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Enjoy Without Restraints!: The Impossible Sublation of French May '68 and "China" in René Viénet's *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* (1973) and Olivier Assayas' *Irma Vep* (1996)

This paper explores the fundamental impossibility of the (mid to late) twentieth-century Sino-French cross-cultural encounter through the two "dialectical" and highly self-reflexive films *Can Dialectics Break Bricks?* (1973) and *Irma Vep* (1996) made by French directors René Viénet and Olivier Assayas. Historically speaking, both *Can Dialectics* and *Irma Vep* were produced with respect to two crucial as well as intertwined moments in French cultural politics—May '68 and the centennial of French cinema accordingly. Yet, the two films do not simply proffer a Eurocentric perspective but rather "dialectically" engage a Chinese Other *qua* Hong Kong action cinema in 1970s and 90s as an anti-thesis and transgression towards their respective French concerns. Despite all the best intentions to merge the Situationist ideas with cinema, I argue that the combinative attempts of "détournement" and "re-enactment" *vis-à-vis* a Chinese/Hong Kong Other suggested by Viénet and Assayas cannot synthesize or sublimate into a "new" model of Sino-French trans-cultural relation as far as the generic "Hong Kong elements" in these two features fail to present a distinctive, coherent "China." But if this is true, such incommensurability between "Frenchness" and "Chineseness" in the two texts can also help us redefine what franco-Chinese cultural contact may mean in its first hand.