Legitimating Visions:
The Nanyang Imaginary in Contemporary Southeast Asian Cinemas

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Abstract

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The Asian Financial Crisis was a tumultuous international event that also resulted in a crisis of faith in the nation and the state in the region, the most dramatic result of which were the anti-Chinese riots in Jakarta and elsewhere in Java in 1998. For the Chinese in Nanyang, or the "South Seas," who had always occupied an ambivalent space in their adopted homelands, it was only one of the more recent key moments in a long timeline of historical trauma. But just as 危机 (Wei Ji), the Chinese term for "crisis," consists of two characters that signify 'danger' and 'opportunity', Nanyang Chinese filmmakers found this crisis as an opportunity to critically re-examine the nation, bending time and expanding space in order to reimagine home, family, belonging and nationhood. After a historical survey of the Chinese in Insular Southeast Asia, this study looks at the ideation of a unique Nanyang Chinese culture through a textual analysis of two contemporary semi-

autobiographical melodrama films commemorating the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and its after-effects in the years after. *Babi Buta Yang Ingin Terbang* (Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly, 2008), an Indonesian-language film, revolves around the emotionally disconnected members of a Chinese-Indonesian family making sense of the anti-Chinese riots. *Ilo Ilo* (爸媽不在家, 2013), an English, Tagalog, and Mandarin-language film, explores the relationship between a Singaporean boy and his Filipina nanny whose maternal nature provokes the jealousy of the child's real mother. This Intra-Asian study will examine the intersections of nationalism and diaspora, as well as of Southeast Asian Cinema and Sinophone Cinema. Despite the differences in style, treatment, and language, these films seem to have a common goal, not as much countering as transcending the nation's "empty, homogeneous time (and space)" in order to accommodate the Chinese Diasporic Imaginary.

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DEDICATION

To the family I was given—

my father, my solid ground, my berth,

my mother who helped me find new horizons,

my siblings navigate this ocean with me—

and the family I was chosen to be part of,

and to you

who gaze at the past with me

to see the future.

PREFACE

Me (far right) and my brothers with cousins at our family farm in Peñaranda, Nueva Ecija

If only for a moment, it seemed like we were stuck in time, transported into an Amorsolo painting, an idyllic fantasy version of the Tagalog countryside. The summer sunset that day had turned the Central Luzon landscape of my Dad's hometown, Peñaranda, a beautiful, golden yellow, and the *amihan* wind danced to the song of the *maya* sparrows flitting across the rice fields surrounding the cemetery. We had gone for the weekend to pay our respects to our grandmother, Nanay Fering. After praying and talking to her, Dad decided it was time to go back home to Manila, a two-hour drive south from there. Tomorrow, it was back to school for me and my brothers at an all-boys private school in Mandaluyong (I was grade 5 back then), and back to work for Dad, who ran his own construction management company, and Mom, who sold construction supplies. We drove across the stony, muddy, unpaved road out of the cemetery in silence, a silence that lingered even after we finally hit the smooth asphalt road.

When Dad finally talked, he spoke only to our Mom, in the passenger seat. He said that there were talks of Far East Bank and Trust Company, one of his long-term clients since 1990, being bought out by Bank of the Philippine Islands. At the height of his relationship with Far East Bank, he had built branches for them all over Luzon island, and he feared that this merger would threaten his primary means of livelihood. As we drove back home, the Amorsolo colors had faded, turning red, then dark blue, before being swallowed by the night. Only our headlights and passing cars lit the way, until garish billboards advertising whitening products or designer clothing brands or real estate investments announced our arrival to the capital city.

I did not know it then, but this was at the height of the Asian Financial Crisis, and this one seemingly insignificant moment (a late afternoon, a sunset, a ride back home) would reverberate across time and inscribe my future. Not long after, my Mom started making plans to migrate to the US, with the intent of taking us with her. The process would take all of eight years, during which time my Dad's business floundered before finally going bankrupt. I would drop out of college to work at an outsourced call center in Manila serving a newspaper in Columbus, Ohio, in order to augment my mom's remittances and help sustain Dad and my brothers. By the time my petition came through in 2007, I had become an adult. When I arrived at O'Hare Airport in the winter cold, my mom and I hardly recognized each other. We had a strained relationship, and it didn't help that the US recession had hit by this time. I finally decided to move out in 2010, settling in Seattle with my brother and some of our relatives from our Dad's side. I worked at another call center before going back to school at the University of Washington in 2015 to finally finish my degree.

Stories like mine hardly ever make it into history books, or economics books. When academics talk about the Asian Financial crisis, they usually focus on 'matters of consequence,' such as political instability, or GDP, or trade policy. But these very big events, these matters of

consequence, their effects go deep down to a very personal level. The intimacies of crisis and its lingering trauma touched me and my family deeply, shaping our being and becoming at the turn of the 21st century. And so, whenever I try to remember the time of the Asian Financial Crisis, it is mediated through that visceral memory, that one Amorsolo evening. The idyllic space of the past that blurs into the uncertain time of the now.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

> "This youngest of the arts is also the one most heavily burdened with memory. Cinema is a time machine… [They] resurrect the beautiful dead; present intact vanished or ruined environments…"
>
> -Susan Sontag (Film and Theatre 370)

> "A whole history remains to be written of *spaces* – which would at the same time be the history of *powers* – from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat."
>
> Michael Foucault (Foucault 149)

> "We need time and space, time and space to work ourselves out of the present crisis and to become once more a contributing force to global prosperity, time and space which only our creditors can give us."
>
> -Chuan Leekpai, former Thai Prime Minister (Speech to the Council on Foreign Relations and the Asia Society)

No one seemed to have expected the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s. For many of the Southeast Asian nations the decade prior, a drive for national development helmed by strong-handed (male) heads of state (i.e. Lee Kuan Yew's People's Action Party rule in Singapore, Muhammad Suharto's New Order in Indonesia, and Ferdinand Marcos' New Society in the Philippines) resulted in, at least in the perspective of international finance commentators, no less than "an economic miracle… a freewheeling business optimism that was assumed would continue indefinitely" (McFarlane 3). But not long after the Thai baht was depreciating so much that it was allowed to float[1] on 2 July 1997, it was only inevitable that other national currencies followed suit (Haggard 3). As national currency values started plummeting in the foreign exchange market, there

[1] To 'float' a currency means that instead of the government fixing the exchange rate, the currency price is set by the foreign exchange market based on supply and demand compared with other currencies

was a general air of confusion and uncertainty. But even as leaders struggled to find a solution, it was already too late: this international crisis did not seem to have a national remedy.

Today, it is believed that the Asian Financial Crisis was the result of various factors both domestic and international. Van Hoa Tran traces it back to Japan in May 1997, when monetary authorities, fearing the depreciation of the yen, raised the interest rates in order to raise the exchange rate value of the yen through increased foreign demand of it (to take advantage of a higher rate of return), which then led to investors to start selling their Southeast Asian currencies and move their portfolios to Japan (Tran 5). But Stephen Haggard also argues that it was the authoritarian running of countries that spelled their own demise. Financial growth was not accompanied by the necessary supervision and regulation, and "close business-government relations that had proven an asset during the period of high growth generated moral hazard, distorted the liberalization process, increased vulnerability to shocks, and complicated the adjustment process once the crisis hit" (Haggard 2). Because of an emphasis of economic growth over economic equality, there was rampant corruption, collusion and nepotism, and power soon outgrew democracy (Handoyo 149).

Financial crisis resulted in social crisis; as noted by former Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, when he opened a World Bank meeting in January 1999, it led to "a doubling of unemployment, children dropping out of school, mental illnesses, and crime" (Human cost of Asian crisis). But it also resulted in a crisis of faith in the nation and the state, the most dramatic result of which were the riots in Jakarta and elsewhere in Java in 1998, when "what had started as a naïve but politically motivated protest soon turned into an orgy of anti-government rioting and increasing attacks against ethnic Chinese" (Kingsbury 365).

It was in this time of crisis when people began thinking about who actually belonged in the nation, and who was didn't legitimately belong; who was to blame for this malady. These issues of home, belonging, and nationhood trickled all the way down to the family, the most basic social unit, and the very first site of struggle an individual encounters in one's life. And for the diasporic Chinese family in Southeast Asia, things could get quite contentious indeed.

For many diasporic (Southern) Chinese in Southeast Asia (as with the rest of diasporic subjects), seemingly simple questions such as "What does it mean to feel at home?", "Where can you situate the sense of family?" or "How does one envision belonging?" become complicated in issues of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and nationhood. Although the Chinese have a deep and rich history in Nanyang (the South Seas) from as early as the 1400s (Kuhn 10), today they continue to occupy an ambivalent space in the nationalized histories of their adopted homelands at best and to be treated with suspicion and antagonism at worst. The Asian Financial Crisis was only one of the more recent key moments in a long timeline of historical trauma for the Nanyang Chinese. But, as noted by Felixberto Bustos, "危机 (Wei Ji), the Chinese term for "crisis," consists of two characters that signify 'danger' and 'opportunity'" (Bustos vii). In the years after the Asian Financial Crisis, the rise of digital filmmaking and Southeast Asian Independent Cinema empowered Nanyang Chinese filmmakers to commemorate these formative years of collective trauma into films, bending time and expanding space in order to reimagine home, family, belonging and nationhood.

1.1 HOME, UTOPIA, HETEROTOPIA, AND THE NANYANG

When it comes to talking about nation and nationalism, it is hard to avoid Benedict Anderson and his important work *Imagined Communities*, wherein he defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6). Here the word *imagined* does not mean fake or false; rather, it refers more to the intangible emotional bond one has with one's nation. As such, it pertains to one's self-identification with one's nation, which is circulated and reinforced through the reproduction of media. Anderson refers to this as unbound seriality, just as one's imagination is unbound. This enables people who don't know each other to somehow find a common bond with each other, through their shared self-identification with a nation. At the same time, a nation is both limited and sovereign. There can only be so many people in a nation (a nation cannot encompass the whole of humanity and beyond) and it can only occupy so much land or territory. Both the population and the territory have to be governed and the borders delineated and defined in order to distinguish one nation from all the rest. This is referred to as *bound seriality*. Both bound and unbound serialities are "replicable plurals" (Anderson 184) in that just as print media (in fact, all mass media) can be replicated and reproduced in order to circulate a shared identity, citizenship can be replicated and reproduced to apply equally (at least in theory) to all who share that same identity and community.

In *Anderson's Utopia*, Partha Chaterjee critiques Benedict Anderson's conception of a dichotomy between the "unbound seriality of everyday universals of modern social thought" and the "bound seriality of a nation's governmentality" (Chatterjee 128). Whereas Anderson believed the ideals of nationalism and the conflicts of ethnic politics to be discrete phenomena separate from each other, Chatterjee argues that they are actually deeply interwoven together: it is from idealistic nationalism that the seeds of ethnic politics grew, and it is through the limiting

perspective of ethnic politics that a nation can be imagined and made legible, legitimate. These two sides in turn arose from colonial capitalism, which demands the quantification of goods and labor into bound seriality even as its print media unite all within its reach in the unbound seriality of "homogeneous empty time," a term originally coined by Walter Benjamin to describe the way capitalism has regulated our experience of time, but has since been utilized by Benedict Anderson to describe the rise of nationalism through print capitalism. This homogeneous empty time is henceforth described by Chaterjee as Anderson's utopia.

Once this dichotomy is muddled, the rest of Anderson's formulation easily dissolves back into the water. "Empty homogeneous time," Chatterjee continues, "is not located anywhere in real space-it is utopian. The real space of modern life is a heterotopia… Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense" (Chatterjee 131). And perhaps nowhere else in the world is this paradox more apparent than in Southeast Asia, where multiple races, ethnicities, religions, and political systems compete, and where time is neither completely empty nor completely homogeneous. The unbound seriality of *Bhinneka tunggal ika*[2] can coexist with the governmentality of reactionary nationalism. An individual can be both a citizen of the nation and a foreign oriental at the same time. The Nanyang Chinese, then, had the somewhat unique task of either assimilating and fitting within the legible limits of their imagined nations, or going further beyond, transcending the nation. It is in this heterotopia that the Nanyang Chinese can negotiate their identities.

The term "Nanyang" is not new. It has its origins in imperial China and how they imagined the lands and seas to the south. But it was Brian Bernards who started using it as an analytical concept to understand postcolonial literature made by ethnic Chinese writers in Southeast Asia. It

[2] The national motto of Indonesia; it derives from an old Javanese poem, and literally translates to "Out of many, one;" today it is understood to mean "unity in diversity."

is an ambivalent term, being sino-centric and race-based (in that a Chinese word is utilized to define the place) while also being place-based (in that it is used to specifically to describe Southeast Asia) at the same time. It is exactly because it is such a murky term that I insist on using it just as Bernards did. In his book *Writing the South Seas*, Brian Bernards traces the origins of the term Nanyang back to the "orientalist" gaze of Imperial China look out to the "primitive" region of Southeast Asia. Today the term is still used in China in much the same way, with Nanyang literature being a specific genre that evokes exotic locales and wild adventures, very much a romance of the south seas. However, Bernards pushes the definition even further, resituating the positionality of the Nanyang from China looking at Southeast Asia, to the diasporic Chinese living in Southeast Asia looking at themselves and to their supposed motherland. As Bernards analyzes the literary works of Nanyang authors writing the South Seas, he engages the reader to go riding the South Seas with him, taking us on a literary journey across the archipelago.

Bernards resituates "Chinese literature" beyond national, territorial, and linguistic borders, and into the Chinese diaspora in the Nanyang. Nanyang is an idea that can only ever exist in the heterotopia, as "the Nanyang crosses colonial, national, and linguistic borders to express cultural affiliation through the multiple trajectories of migration and creolization" (Bernards 8). In the heterotopic Nanyang, "home" is no longer easily defined as a point in time and space out of which a people originate; rather, the focus shifts to the individual who becomes a "unique nodal point of experiences" drawing its energy from multiple points of origin (Ebert 21).

This heterotopia stands in direct conflict with the utopic national imaginary that demands only one point of origin from its citizens, who can then only occupy one discreet point in empty, homogeneous space and time. Despite the fact that Southeast Asia was and continues to be one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse places in the world, with multiple identities occupying

the same national territory at the same time, from post-World War II independence up to the Asian Financial Crisis, the nation-building project in Southeast Asia meant that these heterotopic identities had to be repressed in favor of a unitary national identity. Official history cannot contain the heterotopia. Any excess of meaning is sutured neatly into the official narrative of the nation, either by force or coercion, until crisis rips the neatly sutured fractures asunder, reopening the gap and allowing the repressed to spill out.

In Laurie Sears' book *Situated Testimonies*, she argues how it is in these moments of crisis when the repressed resurfaces that historical trauma can be more adequately articulated by the victims of bound seriality. She presents literary works as situated testimonies—situated because such works often present a particular point of view as opposed to the omniscient homogeneity of official history; testimony because these embody what one has witnessed for oneself—that allow us to "[read] the traces that elude archival constructions—emotional traces that historians may fail to record or witness" (Sears 2). Although she mainly uses books to construct an alternate literary archive that questions, and even at times stands in direct opposition to the official narrative of Indonesian national history, I want to extend her line of thinking to cinema, creating a filmic archive that can more adequately describe the multitudinous experiences of the diasporic Chinese in the Nanyang; experiences that fail to be sufficiently described in the official narratives of their own adopted nations. It is in the cinematic commemoration of crisis that the Nanyang Chinese can rearticulate their own situated testimonies.

1.2 PERSONAL HISTORY; DIASPORIC HISTORY

Me (top left) and my brothers with our father, Silverio Alarilla

This project is a critique of nationalism, but it is also very much a search for my heritage. Shortly before I entered graduate school two years ago, my mother revealed to my brothers and I that our great great grandfather was Cantonese. He was never talked about because he was an embarrassment to the family; a gambler and a drunkard. On my father's side, I had always suspected we were at least part Hokkien, but perhaps we will never really know for sure now, as that part of our family history has been buried deep within by colonialism and nationalism, not to mention that Nanyang food and culture has been co-opted and indigenized by mainstream Filipino culture. Just like many Chinese mestizos in Philippine history (perhaps most notable of which is our national hero, Jose Rizal), I grew up Filipino, with my Chinese heritage and language largely silenced, even though you can see it in my family's eyes.

When our mom petitioned me and my brothers, and we moved to America, I realized that what I was looking for was the same thing my Asian American friends were looking for as well: a place to belong to. This became especially apparent to me when I started volunteering for the

Seattle Asian American Film Festival. A consistent theme in the annual festival was finding an in-between space in which the subjects' multiple intersecting identities can be acknowledged and legitimated in a way that cannot sufficiently be acknowledged either by the American nation-state or the Asian motherland. For example, Canadian filmmaker Jeff Chiba Stearns' *One Big Hapa Family* recounts the historical trauma of being ethnically Japanese in post-World War II North America that motivated mixed marriages in the Japanese Canadian community in order to "pass" as Canadian. At the same time, they find it hard to assimilate back into their supposed motherland. Unable to find a true home in their Japanese-ness or Canadian-ness, they instead find a way to celebrate their *Hapa*-ness, itself a Hawaiian term for "half" that came to mean mixed race people. I began to wonder if something similar was happening with the diasporic Chinese in Southeast Asia, and if Nanyang Chinese filmmakers are also attempting to imagine home through their films.

1.3 Imagining Home in Film

With the rise of nationalism in Southeast Asia came also the rise of cinematic media. For many, film could become an important expression of one's nationhood, and in decades to come, postcolonial nations would attempt to develop their own national cinemas. But what is often underplayed in these national film histories is the fact that with the advent of cinema in colonial Southeast Asia, many Chinese entrepreneurs became early adopters of the technology, becoming among the first to establish cinemas, and later, film studios, throughout the region (Barker 23). At the same time, their role in the formation of National Cinemas is often underplayed, showing how the discourse on National Cinema remains tightly circumscribed around Nationalism based on racist coloniality.

There has been a long tradition of invoking the concept of "national cinema" in the study of Southeast Asian Cinemas, perhaps largely due to the fact that just as *Indische roman* and the new prose of fiction was "seen as intimately connected to questions of political modernity" (Chakrabarty 155), the filmic medium, having arrived at the colonies in the region during the turn of the 20th century, was later integral to the task of imagining its newly independent, modern postcolonial nations after the Second World War. Many books on Southeast Asian film history, such as *Glimpses of freedom: independent cinema in Southeast Asia* (Ingawanij and McKay) therefore use the nation as a unit of analysis. As Dipesh Chakrabarty says in his book, *Provincializing Europe*, history—including film history— "is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation-state at every step" (Chakrabarty 41). Andrey Cordeiro Ferreira problematizes this however, and argues that the formation of modern, postcolonial nation-states, as much as it was developed in anti-colonialist thought, is merely another form of colonialism, a phenomenon he identifies as coloniality. Quoting subaltern scholar Ramon Grosfoguel, he states that "Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the capitalist / modern / colonial / patriarchal world system"[3] (Ferreira). And perhaps the most critical way that colonialism persisted is through the organization of the nation (and the world system) by race:

> Colonialism unified different peoples through the creation of a new concept - that of race - which became a principle of hierarchy associated with the division of the Capitalist work. This hierarchy was one of the hallmarks of colonialism… but survived the colonial situation and became one of the central factors of inequality in the world system[4] (Ferreira).

[3] "Colonialidade permite-nos compreender a continuidade das formas coloniais de dominação após o fim das administrações coloniais, produzidas por culturas e estruturas coloniais no sistema-mundo capitalista/ moderno/ colonial/ patriarcal."

[4] "o colonialismo unificou diferentes povos através da criação de um novo conceito - o de raça - que passou a ser um princípio de hierarquização associada à divisão do trabalho capitalista. Essa hierarquização era um dos traços

Although Ferreira is writing here about the South American experience, I believe this question to be especially relevant within the study of National Cinema in Southeast Asia as well. Andrew Higson describes the problem of national cinema as a form of "internal cultural colonialism" wherein cinema "play[s] a part in the hegemonic process of achieving consensus, and containing difference and contradiction" (Higson 63). Indeed, as in many instruments of the nation-state, the institutionalization of narratives of National Cinema as embodied by Salim Said's seminal book *Shadows on the Silver Screen: A Social History of Indonesian Film* (Said) enacted violence on subaltern film histories circulating concurrently, affectively illegitimating such histories, and illustrating Chakrabarty's argument that "this violence plays a decisive role in the establishment of meaning, in the creation of truth regimes, in deciding, as it were, whose and which 'universal' wins (Chakrabarty 43).

Recent scholarship has started questioning the centrality of "national cinema" and whether this concept is still effective in analyzing Southeast Asian film histories, as in Patrick Campos' aptly-titled book, *The End of National Cinema* (Campos). In Indonesia, David Hanan's book *Cultural Specificity in Indonesian Film: Diversity in Unity* (Hanan) slyly reverse's Indonesia's national slogan and favors the study of Regional Cinema over Jakarta-centric "Film Nasional." And yet, this attempt at decentering the narrative of Film Nasional still somehow operates within the confines of the national unit without questioning it, taking for granted notions of citizenship and belongingness, and foregrounding *pribumi* (indigenous) film culture over diasporic Chinese film culture, which has made great contributions in the Indonesian film industry, despite the Chinese themselves occupying a contingent position within the Indonesian nation-state.

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característicos do colonialism… mas sobreviveu à situação colonial e tornou-se um dos fatores centrais da desigualdade no sistema mundial."

The study of Chinese Cinema is also being re-evaluated, as many of its scholars such as Shih Shumei think it has become "Han-centric… and excludes other ethnicities, languages and cultures; it also supports the Western racialized construction of the diaspora as foreign… 'Chineseness is not an ethnicity but many ethnicities" (Shih 24). The concept of Sinophone cinema, according to Audrey Yue and Olivia Khoo, "removes the emphasis on ethnicity and nationality, and instead highlights communities of Sinitic language cultures spoken and used outside China and on the peripheries of China and Chineseness: it is 'a place-based, everyday practice and experience, and thus it is a historical formation that constantly undergoes transformation reflecting local needs and conditions" (Yue and Khoo 3).

Film theorist Rick Altman defines genre as "not your average descriptive term, but a complex concept with multiple meanings… patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the filmmaker, and their reading by an audience" (Altman 14). One of the most popular genres in Asian cinema is Melodrama, a genre distinguished by John Mercer and Martin Shingler as one that usually revolves around the intergenerational conflicts and tensions between family members. The family is usually affluent, or at least upwardly mobile, and "the audience is invited (or, indeed induced) to sublimate their own fears and anxieties onto the central figure who is, in most cases, also the victim of the drama. This figure could be the son, daughter, or mother, but almost never the father." (Mercer and Shingler 12-13).

But perhaps the most important key feature of melodrama is the heightened, and often stylized, expression of emotions. This has often been linked to "the return of the repressed" in psychoanalytic parlance. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith explains that while melodrama more-or-less attempts to follow the conventions of cinematic realism as formulated in Classical Hollywood

cinema, this is oftentimes just a façade. There is often an underlying sense of foregone pleasure that has to be repressed due to pressures from the outside (the family, the community, the nation). At this point of high drama, there is such an excess of meaning and contradiction that realism and the bound narrative breaks down and the repressed starts to emerge, becomes unbound (Nowell-Smith).

Wimal Dissanayake points out that although most Asian scholars' understanding of melodrama is from the concepts imported from Hollywood, in most Asian societies melodrama has a distinguished history considerably different from its history in the West and is intimately linked to myth, ritual, religious practices, and ceremonies (Dissanayake 3). Dissanayake cites some culture-specific examples, such as the concept of suffering that is pivotal to the discourse of film melodrama in Asian cultures. Krishna Sen also observes that the villain is conspicuously absent. More specifically, villainy is not concentrated in any character or institution but rather dispersed through everyone, including the victim herself and every social institution… The villain is in fact not visible except as some theoretical concept of fate or social reality. (Sen, Politics of melodrama in Indonesian cinema 209). At the same time, she is a bit wary of using the term melodrama:

> In relation to cinemas of Asia, we cannot be certain that the term melodrama constitutes legitimate categorization rather than superficial resemblance… Its discursive constitution need not be the same across intercultural boundaries (Sen, Politics of melodrama in Indonesian cinema 205).

The fact that Melodrama changes so much as it encounters different cultures has led some film critics to think of it less as a genre and more as a mode, a style, or a sensibility, a debate we shall reserve for another time. But its mutative capability, indeed, the fact that it can so easily be "creolized," perhaps lends itself considerable significance in the diasporic Chinese imagination.

As the bound seriality of nationhood cannot adequately contain the repressed trauma and emotions of being diasporic, it has to be released in the excess of melodrama.

Just as Richard T. Jameson said that “movies belong to genres much the way people belong to families or ethnic groups” (Jameson ix), Altman also attempts to draw out the similarities between film genre and the nation:

> Defying received notions of language's straightforward referential nature, the term 'nation' proves to be anything but a single coherent concept referring to a single coherent referent. On the contrary, the very notion of nation appears to depend on constant (but not necessarily visible) conflict among multiple competing but related notions. Though at times of external threats to national sovereignty a nationwide tendency towards epic homogeneity commonly conceals the nation's fundamentally heterogenous nature, peace time quickly restores the constitutive debate regarding the very meaning of the notion of nation (Altman 86-87).

Already, one can surmise that what seems at first glance to be the unbound seriality of melodrama is actually bound by the governmentality of genre conventions. For now, for the purposes of this study, we will conveniently forget about this contradiction. But it is definitely something to keep in mind for further discussions on what an a-national, archipelagic cinema could possibly look like. For now, it is sufficient to say that melodrama as a genre can be used to analyze and interconnect these seemingly disparate films together into what could possibly be envisioned as the Nanyang Imaginary.

1.4 The Nanyang in Time and Space

This study looks at the ideation of a unique Nanyang Chinese culture through a historical analysis of the Nanyang experience, as well as a textual analysis of two contemporary semi-

autobiographical melodrama films commemorating the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and its after-effects in the years after.

The first one, *Babi Buta Yang Ingin Terbang* (*Blind Pig Who Wants to Fly*, 2008), is an Indonesian-language film by Edwin, revolves around the emotionally disconnected members of a Chinese-Indonesian family making sense of the anti-Chinese riots. The next, *爸媽不在家* (*Bà mā bù zàijiā*, literally *Mom and Dad Are Not Home*; internationally distributed under the title *Ilo Ilo*, 2013), is an English, Tagalog, and Mandarin-language film by Anthony Chen, and explores the relationship between a Singaporean boy and his Filipina nanny whose doting and maternal nature provokes the ire and suspicion of the child's real mother. While both films use techniques that critique the notion of utopia and try to envision what the Nanyang heterotopia might look like, *Babi Buta* seems to focus more on critiquing the notion of empty, homogeneous time, through non-linear editing and recurring leitmotifs. *Ilo Ilo*, on the other hand, expands notions of space and territoriality by transposing affective maps onto its cinematic landscape.

In terms of approach, this study aims to be Intra-Asian, a term that Song Hwee Lim describes as cognizant of the transnational trajectories of contemporary cinema (although I would also argue that Film as a medium has always been inherently transnational from its incipience) due to globalized flows of capital that have necessitated as well as promoted cultural exchanges between Asian countries, resulting in thematic and aesthetic intertextuality (S. H. Lim). This thematic and aesthetic intertextuality is most manifested in ways that film genres, such as melodrama, are circulated, coopted, indigenized and intra-nationalized within the film industries of the region. This study therefore intends to examine the intersections of legitimating nationalism and transgressive, unbound diaspora, as well as of Southeast Asian Cinema and Sinophone Cinema.

Chapter 2. DISTORTING TIME: EDWIN'S *BABI BUTA YANG INGIN TERBANG* (BLIND PIG WHO WANTS TO FLY)

> *"Engkong, mulai hari ini, saya harus panggil Engkong Opa, boleh?"*
> *"Boleh…. Nama saya Gian Tik. Wie Gian Tik. Lalu di sekolahan, dipanggil Bernardus. Dulu, ganti nama Suwisno Wijanarto. Su itu asalnya dari Jawa. Wis itu dari Suwis, dari Kerajaan Kuning, misalnya. Lalu, dipanggil Suwisno Wijanarto"*
> *-Babi Buta yang ingin terbang* (Edwin).[5]

Nowadays, we take time for granted. We can only imagine it going forward in discrete, quantifiable units, to the metronomic sway of the clock. But as the above quoted conversation between Linda and Gian Tik, her grandfather, shows, time is more complicated than it seems, especially for victims of trauma. Time is not linear, but indeed recursive. The past occurs simultaneously with the present and the future, as past traumas combine with future anxieties in an uncertain present.

In Bliss Cua Lim's Book *Translating Time*, she offers a two-part "temporal critique" of modernity. The first one derives from Henri Bergson, and talks about the visualization of time: how we easily misrecognize "our own duration as coinciding with the trajectory of the clock hand, or the movement in-general of the cinematographic apparatus" (B. C. Lim 44). In this argument, cinema as a new technology at the turn of the 20th century was used as a way of visualizing "empty homogeneous time" through the standardized, incremental movement of each film frame through time and space: 24 frames per second. Lim says that by relying on this, we fail to apprehend the heterogeneity of true duration.

[5] "Engkong (Hokkien for Grandfather), from now on, I have to call you Opa (Dutch for Grandfather), is that okay?" "It's fine… My name is Gian Tik. Wie Gian Tik. At school, people called me Bernardus. Then I changed my name to Suwisno Wijanarto. Su is Javanese. Wis is short for Suwis, which comes from the Kuning Kingdom. So then they called me Suwisno Wijanarto."

The second part of her critique is a postcolonial re-examination of modern historical time, and its central feature, progress. By visualizing a forward-moving trajectory of history to modernity, "differences divulged by culture contact… [are] *temporally managed* by distancing the indigene from the colonizer's present" (B. C. Lim 45). The colonized, always "undeveloped," is perceived as anachronistic; hence, Fatimah Tobing Rony argues in early cinema, the ethnographic imaginary (which still circulates in contemporary cinema) saw films as "time machines into a faraway present which represented a simple, savage past" (Rony 133). As Rony shows in her writings and in her films, it is through the lived experiences of the subject that the bridging of the temporal distances between present and past can begin, and a "heterotemporality" can begin to be imagined.

Although Lim focuses mainly on the Fantasy film genre in her book, this chapter argues that temporal critique is also in operation in Nanyang cinema, especially in Edwin's melodrama film *Babi buta yang ingin terbang* (2008), through the cinematic commemoration of lived experience using non-linear digital technology.

It is difficult to adequately summarize *Babi buta*, because the film is less a "coherent" narrative and more a series of vignettes depicting the life of a *peranakan* family before, during, and/or after the May 1998 riots at the peak of the Asian Financial Crisis. Verawati, the mother, used to be a badminton player, and represented Indonesia in a badminton competition with China. She becomes disheartened when an audience member asks, "which one is Indonesian?" From then on, she can only be seen in the rest of the movie in the kitchen wrapping dumplings, watching Christian programs, and wearing her Indonesia jersey. Halim, the father, is a dentist who is in love with his nurse, Salma, and so wants to convert to Islam to marry her. Except for one scene, he is always wearing a large pair of sunglasses, and he is often singing Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called To Say

I Love You," either alone or with someone else who usually sings along with him. Linda, the daughter, is seen both as an adult and a child. As a child, she is portrayed either with Cahyono, her classmate, as they eat bread, play with firecrackers at a junkshop and fend school bullies off with little firecrackers, or with her Engkong who brings her to a seedy billiards place with his friends. As an adult, she eats firecrackers wrapped in steamed buns, reconnects with Cahyono, who by now is a video editor for a television studio, and hangs out at the same seedy billiards place, smoking and playing billiards like her Engkong used to do. Salma, Halim's nurse, wants to compete in Planet Idol, and Romi and Yahya, a privileged, gay couple with connections enables her to, but at a price that Halim has to pay. The family members are often filmed in separate scenes, and when they are finally together in the same scene, they rarely interact, and their interactions are awkward and stilted. Interspersed between these vignettes are also scenes of a pig grazing in a landscape of seemingly endless rolling hills.

While the film is pretty much set in modern times (except for the pig, which seems to occupy an uncertain time and space), its characters' conflicts and emotions are very much rooted in historical traumas inflicted upon the Nanyang Chinese by colonial, and later national powers.

From what can be eked out from previous historical studies of the Nanyang Chinese, their identities have been fiercely contested, and their stories subsumed into the official narratives of the nation. But when you zoom out and compare the histories of diasporic Chinese between the different nation-colonies of the region, you will see that Chinese ethnicity was in fact constructed by colonial policies. These were later adopted into nationalist policies of citizenship and immigration, and the fact that the definitions of ethnicity, citizenship, and belonging varied between these postcolonial nation-states shows how "Chineseness" can never truly be an essential category.

2.1 PRE-COLONIAL NANYANG

Before colonization, Insular Southeast Asia developed as an important collection of commercial nodes connecting China and East Asia with South Asia and beyond. Although these nodes were composed of countless kingdoms great and small (and oftentimes at war with each other), they were more or less believed to have been "part of a larger cultural and geographical entity known as *Nusantara* (literally, 'archipelago'), the Malay world of Southeast Asia dating back to the days of the early Malay kingdoms which ruled over parts of the territories known today as Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia and Brunei" (Millet 10). At the same time, the "Middle Kingdom" saw it as "as a maritime realm that lay 'outside civilization' and 'beyond the four seas…' anathema to an agrarian, sedentary civilization… (Sun 329). But to Teochew, Hokkien, Hakka, and Cantonese peoples (among others) of coastal Southern China, Southeast Asia was a land of opportunity.

Southern China is an area of predominantly rocky seaside mountains with little arable land to sustain a dense population. Far from the imperial gaze of the Chinese empire (which had, at different points in history, discouraged and even outlawed migration), they began looking seaward for their livelihood. In his book "Chinese Among Others," Philip A. Kuhn noted that the Chinese were able to thrive in Nanyang by utilizing two strategies: 1) identifying and capitalizing on "niches" in their adopted societies (this meant attending to the unanswered needs of the local population and making sure that only they can supply these particular demands), and 2) establishing and maintaining "corridors," or channels of connections linking their homeland with Nanyang. This meant that they maintained their ties to their ***qiaoxiang*** (hometown) through remittance of money back to their homesteads, but also through establishing bridgeheads through which fellow kinsmen and townsfolk are able to more easily migrate and integrate into well-

established Chinese expatriate populations (Kuhn 51). This concept of qiaoxiang, therefore, oriented the Chinese sojourners back towards Southern China as their homeland, and no matter how long they have been staying in other lands, they always thought of themselves as one day going back home. Nevertheless, by the seventeenth century, the activities of these itinerant traders in the Southern Chinese provinces such as Fujian were

> in some ways, prophetically transnational… Sojourning Hokkien managed shipping and entrepot businesses in networks of dialect-based collaboration. A family might send members to several venues, within and outside China, to manage trade for considerable periods of time… One went where business looked promising, boundaries notwithstanding (Ng 531).

Sojourning was a primarily male pursuit as it was the duty of Chinese women to remain at home, maintaining the household. But many long-term sojourners also found it convenient to marry native women as second wives and business assistants (Kuhn 70). The offspring of these strategic interracial marriages would come to be known as either *Peranakan* or *Baba/Nyonya*, depending on where you were in *Nusantara*. These creolized populations adapted to life in Nanyang by occupying established Chinese niches, and whose ties to China are maintained through the corridors that also brought with them goods and traditions in addition to sojourners. Over time, their place in pre-colonial *Nusantara* society developed. Later, with the coming of European colonialists, their identities within the social structure would once again evolve.

2.2 THE PERANAKANS AND THE BABAS

The coming of European colonizers would divide *Nusantara* into different colonies with different spheres of influence. The territories of these colonies would later shape the spatial imaginaries of the independent Southeast Asian nations. Each colonizer had different colonial

policies regarding the ordering of the natives, the running of their territory, and their sense-making of the creole Chinese.

Brian Bernards points out that creolization "is not merely synonymous with hybridity, intermixture, and syncretism, but more broadly denotes a cultural process and practice informed by the multi-sited and multivalent historical expressions of the creole" (Bernards 20), a historical process that G. William Skinner distinguishes in the comparative histories of the Chinese *Mestizos* of the Philippines, the *Peranakans* of the Dutch East Indies, and the *Babas* of the Malayan Straits Settlements. He also notes a common thread running through these communities: they became intermediate societies whose families were usually composed of a Chinese father, an indigenous mother, and creole offspring. Their offspring in turn, "tended to avoid further intermarriage… and emphasize[d] those aspects of their mixed heritage which served to set them apart from the mass of indigenes" (Skinner 52). They were intermediate societies because they usually served as middlemen between the European colonialists and the indigenous population, never fully belonging anywhere, therefore occupying liminal spaces in the Southeast Asian colonies. Because of this, while their social role as inter-mediators was clearly defined, their actual location within the colonial hierarchy was much less so: depending on the moment, they could be colonial lackeys, harmless visitors, or fellow colonized subjects.

When the Dutch East India Company came to the island of Java in the 17th century, they recognized the *peranakans*' liminal position in native society, and employed them for three sorts of economic service to the colony: trading with China, extracting wealth from the natives, and servicing the colonial cities (Kuhn 64). Their work greatly enriched them, but also generated envy and contempt among the native population, who viewed them as untrustworthy colonial collaborators. It did not help that the Dutch endeavored to keep the ethnic Chinese a "distinct

socio-legal category" (Aguilar 201) to set them apart from the *pribumi* population (Kuhn 73). They segregated the Chinese and natives into separate districts. They also incentivized colonial collaboration, not only through prestigious appointments such as port officers called *kapitan cina* (Wang 8), but also by allowing them to bid for control over tax farms, districts wherein they can collect taxes from the residents and keep a portion as commission.

This kind of mercantilism and materialism was frowned upon by the Qing emperor, Yonzheng. After he assumed power in 1723, he enacted a series of reforms in order to restore Confucian orthodoxy in Chinese society, including the notion that trade was not an honorable profession to be in. His official decrees, at least on paper, forbade Chinese merchants to stay abroad more than two years, stating in 1727 that "most traders who travel overseas are not law-abiding subjects… scheming for secret collaboration with foreigners" (Kuhn 21). But again, this was never effectively enforced.

It wasn't just the Chinese empire that distrusted these "overseas Chinese." The growing economic power of the Chinese in the Dutch East Indies, as well as increasing immigrant population, also made the Dutch very anxious. The Indies Chinese were subjected to intense surveillance and scrutiny. Chinese homes were more likely to be subjected to random searches, and Chinese companies were more likely to be subjected to blackmail. Racial tension was palpable as early as 1740, when fear of Chinese retaliation led to the massacre of some 10,000 Chinese in Batavia (Reid 189). In 1816, a law was passed that required ethnic Chinese to carry a special pass in order to travel within the colony. In 1825, the Governor-General introduced a resolution that first described the Chinese as "foreign orientals" (Phoa). This is not to say that the Dutch did not abuse the native population as well. Far from it, the native Indonesians were subjected to forced labor, heavy taxes, and racism. But instead of uniting to fight against the colonizers, perhaps it was

the varying ways that the Chinese and the *pribumi*s were rewarded and punished that kept them from seeing eye to eye with each other.

The colonial hierarchy that the Dutch established would be replaced by a nationalist notion of seriality when Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945. But this substitution was only by name. While the Javanese, Madurese, Papuans, Minangkabaus, and all others became nominally Indonesians and were, at least by national law, perceived to be equal with each other, in practice, certain groups would maintain a hegemony over others, and the Chinese Indonesians would continue their minor supporting role as economically savvy people in the middle that were fairly politically powerless. This discrepancy in the supposed nationalist "seriality" would also be reflected in Chinese Indonesian filmic seriality.

2.3 Unbounding Filmic Seriality

The very first shot of the film features Verawati playing badminton. It is shot in slow motion, and it invites the viewer to examine every action, every muscle movement, in great detail. But it also calls to attention the mechanical nature of film. As movement and performance get slower and slower, we are invited to imagine the individual frames that make up the film. Each frame is a visualization of homogeneous, empty time, time that has no meaning except to be measured, segmented, quantified, divided into frames. But when the child audience member asks "which one is Indonesian?", Verawati stops, as if frozen in time, while everything else around her moves forward. The shuttlecock falls to the ground, and the child moves his head, curious at what just happened. This very first scene introduces Edwin's own temporal critique of the Indonesian nation. The *peranakans*, long disconnected from the official narrative of the Indonesian nation, have been made to occupy a different temporality, one where sequential seriality does not make as

much sense. Accordingly, traditional filmmaking techniques cannot be utilized to adequately tell the *peranakan* story at the turn of the 21st century. Seriality and sequentiality in film must be unbound and exceed conventional cinematic logic through non-linear montage.

Montage, or editing, is the process in which individual shots are sutured and sequenced together to form a comprehensible and seamless reality. It does not matter if, in reality, one shot was taken days after the next one; through montage, the spectator is presented the illusion of streamline movement and logical causality. For example, if one shot shows a person calling someone off-screen, and the next shot shows a different person turning to someone offscreen and responding, we can surmise that the two different people, regardless of occupying different frames, are connected to each other by sequential logic. Edwin, however, only selectively utilizes this cinematic convention. In *Babi buta*, two sequential shots may take place in the same space but not at the same time. An example would be early in the movie, Verawati is seen wrapping dumplings on the dining room while watching a gospel show on TV. Not talking, she looks offscreen to the right. The next scene is still in the same room, but it's now Linda who's sitting on the same chair as Verawati. A TV show host is in the room, remarking about the number of badminton trophies on the sidetable before introducing Linda as the "*gadis pemakan petasan*."[6] As she wraps a firecracker in a bun, puts it all in her mouth, and lights it, she looks offscreen to the left. These two shots, while occupying the same space, do not occupy the same time. The sequential logic cannot be inferred by any of the visual clues. And yet, Verawati looking offscreen to the left, followed by Lind looking offscreen to the right, somehow seems to suggest that a connection is being made across time.

[6] The girl who eats firecrackers.

The different vignettes are not as much distinguished by their unique spaces but by their unique times, and because this sequential "illogic" seems to recur throughout the film, it is probably reasonable to suggest that multiple timelines are actually happening all at the same time, and they exceed the logic of a singular sequential timeline that is conventional in most full-length narrative films. As such, we are only able to see vignettes of each before we switch to another timeline. Anchoring these multiple temporalities together is the May 1998 riots, a news report of which is first featured roughly in the midpoint of the film. With it entering the picture, the viewer is in a way informed on how to process the earlier events in the film. The teasing by the school bullies, and Linda's explosive retort, for example, may be seen as a foreshadowing of the May 1998 riots. After this midpoint, the riot footage is shown two more times, the last time becoming a backdrop for a karaoke video for the song "I Just Called To Say I Love You." As Linda and Cahyono sing to the song, we are finally given a time marker: the screen says "*peringatan 10 tahun kerusuhan Mei*."[7] We now know that at least that particular scene for one of the timelines is located in 2008.

The riot footage isn't the only leitmotif in the film. In fact, it is full of recurring images. There are the firecrackers, which can scare hungry ghosts as well as bullies away, but can also be eaten on bread. There are the pieces of bread, that are either consumed or are trampled on. Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" is an aural leitmotif that reveals Halim's crush on Salma or Yahya's intentions on Halim, or a way for Halim and Linda to bond, or a way for Salma to become popular on Planet Idol, or a way for Linda and Cahyono to deal with the trauma of the May 1998 riots. Then, there is the pig, who seems to be spatially and temporally disconnected from the timelines altogether. Except on one sequence towards the end, when, after Linda as a girl

[7] The 10th anniversary of the May riots

lights a firecracker next to a bread bun on the floor, the film cuts to the field where the pig is. An explosion suddenly echoes across the field, and the pig is finally loose.

These leitmotifs are used to bridge the seemingly disparate vignettes together, but they also serve another purpose. Leitmotifs usually signify one thing across time in a film or a work or literature. But here, the leitmotifs constantly change and evolve, questioning its own replicability and seriality.

2.4 From Colonies to Nations: Continuing the Racial Order

World War II proved to be an international crisis from which came an opportunity for the colonies to release themselves from their European masters and reconfigure themselves as independent nation. Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, before moving down to China proper in 1937. It was a long and bitter struggle for the Japanese as they fought both the Kuomintang and the CCP, both of whom were generously supported by funds from the overseas Chinese (Andaya and Andaya 251). So when they invaded Malaya in December 1941, followed by the supposedly 'impregnable' island fortress of Singapore in February 1942, and the Dutch East Indies that March, the Japanese dealt with the Nanyang Chinese mercilessly. In the first week of Occupation in Singapore, the Chinese male population was systematically rounded up and massacred by the thousands (Andaya and Andaya 251). In the Dutch East Indies in October 1943, the "Pontianak Affair" would claim the lives of around 854 Chinese (Chee 119). They looted Chinese-owned shops and confiscated the Chinese-owned film companies.

Japan envisioned themselves the liberators of Asia from Western colonialism, and as their military victories seemed to humiliate the European colonialists, they were initially generally welcomed by the indigenous populations in Southeast Asia (Reid 324). While they were hard on

the Chinese, with whom they had imagined a long history of conflict, elsewhere in Southeast Asia, they promoted a type of indigenous "nationalism" that enacted a national culture while maintaining deference to the Japanese empire. For the first time, the people of Malaya saw themselves as belonging to a Malay-wide entity instead of just individual states (Andaya and Andaya 248). It was also this time when the imagined "Indonesia" of the 1930s finally became reality (Vickers 92), and Bahasa Indonesia became the official language of the state. Indigenous film practitioners and cultural workers were given training in film production under the tutelage of the Japanese, who then recruited them to produce propaganda material (Barker 25), for the first time giving these indigenous filmmakers the chance to imagine a cinema for themselves, and not just for their Chinese employers. In the meantime, disenfranchised Chinese siding with the CCP engaged in guerilla warfare in Malaya and Indonesia (Bedlington 62).

These experiences would heavily inform the nationalist drive of Malaya and Indonesia after the war. By this time, the concept of nation in Southeast Asia stemmed from a notion of indigeneity that would serve as the legitimating factor for its citizens. In the former Dutch East Indies, which from 1945 declared itself as the Republic of Indonesia, this was known as being *pribumi*, and it served to unify the diverse ethnicities and cultures in Indonesia as one people of the same land. But in order to emphasize their form of indigenous nationalism, they had to suppress a distinct Indies Chinese nationalism that recognized their Chinese heritage but asserted their desire for status and "sovereignty" as legitimate citizens of an incipient Indonesian nation (Brown 114). So although the Badan Permusyawaratan Kewarganegaraan Indonesia or BAPERKI (Indonesian Citizenship Consultative Body), was formed in 1954 and became the largest socio-political association of the Chinese (Suryadinata 10), fear and suspicion of the "Foreign Orientals" did not let up, especially when the Communist Revolution in what became the People's Republic of China

(PRC) seemed to spark feelings of nationalistic pride for China among some *peranakans*, regardless of how many generations they have lived in the Dutch East Indies. The drafted constitution in 1945 stated that "citizens are native Indonesian persons or persons of other nations who have acquired a legal status as citizens" (The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia). Although at first glance, this constitutional statement seems rather transparent and unbiased, legal commentators such as Elizabeth Chandra observed that "the defining property of citizenship in independent Indonesia came to pivot on the attribute of indigeneity..." and that "the indigenous people in the former Netherlands Indies territory came to be regarded as the natural, therefore principal, component of the nation" (Chandra 86).

In 1953, the Indonesian government was startled to learn that between 600,000 and 700,000 or approximately 40% of the local-born Chinese had formally rejected Indonesian citizenship (Chong-Cariño 24). The ratification of the Dual Nationality Agreement of 1958 came at a time when the PRC declared that people of Chinese ancestry, regardless of birthplace and current citizenship, were Chinese nationals. The law declared that all *peranakan* Chinese who were previously recognized as Indonesian citizens were returned to foreigner status (Thung). In order to regain Indonesian citizenship, they had to publicly reject their citizenship with the PRC and "choose" to become Indonesian citizens.

By the 1960s, distrust of the Chinese as well as Soekarno's increasing power as "president for life" under his Guided Democracy principle was mounting, and people perceived this as the growing power of his allies, especially the that of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) and its allies (Said 66). It was strongly opposed by the army, and the growing political tension culminated in what was later referred to as the Gerakan Tiga Puluh (GESTAPU) movement, in which PKI-affiliated individuals assassinated some of the most high-ranking army officers in 1965 (Brown

198). General Suharto took advantage of the ensuing confusion to consolidate his power and replace Sukarno as president of Indonesia. Suharto then established the Orde Baru (New Order) in 1966.

During Suharto's authoritarian rule, the PKI, the BAPERKI, and other related organizations were banned. The Dual Nationality treaty was renounced, and Suharto himself clearly stated that "the Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent should integrate and assimilate themselves into the *masyarakat Indonesia asli* (indigenous Indonesian society) without delay" (Suryadinata 2). Suharto stopped the import of Chinese-language publications, and closed down all but one Chinese newspaper, which was strictly controlled and censored by the government. Then, in 1966, Suharto introduced the *Keputusan Presidium Kabinet Nomor 127 Tahun 1966* (Cabinet Presidium Decision 127, or 127/U/Kep/12/1966), which, while not requiring, greatly encouraged the ethnic Chinese to change their Chinese names to "Indonesian-sounding" names, as this became regarded as "evidence" of "political loyalty" to Indonesia (Suryadinata 3). Indeed, probably no ethnic group in Orde Baru Indonesia was "more insecure about the question of identity than the Chinese" (Kusno 138). In such a restrictive political climate, the ethnic Chinese of this period had few options: they could migrate to China or other countries, and retain their ethnicity (and indeed, many did, further supporting public perceptions that they had no sense of nationalism), or prove their loyalty to Indonesia and submit to the rules of Orde Baru.

There was also a drastic reassessment of the history of film in Indonesia. Instead of tracing the beginnings of cinema to the pioneering works of Chinese producers such as The Teng Tjun, the Orde Baru-produced histories traced the beginnings of Indonesia's Film Nasional to "the work of two *pribumi* film-makers, Usmar Ismail (dubbed, in the 1970s the 'father of Indonesian

cinema') and Djamaluddin Malik" (Sen, Chinese' Indonesians in national cinema 176), effectively erasing the efforts and contributions of the Chinese Indonesians from the film history of Indonesia.

Once better stabilized, the domestic film industry resurfaced, albeit altered to fit the demands of the Orde Baru; that is, "nationalist history re-emerged in films in the early 1970s, first as settings for war, spy, or adventure movies, but increasingly in later years as the central thematic concern of films" (Sen, Indonesian Cinema: Framing the New Order 82). It is during this period that the connection between genre and nationalism is most apparent. Genre meant order and predictability; the application of the same rules and conventions onto different individual films. This echoed the desires of the New Order to make all its citizens uniformly Indonesian. In order to enforce these demands onto the film industry, many institutions were built up. The film academy at the *Instutute Kesenian Jakarta* or IKJ (Jakarta Institute of Arts) was established in 1971, as well as the Indonesian Film Festival, in order to train, educate, and promote these new filmmakers of the Orde Baru. By the 1980s, the Indonesian film industry (headed generally by Chinese and Indian producers) was, in a year, making nearly 70 feature films, while at the same time importing 180 films, mainly from Hollywood, but also from neighboring countries like Malaysia and the Philippines (Biran 240).

Afraid to innovate and try something new, however, the film industry, mired in hundreds of similar-looking films, began to stagnate. Then, in the 1990s, there was an almost abrupt decline, with only 57 films made in 1991 and 37 films made in 1992.

2.5 Disrupting Narrative (and Historical) Progress

In the introductory quote to this chapter, I referenced a particular conversation between Linda and her Engkong and his many "names." At first seeming to retrace the conventional

historical narrative of Indonesia, he first says “My name is Wie Gian Tik.” It was then changed to “Bernardus” during the Dutch colonial period, then “Suwisno Wijanarto” during the New Order. But when he talked about his Dutch name and Javanese name, he used the words “*lalu*” and “*dulu*.” Because Bahasa Indonesia does not have verb tenses, they instead use these words that roughly mean “earlier” or “back then” when talking about the past. But he does not use any of those words when talking about his original Hokkien name: “*Nama saya Wie Gian Tik*.” This seemingly inconsequential detail disrupts this symbolic historical progression of Indonesia towards modernity. Even his present name (Suwisno Wijanarto) becomes the past, and his past name never stopped ceasing to be his name and continues on until the present.

The oppression of the modern notion of historical progression was tangible to the *peranakans* and is most embodied in their forced re-naming during the New Order. This New Order Policy attempted to disconnect them from their cultural heritage and past so that they could move on to becoming good Indonesian citizens. But, as Gian Tik showed, this nation-building project could and would be resisted. The past continues to the present.

This national narrative is similar to the conventional three-act narrative structure of a novel or a full-length film. The characters used to live in harmony in the past, but everything changes when conflict is introduced. The hero must resolve these one after another until, at last, everything is resolved and they achieve narrative utopia. This logic of storytelling has informed how we write about and retell history. Edwin upturns all that by having no narrative structure in the film at all. Even if you were to line up the multiple timelines in the film and put them all together in chronological sequence, you will not see a narrative arc throughout it all.

Even when Edwin talks about his own life, he tries not to be co-opted into the dominant narrative of the Indonesian nation and national cinema. Born in Surabaya in 1978, Edwin lived

most of his life under Suharto's New Order. In a 2006 interview with the late Southeast Asian film critic Alexis Tioseco, Edwin recalled that:

> Actually I didn't look like I was Chinese, because I'm quite dark skinned, because I was playing around outside all the time. But I always go home with my sister, who [looks] so Chinese, so people always harass her. I cannot try to fight this situation, thinking about my sister. So we [would] just run, and we would try to find a way where we won't see any people, because we always felt unsafe when there were people around us. I don't know, [I remember] that kind of feeling (Tioseco).

Just as Edwin's medical doctor father (who was dark-skinned like him) took great pains to hide his ethnicity to his peers, friends and patients, to the extent of not introducing Edwin's sister whenever he had company, many ethnic Chinese suppressed the expression of their identity.

Edwin studied Graphic Design Diploma at Universitas Kristen Petra, and started his BA in Film at IKJ (*Institute Kesenian Jakarta*, or Art Institute of Jakarta), The film academy of which was established in 1971 in order to train, educate, and promote these new filmmakers of the New Order. However, he was not able to graduate due partly to his and IKJ's conflicting views on the cinematic medium, but mainly because towards the submission of his thesis, he was at the Berlinale Talent Campus that was an annual summit and networking platform of the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale Talent Campus), and so was not able to submit all of his final requirements in time. This did not deter him or his career, though. Instead, he has found an alternative mode of filmmaking that is not commercially-oriented. His early films, for example, were shot with very low budgets, utilizing cheap digital video technology, and collaborating with friends and fellow filmmakers, with whom he has a commitment that is not based on money, but sheer interest to make films. *Babi buta* was not financially successful in mainstream cinema; however, Edwin didn't really intend for it to be. The films of the New Order were obsessed with making a profit; therefore, if Edwin were to counter that, he cannot produce films just to make a profit. Edwin says

that “if we sell DVDs, even if it’s just a small amount of money, it’s like betraying our spirit… If in the beginning we agreed that this is for ourselves, for improving our skills, not for money, then we have to keep that [commitment] till the end, even if people are offering you distribution option. I respect people that make films for money, but for these films we did not make them for money” (Tioseco). Regardless of financial gains, Babi Buta proved to be critically acclaimed in Indonesia (although it proved to be better received outside the country, especially in the European art cinema market). Film critic Eric Sasono praised the film for its daring to recount the Chinese Indonesian experience in an artistic and perhaps even allegorical way:

> Edwin's personal affairs are also a reflection of our collective problems… What anxiety we are maintaining, especially regarding our identity? …How did the inability to ask about it cause the anxieties that we have had for decades? As a nation, we once rejected such anxiety and eventually exploded to produce reforms in 1998. This is the significance of Edwin: what appears to be collectively is in fact always based on something personal (Sasono).

With a new environment of cultural and political freedom, filmmakers such as Edwin are finally able to openly express their culture and history through their films, a feat that even New Order-era closet *peranakan* filmmaker Teguh Karya was only able to talk about slantwise. In the same interview with Alexis Tioseco, recorded before Edwin finished production of Babi Buta, although Edwin says that he was making this film “For Indonesia... and for Indonesian history,” I believe he meant this less in a patriotic way and more in a critical way. Unilinear history is contested by non-linear multi-temporality. There is continuity with the past, but this is not narrative, progressive continuity, but a more abstract, affective continuity that transcends linear time. The movie, having no narrative resolution, is very open-ended. Utopia cannot be achieved, only the ambiguity of the heterotopia.

2.6 Describing the Nanyang in Heterotopic Time

A haunting air of melancholy and alienation pervades the entire film, as if the characters are unable to voice out their deeply embedded trauma. In this film, space and time is fragmented, just as the characters, emotions, and relationships are disconnected from each other. In the end, Halim converts to Islam, gets to marry Salma, and Salma joins Planet Idol and becomes a star, but at a price that Halim had to pay. Verawati finally steps out of the house to revisit the badminton arena. Cahyono finally accepts who he is, and Linda makes an emotional connection with Cahyono. The film ends with all of the set locations seemingly devoid of people, including the endless rolling hills. Has the blind pig finally been able to fly?

Babi buta deconstructs the genre film, the main cinematic staple of New Order Indonesia. Instead of the over-the-top histrionics common in typical mainstream Indonesian films, the emotions are subdued, hidden behind a thin veneer of what seems like apathy. But they are there, simmering with potential energy, they are just unable to be expressed, due to the extreme repression by the New Order. These emotions fail to find an outlet; they transcend generic conventions.

Laurie Sears talked about the late Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer's distinction between a "downstream" literary reality and an "upstream" historical reality: "Pramoedya suggests that literature has an effect on the upstream flow of history, that it can change history" (Sears 1-2). I believe that Nanyang Cinema, for example, *Babi buta*, can do the same as well. The May 1998 riots have since been co-opted by the state narrative of *Reformasi*, a promise of a more inclusive, less authoritarian Indonesia. And yet, the November 2016 demonstrations against Ahok (Kronologi Kericuhan Demonstrasi Anti Ahok di Depan Istana) show that this is not the case.

Through *Babi buta*, Edwin provides us a uniquely Nanyang, heterotopic way of interpreting the Asian Financial Crisis and the May 1998 riots apart from the official narrative of Indonesian nationhood. Through non-linear and non-sequential montage, the film describes it not as a one-time bump on the road to progress, but as a leitmotif in the narrative of the Indonesian nation; that is, until we can perhaps learn how to extricate ourselves from the modernist progression towards colonialist nationalism.

Chapter 3. EXPANDING SPACE: ANTHONY CHEN'S *ILO ILO* (爸媽不在家)

> "How old is he?"
> "Almost 12 months."
> "Ha? They let you leave the baby and go away to work?"
> "Then why did your mother get a stranger to look after her son?"
>
> - Ilo Ilo (Chen)

Jiale, a young Singaporean boy and subject of Anthony Chen's film *Ilo Ilo*, is curious, precocious, at times even destructive. He softens up after the arrival of his caretaker, Terry, a domestic worker from Iloilo, Philippines, hired by Jiale's parents. Up to this point, Jiale has only known about Singapore and Singaporean spaces. But Terry's arrival changes him. As he asks Terry about her own child and family back home in the Philippines, his spatial imagination expands to accommodate not only Singapore, but also the Philippines, much to the ire of Jiale's real mother, Hwee Leng.

Throughout the film, the politics of space are enacted in an emotional tug-of-war between Hwee Leng and Terry. And in Singapore, as with the rest of Southeast Asia—known in Chinese as Nanyang, "The South Seas"—space is very political, especially that most crucial of spaces, home.

3.1 SINGAPOREAN SPACE IN HISTORY

It was long thought that the history of Singapore began with the arrival of British colonial officer Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles to a small, sleepy, and sparsely inhabited island at the end of the Malay peninsula in 1819. However, a book recently published by the National University of

Singapore argues that Ancient Singapore was already a cosmopolitan sophisticated city-state as far back as the 1300s, and was an important port along the "Silk Road of the Seas" (Miksic). There is, however, a 200-year disconnect between Ancient Singapore and the Modern Singapore that Raffles founded, and while both share the same cosmopolitanism due to its strategic location in Southeast Asia, they are worlds apart in terms of collective identity and political, ethnic, and social composition.

While the Dutch dominated trade in Southeast Asia, the British were determined to contest this situation, and needed a direct way to reach the markets of China from their colony in India. The Strait of Malacca was determined to be the optimal choice for safe passage. Penang was acquired in 1785, and Singapore was founded by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles on a small, sleepy, and sparsely inhabited island at the end of the Malay peninsula in 1819. Therefore, Modern Singapore was a British colony from the outset. The British Empire operated their colonial outposts in Southeast Asia on the principle of free-trade that "contrasted sharply with the monopolistic, tax-encrusted policies of the Dutch, Spaniards, and Siamese and proved a great incentive for Chinese commerce and immigration… Thus emerged an international maritime nexus centered on Singapore, with branches in Malacca and Penang: a trading network based on British naval power and Sino-British commercial energies" (Kuhn 100).

As a British colony, Singapore was soon occupied by other subjects from the empire, such as Indians and Malays. But the Chinese became most important and most valued, especially the Baba merchants who had remigrated from Malacca and became labor brokers managing the steadily increasing stream of new Chinese immigrants looking for work in plantations and mines elsewhere in Southeast Asia. By 1827, the Chinese (of all dialect groups) had outnumbered all other racial groups (Kuhn), a trend that continues until today and is unique in all of Southeast Asia

(elsewhere the Nanyang Chinese remained minorities in their adopted lands). At the same time, the securing of the passage through the Strait of Malacca enabled the British to ship opium from India to China via Hong Kong. The British involvement in the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) had depleted their supply of silver, which was used to buy Chinese goods such as tea and porcelain, so in order to balance their coffers, they started selling opium to the Chinese (Ingham 30).

Slowly, the British expanded farther, moving on to the Malayan peninsula (1824), Sarawak (1841), and Sabah (1882), which would become hinterlands from which natural resources (rubber, tin, etc.) could be extracted for trade in the commercial, cosmopolitan Straits Settlements. Because of this, there wasn't much impetus to develop these areas, and by the turn of the century, outside these cosmopolitan cities (run mainly by the Chinese), the Malays remained "frozen in time… untouched by the new economic and social forces" (Bedlington 34).

In the Straits Settlements such as Singapore, the Chinese had became the most important oriental race to the British, especially the *Baba* merchants who had remigrated from Malacca and became labor brokers managing the steadily increasing stream of new Chinese immigrants looking for work in plantations and mines elsewhere in Southeast Asia (Kuhn 101). By 1827, the Chinese had outnumbered all other races in the settlement. The British managed their colonial subjects by race and racial categories and were keen to impose their own definitions of race onto their subjects. According to social psychologist Geetha Reddy:

> The different races were administratively categorised and their daily lives were kept separate. The census functioned as a tool for administrative purposes in abstracting and capturing the heterogeneity of the population… occupational clustering and racial enclaves were also part of colonial policies adopted by the British (Reddy 69).

If the Dutch segregated the Chinese into ghettoes in the urbanized port cities such as Batavia, the British can also be seen as doing something similar, concentrating the Chinese populations in the urbanized port cities of Melaka, Penang, and especially Singapore. For the British Empire, they would reap great rewards for the ordering of the races. Keeping the native Malays in the hinterland kept them physically and psychologically down on the farm and co-opting the Malay ruling class by giving them appropriate pensions kept them from reisting (Bedlington 36). In the meantime, due in no small part to the entrepreneurial savvy of the *Babas*, as well as its strategic location bridging the mainland with the islands, Singapore emerged as perhaps the most crucial entrepôt in all of British Malaya, and a natural hub of regional shipping in the region (Reid 252). And with the formal acquisition of Hong Kong with the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, that followed the First Opium War, Britain's Maritime Trade Highway in the Nanyang would be complete.

The Treaty of Nanking was the first of what the Chinese would later call "The Unequal Treaties," and signaled the end of Qing isolationism. Stephen Fitzgerald noted that that the Unequal Treaties

> [included] clauses in in which the Chinese emperor recognized first the fact, and then the right, of Chinese emigration. The motive of the western powers, of course, were to secure rights in China for themselves and freedom to exploit Chinese labour. But with a respect for international legal niceties not reflected in their actions, they drafted the clauses containing their demands so as to incorporate the principle of reciprocity (Fitzgerald 5).

At the same time, the growing western encroachment of their homelands drew the sympathy of the Nanyang Chinese, who would later be crucial to the funding of the two main nationalist independence movements in China, the Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Community Party (CCP) led by Mao Zedong. In 1909, the Chinese Nationality

Law adopted the principle of *jus sanguinis*, wherein any person born of a Chinese parent was a Chinese citizen, regardless of place of birth (Chong-Cariño 4).

Due to colonial interventions as well as modern shipping technology, social and cultural exchange between the Nanyang Chinese and mainland China became stronger than ever. The Nanyang Chinese can go back and forth to China and beyond, looking for new niches to capitalize on along the way. And yet, they were also crucial in the imagining of the nation in Southeast Asia.

3.2 IMAGINING NATIONAL SPACE

In visually imagining the limits of a nation, Thongchai Winichakul developed the concept of the 'geo-body,' the "portion of the earth's surface [occupied by a nation] which is objectively identifiable" (Winichakul 17). He further explains that the concept is an effect of modern geographical discourse using the technology of the map. The map, a representation of spatial reality, is probably the most visual and "concrete" evidence not only of a nation's boundedness and territoriality, but also its physicality (hence, the geo-*body*). Nation orders the geo-body, legitimates it, and makes it legible and objectively observable. The logic of the map distributes the nation evenly across its space, to present a seemingly ordered and evenly-dense image of the nation. But it also reduces the complex information of a nation in a number of ways, just as cinema reduces three-dimensional space into two-dimensional image, approximating the appearance of real space on a flat, seemingly homogeneous screen.

Winichakul points out that space is not homogeneous and evenly dense at all. There can be many different discourses on space existing on a given topography at any given time. The map effectively reduces all of this in favor of the dominant discourse. It compresses the three-dimensionality of its geography into a two-dimensional image, therefore equating mountain ranges

to valleys, rivers to streams, and so forth. In a similar way, it assumes that the power of the nation-state is evenly distributed across the territory, even though people from one village may, for example, be more patriotic than people from the next, who actually want to separate from the state. Let's say, for example, a map of the Federation of Malaysia. How fully could it describe the struggle of fitting Singapore into its geo-body? Another point is that it can only describe the geo-body at one point in time. You can, of course, line up different maps of the same nation across a particular timeline, but then again, what you would have is cinema.

If the map has become the modern visual representation of the nation, then cinema, whose origins stem from the city, is produced in the city, and is distributed across the city, doubtless has also become the modern visual representation of the city. And Singapore, quite unique of all its sisters, is both nation and city, where urbanism is conflated with both conditions of nationhood *and* transnationality, where, as Ackbar Abbas says, "through [urban] processes like the restructuring of capital and the creation of integrated economic and informational networks… one can approach the unstable relations between space and affectivity" (Abbas 26). Singapore's urban space is where one's affective relationship with nationalism is enforced, even as the city is entirely dependent on transnational flows of capital, goods, and labor. In this chapter, urban space and affectivity are examined vis-à-vis the remapping of the Nanyang Imaginary in transnational, archipelagic space, through Anthony Chen's semi-autobiographical account of the Asian Financial Crisis, *Ilo Ilo* (2013).

3.3 Scaling and Transposing Space

Within the first five minutes, *Ilo Ilo* maps out the characters' living spaces: The school where the ten-year-old protagonist Jiale studies, the shipping company office where his mother

Hwee Leng works, and the small two-bedroom one-bathroom apartment they live in with Jiale's father Teck. Up until the arrival of Terry, the Filipina maid they hired to take care of Jiale and the apartment, these spaces were occupied almost exclusively by Chinese Singaporeans. As the film progresses, it becomes apparent that Terry's presence disrupts their supposedly normal lives pursuing the Singapore Dream. But most importantly, it brings into question Hwee Leng's affective capability to be Jiale's mother. Throughout the film, the politics of space are enacted in an emotional tug-of-war between Hwee Leng and Terry.

Ilo Ilo is the story of a boy and his family as they come to terms with what it means to be Singaporean at a time when all of its national values are being undermined: The Asian Financial Crisis. Struggling to make ends meet, Jiale's parents Teck and Hwee Leng work harder than ever, while at the same time find themselves unable to sufficiently raise Jiale. They decide to hire a cheap domestic caregiver from the Philippines to take care of their house and mind Jiale while they are out working. Jiale himself is obsessed with the lottery and tracks down winning numbers to see if he can guess the winning combinations. At the same time, hungry for his parents' attention, Jiale keeps acting out in school, forcing Hwee Leng at times to leave work early, which in turn forces her to work more to catch up on her tasks. In such a life of contingency, labor is the only constant. However, when Terry arrives, Jiale's life is never the same again.

Jiale's family's house is typical Singaporean dwelling: a two-bedroom high-rise HDB (Housing Development Board) flat averaging around 100 square meters in area. High-rise housing projects were Singapore's solution to affordable housing in a city-state with barely enough land to go around and a high population density. While roomy and comfortable, their flat is far from spacious, and with Terry's arrival, as well as Hwee Leng being pregnant with another child, they are beginning to feel the pinch. Insecure and anxious about the impending "foreign invasion,"

Hwee Leng puts up their defenses, hiding anything of value to prevent Terry from stealing from them. She stops doing her domestic duties to ensure work for the maid: “If I do the chores, what will she do?” When Terry finally arrives, Hwee Leng shows her around the flat before taking her to Jiale’s room. Pulling out a small trundle bed from underneath Jiale’s own bed, Hwee Leng tells Terry that she will be sleeping in Jiale’s room. Then, as if acting as the immigration officer of the tiny kingdom that is their flat, she asks for Terry’s passport, and takes down her information.

Just as maps are scaled down versions of the national geo-body, Jia Le’s flat becomes a scaled down metaphor for the Nation of Singapore. Singapore’s smallness is replicated in the smallness of the flat, and their flat becomes a microcosm of Singapore. And just as Singapore’s borders have to be defined and enforced, the flat must be guarded from potentially illegal foreign invasion. The flat’s double-layer door (a regular wooden door combined with a steel-frame grilled gate) is typical in many of Singapore’s HUB flats, just as the enforcement of border control is made to appear as the norm in many nations around the world. One can open the wooden door while keeping the metal gate shut, thus letting the air in and allowing passersby to look into one’s home while keeping them outside. The person living inside the flat can make the door as open or shut as she wants it to be. And early in the film, Jiale practices this prerogative, locking Terry out of their flat and pretending he can’t hear her knocking at the door. In fact, Terry makes such a ruckus that the neighboring Filipina domestic helper opens the wooden door to tell her to keep the noise down. She keeps the metal gate shut as she talks to Terry, and for a moment shows that the gate does not only keep unwanted people out; they also cage people in. Migration into the tiny island nation can’t be made haphazardly; it has to be strictly regulated. There just doesn’t seem to be enough space for everyone.

3.4 CINEMA IMAGINES THE NATION

Cinema arrived in Southeast Asia by way of the Europeans not long after its invention: 1900 in the Dutch East Indies, and 1902 in Singapore. But it was mainly the diasporic Chinese who jumpstarted the local film industries, and eventually even helped imagine the nation into existence. The Teng Tjun, a *peranakan* from Batavia, studied in Los Angeles, USA, then stayed in Shanghai from 1925 to 1930 to source out films for import into the Dutch East Indies, before going back and founding his own film company, and producing one of the earliest sound films in the colony, *Boonga Roos Dari Tjikambeng* (The Rose of Cikambeng), in 1931 (Apa Siapa orang film Indonesia 1926-1978 500). Not long after, the Wong Brothers, relatively new migrants from Shanghai, released the film *Indonesia Malaise* (1931) becoming the first film to mention the word 'Indonesia', obviously inspired by the *Sumpah Pemuda* of 28 October 1928, the first official proclamation of national identity (Barker 24). These early *peranakan* films "combined Hollywood and Shanghainese cinematic styles with local stories and theatre styles, creating a uniquely "Indies" film style that painted a picture of a cosmopolitan and hybrid people" (Setijadi-Dunn and Barker 27). These early studios were operated much like a *peranakan* shophouse: primarily a family enterprise employing mainly family members in order to keep the money and control within the family. But because they had near-total control of the whole production process, they were resented by the native filmmakers and actors they hired, who had no creative input in the films (Said 29).

This racial ordering also manifested in the creation and organization of the Malayan/Singaporean film industry. The Shaw Brothers originally started as a silent film production company in Shanghai, China. They soon sought to expand their market and looked towards Nanyang. Shaw Runme ventured South, arriving in Singapore around 1924-1925, and

setting up shop there. After some years of distributing their Shanghai-made films to the Chinese community in the city, they decided to start the first local production company to capture the growing market in Malaya. In 1933, they released *Leila Majnun*, based on a well-known Arabian love story. Shot entirely in Singapore, it was funded by Chinese money (The Shaw brothers), directed by B.S. Rajhans, a Punjabi who had prior experience making films in India with the East India Film Company, and featured well-known Malay *bangsawan* theater actors speaking in Malay, including Suki Nordin (Millet 18). At that time, it made perfect sense since although Singapore was predominantly Chinese, it was still part of the larger colony of British Malaya with a predominantly Malay consumer market (E. Lim 32). The Chinese traders had the capital, so they funded most of the films. And the Indian directors had more technical knowhow when it came to filmmaking. This racial organization of film production would continue until shortly after Singapore's independence, shaping how Singaporeans thought about themselves in relation to the incipient Malaysian nation.

By the 1940s, the film industries of both the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya were run mainly by the Chinese, not only projecting a diverse and cosmopolitan ethos, but also imagining into being a particular kind of "Indonesia-ness" or "Malaysia-ness" onto the big screen. However, because they occupied a different time (modernity) and space (urbanity) as the rest of the native population, they cold not be related to by the traditional and rural natives. This would greatly affect the perception of nationhood and national cinema in the coming decades.

After the war, Malaya and Singapore were returned to the British. The Straits Settlements were dissolved, with Singapore becoming a Crown Colony, and Penang and Melaka being incorporated into a new political entity called the Malayan Union. This Malayan Union was originally intended by the British as a way to administer the entire peninsula more efficiently, but

the indigenous population, with a growing indigenous nationalist consciousness, saw this as a threat to the powers of their traditional rulers, the sultans. They also found the citizenship requirements for this new political entity disturbingly lax, as these were amended "to give every person born in Malaya or Singapore, regardless of ethnic affiliations, equal rights to a common citizenship" (Bedlington 70). This was perceived as a colonialist threat to their "special position" as the original, indigenous inhabitants of this country. They were also fearful that the incorporation of Singapore would enable the Chinese to drastically outnumber the Malays (Turnbull 226). After much debate, the Federation of Malaya was inaugurated in 1948, recognizing the "special rights" of the Malays and keeping Singapore a separate entity unincorporated in the federation. In response, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), with a heavily Chinese support base, launched a guerrilla attack (Bedlington 76) in retaliation to this colonial imposition and perceived Malayan collaboration.

The Singaporeans, acutely aware that they could not feasibly survive alone (as they drew their economic power from the natural resources of the Malay hinterland), insisted on integration under a transracial, anticolonialist, and communist platform. At the time of liberation from the Japanese, the communists were the great heroes of Singapore (Turnbull 223). The victory of the CCP on the mainland seemed to legitimize the ascendancy of the communists. The People's Action Party was launched in 1954 as a new leftist group organized by formerly London-based activists including Lee Kuan Yew (Nine Form New Political Party in Singapore). Lee envisioned a Singapore united with Malaya, but ever the pragmatist, he knew that race and nationality were conflated with ideology, and he knew Singapore couldn't win the hearts and support of the right-wing anti-Communist Malayan government if they were both Chinese and communist at the same time. Although he used his public image as a leftist in his campaign to be Prime Minister, after

winning the elections in 1959, he pursued a more moderate path, preached social welfare, not ideological Marxist-Leninism, and encouraging foreign investment while emphasizing self-reliance (Turnbull 264). Steering the PAP more towards a moderate-conservative leaning gave the Malayan government cause to reconsider its formerly hostile attitude toward union (Andaya and Andaya 270), and by 1963, Lee was able to successfully settle the merger of Singapore and Malaya into the Federation of Malaysia on grounds of both political and economic stability (Bedlington 206). But the union did not happen for long. Studying the colonial census archives, Charles Hirschman observed a widening gap between the Malays and Chinese in Malaya from 1947 to 1957 (Hirschman 78), which may have fueled racial tensions. As the postwar era created new opportunities, the Chinese had an advantage in the urban job market over Malays. However, Hirschman also point out that this was not due to any supposedly inherent ethnic traits, but more due to differences in access to education, milieu (urban or rural), and inheritance of wealth (or poverty). Regardless, the people and the governments could no longer see eye to eye, and Singapore withdrew (or was expelled) from Malaysia in 1965. Lee Kuan Yew was inconsolable. At a Press Conference Lee held shortly after independence, on August 9, 1965, he said: “every time we look back on this moment when we signed this agreement which severed Singapore from Malaysia, it will be a moment of anguish. For me it is a moment of anguish because all my life… I have believed in Malaysian merger and the unity of these two territories… It's a people connected by geography, economics, and ties of kinship...” (National Archives of Singapore). Initially “abandoned” by their British colonizers, they were then rejected by their supposed Malaysian family. But that wasn’t all. Singapore had also functioned as the Mecca of Malay film production, producing over 200 Malay films (mostly by Chinese-owned Cathay-Keris and Shaw Brothers’ Malay Film Productions) in total, most of it during the “Golden Age of Singaporean Cinema” in

the 1950s to the mid-1960s, when Singapore's political destiny was very much connected with the independence movement in Malaya. Now stranded without a Malay audience, the Shaw Brothers, which had become the most successful production company in the 1960s, decided to pack up and move their operations to Hong Kong, which was still a British Protectorate, in 1972. Singapore's film output would dwindle to nothing, and it wasn't until two decades later that it would be revived.

3.5 Cinema Transcends the Nation: The Diasporic Turn

Film production in both Indonesia and Singapore was almost at a standstill by the 1980s and 1990s. For Indonesia, it was mainly due to cultural stagnation that resulted from political repression. For Singapore, it was a cultural disconnection that resulted from political fragmentation. But instead of sounding the death knell for Southeast Asian Cinemas, the Asian Financial Crisis actually gave the opportunity to revive them.

As a response to a seemingly weakened President Suharto, a weakened civil society that has been repressed by decades of Orde Baru, and a weakened economy due to the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, in which Indonesia was the hardest hit, a massive student opposition rose up against the killing of four students by the military (Brown 250). During those two days of rioting in Jakarta (and to a lesser extent, Solo), around 1,200 people were killed, and over 100 women, most of whom were ethnically Chinese, were systematically raped and abused. On May 21, 1998, Suharto finally resigned. Succeeded by B.J. Habibie, there followed the period of *Reformasi*, of rebuilding a seemingly shattered Indonesia, and a resurgence of Chinese cultural expression.

While Singapore was not as affected by the crisis, the falling equity prices, property prices, and value of the Singapore Dollar (Ta 139) were still felt by the middle class. In addition, it had exposed a chink in the armor of the state-sanctioned narrative of Singapore's history, usually called

"The Singapore Story" (Loh and Tan 37). Critique of this official narrative had already begun even before the financial crisis. Eric Khoo blazed the trail with his short films in the early 1990s, then his first full-length feature, *Mee Pok Man* (1995), which explored Singapore's gritty underworld not usually included as part of The Singapore Story, and was also shot in Cantonese and Hokkien, very much against the official state endorsement of Mandarin as the "mother language" for the Singaporean Chinese. But with the crisis, emerging independent filmmakers became even more driven to question state-enforced nationalism.

One last crucial factor gave this new generation of Nanyang filmmakers impetus to reimagine cinema in Southeast Asia and beyond: the rise of digital technology in filmmaking. Whereas film productions up until the 1990s relied solely on unwieldly and expensive filmstock, and therefore needed large capital, a cumbersome film crew, and assurance of a return of investment, digital technology made filmmaking cheaper, less bulky, and more accessible. This democratization of film empowered these filmmakers to be riskier, more experimental, and more counterculture. And so, years later, when they commemorated the Asian Financial Crisis, they would not only show its dangers, but also the opportunities it provided them.

Through the history/ies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, they were presented as a hometown relative, foreign oriental, colonial collaborator, nationalist revolutionary, communist rebel, or capitalist opportunist, at different times and spaces. Could one be all of this and nothing like this at the same time? Could one be called an "overseas Chinese" if one has been born, lived, and died in the Nanyang all one's life? Could "emigrant/immigrant" adequately describe the complexities of leaving one's homeland and struggling to make a new home? Would calling one an "alien" be fair if one has wholeheartedly imbibed the culture of one's adopted home? Many recent scholars such as Richard T. Chu argue for the use of the word "diaspora" to

> emphasize and describe the connections, links, and flows that characterized the experiences of these Chinese in "modern" times, as well as their flexible, border crossing practices to elude, overcome, or manipulate the efforts of modernizing nation-states or of other dominant groups to localize them into disciplinable subjects (Chu 8).

Still talking about diasporic filmmaking, but in the Afro-Caribbean context, Stuart Hall identifies *Présence Africaine* as the "site of the repressed," *Présence Européene* as the "site of colonialist, hegemonic construction of knowledge," and *Présence Américaine* as the "New World," the site of cultural confrontation (Hall 233). Similarly, the Nanyang, to these diasporic Chinese, is the site of cultural confrontation, the heterotopia, where they are able to discourse with their own repressed Chinese heritage and the hegemony of the European colonizers in order to create their own identities, one that fully recognizes their situatedness as Chinese, as Southeast Asians, as *Peranakans*, as *Babas* and *Nyonyas*, as the *Nanyang*.

3.6 Contemporary Singaporean Cinema and the contingency of space

During the 50th year anniversary of Singapore's independence, the official logo chosen for SG50 was a single red dot, to signify the "little red dot that we've come to know as home" (Lim and Lee 13). The celebration itself, held at the National Stadium on August 7, 2015, was tinged with melancholy at the passing of the nation's founding father Lee Kuan Yew on March 23 earlier that year, and an elegy played by an orchestra accompanied images of Lee on huge projections all over the stadium. Lee was well-loved in Singapore, having been Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990. He orchestrated the union of Malaysia and Singapore, only to break down in tears when they were expelled from the union. And yet, he helped his nation, a small dot in the middle of the South Seas, rise up, be self-sufficient, and emerge as one of the "leading" nations in Southeast Asia. He

often promulgated this narrative as “The Singapore Story.” At the same time, this historical trauma of rejection and abandonment resounds in contemporary Singaporean cinema today.

In a talk he made on December 8, 2016 at the University of Washington, Film Studies professor and Singaporean national Gerald Sim presented his idea of postcolonial aesthetics on Singapore’s unique relationship with its colonial history as well as the relative insignificance of its land area. Because the tiny island nation is so small, it often appears on maps as just a “little red dot.” Singapore’s insecurity of its size has led to the development of a unique spatial imagination, wherein the little space it has is often politicized, and it sees its history and culture in terms of space. Therefore, even in Singaporean cinema, there is often a desire, whether conscious or unconscious in the part of the filmmakers, to map out its spaces, hence the term “Singapore’s Cartographic Cinema.” Sim further identified three types of mapping discourses in Singapore’s Cartographic Cinema: 1) Aerial maps, or the desire to look at Singapore from the top, as you look at a map, 2) Affective, or emotional, maps, wherein different emotions are linked to different places, and 3) Colonial atlases, wherein different shots, when pieced together, orients the viewer to the colonial center of Singapore (Alarilla).

In many ways, these maps are used in Ilo Ilo to describe the ways the boy protagonist, Jiale, relates to the people around him, most especially his biological mother, Hwee Leng, and his temporary surrogate mother, Terry. At first, Jiale himself is wary of the new “intruder.” He refuses to eat dinner at the same table with Terry. During the first night with her around, he leaves his bedroom to go sleep in his parent’s bedroom, even though Hwee Leng tells him he’s already a big boy and complaining that her growing tummy doesn’t have enough space in the bed. And yet, over time, he learns to grow fond of his Auntie Terry. Meanwhile, the company that Hwee Leng works at starts downsizing, and even Teck gets fired from his sales job for underperforming. Embarrassed

about losing his job and attempting to save face, he avoids going home until late at night, desperately looking for odd jobs he could do just to bring in some money, all the while pretending to his family that he still has his job. Hwee Leng, afraid of being the next one to be laid off from her company, entrusts all her motherly duties to Terry, who lovingly takes care of Jiale even as his parents continue to be alienate themselves from his rearing.

When the upstairs neighbor commits suicide by jumping from the top of their building, Jiale takes Terry up to the rooftop where the man jumped from. In Singapore, an average of more than 1 suicide happens each day; suicide is the leading cause of death for those aged 10-29 (Samaritans of Singapore), and the most popular way of committing suicide in Singapore is by jumping from the top of a building. No wonder, then, that suicide is commonplace in contemporary Singaporean cinema. Gerald Sim once again attributes this to Singaporean's unique relationship with space and mapping spaces. According to Sim, standing on top of a tall building is the closest one could get to seeing an aerial map of Singapore, and jumping to your death is the easiest way to reunite with the precious little land that Singapore has. Then, once you land, you become, just like Singapore, a little red dot on the surface of the earth. For Jiale and Terry, however, this scene is far from melancholy. Jiale, finally beginning to feel close to Terry, shows her this aerial map of Singapore from the rooftop. He finally officially welcomes her to his land, and to his space. From that moment on, Jiale's own affective map starts to expand to accommodate, and include Terry as a legitimate part of his space.

As shown in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, Jiale one day asks about Terry's child. When he remarks how strange it is for Terry to leave her son, Terry responds by saying that it is equally strange for Jiale's parents to entrust Jiale to a stranger. By transposing Terry's real family onto Jiale's family, Terry show Jiale the similarities in their situations, that aren't as strange

as he thinks. Jiale begins to project himself over his own image of Terry's child, just as Terry is transposed onto the role of Jiale's mother. At the same time, she projects her own life narrative of economic displacement and migration onto Jiale's family, evoking a similar spirit of economic displacement and migration that drove the Chinese to Nanyang in the first place. Their discreet island families no longer seem as discreet as they initially seemed; they are actually intertwined by labor and monetary flow, but also by an ineffable unbound connection with each other. The map no longer seems as straightforward and homogeneous as multiple layers of affective connections are placed on top of each other.

During Jiale's birthday, Hwee Leng asks Terry to take their family photo, which Terry obliges. But right after, Jiale asks to take a picture with his Auntie Terry. After Teck takes a series of pictures of the two of them, Hwee Leng hurriedly asks to take a picture with just Jiale as well. Hwee Leng realizes that Terry is replacing her in her role as Jiale's mother. Hwee Leng soon develops a resentment towards Terry, but she cannot fire her, because Terry is doing exactly what she hired her to do: take care of the house and take care of Jiale. The bound seriality of ethnic nationalism has to be maintained in the family, and in Singapore. At the same time, this reveals how ultimately unsustainable this is: Teck, Hwee Leng, and Jiale can no longer function adequately as a family without Terry, just as Terry cannot sustain her own family back in Iloilo without the wages she earns from them. This is an all-too-familiar story for many Filipino migrant laborers as noted by Cheryll Alipio in her forthcoming manuscript, *The Economies of Affect and Care: Child Debts, Devotions and Desires in Philippine Migrant Families.* Family has to be reinterpreted and reimagined, and Terry is in the helm, spearheading this process.

3.7 Migrant Workers as Transnational Cartographers

As Terry expands Jiale's affective map, she also navigates the terra incognita of this foreign land in order to find a space for herself. This movement across the urban environment, in Yomi Braseter's words, becomes

> an exploitative act — stretching the topography, social structure, and individual identity to the limits… challeng[ing] the city to reciprocate by presenting its own spectacle, showing its true face, and subjecting itself to the camera (Braester 19).

Terry leaves the private, exclusively Chinese spaces that Jiale and his family usually restrict themselves to, and makes use of the little available public space available. At the mall, far from the surveillance of Hwee Leng, Terry finds a way to make some extra money on the side by working at a Filipino-run hair salon, even though this is explicitly against her contract with Teck and Hwee Leng.

This is actually more common than one may think, and mirrors the contemporary racial politics of overseas workers in Singapore. For the over 160,000 Filipinos in Singapore, many cannot adequately be sustained by restrictive policies, inequitable pay and living conditions, and so are forced to participate in alternative trades in the shadow market, as well as occupy contingent spaces. Unable to find spaces where they can truly belong, they instead make do with public spaces, just like the sidewalk is appropriated by Filipinos as spaces to hold festive Christmas parties. At the same time, this reinforces their otherness, as they are using these spaces not for their intended purposes. According to Singapore's racial order, Filipinos can never truly belong in Singapore, so they should just work, save up money, then go back home.

These sentiments are mirrored by the school bully one day, when he tells Jiale that his maid only loves him because his mom gives her money. Offended by this affront to his special

relationship with Terry, he fights the bully, and accidentally injures him when the bully hits his head on the wall. The school calls Hwee Leng's office, but she is busy helping her boss lay off more workers. Instead, Terry comes to the school to be answerable to the principal for Jiale's actions. The principal asks why the parents aren't around, and when she threatens to expel Jiale from the school, Terry pleads emotionally for Jiale to stay: "My boy is just ten years old. He's a very naughty boy, but he is smart… please, don't expel my boy." Finally, Hwee Leng arrives and talks to the principal. Afterwards, she berates Terry: "I'm his mother, not you."

But how can you keep a strictly professional, monetary relationship when you are bound so intimately in such a small space? Jiale, fearing his parents' rejection and his potential abandonment, finds belonging in Terry's company. Terry, away from her family back in the Philippines, is able to express her maternal instinct with Jiale. In their tiny shared bedroom, they find a home with each other, a home that transcends the conventional definitions of home and family, they are not really mother and son, but they imagine themselves to be. This seems to echo Edna Lim's own observations of contemporary Singaporean cinema invoking a specific version of the past: a memory of a pre-independence, pre-urbanized past that was repressed by the trauma of separation from Malaya. In this nostalgic construction, they could still imagine the simpler life in the *kampong*, or rural village, the hinterland so far away from modern conceptions of Singapore as a nation. These films of the "revival" invoke the films of the perceived "Golden Age" of Singaporean cinema. In these films, the city is depicted as a "cold formal place… driven by monetary concerns" while the *kampong* is "a simpler place where community resides and characters can be themselves" (E. Lim 32). Although Terry and Jiale do not physically go to the *kampong*, they evoke its spirit, forgetting the official, bound seriality of living in the city, and mapping out a vision of the two of them together in harmony. This vision of transcultural,

translingual, transnational intimacy and affection is transposed over the official map of their lives, suffusing it with a vibrancy and emotion that Jiale cannot get from his real parents. Terry affectively projects themselves onto a map of Nanyang/Nusantara.

3.8 NANYANG/NUSANTARA MAPPED AS ARCHIPELAGIC SPACE(S)

Freed from the official narrative of the "Singapore story," Jiale's affective map of home becomes unbound thanks to Terry. In the end, however, this imagined home, just like most spaces in Singapore, is only temporary. Finally admitting their shortcomings to each other, Teck and Hwee Leng realize that they can no longer afford to keep Terry around. In the car, on the way to the airport, Jiale is sad but defiant. Before Terry leaves, he cuts off a lock of Terry's hair to keep for himself. Drawing it close to his nose, the smell of Terry's hair is one of his few keepsakes of his Auntie Terry.

As Jiale looks out at East Coast Park and the sea beyond from the car window on the way home from the airport, is he imagining the islands beyond? Is he trying to connect with the imagined space of Nusantara, an archipelagic terra incognita where his temporary surrogate mother Terry lives? Over the very last scene in the movie that reasserts Hwee Leng's biological legitimacy to motherhood (by showing her giving birth to Jiale's younger sibling), a song plays from the cassette tape that Jiale received from Terry; it is a Tagalog song by the band *Asin*[8] entitled *Kahapon at Pag-ibig*:[9]

> *Buhay mo ay ingatan mo, pagkat yan lang ang yaman mo*
> *Ang pag-ibig mo sa kapwa ay tutularan ng bagong silang*
> *Darating ang panahon ang kabutihan mo ay maiiwan*
> *Sa lupang ito na pinagpala sa nilkhang iba-ibang anyo*

[8] Literally "Salt." They used to go by the English name "Salt of the Earth."
[9] Literally "Yesterday and Love."

Kung naisip mo pa ang hapdi ng lumipas, wala na bang puwang
ang kasalukuyan
Sabihin mo at manilay ka sa harap ng pinagpala
Ang pait ng iyong kahapon, katumbas ay tamis ng pag-asa
Sabihin mo sa harap ko na ikaw ay magbabago…[10]

Although this last image bound within the film frame projects the legitimacy of Jiale's Nanyang Chinese heritage, the aurality of Terry's last inheritance to Jiale, this Tagalog song, is unbounded by image; it exceeds the limits of the diegetic space of the film as it continues to play even after the last shot and over the closing credits. It continues to be heard even if you look away from the screen. Performed in a "foreign" language, the meaning of the song, and Terry's legacy, surpasses Jiale's understanding even as it permeates his whole being. Through the song, Terry offers Jiale hope, that the bitterness of his traumatic past will someday heal and sweeten as long as he "changes for the better."

It is this transnational archipelagic affective connection that explains both the Chinese and the English titles of this film. The Chinese title, roughly translated to "Mom and Dad are not Home," evokes Jiale's own disconnection from his parents, but also suggests something surreptitious and not exactly legitimate happening between Jiale and Terry, away from the watchful eyes of his Mom and Dad. Jiale and Terry's affective connection lies outside traditional conceptions of "family," "home," and "nation," but it doesn't necessarily mean it is wrong. It simply transcends that official narrative of the Singapore Story. And this is also the reason why

[10] "Cherish your life, for it is your one true possession
Your love for others will inspire those who come after you
The time will come when your goodness will be left
In this land that has been bequeathed to others

If you ever remember the pain of the past, remind yourself of the importance of the present
Utter it and reflect on it in front of the blessed ones
The bitterness of your yesterday will become the sweetness of hope
Stand before me and tell me that you will change for the better..."

the English title is “Ilo Ilo.” Braester asserts that when movies set in cities include the city names in their titles, it is a “gesture of declaring an identity between the film and the city not only grounds the film but also shackles it to its location… requir[ing] intimate knowledge of the locales it describes” (Braester 151). But because this film, diegetically set exclusively in Singapore, is not titled “Singapore,” but is, in fact, named after Terry’s own hometown of Iloilo, this becomes a statement of the “un-Singaporeness” of the film’s conception of “family” and “nation.” In fact, *Ilo Ilo* fits more closely to what Patrick Campos calls the OFW (Overseas Foreign Worker) cycle in Filipino cinema, itself a particular subset of the genre of Melodrama that focuses specifically on the trials and tribulations of Filipinos as migrant workers in other countries. Campos says that the OFW film cycle “imagines an alternative space… clear[ing] pockets of spaces of contestation in which one can seek to annex the global into one’s own practices of the modern” (Campos 529). No longer purely Singaporean, not strictly Filipino, this transnational film situates Jiale and Terry in an imagined space beyond the bound seriality of Singapore’s borders, to the wider, larger space of Nanyang/Nusantara, where their love for each other no longer need be repressed.

In fact, their love for each other exceeded the limits of the film so much that after winning the Camera D’Or award at the 2013 Cannes Film Festival, Anthony Chen became determined to reconnect with his real-life Auntie Terry, Teresita Sajonia of Iloilo, Philippines. Sajonia was the Chen family’s live-in caregiver from 1988 to 1997, and the Chen brothers learned their first English words from her, as well as listened to her cassette tapes of *Miss Saigon* and *Les Miserables*. After her fourth two-year contract expired during the height of the Asian financial crisis, the Chen family could not afford to renew her contract anymore and sent her back home. They lost contact for 16 years. Sajonia did write them back once, but her letter never reached them because they had since moved apartments (again illustrating the contingency of space in Singapore).

Chen visited the Philippines in June 2013 and requested for media outlets to help look for Sajonia, sharing pictures of her when she was still in Singapore. After weeks of searching, a relative of Sajonia's recognized her from a Facebook post shared by one such media outlet. On July 23, Anthony and his brother Christopher Chen paid a surprise visit to Sajonia. In an article in a local newspaper, Sajonia said that she had always considered the Chen brothers her children, since she had none of her own: "I embraced them and cried a little… I'm very happy that they remembered the years we were together and that this was made into a movie… I'm happy that they grew up well" (Burgos). At the Singapore gala premiere at the Marina Bay Sands Theater on August 24, 2013, Sajonia was a guest of honor along with Singaporean President Tony Tan Keng Yam.

But at the same time that Ilo Ilo celebrates this transnational, transracial familial love, it also brings to sharper relief what Campos calls the plight of the feminized (not just female) OFW. He continues:

> …That she exists in the narrative of a box office hit Singaporean film, distributed all around the world, is an indictment of the Philippine state. Unable to guarantee its people's decent livelihood, it relocates the excess of the citizenry overseas, where this excess is absorbed by global capital. And part and parcel of this commodification of labor is the turning of the experience into a cinematic spectacle, first for the ritual entertainment of Filipinos who have been left home, and then for circulation and consumption by the global market of transnational films (Campos 531).

Thus, when Jiale fights the bully for teasing him about his commodified relationship with his maid, Terry, Jiale gets mad at the bully not because he is lying, but because he is speaking the truth. Sajonia, who has already been outsourced and commodified for the benefit of the Chen family during the late 1990s, finds her own life story—or at least, the segment of her life story that happened in Singapore—once more outsourced and commodified to the benefit of her former

ward, Anthony Chen. This also possibly reflects the same conditions that enabled the financial success of the Nanyang Chinese, at the expense of indigenous labor. Lastly, it provides insight as to why the Nanyang Chinese continue to bear the brunt of racist, nationalist ire, as well as occupy such an ambivalent space in their adopted homelands until today.

Such abuse of indigenous labor as well as racial hatred will keep continuing as long as we subscribe to Anderson's utopia: a bound, serialized nation-state in homogeneous empty time and space operating within the logic of capitalism. Instead of counting, quantifying, delineating and limiting what races, ethnicities, and nationalities can or can't do within the bound time and space of the imagined nation, we must instead unbound the limits of our imagination, and think of ways we can all come together without the reductive nature of the nation.

Films like *Babi Buta* and *Ilo Ilo* have given us glimpses of what that can possibly look like, through Linda and Cahyono's journey of breaking free from the persistence of time and memory, and through Jiale and Terry's unbounded love for each other that expands their spatial imaginations. How to realize the dreams of these glimpses of unboundedness is up to another study in the future. But for now, it should suffice to say that these films show that belonging can't be found solely by pursuing the myth of the nation. Home can be found beyond one's "little red dot;" love and belonging can be found beyond national boundaries. These films at least in cinematic fantasy, reconfigures Chinese space and time in the Nanyang and expands its affective territory to adequately accommodate the transnational in its imaginary.

Chapter 4. CONCLUSION

In this study, I had aimed to reimagine the histories of the transnational Nanyang Chinese, initially through the use of a bricolage of nation-centric histories, attempting to reconstruct a more archipelagic kind of narrative that focuses on the flows of migration as opposed to the boundedness of residency and citizenship. Realizing that even this is inadequate to express the memory of lived experience and collective trauma of living as a Nanyang Chinese, I turned to an alternative archive of independent, digital films that used the Asian Financial Crisis as an anchor point from which critiques of nationalism can be initiated, as the sutures of nationalist constructions are exposed only in times of crisis. From these two films, one can begin to see the makings of a transnational, indeed diasporic Nanyang identity, from which we can begin to imagine the reality of heterotopia that has for the longest time been repressed by colonialism and nationalism.

The films explored in this study are only two of a growing Nanyang cinematic archive that unabashedly critiques the "boundedness" of national identities and the nation-state. Ever the diasporic filmmaker, Tsai Ming-Liang's oeuvre spans the sea, carving his own niche first in Taiwan before being comfortable enough to go back to his homeland of Malaysia to make *I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (2006), a film that explores the underbelly of Malaysian urban spaces and the precarity of life as a migrant non-*bumiputra*. While not explicitly Nanyang in content, Thai Chinese filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) deals with the crossing boundaries, whether political, spatial, ideological, temporal, or even metaphysical. Midi Z's Burma Trilogy—*Return to Burma* (2011), *Poor Folk* (2012), and *Ice Poison* (2014)—situates the borderlands as the central site of identity negotiation, "overturning the understanding of Chineseness as a shared identity that flattens local inflections and differences and focuses on the confluences of subjective identities and economic exchange" (Chan 27). While

these films receive very little support from their home countries (and at times are even subjected to heavy state censorship), they have critically been well received in the international art cinema markets, again mirroring the Nanyang experience.

I had initially wanted to do my thesis on early Southeast Asian cinema and how it shaped nationalisms in the region. But over time, I was drawn more towards nationalism's invisible specter: narrow-mindedness, conservatism, racism, the bound seriality of nationalist thinking. This isn't surprising, considering how modernist temporality and colonial territoriality shaped time and space in the postcolonial nation. The histories of the Nanyang Chinese became fragmented in time and space, buried deep within the nationalist histories of their adopted homelands. In Chapter 2, I attempted an intervention by proposing a transnational history of the Nanyang up until the turn of the 21st century. Then, in Chapters 3 and 4, I attempted to use contemporary semi-autobiographical films in order to envision a Nanyang understanding of the Asian Financial Crisis, one that cannot adequately be described in conventional nationalist history.

But what to do with this now, at this particular point in history, when reactionary conservatism has spread across nations like a contagion, and the rise of China as a global power is tangibly being felt all over Southeast Asia, transgressing borders and economically dominating weaker and more fragmented nation states?

Admittedly, I have no answer for that. And even if I do my PhD dissertation on that topic, I will still have no answer for that. What I know for sure is that the bound seriality of nationalism is not the answer. I believe that the answer lies somewhere in the heterotopia, in the discourses between races, in the dialogues between nations, in the conversations between human beings. It is in here, this abstract, intangible time and space, that is everywhere and nowhere at the same time,

that we can be unbound enough to imagine what such a future could possibly look for us. For sure, we will probably need concrete actions instead of just dreams and imaginings. Perhaps, someday soon, I will know exactly what to do to help mitigate global crisis and turn it into opportunity. For now, I—we—have this time and space, the Nanyang Imaginary, to envision what belonging could truly be like.

I am suddenly reminded of my favorite poem in a not-too-recent anthology edited by J. Neil C. Garcia, "At Home in Unhomeliness:"

> A part of us will live here forever, another part
> Of us, perpetually leaving. The look you
> Have in your eyes, as of late, is a worry to me
> As you are mourning the possible loss
> Of what we created from impossibility.
> Come and take all that I give to you:
> A hand to hold, my very pulse echoing
> In your skin, my frame to shelter you from
> The wicked world. This residence
> We may lose, but you are where I truly live.
> There is a space for you in this body yet.
>
> A constant dwelling where we can
> Map out our pasts and our futures, to
> Bring us closer to where we will no
> Longer need the comfort of four walls
> For us to be finally home.
>
> - Residence (Cariño 17-18)

The Nanyang Imaginary is not the point of view of outsiders looking into Southeast Asia. It is the perspective of Southeast Asians who have always felt Southeast Asian but have been told otherwise by their national governments, society, literature, and media. In order to feel a sense of belonging, therefore, these national institutions have to be transgressed and transcended in order to create a home not *in* the South Seas, but *of* the South Seas.

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