Japanese) characters, the understanding between 'Japan' and 'Asia' grows in importance. Even though the 'Asian' characters are highly idealised personae within these dramas and problems arising in the region because of Japan's dealing with its wartime past are almost entirely left out, it is the younger generation that is presented as being able to communicate regardless of differences, boundaries, or even politics. Thus, a 'brighter' and less troubled future is painted through these dramas—one where shared values to configuring identity and living life override national borders in favour of a shared sense of regional belonging.

To what extent will these dramas' 'vision' of a Japan as an integral part of Asia with the region's youth generation sharing the same values become a reality? There are opposing forces which we see as directing the vision towards and away from influencing the direction of Japan's possible future. On the one hand, the younger generation is shown as being able to communicate with each other beyond political problems, and this is clearly a model being presented to the very grass roots of Japanese society. On the other hand, however, it remains highly questionable whether a profound understanding can really be achieved by attributing special qualities to 'Asians' while offering no substantial treatment of the political differences and nationalist rhetoric that still haunts this region. Ultimately, the vision of the dramas may only succeed if the viewers can look beyond the characters within them to the expanded opportunities they provide for the younger generation in Japan and the wider Asia to engage in meaningful relationships and dialogue with one another.

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## **Appendix: Contents of television dramas analysed**

### **No. 1 “Mō ichido kisu” (One More Kiss, NHK 2001)**

Male Japanese main character (20): breaks off his studies, looks for a goal in his life, finally starts working as a composer

Female Korean main character (24): professional pop singer, dreams of spending her life with the man of her dreams

### **No. 2 “Shijō no koi” (Highest Love, NHK 2001)**

Male Japanese main character (in his 40s): suffers under his divorce, gains a more positive worldview due to the encounter with the Korean character

Female Korean main character (in her 20s): constantly believes in the good of the world,

sacrifices herself to save the life of the Japanese main character's daughter

**No. 3 “Kankoku no obachan wa erai” (Korean Aunties Are Wonderful, NHK 2002)**

Female Japanese main character (in her 30s): works as freelance illustrator, rethinks her position within her family

Female Korean main character (in her 50s): considers ‘family first’ as basic duty for women

**No. 4 “Friends” (TBS, KBS 2002)**

Female Japanese main character (in her 20s): unsatisfied with her job, starts learning Korean and finds a dream for herself

Male Korean main character (in his 20s): dreams of making films, wants to fulfil the expectations of his father, finally able to fulfil his dreams

**No. 5 “Faitingu gāru” (Fighting Girl, Fuji TV 2002)**

Female Japanese main character (19): breaks off university, starts as fashion designer

Female Korean main character (24): flees from a marriage of convenience in Korea, wants to work in Japan

**No. 6 “Sakuranbo no minoru tani” (The Valley Where the Cherries Bear Fruit, NHK 2000)**

Male Japanese main character (about 35): is transferred to China, encounters the traditions of a minority, rethinks and consequently changes his life

Female Chinese main character (about 25): wants to preserve the traditions of the minority group she belongs to

**No. 7 “Honke no yome” (Nihon terebi 2001)**

Female Japanese-Taiwanese main character (25): freelance journalist, wants to change the traditional lifestyle of her husband's family, learns to cherish traditions

Female Japanese main character (in her 50s): cherishes family traditions, learns to appreciate a more modern lifestyle

**No. 8 “Honkonmyōjōmei” (Fan of a Hong Kong Star, TV Tōkyō 2002)**

Female Japanese main character (in her late 30s): dreams of establishing an Asian shoe label, able to fulfil her dream

**No. 9 “Usō koi” (False Love, Fuji TV 2001)**

Male Japanese main character (38): photographer, has quit creative camerawork, dreams of working more creatively again

Female Chinese main character (27): dreams of becoming a fashion designer

**No. 10 “Sonagi – Ameagari no satsui” (Sonagi – Murderous Intentions after the Rain, Fuji TV, MBC 2002)**

Female Japanese main character (27): brother murdered in Seoul, urges for solution of the case

Male Korean main character (27): Police officer, solves the cases despite his superior’s objections