EITHER 'SHINING WHITE OR BLACKEST BLACK': GREY MORALITY OF THE COLONIZED SUBJECT IN POSTWAR JAPANESE CINEMA AND CONTEMPORARY MANGA

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ABSTRACT

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The cultural and political relationship between Japan and the United States is often praised for its equity, collaboration, and mutual respect. To many, the alliance between Japan and the United States serves as a testament for overcoming a violent and antagonistic past. However, the impact of the United States occupation and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is rarely discussed in light of this alliance. The economic revival, while important to Japan’s reentry into the global market, inevitably obscured continuing paternalistic interactions between Japan and the United States. Using postcolonial theory from Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Hiroshi Yoshioka as a foundation, this study examines the ways Japan was colonized during and after the seven-year occupation by the United States.

The following is a close assessment of two texts and their political significance at two specific points in history. Akira Kurosawa’s 1948 noir film *Drunken Angel (Yoidore Tenshi)* shaped the identity of postwar Japan; Yasuhiro Nightow’s *Trigun* manga series navigates cultural amnesia and American exceptionalism during the 1990s after the Bubble Economy fell into recession in 1995. These texts are worthy of simultaneous assessment because of the ways they incorporate American archetypes, iconography, and themes into their work while still adhering to Japanese cultural concerns. Kurosawa and Nightow render worlds that reflect collaborative effort between the two cultures but in reality reveal social inequalities, thus creating a space for resistance. The "grey moralities" exhibited in *Drunken Angel* and *Trigun* through their characters, narratives, and the cultural circumstances in which they were created, offers a space for the colonized Japanese subject to push back against systems of oppression using popular culture that comes to be appreciated by both the colonizer and the colonized.
For Kurosawa and Nightow, who have shown me the ways
one can fight oppression with art, humor, love, and peace.

It is wonderful to create.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The cultural and political relationship between Japan and the United States is often praised for its equity, collaboration, and mutual respect. To many, the alliance between Japan and the United States serves as a testament for overcoming a violent and antagonistic past. However, the impact of occupation and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is rarely discussed in light of this alliance. General Douglas MacArthur was tasked with leading the U.S. occupational forces in Japan, and his attitude toward the Japanese was textbook paternalistic. Shunsuke Tsurumi elaborates on this in *A Cultural History of Postwar Japan*: "[MacArthur's] opinion is … that the Japanese were mentally 12 years old ... There can be no doubt of his good will, but it was the good will of a full-grown man towards a 12-year-old" (4). Regardless of the "good intentions" of American policies, this rhetoric is not that of a leader who fully respects and understands the culture he claims to be preserving. Instead, it is the behavior of a conqueror who finds himself superior. In addition, the level of westernization Japan experienced with a new constitution, education reform, and a permanent military installation in Okinawa supports this notion. America was intent on incorporating democracy into everyday Japanese life, and the way they did this (censorship, education, and propaganda) was not altogether different from how European countries colonized nations in Africa and the Middle East. To cast Japan as a colonized subject, I use a postcolonial theoretical lens with support from film theory and Japanese scholars to examine the legacy of occupation and atomic weapons as they appear in postwar Japanese cinema and manga.

The following is a close assessment of two texts and their political significance at two specific points in history. Akira Kurosawa's 1948 noir film *Drunken Angel* (*Yoidore Tenshi* in Japanese) shaped the identity of postwar Japan. This film explores the lives of two men
struggling with alcoholism, crime, destitution, and disease in a Tokyo slum. Kurosawa's portrayal of occupied Japan is a visceral and sobering one, but it remains a vitally important postcolonial text. *Drunken Angel* is forced by censorship to tell a story that cannot criticize the American occupation, yet Kurosawa accomplishes this through characterization, musical score, and symbolism. The complicated final product is simultaneously pastiche and social commentary: *Drunken Angel* adheres to almost every restriction demanded by the American occupiers who remained completely unaware of Kurosawa's irony.

Additionally, Yasuhiro Nightow's *Trigun* series, published in manga magazines between 1995 and 2007, was also written in a politically charged atmosphere. The collapse of the Bubble Economy in 1995 once again called into question the relationship between Japan and the United States. The Bubble Economy was the result of post occupation prosperity and its failure can be attributed in many ways to a continued paternalistic relationship between the two countries. The *Trigun* series also addressed the atomic bombings at a time in which the subject was considered taboo. Nightow's characters struggle to live with repercussions from the destruction of two prominent cities on a desert planet and what this means for the future. The obvious reference to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings immediately casts *Trigun* as a postwar text, even with the fifty year difference between Kurosawa's debut and Nightow's.

These texts are worthy of simultaneous assessment because of the ways they incorporate Western archetypes, iconography, and themes into their work while still adhering to Japanese cultural concerns. Kurosawa and Nightow render worlds that reflect a collaborative effort on the surface, but in reality reveal social inequalities and create a space for resistance. Kurosawa is regulated by the American occupation and censorship laws; Nightow is regulated by the postwar constraints that led Japan into a recession. As a result, the question at the center of this study is:
can art of the occupied (or the colonized) be truly subversive if it adheres to the doctrine of the colonizer? What happens when this contradictory art inspires the art of future generations, other cultures? The answer lies in the "grey moralities" of *Drunken Angel* and *Trigun*, which through their characters, narratives, and the cultural circumstances in which they were created, offer a space for the colonized Japanese subject to push back against systems of oppression using popular culture that comes to be appreciated by both the colonizer and the colonized. Kurosawa and Nightow's texts use the postcolonial concepts of mimicry and cultural hybridity to disrupt and reclaim their authority within imposed hegemony. The protagonists of *Drunken Angel* and *Trigun* utilize these obfuscating tactics to reach a broader audience, but also cleverly hide social commentary within the "acceptable" realm of westernization. This practice works against the prevalence of cultural amnesia and self-colonization in Japan that refuses to acknowledge the trauma of World War II.

The works of Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon are essential to understanding the complex and amorphous spaces of colonization with which Kurosawa and Nightow struggle. These theorists address the ways colonized subjects find power through identity politics and social interaction. Bhabha's critical essay "Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse," from his 1994 text *The Location of Culture*, is essential to investigate the morally grey colonized subject. In this essay, Bhabha observes a lesser form of resistance born from the ambivalence of the colonized subject in his examples drawn from the British control of India. This theoretical framework can be applied in similar ways to the American occupation of Japan following the end of World War II and beyond. Bhabha discusses how many of the laws focused on creating the illusion of "Britishness" within the colony by creating British citizens out of the Indian people now under imperial rule. This was done through education reform and the
influence of Christianity in order to produce a "proper" citizen of the colony that would reflect well on the British Empire (Bhabha 87). This model is not unlike the same model the United States imposed upon Japan, though it was supposedly done in the name of peace. Regardless, it is not difficult to see the United States as the colonizer, considering the occupation began roughly a month after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In his book *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon uses the Algerian revolution to illuminate how the colonized subject reevaluates his/her traditional culture (typically the culture that is oppressed by the colonizing force) and uses this traditional culture to disrupt power structures. In "Algeria Unveiled" he describes the veiled woman as a powerful disruption of exoticism and colonial power once these women actively join the revolution. Writing about occupation and resistance, Fanon says:

> When colonized people undertake an action against the oppressor … they must overcome a considerable amount of taboos. The European city is not the prolongation of the native city. The colonizers have not settled in the midst of the natives. They have surrounded the native city; they have laid siege to it (51).

The United States was determined to rebuild Japan but everything was regulated through what General MacArthur, and by extension Western ideologies, permitted. This creates a difficult grey area for the terms of the occupation and the nations involved; a grey area between colonizer and colonized, cautious ally and former enemy, paternalistic superior and "uneducated" inferior. There were many Japanese who recognized this all too well:

> The shift to the new values set by the United States was felt to be a necessity which had to be accepted. But the idea that the new values were the only universally acceptable ones, as the Occupation seemed to assert, was something
the Japanese would not readily accept, although they did not openly criticize them (Tsurumi 11).

This secret desire to not entirely accept these Western demands set up the space for a particular form of resistance through art, literature, music, and film.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry and Fanon's documentation of cultural resistance is useful to address subversive media created during the occupation. Japan's surrender to the United States was a turning point for many Japanese artists who had otherwise been oppressed during the war, regardless of their political leanings. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945), the militaristic Japanese government called for censorship of most films; artists were only allowed to create things for the war effort. According to Kyoko Hirano in *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: Japanese Cinema Under the American Occupation*, Japanese filmmakers realized they would again be integral in shaping the ideologies of their nation after the surrender to the United States. Of course, many feared punishment from American occupiers for making propaganda films in support of Japanese nationalism (Hirano 31). The United States Department of War analyzed several of these wartime Japanese films to study them thematically (it is worth noting the only exposure to Japanese culture the Department of War had was through these wartime films). They concluded many Japanese films dealt with self-sacrifice, privileged the will of the state over individual desires, and did not always focus on democracy (Hirano 26). Considering the amount of work these studios produced under a militaristic regime, they would be the perfect collaborators for shaping a new democratic ideology. Thus, American occupiers decided all Japanese filmmakers would require regulation.

Beginning in mid-to-late September of 1945, the United States implemented the process of film censorship. All Japanese film studios were ordered to endorse democracy and the new
constitution created by the United States. Bans were placed on traditional Kabuki theatre performances for supposedly promoting "feudalist loyalty" and the original prints of propagandist wartime films were burned, despite claims by Japanese scholars these would have historical value (Hirano 43). The United States was determined to make Japan a democratic state, even if this meant suppression of centuries-old, traditional Japanese culture. This speaks to what Fanon describes with the "besieged city." The United States entered Japan supposedly to aid in its rehabilitation but instead created more division. This divide also left a space for resistance, such as the one Akira Kurosawa would soon occupy.

Kurosawa was not primarily concerned by ideology, instead driven by story, experience, and character. His focus on these elements would enable him to create a film that is, in the words of Bhabha, an "authorized version of otherness" (88). During the occupation, resistance was met through the careful repurposing or reimagining of supposedly "democratic" ideals in many films, particularly in Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel*. Characters or settings loaded with symbolism provided a platform for deconstructing the political and social climate of Japan, most often without the censors realizing it.

Before the occupation, American films were very popular in Japan before they were banned by the Imperial regime. Additionally, the noir genre itself found a stronghold in Japanese cinema in the early 1930s. Many of these early noir films borrowed elements from American gangster movies of the period. One of the most popular noir films at this time was Yasujiro Ozu’s *Dragnet Girl*. According to Michael Koresky in his article “Eclipse Series 42: Silent Ozu—Three Crime Dramas,” Ozu was “enamored of American cinema … he had borrowed from it before, partially basing the plot of his now lost 1927 debut feature … on that of a contemporary American crime drama” (*The Criterion Collection*). Yasujiro Ozu made over
fourteen films before American culture was banned in Japan, and his influence is apparent in how Kurosawa structures his noir films. Koresky writes, “Ozu employs bold camera movements and attention-grabbing set design (including walls covered in American movie posters and other homages to Western culture)” (*The Criterion Collection*). Kurosawa’s films are also heavily influenced by Western literature and culture; his camerawork and set design are what sets him apart from his contemporaries, much like Ozu. It is not difficult to see the parallels between these two directors, though Ozu was left to obscurity until his death. Kurosawa builds on what his predecessor has done to create something that is more than a noir in aesthetics; Kurosawa tells his story through this “low culture” genre and uses elements of American style to tell a much more critical narrative than Ozu before him.

In my analysis of manga, I address the debate among scholars regarding what are considered the first examples of manga in history. Kinko Ito traces manga back to ancient times and the Middle Ages, in which paintings were collected into volumes that "depict caricatured beings such as frogs, hares, monkeys, and foxes engaging in everyday human activities, parodying the decadent lifestyle of the Japanese upper class of the period" (458). I follow Ito's analysis, since she describes the contextualization of manga throughout history as being part of a system of resistance against the upper class. Ito claims,

One of the most important functions of Japanese manga in its long history is satire, and the satire of authority was most dynamic during the civil rights and political reform movement known as the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, which started at the beginning of the Meiji period (462).

This is important to my analysis of the *Trigun* series as a subversive text, considering manga was one of the first art forms to be appreciated and distributed to the masses rather than the elite.
The postwar moment saw a rise in the popularity of manga titles, though several of these manga titles were primarily directed at young boys through the shōnen genre. However, this did not prevent adults from also consuming manga. Many comics released during the 1950s and 1960s focused on narratives of heroism from the war. It was not until the arrival of serialized manga magazines that the medium became more political. According to Sharon Kinsella in *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*, this was the result of more working class men and students reading political narratives (24).

Two of the most important manga artists from this time period were Osamu Tezuka, known for *Astro Boy* (*Tetsuwan Atomu*) and *The Story of Buddha*, and Keji Nakazawa, known for *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi-no Gen*), a manga that directly addresses the Hiroshima bombing. These artists are not only important for their personal connections to the war but also for their anti-nuclear narratives that sought to work through cultural trauma. These artists developed a cinematic style that filtered into the following generations’ work. Osamu Tezuka, aware of his expanding audience, decided to take a more cinematic approach:

Tezuka borrowed the cinematic effects he had discovered in German and French movies. Mixing together far-away shots, close-ups, and angled perspectives, and employing a variety of transition types ... Tezuka and other artists following him create filmlike action sequences that can be scanned quickly (MacWilliams 117). Like Kurosawa, Tezuka and other postwar manga artists used recognizably Western techniques to speak to Japan's shifting cultural identity and the atomic bomb’s legacy. To return to Bhabha, Tezuka and Kurosawa's parody or appropriation of Western signifiers and cinematic styles casts these works as subversive. In this moment, the colonizer sees a version of himself appropriated
by the colonized subject, and thus "the observer has become the observed" (Bhabha 89). This is also what Yasuhiro Nightow accomplishes with the narrative of *Trigun*.

*Trigun* is a postwar text for the political climate in which it was written--the collapse of the Bubble Economy is also a collapse of the occupation's legacy. The publication of Shintaro Ishihara's *The Japan that Can Say No (Nō to ieru Nihon)* sparked controversy in 1989 into 1991 after it was officially translated into English.\(^{iv}\) Ishihara, a conservative politician, argued against continuing patterns of paternalism still evident in US/Japanese relations. Though these interactions were more about trade, finance, and economic issues, Ishihara is adamant Japan wrestles with unresolved inferiority resulting from the American occupation. Hiroshi Yoshioka responds to Ishihara's argument in 1995's "Samurai and Self-Colonization in Japan." Though Yoshioka is critical of Ishihara, he nevertheless agrees there is still a trend of internalized racism and exceptionalism on the part of the United States and their interactions with Japan. He writes:

> I would like to call attention to another reason why [Ishihara's text] appeals to the West; it implies a certain way of representing Japan to the West ... to assume some 'real' or 'true' tradition in the Japanese mentality which survives all the cultural and social transformation caused by modernization (108).

Yoshioka argues there has been a colonization of Japanese imagination as a result. A false version of Japanese "tradition" is cast back against the country via westernization resulting in a misunderstanding of the culture at large. Yoshioka continues his analysis with the deconstruction of the Samurai as a cultural signifier of Japan. Many of these anxieties are present in Nightow's narrative as well.

In the 1980s and early 1990s Japan supplied the United States with a great deal of technology, which led to the import of video games, Japanese films, and animated television
shows. Many manga and anime narratives of this period were concerned with globalization. In the mid-1990s, enough time has passed for Nightow to dig into the trauma of history and use the wartime narrative to look to the future. *Trigun* is not constrained by censorship; its narrative must work more metaphorically to speak to history in times of peace. Nightow’s use of atomic bomb imagery within a science fiction setting accomplishes something similar to that which Kurosawa addressed.

Nightow appropriates aesthetics and tropes from not only science fiction but also American cinema, specifically the western genre. The *Trigun* series (like other Space Westerns like it) were in high demand in the United States due to the success of its 1998 anime adaptation. A very interesting phenomenon emerged from this demand: not only is *Trigun* more popular in the United States than it is in Japan, it is also part of a trend of Japanese media that displays a complicated form of cultural hybridity. Nightow's work reflects the way he grew up as a creator with an imagination shaped by the occupation. *Trigun* is also critical of these issues similar to the ways Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* was critical of both the occupation and toxic masculinity. It is notable these works are appreciated by Western audiences without fully realizing their undercurrent of subversion.

The atomic imagery and *Trigun*’s cross-genre storytelling is similar to Kurosawa's disavowal of the occupation through metaphor and mimicry. Nightow's protagonist, a pacifist gunslinger known as Vash the Stampede, represents the struggle to overcome cultural trauma, amnesia, paternalism, and self-colonization. Nightow builds from Tezuka and Nakazawa’s portrayal of wartime tragedies through cinema to address the responsibility of the atomic bombing and reclaim agency as a colonized subject. Though his main protagonist is a pacifist, Nightow does not characterize Vash the Stampede as a saint. Rather, he is morally conflicted and
struggles to do good deeds in a violent world. *Trigun* explores how pacifism can become a trap in the aftermath of tragedy, which immediately challenges Japan's casting of the atomic bomb as a symbol for peace. Despite his willingness to uphold good morals, Nightow's protagonist is as morally ambiguous as the alcoholic doctor and the young gangster in Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel*.

In a 1960 interview with Donald Richie, Kurosawa explores why he chose to write the main character of *Drunken Angel* with a grey morality:

> I wrote [Dr. Sanada's] part over and over again. Still, he wasn't interesting. We had almost given up when it occurred to me that he was too good to be true, he needed a defect, a vice. This is why we made him an alcoholic. At that time most film characters were shining white or blackest black. We made the doctor grey (9).

Kurosawa was determined to approach filmmaking and storytelling in way that did not simply fall into the neat binaries of black and white or good and evil. Complicated times called for more complicated characters to speak accurately to shifting generational values, colonization, and westernization. A morally grey protagonist makes for a more interesting, more complicated, and more widely contested subject. Shades of grey disrupt, obfuscate, and trouble status quos and authenticities, including those that are imposed. In the following chapters, I analyze how the manifestation of a "grey morality" is a central thematic device in both Kurosawa and Nightow's postwar works and that this grey morality allows for the refusal of colonization.

In the third chapter, "Deconstructing the Colonized Gangster In Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel,*" I discuss the subversive qualities of Kurosawa's film in detail: Japanese characters wearing American-style clothes, the non-traditional soundtrack, and an anti-hero protagonist.
To survive in a cruel world, Kurosawa's drunken doctor and the young colonized gangster must assimilate, but their subversive strength lies in how well they can shift their agency within this system of oppression. I examine how these characters perform mimicry in order to facilitate an anti-occupation narrative while struggling against the American censors.

In the fourth chapter, "'Can Murderers Only Be Murderers?' Questioning Atomic Power in Yasuhiro Nightow's Trigun," I examine how the American occupation is a connecting thread of continuous colonization stretching decades into Japan’s future. *Trigun* provides an in-depth look at the cultural psyche of Japan in this period after years of silence and amnesia about the Atomic tragedy. Nightow’s deconstruction of pacifism confronts the problems of his generation: how does one grapple with a bomb as a symbol of peace? His hero Vash the Stampede represents an interrogation of how violence sets a precedent for peace.

Finally, I argue that Japanese popular culture has always been of interest to the Western world, and Kurosawa’s influence on Hollywood ripples throughout generations of filmmakers, manga artists, and writers. Moreover, as culture, gender, and societal norms shift into their own grey areas with the onset of globalization, I contend cultural hybridity through popular culture becomes a way for Japan to reassert political agency after decades of reliance on the United States.
Notes

i In this study, all Japanese names are written with surnames listed after given names: Kurosawa Akira becomes Akira Kurosawa, and so on. Japanese terms will be italicized with the exception of words well-known in English-language scholarship, such as Samurai, Kabuki, manga, etc. All original titles of Japanese works will be written in Rōmaji.

ii By manga I refer to serialized comics printed in magazines or collected in tankōbon books, as opposed to comic strips, which were popular in Japan in the early 20th century, but not as widely read. According to Tsurumi, they were also subject to censorship during wartime by the Japanese (31--32).

iii According to Yuki Tanaka in "War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu," Tezuka was drafted into the army and often disciplined for drawing off-duty; he also witnessed the firebombing of Osaka first-hand, and was the only survivor after his unit was killed (3). Additionally, Keiji Nakazawa is a survivor of Hiroshima and lost his brother and father in the bombing (Szasz and Takechi "Atomic Heroes and Atomic Monsters" 747).

iv The controversy was credited to the unauthorized translation of Ishihara's text into English. According to Ezra F. Vogel in the foreword of the 1991 edition, the translations circulated in the Pentagon before it was leaked to the American press, where the book was branded anti-American (8—9).

v The term Space Western (also known as Weird West) applies to a genre of science fiction that takes the frontier aesthetics of American and Italian Western films and either combines them with advanced technology or deep space travel. Popular titles in this genre include Joss Whedon’s Firefly series, as well as the anime titles Outlaw Star and Gun x Sword. All of these titles are contemporaries of Trigun.

vi Shinichiro Watanabe's Cowboy Bebop was released the same year as Trigun’s anime adaptation. The Trigun anime was overshadowed in some ways by this series' popularity because of Cowboy Bebop's much darker and grittier storyline. Cowboy Bebop is also considered by scholars, critics, and fans to be one of the most popular and successful anime franchises of all time.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial theory provides the important groundwork for the examination of Japan as a colonized subject, given it is difficult to trace this concept throughout Japan's history. To establish Akira Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* as a postcolonial narrative in the first chapter, I use the work of postcolonial theorists Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon to address Kurosawa’s resistance during the American occupation.

Homi K. Bhabha's "Of mimicry and man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse" explores what happens to the colonized subject after the colonizer has enjoyed years of established power. How are resistance and subversion cultivated when the imposed system can offer the colonized subject more power and status if they integrate into the system themselves? This is the moment, according to Bhabha, the tricky, amorphous space between being assimilated into a system and subverting it from within. How can there be resistance when the colonized subject has joined or accepted oppression? Mimicry offers a complicated form of resistance that is only accessible within the cracks of an oppressive system. I argue these spaces are not always accessible, but are often highlighted through popular culture. Bhabha defines the colonized subject and the concept of mimicry in relation to the colonizer as:

a recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.

Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference ... mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal (86).
The suit-wearing gangsters who populate American-style dance halls in *Drunken Angel* are thus the perfect way to mimic the colonizer and begin this process of disavowal without the US censors’ knowledge.

Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* draws parallels between the occupation and colonization. In "Algeria Unveiled," he writes, “In an initial phase, it is the action, the plans of the occupier that determine the centers of resistance around which a people’s will to survive becomes organized” (47). Additionally, Fanon deconstructs why the colonized use or adopt the culture of the colonizing force--to obfuscate resistance. Fanon describes how Algerians used the French radio stations and the French language itself to give power to their revolutionaries by seemingly assimilating to French culture and amenities. Similarly, the occupation of Japan stifled many creative freedoms yet those in power did not see their censorship as too restrictive; to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), Japan's past as a military regime was cause for a cultural reboot. Kurosawa and other content creators in the postwar period were forced to find resistance within this complicated web of censorship and mimicry.

Hiroshi Yoshioka is one Japanese scholar who uses a postcolonial lens to investigate postwar Japan. In his essay "Samurai and Self-Colonization in Japan," he writes,

> Except for the American occupation after the Second World War, Japan has never been colonized. Japan was so quick to westernize itself that it avoided political colonization ...

> In this respect, we can regard Japan as part of the West in modern history (100).

Yoshioka's analysis is cause for examination, considering he addresses the occupation as colonization but concludes Japan avoided colonization’s effects via assimilation. This reveals how the Japanese viewed themselves after the arrival of the United States: there was an immediate call for westernization to survive. Yoshioka claims the Japanese do not think of the
occupation as colonization because it seems natural to have Western and Japanese cultures exist simultaneously. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this idea, Yoshioka argues there is a “hidden mechanism” to this coexistence; this hidden colonization of the imagination comes from the legacy of the Samurai and its effect on Japan and the West. He writes:

Samurai provide people with a fantasy that the world has not been changed by the impact of modernization … I suppose the samurai was generated as a kind of psychological defense against the strong modern subject of the West. It has played a certain role in the struggle to develop a strong ego (collective as well as individual) which could confront the West (103—104).

Yoshioka’s theory of self-colonization is an important piece of Japanese postcolonial theory that address themes in both Drunken Angel and Yasuhiro Nightow's Trigun series.

In analyzing how Kurosawa's narrative disrupts the role of the colonized subject, I utilize film analysis from Kyoko Hirano and Donald Richie together with feminist film theory from Teresa DeLauretis. Kyoko Hirano's Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo addresses immediate postwar issues such as censorship, the stigma of surrender, interactions with racist US soldiers, and how Japanese culture shifted under a more democratic constitution. These concepts lend themselves well to discuss the occupation as a colonial act. Hirano’s detailed analysis of Kurosawa’s work and her documentation of many types of censorship establish how important Japanese filmmakers were to reestablishing agency for Japan during and after the war.ii

In The Films of Akira Kurosawa, Donald Richie’s comprehensive biography of Kurosawa is equally important to analyzing his influence upon filmmakers and manga artists long after occupation ended. Richie also provides a rich analysis of Kurosawa’s films. Richie’s personal correspondences with Kurosawa are weaved in with accounts of pre-production, script writing,
and the cultural impact of each film. Interviews with Kurosawa’s childhood friends, contemporaries, and his mentor, director Kajirō Yamamoto, are central to examining how the themes of Kurosawa's films developed during the postwar years.

Teresa DeLauretis's theory of transmitting ideology through cinema works alongside Bhabha's postcolonial concept of mimicry and Fanon's besieged city to speak to the ways Japan was shaped into a colonized subject. In *Alice Doesn't*, DeLauretis describes the power of cinema as:

... an apparatus of representation, an image machine developed to construct images or visions of social reality and the spectator's place in it. But, insofar as cinema is directly implicated in the production and reproduction of meanings, values, and ideology in both sociality and subjectivity, it should be better understood as ... a semiotic process in which the subject is continually engaged, represented, and inscribed in ideology (37).

Films remain inherently political to this day. Each moving part of a film projects various messages of gender, race, sexuality, and social commentary via images. During World War II, these images were constrained by ideology. This is important to showcase how Kurosawa transmits his own ideology, one of resistance that subverts Western authority by playing into it.

Additionally, articles about *Drunken Angel*’s musical score and narrative by Michael W. Harris (“Jazzing in the Tokyo Slum”) and Keiko McDonald (“Dream, Song, and Symbol: More About Drunken Angel”) as well as E. Taylor Atkins’s “Can Japanese Sing the Blues? ‘Japanese Jazz’ and the Problem of Authenticity” add to my analysis of Kurosawa’s film as an embodiment of mimicry using American jazz as both parody and a narrative device.

To cast *Trigun* as a postwar and postcolonial text in the second chapter, I use Bhabha, Fanon, and Yoshioka's theories with analysis from US and Japanese scholars to deconstruct the
legacy of occupation and the Atomic bombings. Bhabha's "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" from The Location of Culture is useful to explore postcolonial theory with the advent of new technologies and the rise of globalization. This speaks to the time period in which Nightow writes: I contend collapse of the Japanese economy in 1995 is an extension of the occupation. While there is no doubt Japan’s postwar economy rebounded, the occupation created a void in the way it did denied Japan the chance to culturally redefine itself without influence from Western nations.

Masao Miyoshi’s Off Center describes the continuous misrepresentation of Japan throughout its own political history. Miyoshi claims a binary exists in previous scholarship about Japanese literature and history, in that it exists alongside Western influence (symmetry) as opposed to against it (asymmetry). He writes,

an imaginary symmetry was allowed to dominate and disguise historical asymmetry, as if the matter of accuracy and justice had nothing to do with power. These notions are products of binarism, itself no doubt a product of Cold War ideology (2).

Historical asymmetry, according to Miyoshi, is history forced into binaries due to ethnocentrism. The Cold War notoriously separated the world into “East and West,” with no regard for nations in between, unless they were the United States or the Soviet Union. The lack of attention paid to Japanese pacifism during the Cold War contributes to notions of lost identity and cultural amnesia. In turn, these themes flow into popular culture produced in the 1950s and 1960s. I include a brief history of postwar manga leading up to Nightow's publication of Trigun in the 1990s with a focus on Tezuka Osamu's Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu) and Keiji Nakazawa's Barefoot Gen (Hadashi-no Gen).
Sharon Kinsella’s *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* is a detailed account of the history of manga until the early 2000s. I incorporate historical records from this book to question how the message of peace in postwar manga is ultimately constrained by westernization and cultural amnesia in Japan. Osamu Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* and *The Story of Buddha* are two of the most widely read manga of all time. I examine the history and influences of his work, namely how Tezuka was inspired by Disney films and other American cartoons. His manga is a touchstone for many artists of both the postwar era and the current moment.

Similarly, Keiji Nakazawa is important for his first-hand account of the Hiroshima bombing and how he portrays this violence in his artwork. *Barefoot Gen* also saw limited success in the United States, though it included a much fiercer antiwar and antinuclear standpoint.

Additionally, Masashi Ichiki's "Embracing the Victimhood: A History of A-Bomb Manga in Japan" also provides an historical account of the atomic bomb's appearance in manga starting from the postwar era into the mid-1990s. Ichiki's article features a cross-genre inspection of atomic bomb manga, and how narratives of the bomb were either appropriated for drama or intended for social commentary.

Christine Hong's extensive study “Flashforward Democracy: American Exceptionalism and the Atomic Bomb in *Barefoot Gen*" traces the history of postwar rhetoric both in politics and Japanese manga. She is especially concerned with notions of ambivalence and inevitability predominant in Hiroshima scholarship. Hong cites erasure as the reason the United States is not held accountable for the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and uses Gertrude Stein’s 1946 essay to speak to the cultural ambivalence the United States cultivated toward the bombing of Japan. Hong writes:
[Stein’s essay] speaks to Hiroshima’s non-centrality within the US imagination … The mushroom cloud stands not only as an abstraction of US technological prowess and Cold War ascendency, but also a screen of memory of the human costs of the bombings has become commonplace (126).

This “screen of memory” is what contributes to Japan’s shifting identity politics in the postwar climate, and the country’s own lack of accountability for war crimes committed in Korea. Conflicting trends of victimhood, heroism, exceptionalism, and a desire to forget or repress trauma are all culturally relevant during the time period Japan reasserted itself as a global contender in the postwar era.

James Orr’s The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan explores how the atomic bomb was appropriated in postwar rhetoric not only as a symbol of peace, but also as an inevitability. Orr claims Hiroshima's past is always in danger of being appropriated by conservative groups or otherwise forgotten. He writes:

Hiroshima became both an icon of Japan’s past as war victim and a beacon for its future as a pacifist nation … The ban-the-bomb movement … helped make the idea of atomic victimhood a part of the Japanese cultural and political treasury. Yet … it could be tapped by Japanese of any political faction … Atomic victimhood also proved inadequate to convince many non-Japanese of the sincerity of Japanese pacifism (37--38).

This is important to Trigun’s narrative, as Nightow's manga enters history as one of the first texts to declare responsibility for the atomic bombings. A science fiction narrative allows Nightow to cast a victim of a Hiroshima-like tragedy as his protagonist with an important caveat: Vash the Stampede may be a survivor of mass destruction but he is also the cause. This creates a morally grey hero, despite Vash's want for pacifism in the face of tragedy. Using Orr's analysis of atomic
bomb rhetoric and Hiroshima’s appropriation as a tool of peace, I look at the main protagonist of *Trigun* as a response to the collapse of the economy and subsequent reemergence of post-war anxieties in Japan.

Bhaskar Sarkar’s *Mourning the Nation* is ideal to examine the complexities of cultural amnesia in postwar and recession era Japan. Sarkar weaves the history and trauma of Partition through Indian cinema and how narratives of trauma permeate the film industry. Much like Orr, Sarkar sees Partition narratives used for propaganda and nationalism. Though this text focuses on South East Asia, its intersections of grief, trauma, nationalism, and visual narrative is important to look at representations of Japanese trauma in the decades following Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Finally, Néstor García Canclini’s theory of hybridity and his book *Consumers and Citizens* is important to determine how Kurosawa and Nightow’s work transcend binaries and boundaries as a result of globalization. Cultural hybridity is also important to Bhabha in “Signs Taken For Wonders” from the *Location of Culture*. Given that Kurosawa and Nightow were both heavily inspired by American culture, themes, and iconography, it is necessary to look at how their work has become part of the global landscape. Considering Japanese culture is now a global interest, Canclini and Bhabha’s theoretical assumptions about the erasure of national boundaries is key to understanding how Kurosawa and Nightow’s work function as cultural hybrids.
Notes

i Several of the sources gathered for this project are translated from Japanese into English. I use translated interviews conducted with Akira Kurosawa and Yasuhiro Nightow. Many of these interviews are available in multiple versions in a variety of formats.

ii There is a source I was not able to read in regards to potential postcolonial analysis. This text was only available in Japanese: Rio Takeuchi’s "Shin no Shinshi" (true gentleman) and "EseShinshi" (pseudo-gentleman): Social Construction of "West" and "Japan" (2005).

iii There is a lack of scholarship on *Trigun*, so I use Tezuka and Nakazawa’s work to show their influence flows through the postwar generations of artists. Nightow was born in the 1960s, and his artistic influences owe much to *Astro Boy*, *Barefoot Gen*, and other postwar artists.
CHAPTER III: DECONSTRUCTING THE COLONIZED GANGSTER IN KUROSAWA'S

DRUNKEN ANGEL

Until the surrender to the United States in 1945, Japanese filmmakers held a great amount of power and sway over public opinion. Though required to promote the war effort and loyalty to the Emperor, their propaganda reels were instrumental in shaping the nation’s identity. In 1939, the Japanese government took hold of the film industry and instituted the Film Law, not unlike those implemented in Nazi Germany. According to Kyoko Hirano in her historical account of postwar Japanese cinema, the Film Law “authorized the deletion and the suppression of scenes that might be harmful to public order and behavior,” including those that prohibited slice-of-life films and women drinking, smoking, or being sexually promiscuous (15—16). The Japanese government also ran a fierce campaign to demonize the United States and Britain. Hirano says:

The teaching of English was prohibited in schools; Japanese who had been brought up or educated in Western countries (except Germany and Italy) were suspected as spies ...

After Pearl Harbor, all American films were banned and confiscated, and only films from the Axis and neutral countries were allowed to be shown (24—25).

Conversely, censorship and regulation of film and media under Japanese rule allowed filmmakers access to classified information to make newsreels. Many knew of battles fought before the Japanese public. For example, news broke of the Hiroshima bombing to directors working at the Toho film studio long before the public was told (Hirano 31). The filmmaker’s power was too strong for the American occupiers to ignore. In their eyes these men had to be regulated, or they risked creating a space for Japanese resistance. As a result, the United States immediately controlled Japanese film production.
In 1945, the American Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) created a new standard for every Japanese film to follow for public distribution. These standards included a list of thirteen taboo subjects. Any film including these topics would be subsequently banned unless otherwise changed. This list contains subjects ranging from militarism, revenge, nationalism, and anti-democratic messages to portrayal of "feudalist loyalty" and suicide (Hirano 45). General MacArthur and the occupational forces clearly saw themselves superior in relation to the oppressive nature of the previous Japanese military regime. After all, "It was America's duty to tackle the difficult job of transforming the uncivilized Japanese nation into a civilized fellow citizen of the world" (Hirano 39). This “duty” would not allow Japan creative freedom or freedom of the press. With occupation’s institution, Japanese filmmakers were lifted from the oppressive war-mongering precedents set for them only to find themselves faced with a new set of restrictions, this time with the task of preserving democracy.

In *A Dying Colonialism*, Frantz Fanon contextualizes the Algerian revolution in postcolonial history. He traces years of French colonial occupation through the 1950s and how this changed the ways Algerians addressed resistance. The essay "This is the Voice of Algeria" demonstrates how the colonizer's power can be disrupted with the appropriation of his own culture. Many Algerians were encouraged to purchase a radio to listen to French radio stations and thus maintain loyalty to their occupiers. However, with the advent of a revolutionary radio station, the colonizer's influence was suddenly stripped away. Fanon claims:

*The Voice of Fighting Algeria* and all the voices picked up by the receiver now revealed to the Algerian the tenuous, very relative character, in short, the imposture of the French voice presented until now as the only one. The occupier's voice was stripped of its authority (95).
Though Fanon talks about resistance in terms of radio, this concept can also be applied to the ways Japanese filmmakers maneuvered imposed censorship during occupation. Arguably, no director was more successful at manipulating these power structures than Akira Kurosawa. This is where postcolonial discourse and his 1948 noir film *Drunken Angel* intersect. Kurosawa's characters, as colonized subjects, struggle against assimilation while also trying to survive. In 1994’s *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha defines mimicry as a way the colonized subject asserts agency within systems of oppression by taking on the guise of the colonizer themselves, and mirroring it back to them. Bhabha writes:

> Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them. Similarly, mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its ‘otherness,’ that which it disavows (91).

Kurosawa’s gangster Matsunaga embodies this form of resistance. By dressing as the colonizer, Kurosawa's antihero strips agency and authority from the oppressive forces. Matsunaga rules over a cluster of black markets in a Tokyo slum, and makes a good living doing so because of his duality as Japanese and westernized subject. However, this form of resistance is not without its difficulties. Kurosawa (like his characters) must still navigate institutionalized racism.

As an art student during the war, Kurosawa's politics manifested in Marxism; many student activists at the time were opposed to the militaristic regime imposed upon their generation. These early political experiences set the stage for his resistance in the postwar years. Kurosawa later became frustrated with the Marxists and fell out of the movement shortly after he left school. In a 1975 interview with Joan Mellen, Kurosawa discusses his experience with Marxist politics:
I always have many issues about which I am angry, including capitalism. Although I don't intend explicitly to put my feelings and principles into the films, these angers slowly seep through ... I would say that almost all the intellectual urban youth in that period were at one time or another Marxists. They were not satisfied with the government and its policies. I was one of them (57).

Kurosawa retained his opposition to hegemonic norms as a young man once he found his way into the film industry. His first experience with CIE censorship practices was during the release of his second film, *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger’s Tail* (1945).iv According to Hirano, during the uncertain months before American policy officially took hold several filmmakers at the Toho studio scrambled to make films with limited resources. Kurosawa’s adaptation of a story frequently told through Kabuki and Noh theatre was completed and submitted for review, only to be banned by the censors. In a 1981 interview with Tony Rayns, Kurosawa remarks that, "The finished film was banned from public showing because it was considered 'feudalistic.’” (83).

What are scholars to make of the “feudalist” ideology the censors believed Kurosawa sustained? It was apparent the men of United States Department of War had no previous knowledge about Japan beyond cultural stereotypes. Hirano writes:

> Americans also had to learn quickly about Japan, because there had been almost no education in Japanese language or culture before the war, in contrast to ... Japan, where English language and literature had been taught in schools, and the Japanese had adopted elements of American culture to which popular films had exposed them (25).

This lack of exposure to Japanese culture is apparent in the racist policy of Japanese internment camps implemented by the United States after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Additionally, in 1944’s propaganda film *Know Your Enemy: Japan* Japanese customs are said to be “primitive” in
comparison to America’s. Samurai are portrayed as demonic and barbaric; an overwhelming fear of the sword is palpable in this film. To the American public, and by extension the United States Department of War, the Samurai and his sword were a dangerous extension of Japanese ideology. Hirano supports this claim in her analysis of the film: "swords are manipulated to suggest that the Japanese were cruel, arrogant, untrustworthy, and backward ... it is also easy to understand how [Americans] could come to believe that swords were inherently evil (68). The notion that the sword itself is a threat to democracy is evident in the way the occupation censor board rejected films infused with historical drama. It is also apparent in the way Kurosawa’s *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger’s Tail*, a narrative detailing the exploits of Samurai masquerading as priests, was banned from public screening.

In his essay “Samurai and Self-Colonization in Japan,” Hiroshi Yoshioka argues the mythos of the Samurai is misunderstood and appropriated by Japan as much as it is by the West. He claims colonization is not considered by many Japanese scholars because it seems natural to have Western and Japanese culture exist simultaneously (101). There is an unwillingness to acknowledge the damage done to the Japanese by the Japanese themselves, specifically through what Yoshioka calls "hidden colonization." This is a result of the Samurai's shared heritage between Japan and the West. The Samurai is, among many things, a mask to protect and obfuscate a complicated colonized past. Kurosawa, unlike many filmmakers and creators of his time, was critical of *bushido*, the Samurai code of honor, well before he created his Samurai epics of the early 1950s. How is the Samurai mythos (and Yoshioka’s interrogation of what the Samurai means for Japan) relevant in an era that forbade their existence? I contend Kurosawa’s early noir film *Drunken Angel* not only critiques the Samurai model using Yakuza gangsters as proxy warriors but also critiques colonizing practices of the United States through metaphor and
the grey moralities of his characters. *Drunken Angel* is worthy of postcolonial analysis for the way it criticizes American democracy even while it is simultaneously regulated by it. This film exists as a snapshot of postwar Tokyo, but also as commentary on the complicated influence of American culture on Japan, the erasure of Japanese tradition, and antiwar sentiment that some Japanese harbored against the Imperial regime.

**Colonized in the Tokyo Slum: *Drunken Angel*'s Subversive Power**

In *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa DeLauretis claims through a discussion of semiotics drawn from Umberto Eco that images on film have the power to change social realities, especially those reimagined or reinvented. She writes, “By establishing new codes, [signs] are capable of transforming both the representation and the perception of reality, and thus eventually can change the social reality” (55). According to DeLauretis, external forces and stressors can also affect this social reality, disrupt the ways signs in film are produced, and change the ways characters are coded. The signs and codes in film are also adaptive to various external circumstances. DeLauretis claims, “adaptation is nonetheless a kind of production—of sensation, cognition, memory, an ordering and distribution of energy, a constant activity for survival, pleasure and self-maintenance” (55). In *Drunken Angel*, Kurosawa tells a radical narrative via complicated production of signs and coding. The imagery of *Drunken Angel* inevitably changes the social reality by pushing back against the oppressive colonizing force of the American occupiers. Kurosawa’s gangster protagonist Matsunaga and the symbolism of the film also represent an embodiment of mimicry, creating opportunities for resistance in a space limited by censorship.

*Drunken Angel* is considered by many scholars to be Kurosawa's breakthrough production, with the emergence of directorial trademarks and the first appearance of actor
Toshiro Mifune, with whom Kurosawa would have a working relationship for several years. The main characters of *Drunken Angel*, the young gangster Matsunaga (Toshiro Mifune) and the alcoholic but committed Dr. Sanada (Takashi Shimura), represent opposing viewpoints of Japan in the postwar moment. Matsunaga is a young, westernized man who wears three piece suits and spends his time at dance halls; Sanada is the old-world man who agonizes as he watches the Japanese youth endure sickness and death. The common thread these characters share is their grey moralities. Matsunaga is a gangster who makes his living through black markets and violence. He is volatile and aloof, ruling his turf with nothing but intimidation. However, he is still very much a boy, orphaned by the war and pushed to the fringes to survive. Similarly, Dr. Sanada is committed to his patients no matter who they are but in turn poisons his body to cope with death, disease, and a crippling sense of despair. Many of his colleagues own hospitals or private practices, but he stays in the slums, helping the people no one else wants to acknowledge.

The US occupiers did not want to acknowledge the existence of the Tokyo slum, either. The film went through several rewrites and script changes because of conflicting views with the CIE. In his analysis of *Drunken Angel*'s subversive qualities, Michael W. Harris examines the challenges Kurosawa and his friend Keinosuke Uegusa underwent as script writers, particularly when it came to the film’s characters and title. Harris writes:

Sanada can be called 'sensei,' a title of respect reserved for those in authority or the highly educated. By portraying a person who could be referred to by such a title in the lowest ranks of society, a critique of postwar Japan is accomplished and underscored in the film’s title. This pointed criticism was not above the censors as the title was repeatedly the subject of their disapproval (66).
Dr. Sanada, who drinks alcohol from his own medical rations, berates Matsunaga, and remains judgmental and sarcastic with everyone else, is no “shining white” beacon of hope in this film. Rather, Kurosawa characterizes him in a way that does not sugar coat or obfuscate the era’s issues. Dr. Sanada is a trained professional who lives in a slum where children play in sewage and constantly contract typhoid, tuberculosis, and other diseases. Alcohol is what allows him to cope with what he sees in postwar Tokyo. This is a bold position for a film to take, particularly one made during occupation. According to Harris, one censor suggested changing the title to *Fallen Angel*, as indicated by records from the SCAP (“Jazzing in the Tokyo Slum,” 65, note 47). The film’s narrative and style completely change with this suggestion; there is an immediate allusion to Christianity in this new title and it erases the grey morality of Dr. Sanada’s characterization. In the end, Kurosawa kept the original title, but this incident has clear suggestions of Western superiority and internalized racism on the part of the United States.

It is especially significant that American occupiers are absent from this film (also a stipulation of the censor board). Even a quick appearance of a Jeep driving through the film set is carefully edited. Nevertheless, US influence is still apparent from the images that appear on screen. English-language advertisements surround Matsunaga and Dr. Sanada as they walk through the crowded slum. The dance hall Matsunaga frequents is called The Social Center of Tokyo, where American jazz music plays every night. Additionally, many of the Japanese characters only wear traditional clothes in the privacy of their homes. In his article, “*Drunken Angel: The Spoils of War,*” Ian Buruma discusses why the absence of American occupiers is significant to this film:

Foreigners are irrelevant to Kurosawa’s story. Overcoming the culture of war is a Japanese business. The yakuza are a Japanese phenomenon. The Americans provided
much of the propaganda about democracy and equal rights, but they played no part in the kind of relationships dramatized in this film (*The Criterion Collection*).

*Drunken Angel* is indeed concerned with human relationships, but also with contamination, corruption, refusal, and subversion as a result of relations between the Japanese and the Americans. Kurosawa did not need to have American characters in the film to criticize occupation. Consequently, his characters must wear the mask of the colonizer and thus ignore the colonizing presence to address these themes. In *Drunken Angel*, Kurosawa is explicit about exploring these many grey areas.

Matsunaga is a man displaced by the war and forced into a façade, both by his Yakuza code of honor and by the colonizing force of American occupation. In contrast to the film’s other characters, his appearance directly addresses Japan as a colonized space. Matsunaga's clothes are American fashion trends of the period; he slicks his hair back in the gangster style much more common in the West (see fig. 1.1). In "Algeria Unveiled," Frantz Fanon describes the power of clothing to communicate difference: "The way people clothe themselves ... constitutes … a society's uniqueness ... It is by their apparel that types of society first become known, whether through written accounts, photographic records or motion pictures" (42). Kurosawa uses this to his advantage in *Drunken Angel*. By clothing his ailing gangster in the American style of the period he casts Matsunaga as a signifier of a colonized subject who embodies the occupation itself as a Japanese man wearing Western clothes. This allows him to navigate the censorship policies and also tell a more complicated narrative.

The musical score of *Drunken Angel* is also similarly subversive. In this film, the soundtrack is full of brass and heavy strings. This was uncommon for most Japanese films, due to the use of traditional instruments as well as the nationwide ban on Western culture in the late
1930s (Harris 57). Many scholars note that *Drunken Angel*'s more “polished” feel is a result of Kurosawa's personal involvement in developing the score with composer Fumio Hayasaka. Michael W. Harris writes, "Music is not only integrated into the film as a plot device but also serves the function of marking important moments, tying elements of the film together and helping structure the film's narrative" (61). Many critical plot points occur in the dance hall where Matsunaga frequently listens to the house band play jazz. Kurosawa himself wrote the lyrics to the film's central jazz theme, "Jungle Boogie," a sequence performed during Matsunaga's spiral into an alcohol and fever-induced stupor.

In "Can Japanese Sing the Blues?" E. Taylor Atkins examines the historical significance of the Japanese jazz movement starting in the postwar period. Jazz is a genre with a complicated history of authenticity and racial politics. Atkins declares the authenticity of jazz is attributed to standards an artist must have to work "unchallenged" within the mainstream. However, "the standards for determining authenticity may change or be contested, yet some such standard is always in operation and its power is significant" (33). Kurosawa knew that these standards were not only enforced by US occupiers, but also the standards enforced by the influence of American culture on the world at large. To return to Harris:

We can conclude from the use of diegetic jazz music that it is largely associated with Matsunaga's highly Westernized yakuza lifestyle, which is why ... it ran afoul of the Allied censors: it linked Western dress and music with that of gangsterism (71).

This is another way of reclaiming authority from the American occupiers. The sequence can be read as a parody of American culture: "Jungle Boogie" blares as Matsunaga, fiercely drunk, spins his dance partners around yet still accurately completes all the steps. Kurosawa's decision to include references to democracy and showing young Japanese people in Western-style dance
halls allows him to appease the censors. In "The Voices of Algeria," Fanon details a similar phenomenon occurring after the Algerians began to speak French regularly:

[Speaking French] was no longer tantamount to treason or … identification with the occupier. Used by the *Voice of the Combatants*, conveying in a positive way the message for the Revolution, the French language also becomes an instrument of liberation (90).

Kurosawa accomplishes liberation with his appropriation of a traditionally American music genre and using it as both parody and a narrative device. It permits him to cast a morally ambiguous hero at the center of his story while the nuances of this scene are subtle enough to allow it to pass the censors unfettered. The death of this hero by the film’s end also cements the director’s subversive political statement against the occupation.

Matsunaga's characterization reveals a resistance constrained by real world issues of postwar Japan: identity crisis, disease, and conflict between shifting generational values. Donald Richie’s analysis of Matsunaga examines how he can be read as a representation of Bhabha’s mimicry within the film:

[Matsunaga] does not want to be what he is ... He wears his clothes badly, he hasn’t a gangster’s body … His illness makes him confront himself. A sick gangster is no gangster …. What he thinks he is, what he wants to be, in no way corresponds with what he is capable of becoming (51).

Matsunaga rails against a deep fear—the fact that he is not cut out for the life he is forced to live. Ironically, this anxiety comes from his ability to wear the mask of mimicry. Matsunaga has already tried (and continuously tries) to lose himself in multiple identities. This is why he spends time drinking, smoking, and getting into fights at the dance halls. He wants to lose himself in some form of “otherness” so he will not focus on who he truly is: another war orphan displaced
by violence and colonialism with no familial ties. His Yakuza code of honor has protected him thus far, but Matsunaga does not yet realize he cannot live a reformed life and remain who he wants to be. Again, Donald Richie’s analysis speaks to Matsunaga's many contradictions:

The gangster’s downfall begins at the very moment when he had decided to reform...
despite or because of his choice, [Matsunaga] goes rapidly down from here. He loses his position, his mistress, his money. What he does not lose, however, is something he has just recently gained, his sense of himself (50).

Kurosawa frames Matsunaga’s decision to reform alongside the cesspool of the slum; the repeated motif of the cesspool exists as a reminder of corruption, decay, and chaos that exists separately from Matsunaga's world. He does not wish or want to acknowledge these things or be reminded of his mortality (as Dr. Sanada is quick to tell him). The appearance of flowers has become a directorial trademark in Kurosawa’s work, and he uses them throughout *Drunken Angel* to add depth to Matsunaga’s character. In this scene, a carnation characterizes Matsunaga's reform as innocent, almost child-like (see fig. 1.2). Kurosawa then reveals the main antagonist “Boss” Okada standing beside Matsunaga. Okada is fresh out of prison and looking to take back his old territory. His observation of Tokyo’s changes is also relevant to the postwar period.

Keiko McDonald in "Dream, Song and Symbol: More about Drunken Angel" describes Okada's reaction to the "new" Tokyo:

[Okada] says things have changed in the old neighborhood. Everything that is, but the cesspool. He says it casually, but the message is clear. All is chaos, all is change. Only life at the cesspool resists all change, taking chaos as it comes (24).

Indeed, Okada’s reappearance is a revival of the old world (namely the Imperial world) come back to corrupt Matsunaga again, hence the looming cesspool behind the two men. Kurosawa’s
films consistently examine grey areas between right and wrong often through the eyes of men restricted by warrior codes, emotional trauma, pride, or toxic masculinity. Matsunaga is no different. He yearns to retain his pride, his safety and his health, but how can he? How can a Yakuza reform if he is already a gangster?

Wearing the Mask of the Samurai and Yakuza

In Yoshioka's “Samurai and Self-Colonization,” he argues that Japan has never been directly colonized, though they are “self-colonized” by repeated interactions with the West after Japan opened their borders in 1854. The Orientalizing actions of the West led to cultural stereotype; the Samurai became the global signifier for Japan. However, the Samurai is arguably one of the most misappropriated cultural markers in history. Yoshioka writes:

The samurai is neither inside nor outside Japan, it is ... on the interface connecting Japan to the other. It is like a semi-transparent mirror put between Japan and the West. As one gazes into it, one’s reflection looks strangely doubled with that of the other beyond the mirror ... in other words, the samurai has made it possible to imagine oneself as Japanese and Western at the same time (105).

The mirror metaphor is similar to what Bhabha discusses in “of mimicry and man,” when he refers to the identity politics of mimicry as split:

The 'unthought' across which colonial man is articulated is that process of classificatory confusion ... This results of the splitting of colonial discourse so that two attitudes towards external reality persists; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire that repeats, rearticulates, 'reality' as mimicry (91).
This idea of doubling (being almost like the colonizer but not quite) is apparent in the way Kurosawa characterizes the Yakuza in the postwar period. Kurosawa’s gangster is a living embodiment of Yoshioka’s mirror—Matsunaga is Japanese and Western at the same time. Though the tragic hero of Drunken Angel is a Yakuza rather than a Samurai it is not difficult to see the parallels.

According to Peter B.E. Hill, the Yakuza originated as gangs of gamblers, peddlers, and con artists during the Edo period (1603—1868), and later formed organized groups with enough power to influence the Shogunate (37—38). In postwar Tokyo, black markets flourished, as did the Yakuza's hold on the slums. Yakuza gangs also have a code of honor similar to bushido, called jingi. In her analysis of Drunken Angel, Keiko McDonald discusses how these systems reflect on Matsunaga's final confrontation with Okada at the end of the film:

*Jingi* ... entitles the boss to demand absolute loyalty from his kobun, or henchman. That loyalty is reciprocal, too. The boss must be a benevolent dictator, a model of rectitude and compassion where his men are concerned (24).

Matsunaga has grown to expect compassion from the society that took him in and protected him from poverty and death. Regardless, the code of honor cannot save Matsunaga as he navigates the postwar world. It is significant that Kurosawa uses the narrative of a young gangster and an alcoholic doctor to speak to themes of colonization and the loss of identity. These characters are imperfect and unable to be categorized because of the humanity reflected in their characterizations. Though Kurosawa attributes the film’s title to Dr. Sanada, in a 1960 interview with Donald Richie he says, “It is Mifune that everyone remembers” (8). For audiences to sympathize and understand a morally ambiguous gangster is significant. Not only does this reflect the societal issues relevant at the time of the film’s release, it also speaks against the toxic
Samurai/Yakuza codes of honor. Yoshioka’s theory of Samurai and self-colonization sheds light on why so many young Japanese men were concerned with these past figures:

In order [for Japan] to grow into a modern state in a short period, it was more effective to give up striving to become the strong subject, and cultivate instead an amorphous subject and ambiguous identity. The strong self image of the Samurai was invented, but it was invented as a dummy to confront the Western subject. It is a mask to cover the absence of the subject (107).

The amorphous, ambiguous identity shares similarities with the grey moralities in this film as well. Kurosawa’s portrayal of the Yakuza as morally grey is a way of taking agency from the colonizer, but also the self-colonizing tendencies that Yoshioka describes. In essence, Kurosawa’s characters exist outside of both norms, but are also torn apart by them. According to *Drunken Angel*, the only way to transcend the postwar binary created by colonization is to shift loyalties between them.

By the film’s end Matsunaga, in the final stages of his tuberculosis, decides to take matters into his own hands and fight the code of honor, his disease, and ultimately his oppression. The only way he can do this is to confront Okada, and Matsunaga loses his life in the process. Matusnaga’s death can either be freeing or futile; the ending of the film went through several rewrites as a result of the CIE’s weariness about gang violence. In his analysis Michael W. Harris claims:

Kurosawa means his ending to directly condemn the gangster lifestyle, though whether it succeeds is open to debate, as it was changed because of concerns from the censors … it is important to note both Matsunaga and Okada died in the original script … But
Kurosawa and co-scriptwriter Keinosuke Uegusa changed the ending, in theory to give the film a more hopeful tone at the end to please the censors (65).

While it is important to understand that the ending of the film is constrained by the censors it does not mean the ending is simply hopeful. The meaning of Matsunaga’s demise and the aftermath is much more muddled and difficult to categorize, caught in the literal and bureaucratic chaos of postwar Japan. In her analysis of the film, Keiko McDonald writes, “Kurosawa is a moralist eager to persuade us that society can be improved by individuals motivated by compassion … But Kurosawa’s morality insists on a measure of social and political activism” (32). Matsunaga’s death, although the last in a series of ironic and pessimistic turn of events, is not futile but a way to reassert agency. The way Kurosawa characterizes him throughout the film, and the way this scene is shot in broad sunlight on a balcony above the cesspool with a triumphant music score, indicates something empowering about this death (see fig. 1.3). He is even bathed in white, significantly angelic, even if it is accidental. However, in death Matsunaga is still a gangster, which problematizes not only the angelic themes in this final sequence but also Kurosawa’s message. To return to Harris’s analysis from “Jazzing in the Tokyo Slum: Instead of the clear denunciation of gangsterism that would please the censors the most, the ending suggests that these people are irredeemable, even in death. Rather than showing a possible rehabilitation of the gangsters and people ‘cooperating to build a peaceful nation,’ to quote the SCAP recommendations, the film takes a nihilistic view of the criminals’ fate. The only way out of the gangster life is through death (66).

If Matsunaga represents a split colonized subject, torn between mirroring the colonizer and becoming the colonized, his death is very significant to the analysis of Drunken Angel. Matsunaga represents Japan in the postwar years forced to cooperate with imposed democracy.
He is in many ways orphaned by both countries, unsure where to turn or how to live. Kurosawa’s repeated refusal of the code of honor system is especially significant in this film. Though his dialog and narrative pleased the censors he also managed to tell his own story of refusal. In the film’s final sequence Dr. Sanada, standing by the cesspool, reacts to Matsunaga’s death with anger and dismissal. He is upset to hear about it, having just lost a patient he was unable to save. “We as viewers know Matsunaga was also capable of compassion but Dr. Sanada … [has] no idea … this chaotic, postwar society really remake itself according to such high standards?” (McDonald 32). Kurosawa’s optimism is decidedly bleak, in that his most heroic character is dead by the end of the film. However, Dr. Sanada returns to the slum and continues his work despite the loss he suffers. In the end, Kurosawa believes that the better world will indeed arrive, though it will be some time before he can see it.
Fig. 1.1: Matsunaga (Toshiro Mifune, right) in The Social Center of Tokyo with his lover Nanae (Michiyo Kogure). Note their distinctly Americanized clothing and hairstyles. (Screen capture from Kurosawa’s *Drunken Angel* 1948).

Fig. 1.2: Matsunaga (Toshiro Mifune) by the cesspool with a carnation. All of Kurosawa's subversive elements are present in this scene alone (Screen capture from Kurosawa’s *Drunken Angel* 1948).
Fig. 1.3: Matsunaga’s death scene. Note how he is above the cesspool, shining white, and “angelic.” (Screen capture from Kurosawa’s *Drunken Angel* 1948).
Kurosawa is considered by many critics and scholars to be one of the greatest film directors of all time. His work has influenced many films: John Sturges's *The Magnificent Seven*, Sergio Leone's *Man with No Name Trilogy*, and George Lucas's *Star Wars* franchise. Many of the aforementioned films either borrowed elements from Kurosawa's Samurai epics, or directly retained their plot points. *The Magnificent Seven* includes exported characters from *Seven Samurai*, and Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* is a remake of *Yojimbo*. Kurosawa's unconventional narrative style, filmmaking techniques, and his political background would leave him at the mercy of disapproving Japanese critics for most of his career. It is also what garnered him specific interest from the occupational forces in postwar Japan.

Indeed Kurosawa’s training as a painter is noticeable in his filmmaking, from the way he arranges his actors, cameras, and set pieces. Though these techniques were innovative and challenged norms, they were often difficult to orchestrate, leaving him at odds with the crew, studios, and Japanese Imperial censors.

The print of Kurosawa's first film as director, *Sanshiro Sugata*, survives incomplete as a result of the Japanese censors cutting material for being too "Anglo-American" (Hirano 21). Kurosawa ultimately lost this fight with Imperialist censors, but it set the stage for confrontations with the Americans during occupation.

In Donald Riche's biography *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, Kurosawa’s childhood friend describes their decision to study painting: "Several years after graduation, Kurosawa and I joined the Japan Proletariat Artists' Group ... We signed up not because we were in love with Marxist theory but because we felt such a strong resistance against things as they were and in this group at that time we could study the new movements in art and literature" (11).

The title of this film is also translated by Donald Richie in *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* as *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail* (30).

An anxiety over the Samurai sword is apparent with repeated appearances of a Japanese soldier wielding a sword over a P.O.W.'s head. The brutality of the Japanese to P.O.W.s is well-documented. However, racist American propaganda toward Japan is unprecedented when compared to the propaganda used to promote the war in Europe.

Matsunaga’s childlike tendencies are evident in the way he addresses Okada as *aniki*. Though a term of respect, its literal translation is “big brother;” Kurosawa (and Mifune’s performance) frames Matsunaga as sympathetic, and to sympathize with a Yakuza gangster, the audience must come to understand how young people are pushed to the margins by occupation.

Though *Drunken Angel* was already under scrutiny via the CIE, Kurosawa himself was critical of the Yakuza. In a 1975 interview with Joan Mellen, Kurosawa declares Yakuza to be evil and irrational; he describes the image of a "super-Samurai" in his later films speaks against the prevalence of Yakuza gangs in the early 1960s (63).
CHAPTER IV: “CAN MURDERERS ONLY BE MURDERERS?” QUESTIONING ATOMIC POWER IN YASUHIRO NIGHTOW’S TRIGUN

The occupation of Japan lasted from 1945 through 1952, and to the Western world the United States successfully rebuilt Japan into an economic powerhouse and vital Cold War ally. Though Japan's infrastructure was repaired, a new constitution implemented, and the economy reassembled, the occupation’s legacy had yet to be realized. Amid cultural upheaval, westernization, and restrictions placed upon the Japanese military to make a "democratic nation," Japan had yet to cope with the trauma of defeat and subsequent colonization. The economic revival, while important to Japan’s reentry into the global market, inevitably obscured continuing paternalistic interactions between Japan and the United States. Moreover, the use of atomic weapons to end World War II is not addressed with the same amount of postcolonial analysis as many other historical events. There are conflicting reports about the effects of the bomb and after the arrival of American occupiers, mass censorship of reported deaths and medical records.

Though the bomb's legacy rippled throughout the world in the form of Cold War, the secrecy of the Manhattan Project and the censorship of data created a culture of historical amnesia for both Japan and the United States.

However, Japanese manga confronted narratives of cultural amnesia, anxiety over nuclear proliferation, and the desire for peace. These themes culminated in the works of Osamu Tezuka, Keiji Nakazawa, and other artists in the first few decades of the manga boom (the 1950s through the 1970s). Tezuka was responsible for global interest in Japanese popular culture as a result of his popular manga series Astro Boy (Tetsuwan Atomu, or "mighty Atom"). Tezuka’s political activism rippled through the generations. Yasuhiro Nightow’s Trigun series, as part of this political legacy in the 1990s, manipulates the paternalist influences imposed upon Japan using
tactics similar to Kurosawa’s: mimicry, refusal, and subversion. Hiroshi Yoshioka claims in "Samurai and Self-Colonization" the duality of American and Japanese culture in the 1990s is the result of colonization of the imagination. He writes:

The basic relation to ... the West, in contemporary Japanese society, is deeply involved with an inward process of cultural domination ... What I want to attack is the very opposition of reproduction and originality in cultural formation. Or more precisely, even if modernization is undertaken merely as copy and repetition ... reproduction, copy and repetition ... constitute a complex theoretical subject (100).

Nightow, like many of the postwar manga artists, relies heavily on reproduction and repetition by incorporating atomic bomb imagery into Trigun's narrative. His narrative contains many pop culture references; some are overt, including his appropriation of Old West tropes from American films (taverns, sun-bleached towns, frontier justice, etc.). Others are more subtle, such as references to manga and films that inspired him. Nightow and his characters are complicated combinations of many cultures including the protagonist Vash the Stampede, which allows Nightow to speak to continuing patterns of colonization and paternalism. To do this, he uses atomic imagery to designate the origin of life on his desert planet and complicate the motivations of his hero. Vash is both a survivor and perpetrator of atomic destruction, and thus exhibits a grey morality as a heroic victim. As a result, Trigun's narrative is a deconstruction of atomic bomb mythology by questioning its use as a symbol for peace. Many works of the 1990s were no longer concerned with the postwar period, but Trigun provides an exception. To see the importance of Trigun’s antinuclear message in this time period, it is necessary to first examine how Hiroshima and Nagasaki’s legacy was addressed in the early manga of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.
History of the A-Bomb in Postwar Manga

According to Sharon Kinsella, manga produced and read in the postwar period differed greatly from the comics read in newspapers and magazines prior to 1944. The influence of Disney animation and American comics sold during the occupation led to changing art styles and narratives, paving the way for story manga (28--29). Osamu Tezuka was one of the most prolific early writers and illustrators of story manga. 1952’s Astro Boy resonated with young readers and adults alike, because of the way it addressed postwar concerns about nuclear proliferation and combined narrative elements from novels, animation, and cinema.

Tezuka’s narrative is purposefully political, yet also heralded as universal. Themes of reconciliation were very important to the postwar era, and spoke to national concerns about maintaining a relationship with the United States and reentering the global stage as an economic power. Astro Boy is widely popular and still discussed because of its appeal to both Japan and the West. This success is attributed to the influences of Disney and American cartoon styles in Tezuka’s character designs and overall aesthetic. These elements, combined with Astro Boy’s overt antinuclear sentiments also contributed to its popularity in the West. According to Yuki Tanaka in "War and Peace in the Art of Tezuka Osamu," “Astro Boy moves around the world, seeking peace and justice. He transcends nationality and ethnicity and freely crosses national borders” (6). Though some of the thematic complexities were lost through localization, Astro Boy was one of the first Japanese animated series to find a fan base in the United States. This is very important to further examine the complex relationship between manga and politics in the following decades.

Though many manga were critical of wartime topics like kamikaze narratives, they still painted the war in idealistic ways for their young readers. By only addressing heroism and
sacrifice in manga other issues were discarded from national attention, including war crimes committed against the comfort women, and compensation for the atomic bomb survivors (*hibakusha*). Japan's identity crisis and the trauma of defeat culminated in The War Dead Commemoration Day on August 15th, 1968. In "Memories of Pilots and Planes: World War II in Japanese Manga" Eldad Nakar explains this memorial service revealed the problematic cultural amnesia so prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. He writes:

> The [fallen] and their sacrifice were placed at the center of national attention—while aspects of the war were quietly left in oblivion. The War Dead Commemoration Day, then, obscured the actual outcome of WWII ... by focusing on the commemorative spotlight tightly on the heroic and sacrificial deeds of the dead (72).

Many political leaders of the 1950s and 1960s also perpetuated the focus on heroism and sacrifice on a national level, casting the surrender and the Atomic bombs as a "necessary evil," thus continuing the trend of cultural amnesia and erasure. It is no surprise that manga also continued this trend. Nakar proposes:

> [War stories] provided the past with meaning through the much-improved present, while conversely invoking the wartime spirit of struggle and self-sacrifice to encourage the post-war generation to work harder. Past, present and future were not dealt with separately but interwoven into a continuity of success ... Children were being shown a war that was tamed, miniaturized, and thereby rendered fascinating rather than terrifying (72—73).

Keiji Nakazawa's influential 1972 manga, *Barefoot Gen (Hadashi-no Gen)* changed how manga directly addressed political issues. A survivor of the Hiroshima bombing, Nakazawa's depictions of the event shattered previous narratives comparing the bombing to a natural
disaster. In his article "Embracing the Victimhood," Masashi Ichiki claims, “with the emergence of Hadashi-no Gen, gone was the ignorant and romantic imagination that viewed the A-bomb as a natural disaster ... Nakazawa views the A-bomb with a sense of condemnation" (42). As one of the first manga artists to condemn the bombings and question patterns of erasure by both American and Japanese politics, Nakazawa created a space for future conversation. After years of political silence, misinformation, and outright refusal, his first-hand account emerged to widespread popularity, if not controversy. Barefoot Gen's artwork, though similar to Tezuka's in aesthetics, does not shy away from using horrific images. Regardless, these images are essential to dispelling myths about the bombs as natural disaster, instead presenting them as purposeful tools of destruction and senseless violence.

Metaphorically exploring complicated themes appealed to manga publishers weary of selling war stories to children. As a result, science fiction became one of the most successful genres. According to Nakar:

The atom bomb … became instead a symbol of scientific progress … [The Cold War] was another source of scientific/military themes from which Japan was safely distanced, and the US--Soviet space race gave the Cold War an extra touch of science fiction exoticism (71).

This "distance" also contributed to Japan's cultural amnesia about the atomic tragedy, but did not stop imagery from reappearing in manga and anime as the years went on. This imagery was prevalent well into the 1990s; Nightow's shōnen manga series Trigun is arguably the most popular manga to use atomic bomb imagery within a science fiction setting.
Nightow's Narrative as a Postwar Text

First serialized in *Shōnen Captain* in 1995, *Trigun* was written in a contentious period for the Japanese economy. The Bubble Economy, so-called for its longevity for over two decades, suddenly "burst" in 1995. The ensuing recession lasted until roughly 2007, the same year *Trigun*’s fourteenth and final volume was published. Though Nightow's work is not written in the immediate postwar or post-occupation years, it operates within a similar theoretical space. The Bubble Economy was an enduring reminder of the occupation, and used as leverage for economic and political interactions between Japan and the United States. According to Masao Miyoshi in *Off Center*, the global trade network implemented by the United States within the United Nations contributed to the United States’ economic monopoly of most trade relations, and shifted the value of the yen multiple times during the Bubble Economy (78—79). Economic monopoly created a void in the way it denied Japan the chance to culturally redefine itself without Western influence. In his essay “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” from *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha claims defining a culture after the advent of global technologies would be difficult, particularly for a nation that has experienced colonization. He writes, “Culture is translational because of such special histories of displacement—now accompanied by … ‘global’ media technologies—make the question of how culture signifies … a rather complex issue” (172). With a more globalized world, the national boundaries and binaries established by the Cold War are challenged. Thus, postcolonial theory must also change to reflect a world where cultures are continuously shared. Nightow’s *Trigun* series accomplishes critique of Japan’s past by addressing this merging of culture.

Nightow's politics reflect both his influences and the political period in which he begins *Trigun*’s narrative. In a 2000 interview with *Manga No Mori*, a manga newsletter, Nightow
says he was initially inspired by Fujio Akatsuka (*Osomatsu-san, Tensai Bakabon*), Leiji Matsumoto (*Galaxy Express 999, Space Battleship Yamato*), and was fond of drawing Charles M. Schulz's famous Snoopy from *Peanuts* ("From Reader to Artist"). Though these artists are all stylistically different, it is easy to see their influence in *Trigun*’s narrative and art. Akatsuka’s work is known for its absurdist humor. Matsumoto’s work is mostly political science fiction, incorporating themes from multiple cultures and wrestling with postwar anxieties in a fictionalized space. Charles M. Schulz’s influence is also apparent in the way Nightow breaks action to tell a joke or change a character’s expression for comedic effect; many translations also use the term "blockhead" when characters call each other names. Though these breaks can be jarring, they give his work an overtly human quality by reflecting realistic conversations.

In one sense, this simply makes *Trigun*’s narrative relatable. Perhaps more importantly, it obfuscates the radical thematic elements of the text itself. *Trigun*’s humor is one of its strengths, and Nightow uses it to confront stereotypes and morality. Often there are complications with class, culture, and language barriers addressed via a joke or comical sequence. Characters bicker and tease each other while eating food or even in the middle of battle. Nightow’s humor is somewhat of a departure for such a serious *shōnen* title, though it immediately casts *Trigun* as a text concerned with addressing important issues through means of mimicry and cultural differences.

As a science fiction narrative, *Trigun* accomplishes something very similar to what Kurosawa accomplished with *Drunken Angel* in 1948. The genre conventions of noir films allowed Kurosawa to obfuscate his critique of occupation, and thus, his film avoided censorship. Science fiction allows Nightow something similar. Since it is a genre that permits suspension of disbelief, the use of atomic imagery can be somewhat separated from Japanese history, as it is
now a part of Nightow’s world building. However, this imagery simultaneously casts *Trigun* as a postwar text, even with the gap between his work and the occupation. The recession leaves Japan reliant on the world and its postwar history is relevant once again at the time Nightow writes and illustrates this manga. Nightow's fictional world creates an opportunity to explore the struggle for national identity and the influence of globalization at the time. It also pushes back against years of historical erasure on the part of both the US and Japan.

Nightow’s world functions in a similar way to Kurosawa’s *Drunken Angel*, but with one important difference. Whereas Kurosawa’s characters were meant to reflect colonized subjects, Nightow’s *planet* and the characters who inhabit it are meant to do the same. In a future in which Earth has run out of natural resources and sent humans into space to survive, the inhabitants of *Trigun's* desert planet, No Man's Land, are remnants of the Big Fall. One-hundred and fifty years before the narrative begins, a space fleet carrying millions of humans crash landed on the surface and seven large cities later formed around these crashed space ships. This world is desolate, and its inhabitants are desperate, relying on lost technology to survive. The comparison to postwar Japan is clear: a world with a fledgling society, left to its own devices, easily corrupted, and teeming with the downtrodden. The language of No Man's Land is also English.

Though the signs in the dusty border towns are written in English, many taverns serve Japanese foods such as ramen. As Bhabha claims in “of mimicry and man:” “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable, Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (86). Nightow's world building is an important departure from the creators who came before him; he does not cast globalization or the loss of Japanese tradition as negative. Rather, No Man's Land is a space for Nightow to create his own history. This world could very easily be a post-apocalyptic or alternative-history Earth, but it is not. Nightow chooses to have
recognizable elements of (notably American) culture to provide a familiar groundwork for his readers. This also enables him to critique the politics of his time and personify Japanese history through his protagonist, a wandering pacifist gunslinger called Vash the Stampede.

Vash the Stampede as a Colonized Subject

Nightow explores colonization mainly through the metaphorical constraints of science fiction: Vash and his brother Knives are not human. Instead they are "Plants," beings that can create organic matter at will. As children, Vash and Knives were raised by Rem, a woman piloting the fleet of ships headed to No Man's Land. While they are initially excited to meet other humans, the boys discover that they were not the first Plants to be born. While exploring the ship, Vash and Knives find a report about "Tessla," written by an unnamed scientist: "Commence observation for time being. If I may offer my personal thoughts, I cannot help but be enthusiastic over this great scientific discovery" (Nightow Trigun Maximum 3: 29). The defining moment of this discovery is the display of Tessla's vivisected body, preserved in stasis. Vash and Knives, seeing the full violation of their own kind, are horrified. The reveal of Tessla casts Vash and his brother in danger of being colonized and enslaved by humans.

On No Man's Land, humans utilize Plants to power their cities, since they can create electricity at will. Thus, Knives is filled with hatred for humans. Later, he is revealed to be responsible for Rem's death, the crash-landing of the space fleet on the planet, and forcing Vash to annihilate July City. Vash, conversely, internalizes the forgiveness Rem paid to him after she explained what had happened to Tessla. He is determined to prevent this form of colonization through education and reform. To do this, he chooses to live as a human. In doing so, Vash represents an even more complicated form of a colonized subject. Not only is Vash in danger of being enslaved, he is also the colonizer of No Man’s Land as a former member of the Earth fleet.
Vash differs from other colonized subjects in the way he uses his privilege to help his colonized kin and the people who have enslaved them. In "Algeria Unveiled," Frantz Fanon discusses the use of the body as an agent of resistance. He writes, "the unveiled body seems to escape, to dissolve ... The Algerian woman who walks stark naked into the European city relearns her body, re-establishes it in a totally revolutionary fashion" (59). Though Fanon speaks of the veil and how it applies to women, this can also be used to discuss how Vash lives among humans. As a Plant, Vash has the ability to heal his body, but he refuses to do this to continue his masquerade. His body is covered in scars to remind himself and others of what he has suffered (see fig. 2.3). In his book *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Bhaskar Sarkar surmises the body is also essential to understanding how trauma effects the generations. He writes,

> [Trauma] marks a moment of rupture … [this] rupture has more a searing, corporeal dimension, experienced as the amputation of the national body, pillage and rape, physical injury and death. This sense of bodily harm … extends the sense of trauma to an entire national community (7).

Vash’s scars remind him of his own mortality but also his desire to understand humanity. His scars and his amputated arm are signifiers of living through trauma. Nightow incorporates Vash’s body into the narrative to keep the hibakusha and the atomic bomb’s legacy relevant in the 1990s. Vash acts an agent of peace as he wanders the planet, educating humans about Plants and attempting to save as many lives as he can. Nightow is still critical of Vash’s efforts, however: Vash acts as an ambassador so that he will never face the trauma of Tessla's discovery or July City’s destruction.
Interestingly, Nightow does not cast a particular country or nation at fault for Tessla's death. The science fiction setting demands that half of the narrative be set in space—this erases the east/west binary and casts Earth itself as a colonizing force. This does not erase a specific moment in history. Instead, it critiques the history of colonialism. Nightow avoids some of the pitfalls of making a storyline “universal” in this sense by uniting oppressions rather than dividing them by national borders or boundaries. He unites humanity in their desperation to survive and casts Vash as a non-human colonized subject to discuss Earth's history with colonialism and imperialism. Bhabha's use of cultural hybridity can be applied to what Nightow accomplishes with the blank slate of No Man's Land. Bhabha argues that cultural hybridity can also disrupt colonizing practices by shattering the illusion of one homogenous culture. In "Signs Taken For Wonders" he writes:

The displacement from symbol to sign creates a crisis for any concept of authority based on a system of recognition: colonial specularity, doubly inscribed, does not produce a mirror where the self apprehends itself; it is always the split screen of the self and its doubling, the hybrid (113—114)

Nightow uses the planet No Man's Land and Vash's decision to live as a human to address the colonizing tendencies of all peoples. Using science fiction leaves out the "recognizable Other" and thus gives power back to the Japanese artist to tell a story of colonialism on their own terms. Additionally, Nightow takes the themes of moral ambiguity in Kurosawa's work one step further: No Man's Land is an inherently morally grey world because it exists to be colonized. How Vash navigates this world as a being that has experienced colonialism and trauma after accidentally destroying July City is key to understanding how Nightow critiques cultural amnesia within Japanese history.
Assuming Responsibility

Wanted as a criminal for destroying July City in a cataclysmic event that parallels the atomic bomb (see fig. 2.1), Vash is introduced as an outlaw complete with a Wanted poster. However, he does not initially possess the same moral ambiguity the young gangster Matsunaga did in Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel*. Unlike Matsunaga, Vash's struggle for survival is not mediated by an oppressive force. Instead, it is mediated internally, by guilt, trauma, and disgust for his body. Though Nightow frames Vash as an ultimately good being (similar to the way Kurosawa characterized Matsunaga), his morality is still grey *because* of his unflinching assumption to only live for peace. In *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* James Orr writes of the postwar generation’s concern for pacifism: “The younger generations never experienced the hardship of defeat, but they understood the nuclear threat. Their pacifism naturally grew with consciousness of themselves as Japanese, a people with a special mission in the nuclear era” (66). Nightow challenges this “special mission” with Vash’s staunch pacifist ways. Nightow is adamant about exploring the complexities and irresponsibility of adopting pacifism as the only option in the face of tragedy. Thus, Vash is framed as an evil urban legend for his association with July's ruin:

One of the cities completely vanished in the space of a single night, ripped out by its very foundations ... This is the first time Vash the Stampede appears in the annals of history ... the shadow of a blonde-haired man that still lingers among the mountain of wreckage (Nightow *Trigun* 1: 44—45).

The loss of July in a single night is a metaphor for the loss of Hiroshima. Nightow's use of a metaphorical bombing places Vash at the scene and casts him responsible for the tragedy. He is also "the first man to be declared a natural disaster" by the government of No Man's Land
(Nightow *Trigun Maximum* 1: 13). This is significant, as it creates a parallel between the manga and the rhetoric addressing the atomic bomb. After attaching monetary or cultural value to Vash and declaring him a natural disaster he can be controlled. Here, Nightow's work provides the atomic bomb narrative with a crucial departure. Though *Astro Boy* and *Barefoot Gen* tarried with grief and condemnation of the bombings, they still directed these emotions toward the inevitability of the event. *Trigun* is different in that in provides a reason for tragedy, and a perpetrator to take responsibility for it.

Vash realizes this when he attends a service at a Catholic church. As the priest talks, Vash thinks, "It's impossible. No one can forgive my sins ... how can there be any release from this burden? I can't forgive myself" (Nightow *Trigun Maximum* 2: 544—543). This is similar to the ways in which the narratives of the bomb were told throughout postwar manga like *Astro Boy*, more concerned about Japan's status as a peaceful nation after World War II. This also contributed to the internalization of victimhood without acknowledging the blame for the trauma in the first place. Christine Hong elaborates on the repeated theme of blamelessness and victimhood running through most of the postwar rhetoric that addressed the use of atomic weapons:

Hiroshima ... functions as an exceptional human rights story, a story not only of war crimes that appear to require neither redress nor reparations but also of the putative overcoming of historical trauma through US-sponsored post-war economic progress and democratic rehabilitation ... always already contextualized against the spectacular economic rise of Japan ... the spectacularity of the bombing of Hiroshima has been effectively canceled out (130).
The legacy of the bombs, while still obviously relevant in the 1990s, seems almost inconsequential regarding the economic prosperity Japan cultivated for thirty years. It makes sense for Nightow's narrative to dig into the trauma of the past in response to the political climate of the 1990s.

Vash's pain is never trivialized or rationalized, but his reliance on his mantra of “love and peace” blinds him from acknowledging his trauma. Again, Sarkar elaborates on the disruption of internalized trauma within national collective memory:

The focus on traumatic memory … sidesteps the problems associated with idealistic notions of identity and agency … shared memories of oppression, not the actual experiences, become the grounds for moral claims and political mobilization (12—13).

Vash’s pacifist nature functions to soothe trauma and protect him from past atrocities but it does not shield others in the same way. His attempt to pass on “love and peace” is often met with confrontation. His refusal to take another’s life also inadvertently causes many deaths. Since he refuses to kill criminals they go on to other towns and cities to continue their cycle of violence. Though Vash is a pacifist gunslinger his inability to acknowledge his past is what prevents him from truly protecting everyone. The appearance of Nicholas D. Wolfwood threatens to uproot Vash's careful denial of responsibility.

Wolfwood is a wandering priest who doubles as an assassin for the group of mercenaries known as the Eye of Michael. In order to protect and sustain the orphanage he came from, Wolfwood gave up his childhood and his humanity, resigned to his fate as irredeemable. Though initially hired to kill Vash with the promise that his orphanage would be protected, Wolfwood operates as a double agent; he helps Vash as much as he hinders him once the two form a begrudging friendship. Wolfwood serves as a foil, a man Vash is one step away from
becoming. Wolfwood considers pacifism to be as deadly as an assassin's bullet, convinced a life of peace in such a cruel world is pointless. He says:

Nowadays, people's lives are nothing but a continuous pattern of strife. There are choices, complicated and ultimately cruel, but you have little time to make them. The worst thing one can do is to do nothing, dreaming that the situation will resolve itself ... You can't not make a choice!! You think a guy who can't kill a man...can save a man? (Nightow *Trigun Maximum* 1: 135).

Wolfwood knows it is unrealistic to save every human being through non-violence, especially in a world where life or death is decided by a gun. Vash, however, refuses to acknowledge this. In a key sequence from volume one of *Trigun Maximum*, Wolfwood shoots another assassin to prevent him from killing Vash. As a result, Vash slaps Wolfwood and makes this claim: "Maybe he would have fired...but I would have just dodged! No matter how many times I'd have to! It's better than killing him and taking away his chance to stop!" (Nightow *Trigun Maximum* 1: 291).

This claim sounds childish and desperate. It speaks to Vash's past as a wandering observer, never getting close to anyone. He believes strongly in the passage of time, education, and change, yet Vash is blinded by his one-sided view of pacifism. Wolfwood, too, knows this: "Spikey, you're a slick one. You talk of saving everyone, but you don't wanna get your own hands dirty" (Nightow *Trigun Maximum* 1: 292). Vash's cause is noble, but the way he goes about it causes harm to others, a fact he does not acknowledge until Wolfwood enters his life. His mantra of "love and peace" can be seen as a way to shield himself from the destruction that he committed; he cannot admit he is not far removed from Wolfwood’s morality. This leaves him with a complicated conundrum: what is Vash to do once he makes the choice to kill to save another's life?
In the final volume of the series, Vash confronts Legato Bluesummers, a villain who has threatened the lives of his friends and tortured Vash (physically and psychologically) throughout the entire narrative. The battle is exhaustive, as Vash and Legato are evenly matched. One of Vash's allies, Livio, is drawn into the middle of the battle and Legato threatens his life. Now Vash must make a choice: either shoot Legato to save both himself and Livio, or let Livio die so he can continue fighting and hope for a peaceful end. Ultimately, Vash chooses to kill Legato rather than let Livio die. This sequence provides the moment in which Vash finally reconciles his responsibility for destroying July. Though the shock of Legato's death renders Vash comatose for several chapters, it is not the first time he has killed. Rather, it is the first time he has willingly done so, crossing the line Wolfwood has warned him about. Vash's decision to kill Legato makes him directly confront the lives he took during July’s annihilation. Killing has tremendous consequence, and Vash now understands in painful detail what he has done. His amnesia, whether self-imposed or the result of trauma, completely denied him this realization.

Legato's death happens at the same time Vash's brother Knives has amassed an army to take over the planet, threatening to destroy most of humanity on No Man's Land in the process. Fleets of ships from Earth converge and make the decision to use atomic weapons to stop him. While Vash lies unconscious in the arms of his friend Meryl, Livio sobbing beside them, Meryl observes, "Just a few moments ago... they were talking about sacrificing tens of thousands. Sitting high above...they wouldn't shed a single drop of blood themselves. No wonder it was so easy to make the decision" (Nightow Trigun Maximum 5: 337--338). Here, the postwar narratives of the atomic bombing converge: cultural amnesia, victimhood, heroism, exceptionalism, and ambivalence. Vash is only able to confront his brother after he has accepted both his biases and his trauma; he defeats Knives without having to take his life. Afterward,
Vash is finally able to look to the future as a literal global citizen: the Earth fleet has brought television to No Man's Land, and soon he is chased not only by bounty hunters, but by reporters and news cameras. His sweaty face is broadcast across the globe, and though he demands everyone leave him alone, one of the final panels of the series sees Vash running into a fresh expanse of desert, a wide grin on his face (Nightow *Trigun Maximum 5*: 538).

In *Trigun*, Nightow does what the influential manga artists before him could not: he has written a story that directly addresses Hiroshima and Nagasaki’s complicated legacy while also critiquing how it is handled. He uses atomic imagery to create his world, suggesting that violence and disaster are intrinsically tied to history. His characters navigate this world and continue to make the same mistakes (July City’s ruin was no accident). However, including Vash as a heroic victim of such an incident, Nightow explores thematic elements that finally break from the binaries of "natural disaster" and "inevitability." Wolfwood once desperately asked, "Can murderers only be murderers?" Nightow's characters struggle for peace and understanding in a cruel world. They do not always succeed. Nightow does not choose to end on loss. *Trigun* is about restarting, rebooting, not living in black and white, but thriving within shades of grey.
Fig. 2.1: July City’s destruction. Nightow uses atomic imagery to address this traumatic event (left) and the origin of life on No Man’s Land. From *Trigun Maximum Omnibus* Vol. 5 (438).
Fig. 2.2: The opening spread of *Trigun*’s first chapter. July City’s remains are heavy with atomic imagery. From *Trigun Omnibus* Vol. 1 (5).

Fig. 2.3: The first glimpse of Vash’s scarred body. From *Trigun Omnibus* Vol. 1 (466—467).
According to Kinko Ito in "A History of Manga in the Context of Japanese Culture and Society," the most popular postwar American comics were translated into Japanese: Blondie, Crazy Cat, Popeye, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Superman (466). These cultural American icons influenced manga artists of the period, and contributed to a national desire for American-made products like television.

The original run of Astro Boy (1952 through 1968) coincided with publication of serialized manga magazines. During the 1970s, the popular magazine Jump (Shūkan Shōnen Jump, today known as Weekly Shōnen Jump) published political manga stories protesting the American installation of troops in Okinawa (Kinsella 32). Widespread popularity and distribution of manga, particularly during the Meiji University student movement, reveals its political impact, and how manga functions not only as literature, but as a visual medium that can accurately portray the cultural amnesia of post-occupation Japan.

Barefoot Gen is arguably the first manga to be translated and published in the United States. However, according to Ferenc M. Szasz and Issei Takechi in "Atomic Heroes and Atomic Monsters: American and Japanese Cartoonists Confront the Onset of the Nuclear Age, 1945--80," the series was only successful for two issues after its 1978 translation (750). The whole series was later published in collected volumes in 2002.

Shōjo manga (girl's comics) often addressed the lives of Hiroshima and Nagasaki victims, though not always in appropriate ways. According to Ichiki, many shōjo narratives of the 70s cast the survivors as social outcasts, feminized by their victimhood, and/or romanticized their deaths (39). Though many of these narratives addressed real world concerns, such as the rise in leukemia and cancer deaths, too often they were appropriated for a more dramatic storyline.

Many of these images include the direct effect of the radiation on people’s bodies. In one sequence, Gen watches people jump in the river to douse flames on their backs. Nakazawa also includes a heartbreaking scene in which Gen must leave his father and little brother pinned down in the wreckage of their home as flames draw near (264--270).

Szasz and Takechi claim the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki often symbolized the need for peace as Japan shifted into the digital age (746). However, this denied exploration of who was to be held accountable for the bombings, and why the tragedy occurred in the first place.

Trigun was originally serialized in Shōnen Captain magazine, then later renamed Trigun Maximum after publication with Young King Ours once Shōnen Captain was discontinued ("INTERVIEW DE L'AUTEUR"). In this study, I use the omnibus editions of the series released by Dark Horse Comics starting in 2013.

"No Man's Land" is the given name of the planet in the final volume of Trigun Maximum (Nightow 5: 501). In the anime adaptation, it is known as "The Planet Gunsmoke."
With the exception of Rem, who is shown on Earth with a train ticket written in Japanese, none of Nightow’s characters actually speak the language. One of the assassins sent to kill Vash the Stampede is a Samurai. During their first meeting, Nightow draws Vash looking comically nervous and embarrassed, since he cannot speak Japanese; he even bows awkwardly (Trigun Maximum 1: 240).

Plants are described as "the thing that produces water, UV rays, oxygen … Depending on how much electricity is fed into one, it can defy even the laws of physics and produce organic systems. In appearance, they look like the messengers of God" (Nightow Trigun 1: 254-255). Vash and Knives are significant, in they can live independently from a power source; other plants are confined to these and are controlled by humans to create natural resources.

In the manga, Wolfwood has the appearance of a young man in his twenties, though in reality he is between 17 and 19 years old. This is due to the Eye of Michael's required body enhancements: "Healing capabilities. Strengthened bones. Increased muscle strength. Sharpened sensory nerves ... 'The forced increase in metabolism made me age faster.'" (Nightow Trigun Maximum 3: 352--354). Wolfwood's real age casts his acts of violence as even more damming, considering he is so young. This thematically matches Kurosawa's Drunken Angel—the death of a man so young is cause for reconsideration of rhetoric, policy, and responsibility. This is exactly what Vash sets out to change after Wolfwood's death.

To save a character like Livio is also controversial, considering he was originally a villain and instrumental in Wolfwood's death. To let him die would not have been unexpected. However, Vash says, "You risked your own life to protect so much... I couldn't bear to let that go to waste" (Nightow Trigun Maximum 5: 325). Livio represents a new future; Vash acknowledges Livio has changed his violent ways, but does not try to exist apart from them.

Knives does not survive the end of the series. After Vash defeats him, the two go on the run together and hide in the home of a doctor and his son. Knives, having exhausted too much of his power, dies after providing the family with a fruit bearing tree (Nightow Trigun Maximum 5: 515--516). His death speaks to something very important: Vash's mantra of "love and peace" is applicable after there has been time to educate, understand, reconcile, and learn from history. Knives's kindness does not excuse his atrocities, but it does illuminate the power of Vash's desire for change.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The cultural relationship between the Japan and the United States, while important to the sharing of technology, popular culture, and foreign policy, is shrouded in a colonial and imperialist past. The films of Akira Kurosawa were some of the first to challenge the relationship between Japan and the United States, displaying resistance despite a censorship board steeped in internalized racism and paternalism. His 1948 noir *Drunken Angel* set the stage for other Japanese filmmakers to utilize symbolism, allegory, and imitation to resist imposed "democratic" norms. Kurosawa's influence on Western cinema and Japanese manga perfectly embodies the power of cultural hybridity as a weapon against oppression.

Japanese popular culture is said to have recently entered the mainstream consciousness. Even so, it has clearly been an interest to the West since the early 1950s. According to Donald Richie in *The Films of Akira Kurosawa, Rashomon* first screened for Western audiences at the 1951 Venice Film Festival and won first prize, an outcome many Japanese critics never imagined. Richie observes:

> What perhaps most surprised the Japanese however, was that an historical film ... should prove acceptable to the West ... Actually, of course what had happened is that in this film ... the confines of ‘Japanese’ thought could not contain the director who thereby joined the world at large. *Rashomon* speaks to everyone, not just to the Japanese (80).

Considering Kurosawa’s Samurai films reached their peak in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s, I argue Japanese popular culture has always been a fixture in Western cultural consciousness. This popularity, however, is often obscured by exoticism, ethnocentricity, and plagiarism of Japanese media by the West. Kurosawa's global authority is the connecting thread between the generations of postwar filmmakers and manga artists (like Osamu Tezuka, Keiji
Kurosawa's tendency to borrow elements from multiple genres left a lasting impact on following generations.\(^1\)

The mimetic reproduction of Kurosawa's narratives in many Western films indicates the transmission of values and power throughout several generations and mediums. This transmission is possible only through cultural hybridity and globalization. But what does this accomplish? Japanese media is of interest to so many, especially considering the impact of Kurosawa in the postwar period, and the global popularity of anime, manga, and Japanese video games in the 1990s. Yet Japanese popular culture is still appropriated and misunderstood by the United States and other Western countries. Does the hybrid nature of these texts inevitably set them up for continuing appropriation? Has too much time passed to keep Kurosawa's early radical films like *Drunken Angel* relevant in the current moment? The answer is no.

Kurosawa's predecessors were also concerned with westernization: Yasujiro Ozu's noir films incorporated American-style action sequences, camera work, and set design into their hard-boiled narratives before Japanese Imperial censors outlawed American culture in the late 1930s. Kurosawa's *Drunken Angel* achieves something similar with its portrayal of westernization, but it does not simply masquerade as a noir film. *Drunken Angel* is in fact a cultural hybrid in the way it incorporates Western culture into its narrative and symbolism to facilitate resistance against a colonizing force.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha discusses cultural hybridity as another way in which the colonized subject can assert dominance over the colonizing force. His use of cultural hybridity is similar to his concept of mimicry. Yet mimicry is more a tactic of survival than a direct challenge to systems of oppression. Bhabha claims cultural hybridity is not about
relating two different cultures together, but is instead "a problematic of colonial representation ... that reverses the effects of the colonialis\textbackslash't disavowal, so that the other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—it's rules of recognition"

(114). A hybrid text is therefore not completely westernized, nor is it only the work of the colonized. It is something else entirely—a combination that cannot be completely regulated by either side. This is the chance to usurp power from the colonizing force by producing something it cannot recognize. By taking mimicry one step further a colonized subject can thus begin the process of deconstruction and take power from the imposed demands of the colonizer.

Kurosawa's subversive cinematic and literary influences operate in tandem with his characters; the Samurai and Yakuza protagonists in his most globally popular films like *Drunken Angel*, *Seven Samurai*, and *Yojimbo* operate as familiar signifiers of Japan. Thus, these films become "authentic" representations of Japan and Japanese culture, without the realization that they are cultural hybrids. This can be problematic if Kurosawa's films are continuously remade and reimagined with false assumptions of authenticity. For example, Italian film director Sergio Leone was so taken with *Yojimbo*'s imagery and plot that he recreated it in 1964's *A Fistful of Dollars*. Incidentally, this film spawned the "Spaghetti Western" film genre and Leone became a successful and influential filmmaker in his own right. However, it cannot be ignored that Leone's success was built on the plagiarism of Kurosawa's work. This once again casts Japan as a colonized subject. In *Consumers and Citizens*, Néstor García Canclini examines the effect of globalization on industry and culture. He claims globalization is mediated by social conflict and multiculturalism, but the consumption of a culture's media does not indicate a truthful representation of its values or character. He writes:
Identity is a construct, but the artistic, folkloric, and media narratives that shape it are realized and transformed within sociohistorical conditions that cannot be reduced to their mise-en-scene. Identity is theater and politics, performance and action (96).

Kurosawa's work, especially his noir film Drunken Angel, accomplishes these simultaneous representations of identity through the narrative device of a morally grey protagonist. This disrupts binaries and creates a multifaceted narrative that is appreciated by both the colonized subject and the colonizer. This also allows the film to be continuously appreciated as Kurosawa's films are restored and reformatted for a digitized and globalized world.

Yasuhiro Nightow draws from his own experiences with oppression to create Vash the Stampede and address the legacy of trauma from the occupation and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki still relevant even in the 1990s. Trigun's original run coincided with a recession that lasted from 1995 until 2007; though there is no previous scholarship written about Nightow's work, Trigun remains a significant text to read against Japanese history. If one follows the trajectory of history from Kurosawa's work to Nightow's their similarities are apparent: both Drunken Angel and Trigun push back against westernization and paternalism's oppressive influences.

Furthermore, Nightow's work borrows the same cinematic styles and storytelling techniques Kurosawa first used, but also borrows from Leone's Yojimbo-inspired films. Nightow's Trigun is science fiction in that it takes place on a desert planet, but it is also very much a western in execution and aesthetics. Vash the Stampede is an outlaw wandering through each dusty border town with a bounty on his head. Indeed, Trigun borrows plot and visuals from A Fistful of Dollars and Kurosawa's films. Nightow uses cultural hybridity to take back Japanese agency during the recession of the 1990s. He borrows Leone's elements and in turn
reapplies Kurosawa's subtle social commentary to a Japanese text. *Trigun* becomes a cultural hybrid and the once appropriated colonized Japanese subject has now reasserted dominance over an imposing Western power. Paul Dampier explains that the setting of the "frontier" often reinforces colonialism, but Asian films and media using this setting tell a more complete story of colonialism:

Violence originates from involuntary cross-cultural exchange between colonizer and colonized ... However, Western domination in cross-cultural exchange has also produced these zones of ephemeral cohabitation between exiled peoples and cultures ... With this in mind, [Asian Western films] ultimately create identities and spaces that can (co)exist, however briefly, outside of the colonial, capitalist frontier narrative (6).

In an *omake* (extra chapter) following *Trigun Maximum* volume thirteen, Nightow describes why he continues to create: "If creation is the act of filling a void born of oppression and the thirst for desire...then my deprived childhood has a very important meaning" (*Trigun Maximum* 5: 273). Nightow's work is not only politically important, but now has its own legacy of resistance, mimicry, and disavowal as a hybrid text. To return to Bhabha:

Hybridity reverses the *formal* process of disavowal so that the violent dislocation of the act of colonization becomes a conditionality of the colonial discourse. The presence of colonialist authority is no longer immediately visible ... To see the cultural not as the *source* of conflict--*different* cultures--but as the *effect* of discriminatory practices ...

changes its value and its rules of recognition (114).

Nightow's work is an amalgamation of postwar narratives: the lasting authority of the US occupation and the Bubble Economy, the trauma of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a history of colonialism, erasure, and paternalism. These issues are central to Japan/US relations and history,
but are often only addressed through popular culture. While this is a significant development, Japanese manga and anime still face a notable lack of recognition in Western scholarship. There is still a tendency to imagine manga as separate from literature. The historical impact of manga’s social and political import cannot be denied even as we acknowledge the different ways in which Japanese literature is consumed by Japanese and Western audiences.

Given the complicated relationship between Japan and the United States, it is no surprise that Japanese media has influenced Western cinema, literature, animation, and graphic novels. The works of Katsuhiro Otomo (Akira), Hayao Miyazaki (Studio Ghibli), Akira Toriyama (Dragon Ball), and Naoko Takeuchi (Sailor Moon) are now household names, and in turn inspired a number of popular Western artists and filmmakers. These works found global recognition in the 1980s, and continuing through the 1990s and 2000s. With the advent of the internet, global fan communities have increased the demand for simultaneous broadcast of anime in Japan, the United States, and elsewhere, complete with corresponding subtitles. Manga populates global chain bookstores such as Barnes and Noble. ONE's shōnen series One-Punch Man cracked the New York Times bestseller list in 2015. There is no doubt Japanese popular culture shapes the global landscape.

However, what does this mean for the subversive elements in Kurosawa and Nightow's work? How can Japanese films and manga be consumed without Western audiences realizing their critique of history and American imperialism? Canclini concludes the generational shift contributes to what is remembered, understood, and repeated. He writes: "We are leaving behind the era in which identities were defined by ahistorical essences. Today ... identities depend on what one owns or is capable of attaining" (16). Consumption is a huge factor in determining whether something is globally accessible—can it be streamed on the internet? Can it be digitized
and shared with others? Luckily, Kurosawa's films are available online through several university film collections and streaming websites. Nightow's manga is also published in e-book formats. Even so, this accessibility does not obscure the messages in these texts. Rather, I argue it enhances it.

To allow access to these works for a global community also allows their legacy to be preserved. *Drunken Angel* and *Trigun* speak to Japan and the United States’ collective memories by incorporating both Western and Japanese elements into their characters, narratives, and themes. Kurosawa's legacy provides familiar groundwork for a new generation that may approach his work after they have watched or read a reimagined version of *Drunken Angel* or *Seven Samurai*. He and Nightow never settled for stereotype or played into assumptions; their characters reflect an inability to be completely categorized, resistance to hegemonic norms, and refusal to accept "good" as wholly good and "evil" as wholly evil. Donald Richie writes, "In the films of Kurosawa one finds ... an awareness of oneself and an awareness of the world, and an awareness of the fact that the world and the self do not, cannot match" (198). The grey moralities exhibited in *Drunken Angel* and *Trigun* allow them to become universal in the age of globalization as national and cultural boundaries blur. The world cannot match the individual. The world has never deemed it possible. Additionally, the colonized subject cannot match the colonizing force. Kurosawa and Nightow successfully explored the areas in between these binaries, places in which many postwar narratives dared to tread. They cultivated a legacy of resistance that is still produced through popular culture to this day, and as a result their narratives are relevant, influential, and celebrated.
Indeed, Kurosawa's most popular film, *Seven Samurai*, was reimagined several times within the last seventy years. In the United States alone, the plot was adapted for John Sturgess's 1968 *Magnificent Seven* film (later rebooted in 2016), served as inspiration for Genndy Tartakovsky's *Samurai Jack* animated series, and paid homage by the *Star Wars: Clone Wars* animated series. In Japan, the film has also been adapted into anime and manga format as *Samurai Seven*.

Wolfwood and Vash find themselves in a town besieged by two warring families, which is the exact plot of not only *A Fistful of Dollars*, but also Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (*Nightow Trigun Maximum* 1: 114-115). Later, Vash confronts Samurai assassin Rei Dei the Blade, in a battle similar to Sanjuro's fight against a man with a pistol in *Yojimbo*.

Quentin Tarantino, of *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill* fame, is perhaps the most well-known American filmmaker to incorporate Asian media in his films. However, in her article "Bad Jokes, Bad English, Good Copy: *Sukiyaki Western Django* or How the West Was Won," Olivia Khoo explains why Tarantino's appropriation of Asian cinema is problematic. She writes, "Rather than displaying egalitarianism, what Tarantino represents is actually a form of elitism that we see mirrored in much of the scholarship on Asian cinema" (89). Later, she claims Tarantino functions as a "gatekeeper auteur."

For a comprehensive analysis on the popularity of Japanese media in the 90s and early 2000s, see Anne Allison's *Millennial Monsters* (2006).
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