ABSTRACT

DESERING JAPAN: TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS AND CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM

by Mary Boscarino

Using the emerging interest in Japanese popular culture as an entry point, this thesis explores how discourses of critical multiculturalism highlight the roles of the everyday and interpersonal in shaping subjects’ engagements with global communities. Chapter one looks at representations of fraternity in the films Moon Child, Brother, and The Last Samurai in order to dismantle center-periphery models that assume whiteness as legitimately central and hegemonic. Chapter two examines representations of interracial romance in the novel Audrey Hepburn’s Neck and the films My Darling is a Foreigner and About Love in order to destabilize the privileging of white men and show how fetishistic attraction to cultural “others” complicates one’s sense of historical connectivity. Chapter three situates these films within the context of online circulation in order to explore how fans engage in a participatory, reflexive cosmopolitanism.
DESIRING JAPAN: TRANSNATIONAL ENCOUNTERS AND CRITICAL MULTICULTURALISM

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Prologue

This thesis is in many ways a form of negotiation of my fetishistic-like desire for Japan and my serious scholarly engagement with Japanese texts. The main motivation behind this project is my awareness of my own fandom. I have been a fan of Japanese animation ever since watching *Sailor Moon* on television as an 8-year-old child, straining to hear over the din of rambunctious children running around my babysitter’s house. This interest in anime has since expanded to include Japanese manga, music, literature, television drama, and film. As my interests in Japan widened, they also became more sophisticated and nuanced given my own maturity and academic studies. In the past eight or so years, I have been concerned with addressing the fact that I do at times take pleasure in conceptualizing and exoticizing an “Other;” in pretending that Japan is an ideal, “cool” better-than-here country; and in romanticizing its culture and people. Given my intense desire to be a fan that responds to, views, and interacts with a culture in a way that is responsible, my discussions make an effort not to reinforce the fan versus scholar binary. Particularly because I myself am both a fan and scholar—I maneuver in and out of detached, reflexive commentary and escapist pleasure—this thesis attempts to destabilize the differentiation between academic critic and non-academic viewer.

Although I have noticed a recent increase in the amount of scholarship on fans of anime and manga, it is my general impression that criticism has not yet fully tackled the complexity and variety of the Japanophilia phenomenon. This Master’s Thesis is a first step towards beginning to capture how I, and others like me, generate a type of transnational subjectivity through an engagement with Japanese media, American texts about Japan, and our own cultural awareness and ignorance. Let me end with some vignettes of the daily, quotidian ways in which my fandom operates:

*After reading a hundred pages from a British Modernist novel, I visit a website hosting numerous films and television shows from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan. I click on the next episode of a Japanese historical drama television series called *Fuurin Kazan*. The video I am streaming, as evident from its commercials, seems to be a home-video-recording off of a Japanese cable channel broadcast in California.*

*Before the Japanese 302 college course I am taking begins, we listen to Japanese versions of Disney movie theme songs. On another day, we watch fan-made animated videos of the popular Japanese video game and film *Final Fantasy VII*.***
I first watch a Japanese film called I Love My Sister on YouTube (broken into sections and subtitled by fans). Wanting to own the film on DVD, I buy a Chinese DVD version sold on eBay by a seller from Hong Kong. The translation quality of the English subtitles is entirely inadequate. So, I decide to transfer the film to my computer and use a software program to make my own subtitled translation. Relying on my own knowledge of Japanese—after having taking about two-and-a-half years of formal classes—and using the first fan-sub version I had seen as a reference, I add in subtitles then save the entire file to my laptop. Having decided to teach the film as a primary text for my Freshmen Literature and Composition class, I project the film from my laptop onto the classroom projector in front of an audience consisting nearly entirely of white, middle-to-upper-class 18-year-olds who later describe the film as “weird,” “boring,” and hard to understand.

I have a Writing Center consultation with an international student from China. Noticing my desktop background image of Japanese actor Shun Oguri, the student remarks, “I know him! He is a very popular actor.”

As I write part of this thesis, I listen to songs by a Japanese musician named Gackt. Many of these mp3s have been downloaded for free from a Vietnamese website.

While I am watching an episode online of the Japanese television drama Nobuta wo Produce, my mother calls to tell me that a devastating earthquake and tsunami have killed thousands in Japan. I read translated articles from Japanese news sites then donate money to the Japanese Red Cross Society via Google’s resource page and checkout service.

Using my father’s NetFlix account, I watch the Australian film Japanese Story and a Japanese film called Who’s Camus Anyway? Months later, he e-mails me a link to the Amazon product information for the film and suggests that I watch this “great award winning Japanese movie.”

While waiting for the campus bus, I notice a student wearing a shirt of “Domo,” the official mascot of Japan’s NHK television station. On the bus, I turn to tell him, “I like your Domo shirt.” He responds, “I’m glad you even know what this is!” Then, he proceeds to have a conversation in Spanish with a friend of his.

At a 21st birthday party consisting entirely of Caucasian young adults. I reply to some remarks about the upcoming Women’s World Cup final match between the U.S. and Japan that I would actually be happy if Japan won. In return, I receive shocked and mildly disgusted comments about the need to be “American.”
Introduction

In a contemporary context of global capitalism, cultural exchange entails numerous products, persons, beliefs, and representations that overlap and influence one another in extremely complex ways. This dynamic post-World War II neoliberal transnationalism perpetuates a variety of images of Japan, many of which revolve around capital and economic vitality. In regards to the American imagination in particular, Susan Napier explains in *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*:

> In an amazingly short period of time Japan went from brutal inhuman enemy to subservient little brother (or sister) in the eyes of the American occupiers. … In an astonishing turnaround the postwar Japanese economy revived and soon was growing well beyond prewar levels. The period of ‘double digit’ economic growth in the 1960s eventually led it to becoming the world’s second largest economy and, not coincidentally, to being perceived as a distinct and sinister threat to the American economy. … these finally reached a crescendo of panicky reactions in the 1980s as many Americans began to believe that Japan had actually ‘won’ the war and was now threatening the American way of life. (16)

This trajectory of events and their subsequent discourses occurred in relation to the Cold War impetus of the U.S. government to facilitate a free market network in which Asia participated as always subordinate to the American center. In *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* Christina Klein delineates how discourses of sentimentalism and American benevolence towards Asia operated during the period to reinforce the U.S.’s aggressive anti-communist economic maneuvers. Re-conceptualizing the war enemy as a subservient child in need, and the women in need of legal liberation by American benefactors, worked to make everyday citizens believe in the legitimacy of American intrusion into Asian countries that they now felt sentimentally sympathetic towards. The expansion of U.S. power in Asia during this cold war period coincided with the decolonization process throughout Asia. As surrounding nations, such as the newly independent India and Philippines and the newly divided Korea, were trying to negotiate civil unrest, address the indelible marks of the colonizer, and solidify a position in the global market, Japan as a wartime-aggressor-turned-victim obfuscated its compensatory responsibility to Asia and partially aligned itself with its occupiers to achieve improved economic leverage. Koichi Iwabuchi explains in *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* that Japanese national identity developed mainly from contrasting Japan with the two discursively constructed entities of the United States and Asia.
Japan was represented by many essentialist and (self)Orientalist discourses as the only “developed” Asian nation. By latching onto “Japan’s peculiar position as the only modern, non-Western imperial/colonial power,” Japanese political and social discourse represented itself as able to function in a U.S.-dominated order by being inherently not Western yet also different from its underdeveloped Asian neighbors lacking an industrialized modernity (Iwabuchi 7). Drawing their attention to the demands of the U.S. capitalistic network, Japan failed to fully acknowledge its responsibility in the war, particularly its aggressive colonial policies in Asia, by eliding this past militaristic expansion through the promotion of its current economic vitality.

This burgeoning Japanese economy, mixed with the cultural memories of Japan’s actions during World War II, prompted a wave of embittered anti-Japanese sentiment in the United States and throughout (South) East Asia during the seventies and eighties. In Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S., Roland Kelts further clarifies attitudes during this period in which Japan’s economic leverage was increasing dramatically, particularly due to various Japanese companies buying out American brands:

American Japanophobia was essentially a combination of two instincts … ill-informed jealousy and fear at the speed of Japan’s economic growth and its ability to not only compete with U.S. industries, but also possibly to destroy some of them … [and] irritation that Japan was able to succeed with a style of capitalism that was not a direct copy of its American counterpart. Chalmers Johnson, a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and head of the Japan Policy Research Institute, wrote in his best-selling 2000 book Blowback that what disturbed the United States most about Japan’s success was that at the height of the cold war, it had found a third way between Soviet and American theories of the market … In Asia, the Japanophobia was more visceral, resulting from a hatred of its old imperialist aggressor and a jealous fear of Japan’s rapid return to economic health. (120)

The 1980s revealed the limits of the American cold war “benevolence:” Americans were willing to serve as benevolent benefactors with the assumption that those “benefited” remain perpetually subordinate. Japan’s financial and economic flourishing, then, signaled the potential overreaching of American policies in that continually using this “rebuilt” nation for American goals enabled Japan to become strong enough to function more on its own, and even resist demands by the United States that were not of benefit to Japan. U.S. policies had sought to reorganize and structure the region along capitalistic terms that placed specific countries in particular positions to optimize American hegemony; Japan’s actions were thus deemed as acting
out of line in that they were seen as *overreaching* their “appropriate” position. An economically viable Asian nation whose rising power did not always remain circumscribed by American hegemony challenged U.S. assumptions of the subordination of the East to the West. Meanwhile, other Asian nations, some of which were directly suffering from U.S. intervention, were put in the position of watching a former colonizer be “helped” by a current colonizer that was exploiting parts of Asia for resources and cheap labor.

A major economic downturn in Japan in the early 1990s, however, began to partially alleviate Asian grudges and American fears of losing power: the Japanese may have temporarily flourished, some believed, but their success was unsustainable. At the same time, other Asian economies, particularly China, were gaining more influence: “In this context, the Japanese experience of modernization and its economic power are no longer perceived as scandalous or spectacular, since the ascent of Asian power is becoming more important to the West” (Iwabuchi 12). This led to American attention being drawn away from Japan as well as to Japan’s need to come to terms with the fact that it was not the single, leading economic force in Asia. Japan’s “Return to Asia” project indicated how Japanese “Asian” identity was now being stressed more heavily as a means of benefiting from the cooperation of other parts of Asia in networks of transnational capitalism. Given that those for whom the bitter memory of the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers resonates are decreasing, contemporary fantasy Japans rely increasingly on representations rather than direct experiences. As Harumi Befu states in “Globalization Theory from the Bottom Up: Japan’s Contribution”: “More than 50 years after the war, the generations which directly experienced Japanese atrocities are decreasing in number. Also, for the younger generations who enjoy Japanese pop culture, any animosity toward Japan is derived not from their own visceral experience but from secondary information, such as narratives from the older generations, school texts, and the media” (16). The Japanese government moved to take advantage of this historical removal by explicitly promoting itself as hip, cute, friendly, and cool through the global dissemination of its popular culture and media. Japanese anime, manga, television dramas, and pop music became very popular in (South)East Asia while a larger number of animated series began being aired on television in the United States in “dubbed” English language versions, sometimes with substantial cutting and revision. The increasing interest in Japanese media that has resulted, as many critics argue, signals a significant shift in American conceptions of Japan: from the “Japanophobia” of the 1980s, which
considered Japan a threatening economic powerhouse to be both feared and envied, to a “Japanophilia” that fetishizes, even loves, Japan as “cool.” This shift is not a matter of a simple, linear progression so much as a complex collection of ideologies and fantasies; rather, Japan embodies numerous different imaginaries that overlap and shift. While one thus cannot say that phobia has transformed into philia, it does seem safe to say that the number of “Japanophiles” has increased significantly and seems to be growing.

I am specifically concerned with this contemporary context in which a significant number of people throughout Asia, the United States, and Europe desire Japanese media and consider Japanese pop culture “cool.” Associating this word with Japanese culture has increased ever since a 2002 Foreign Policy article by Douglas McGray conceptualized Japan’s general shift from hard power to soft power as its “Gross National Cool.” The global dissemination of audio-visual media, both physical products and online data, serves more and more as the figurehead for a consumable brand of Japanese culture. Users come to variably comprehend Japan as a historical and political entity through the various ways in which coolness is discursively formulated into a type of ambassador of culture that attracts through style, innovation, and thematic appeal. Given how hyper-saturated society is with fragmented representations of historical moments, one can see how more and more people feel connected not with any actual, temporal history as much as with visions of a past way of life. Put another way, there is a sense of nostalgia for a past that never occurred directly to the individual. While it is important not to forget history or render it invisible, one must acknowledge that there is a level of detachment involved in people’s contemporary experiences: a sense that history does not directly concern them. I have indeed witnessed a sort of blasé attitude in younger persons who lack a general concern for and even simple, basic awareness of what even happened in the past. Mediated representations fill in this gap. Just think about the multiple times in which someone claimed to know all about a certain historical event because “I saw it in the movie…” While it is natural to bemoan the reduction of culture to fragmented images and stereotypes, stopping academic discussion here is not at all fruitful. Rather, we need to fully examine how the desire for an “exotic Other” that develops from exposure to such representations is able to perpetuate and intensify one’s engagement with a culture beyond a simple self-indulging fantasy that reinforces one’s position of superiority. My thesis delineates how the present emphasis on Japan as the creator of modern, hip, and cool media products—such as video games, anime, manga, and cute
(kawaii) accessories—is situated in a wider historical context of transnational capitalism and cultural representation. Obviously, finding something “cool” is different from seriously and respectfully engaging with it. But I argue that desiring a specific “culture” in such a way—“cool,” “cute,” “beautiful” etc.—plays a significant role in developing a serious, respectful engagement in that it perpetuates one’s interest and attachment. Taking myself as an example, my earlier interest in Japan that revolved around cute characters, cool anime plots with ninja, samurai, or “mecha” (short for a large, piloted machine) fighting, and beautiful “Oriental” patterned designs sparked my desire to engage with Japanese culture on a more sophisticated level by exploring the link between such fandom and socio-political history (hence, this thesis). So while Japanophilic desires do not necessarily signal a willingness to engage with a culture and its complexities, an ongoing, intensifying interest may lead to a sophisticated appreciation in which one makes an effort to be aware of social contexts and power relations.

This process is what I term “reflexive cosmopolitanism.” Cosmopolitanism has traditionally been formulated, and criticized, as a privileged worldliness in which one “understands” and is “nice” to foreign cultures and people.1 In the Introduction to Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation, Bruce Robbins explains that advocacy of cosmopolitanism tends to align itself with universalism as if the multiplicities of cultures can and should be assimilated into a single, homogenous ideal of a global utopia (2). He thus clarifies that cosmopolitanism should be conceptualized as plural, embodied, and particular. Similarly, I use the term not to signal a static, essentialist definition—one either is a reflexive cosmopolitan or is not—but more of a dynamic continuum upon which persons fall according to their past experiences and degree/amount of interaction with a particular set of cultural representations. Reflexive cosmopolitanism is not a specific location on this continuum but an organic process of reevaluation and movement. This claim I make for reflexivity comes mainly from my own personal experiences of reflection as a literary scholar and fan of Japanese animation and film. While I cannot necessarily speak for other viewers, I suggest that there is a spectrum in which one’s own degree of privilege, experience, and awareness—themselves impacted by social

relations and culturally embedded assumptions—impacts the type and extent of one’s reflexivity. Outlined below are the types of general circumstances that enable reflexive cosmopolitanism to operate. As will be delineated throughout this thesis, such characteristics impact how an American viewer engages with Japanese films and develops a variegated conception of Japan.

Orientalism as Discourse

The reflexive cosmopolitan sees Orientalism itself as a fantasy which one enters into and out of. My thesis specifically draws attention to the pleasure involved in constructing and exoticizing an “Other” as a means of not only prolonging the fandom but also developing more complex, nuanced perspectives on Japanese culture. This desire for Japan as a foreign Other offering alternative possibilities is central to the activities in which characters and fans become emotionally invested through fetishes. Although I do not necessarily conceive of fetishes in Freudian terms, one can recognize how a fetish replaces some sort of lack. One may indulge fetishistic impulses as a way to cope with the mundane realities of daily existence. In particular, a fetish fills in for dissatisfaction with local, domestic cultural norms or media. In other words, a degree of unhappiness with the limits circumscribed by the social and material conditions determined by the nation-state prompts one to seek satisfaction outside of such boundaries. A significant aspect of reflexive cosmopolitanism, then, that must be acknowledged seriously is the fact that it is pleasurable to romanticize a culture as different and interesting. As a fan of Japanese anime, manga, film, and music, I like to Orientalize Japan as an ideal exotic Other; I would be kidding myself if I denied that this was ever the case. At the same time, however, I am entirely aware of Orientalism as constructed discourse and recognize that such simplistic representations are inaccurate, misleading, and serve the creator’s particular needs and desires. Romanticizing a culture is an acknowledged falsity—I know Japan is not “really” like this—in which one temporarily indulges in this imaginary, fake fantasy of seeing culture in such a light. Rather than seeing Orientalism as a set of assumptions constructed and reinforced through discourse, as it has been traditionally defined, one can begin to see how discourses are revealing Orientalism as an exteriority that can thus be questioned and criticized. In other words, even

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explicitly Orientalist representations can be critically redeployed to propel one to recognize Orientalism as being negative and problematic.

A major impetus of this thesis, then, is to move beyond Orientalism, which Edward Said defines as “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Falling back on the ways in which a text perpetuates Orientalism tends to oversimplify what is actually more nuanced and complicated. Various critics have recognized the need to extricate ourselves from East/West binary thinking in order to approach texts as more multifarious. Lisa Lowe in particular offers an effective framework in her book Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms, which treats Orientalism as internally complex, unstable, and heterogeneous. Reflexive cosmopolitanism can thus be conceptualized as an ongoing activity that continually uncovers the validity of Lowe’s comment that “although orientalism may represent its objects as fixed or stable, contradiction and noncorrespondences in the discursive situation ultimately divulge the multivalence and indeterminability of those fictions” (x). In regards to texts such as the ones discussed in this thesis, then, reflexive cosmopolitanism means acknowledging Orientalist thinking and behavior exhibited by characters, the director, viewers etc. as undesirable, disreputable, or superficially pleasurable.

**Power Relations**

Of significant importance to my thesis is the extent to which a character or viewer feels (dis)connected from/to a historical past and present. Scholars such as David Palumbo-Liu and George Lipsitz have criticized the poststructuralist perspective on the subject’s relation to history as unable to fully account for the actual existing material conditions that perpetuate racist attitudes and violations of civil rights. Although perhaps a bit too abstract and universalized, Foucauldian conceptions of power can be linked to the situation of global capitalism in a way that offers us fruitful insights into how antagonistic prejudice operates as well as opens itself up for dismemberment. In particular, Foucault’s notion of a fluid network of power relations in “The Subject and Power” serves as a useful framework for perceiving how films, directors, producers, performers, viewers, and fans participate in dynamic, transnational relationships of power:
what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future … Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized. (220-1)

Persons, as inhabitants of a variety of subject positions within a discursive terrain, act in ways that tend to oscillate along lines of behaviors deemed appropriate by particular discourses. The various elements in what Foucault calls the “field” of possible actions, which are dictated by discursive ideologies and material hegemonies, are mutually constituted: they exert power over others and have power exerted over them. Although the field of possible actions is already limited, one can act to achieve a degree of mobility within this constricted space. Various representations co-exist within a complex network of power relations in which particular subjects construct others and are constructed by others. Reflexive cosmopolitanism, then, entails some degree of recognition by the subject of his or her position within systems of power, particularly the ways in which one is privileged, empowered, excluded, disenfranchised, etc. Understanding one’s own subject position as well as the subject positions of those one interacts with (i.e. how, and what, hegemonic ideologies and unequal material conditions have brought these individuals to this particular situation) is a necessary precursor for the generation of any truly respectful engagement with society that seeks to remedy injustices.

Critical Multiculturalism

By representing the quotidian ways in which everyday persons handle their daily encounters with racialized persons, what I term “critical multiculturalism” opens up a space in which the historical past can be remedied and draws attention to the factors that impact how people function, think, and feel as racialized, cultural subjects. Rather than determine what qualifies as critical multiculturalism, I strive to identify the possibilities for resistance to the privileged hegemony and the potential for transformative commentary present in all representations. My intention here is not to provide an exhaustive description of critical multiculturalism but rather to indicate how it operates in the specific texts selected for this thesis. It is commonly held by many fields in the humanities that what a producer intends to do and how an author wants his or her text to be interpreted do not necessarily correspond to how an
audience or consumer actually understands and responds to a document. In short, it is useful to think of “critical multiculturalism” as what a text does and “reflexive cosmopolitanism” as what persons do with what the text does, neither of which is stable nor static.

Let me first differentiate my use of this over-determined term from its already existing discourse and criticism. Rather than create new terminology to delineate my argument, I borrow the terms “cosmopolitanism” and “multiculturalism” in order to evoke and complicate the ways in which affective, utopian, and/or universalizing gestures get taken up in a network of unequal power relations and cultural ideologies. Scholars have explored how the liberal pluralist ideology of multiculturalism tends to deemphasize existing racial tensions, material inequalities, and political disenfranchisement. Critical reception has thus drawn attention to how the evocation of democracy as enabling equal access and opportunity to all has served as a mask, covering up the racial and cultural dynamics of power relations in favor of a superficial “we are all equal” mentality. For example, Lowe differentiates between the representation of multiculturalism and actual shifts in power relations by explaining that the production of multiculturalism “diffuses the demands of material differentiation through the homogenization, aestheticization, and incorporation of signifiers of ethnic differences” (86). Such scholars criticize a sanitized, celebratory acceptance of the supposedly harmonious coexistence of races in favor of a worldview that seriously works through historical relations by changing discriminatory exploitation. They have revealed how discourses of benevolence, kindness, and respect project personal, affective relationships as a sign of racial equality while not actually making any institutional reforms that actually remedy inequalities.

For example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty states in “On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s” that discourses of harmony and civility operate to maintain the status quo by promoting kindness and respect between individuals and yet “carrying on business as usual” (158). This thesis works to complement such astute observations by theorizing what else discourses of benevolent harmony do, particularly the ways in which they propel one to challenge entrenched hegemonies.

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The Interpersonal as Beyond the Individual

This thesis thus delineates how critical multiculturalism’s placement of the interpersonal within larger social, cultural-historical contexts sparks a reflexive cosmopolitanism in the viewer that actually links his or her own life, status, and person with the contemporary political landscape of increasing interaction between differentially racialized, disenfranchised, and privileged persons. While the attention to the individual does tend to relegate social conflicts to the private sphere where it may have less influence on real political change, I argue that interpersonal communication is a sort of actually occurring manifestation of the public sphere that, being addressed through representation, enables more of a feeling of connection with social life as something that does impact you and something you are complicit in and can thus resist. In other words, critics’ overemphasis on how such discourse confines larger political concerns to individual psychology does not fully account for the important role an individual’s development of awareness plays in helping to enact positive social change. It is important to keep in mind how representations of changed or changing conditions, even if they are not actually manifested in society, can still propel one to consider what the goals for the future should be, how to get there, and what circumstances to celebrate or criticize. By framing the intersection of race, class, gender, culture, history, politics, and emotion in terms of interpersonal relations, which the viewer has access to via the thoughts and emotions of specific characters, critical multiculturalism indicates how individuals function through adopting a willingness to engage with individuals across racial, cultural, or national divides. Cinematic representations of private, intimate interactions serve as a mode through which the viewer can feel connected with and inculcated in social, political, and historical relations. As I argue, then, the interpersonal as representation does not trap the potential for counterhegemonies in the individual—thus perpetuating a fragmented, disconnected lack of coalitions—but rather can prompt feelings of connection with society that may indeed lead to making alliances with others due to having shifted one’s perspective.

Quotidian Behavior

Of utmost significance to the interplay between reflexive cosmopolitanism and critical multiculturalism, then, are the represented and real-life everyday behaviors of individuals engaging with a text, each other, the public, or themselves. While I try to be careful not to give
interpersonal relationships too much credit, my argument hopes to remind readers of the critical, political, and transformative potential of individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and remarks. As the vignettes of the Prologue hopefully demonstrated, contemporary engagement with fictional media is oftentimes quite mundane and quotidian: one sits and watches a movie, texting friends intermittently; one sits in front of a computer screen talking about a favorite character on Facebook chat while eating a frozen dinner; one chats with a coworker about a recent online purchase of a band’s new album during their lunch break. This claim, however, obviously maintains certain assumptions regarding race, class, and economic opportunity. My theory of reflexive cosmopolitanism tends to have the middle-to-upper-class American in mind: someone economically well off and relatively safe from overt violence, who thus has the financial resources and time to browse the internet for videos to watch, post comments about their favorite shows, etc. As I make my argument, then, I hope to draw attention to my own position rather than elide or render invisible the biases and narrow perspective from which I operate. So while perhaps for one, say, caught up in civil war, a movie may seem like a realm of fantasy in utter contrast to harsh reality, I would argue that people such as myself consume creative media representations as part of the quotidian and everyday. This is particularly evident when one considers how websites such as YouTube make it easier than ever to access video clips of all kinds. So while some critics cite the imagination and one’s experience of a text as a sort of escapist fantasy different from everyday reality, I explore how fantasy and reality do not simply co-exist but actually permeate, overlap, and dissolve into each other. For example, Napier mentions that “Fantasyscapes are inherently liminal worlds, temporary alternative lifestyles that exist parallel to the mundane, which people enter and exit when they please” (11). The word “parallel” here suggests that they coexist but are separate. I would argue, however, that they overlap; indeed, you are not “in” one then “in” the other since the mundane permeates fantasy and vice versa. I thus align myself more with Arjun Appadurai who states in Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization that “the imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies” (5). So, watching a film, for example, is less and less an instance of escaping into an imaginative realm so much as a quotidian maneuvering of reflexive cosmopolitanism.
Because of this, depictions of everyday moments are not to be underestimated in their abilities to inculcate the viewer in political life. Since, as phenomenon such as user-generated content and social media reveal, the line between producer and consumer is constantly being blurred, representations of the interpersonal reflect and influence the knowledge-producing activities of average Americans. Some texts discussed in this thesis center around quotidian activities, while those that evoke violent, chaotic events still draw significant attention to moments of respite in which characters engage in quotidian activities. These representations of the mundane appeal to those who may or may not know about larger historical issues or social problems but tend to feel their actions are powerless or inconsequential to the big picture of race relations. The reinforcement of such “there is nothing I can do about it” attitudes prolongs the complicity of viewers who do not act to resist or change the hegemonic ideologies constraining them. At the same time, however, the evocation of the quotidian opens up a space for the subject to achieve a degree of empowerment and feel capable of acting in small, daily ways. Instead of viewing this as a method for perpetually cordoning off the individual from the political to the extent that hegemonies persist without being questioned, then, we can re-conceptualize the interpersonal and the everyday as themselves reflecting and enacting a significant questioning and transformation of the material conditions and political structures that hierarchize people along lines of race, culture, gender, and class. Within the discursively constructed network of power relations that perpetuates historically complicit, unrealistic multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, then, quotidian moments provide potential lines of flight that can resist and deteriorate ideologies overtime. In other words, critical multiculturalism and reflexive cosmopolitanism explore the radical possibilities of the quotidian.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is helpful as a critical tool for noticing and delineating critical multiculturalism and reflexive cosmopolitanism. During the rising public and academic interest in the phenomena of “globalization” and “internationalization,” discourses of transnationalism (re)emerged to reject these terms’ connotations of universalism and essentialism, respectively, in favor of a perspective that always put the nation-state into question.⁵ Transnationalism both

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acknowledges the fact that the nation is only one of many powers impacting a subject and that the nation-state aggressively reasserts itself within processes of globalization. In “Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis,” Briggs, McCormick, and Way argue that transnational methodologies reveal nationalism to be a changing ideology and the “nation” to be “a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction” (627). Refusing to assume the nation as a pre-given, transnationalism seeks to address the ways in which nationalism propels violence and racism and to let traditionally silenced subjects speak for themselves in public discourse. An emphasis on the disruptions in dominant historical narratives and the destabilization of the nation provides a useful site from which to explore the radical potential of individuals’ mundane interactions with people and media forms. I specifically examine transnationalism as an activity in which individual subjects negotiate their everydayness, (fetishistic) desires, historical complicity, and language through relationships with other subjects. Given its emphasis on the ways in which subjects dismantle and reconstitute the literal borders and representational restrictions of nation-states, transnationalism serves as an effective way to conceptualize the mobile maneuvers of the reflexive cosmopolitan. My thesis attempts to show how reflexive cosmopolitanism notices how critical multiculturalism translates cross-cultural interactions into transnational encounters. Seeing cross-cultural encounters as transnational multiplicities better enables one to relate a conversation between characters to other cultural relations. In other words, one begins to internalize the discourses of critical multiculturalism in such a way that they seem particularly relevant to one’s own situation and community. For example, although I do not interact regularly with Japanese Americans, I still naturally relate the commentary made between an American and Japanese character to the tensions in my own neighborhood: the “lazy Chaldeans” sitting in their garages; the discomfort with the “encroaching” Arabic storefronts; the disjunction between the suburbs and urban Detroit; etc. In other words, reflexive cosmopolitanism propels one to critically access multicultural contexts to see how interpersonal relations are discursively constructed: how there are particular ideologies, which do manifest themselves in individuals, operating to maintain the power of the hegemony across changing categories and relations.

Chapter Outline

While there are plenty of texts that convey the discourse of critical multiculturalism and ruffle viewers’ reflexive cosmopolitanism, I look at fictional narratives in some way involving Japan as a specific entry point. Given that much of Western scholarship on Japanese media focuses on anime, manga, “art-film auteurs” such as Takeshi Kitano, and the film “classics” of Akira Kurosawa and Yasujirō Ozu, I include some lesser known Japanese pop films in order to open up terrain that has yet to be fully explored. In hopes of complicating outworn concepts, I do include a Kitano film and Hollywood blockbuster as well. A discussion of literary texts is intentionally placed approximately midway through my thesis to evoke and remind readers of the intertextuality continually impacting American assumptions as well as to symbolize for the reader my own academic foundation that has served as the basis for my scholarly training and worldview. Rather than relegate my work to a specific field, I strive to maintain an interdisciplinary approach that effectively indicates how transnational subjectivities function in dynamic ways and in a variety of spaces. Although many of the selected texts entail Japan-U.S. relations, I strive to complicate the East/West binary by bringing in texts evoking inter-Asian relationships. Taken together, these texts reflect a multicultural environment in which transnational encounters occur in numerous, complicated, and overlapping ways. Lastly, I conclude the thesis with a focus on actual viewer comments in an attempt to shed light on the actual types of responses to these films that circulate and impact fan activities.

Chapter One looks at representations of multicultural fraternity in order to dismantle center-periphery models that assume whiteness as legitimately central and hegemonic. Takahisa Zeze’s Moon Child and Takeshi Kitano’s Brother are paired together in the context of the immigrant-gangster genre in order to explore how minority-minority bonds within a “global city” environment resist a threatening hegemonic power. I bring in The Last Samurai directed by Edward Zwick after these two films in order to indicate how their representations of brotherly alliances allow us to complicate the film’s portrayal of majority-minority relations. Specifically, I respond to the popular view that the film promotes American (male) supremacy by articulating

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the complex, nuanced, and contradictory ways in which the film and its director negotiate their appropriation of and admiration for Japanese culture by explicitly depicting “white” characteristics as undesirable. Juxtaposing these three films in a shared space of cross-cultural relationships enables a more heterogeneous discussion that sees films as intricate complexities attached in dynamic ways to a system of transnational cinema. Thinking of these films as pieces of the discourse of critical multiculturalism enables one to recognize how representations of fraternal bonds as horizontal alliances arranged not along purely racial lines prompt a reflexive cosmopolitanism that acknowledges and resists existing power relations.

Chapter Two extends and complicates the first chapter’s focus on the theme of masculine fraternity by drawing attention to gender and sexuality. It looks at representations of cross-cultural romance in order to destabilize the privileging of white male desires. Discussions of the novel *Audrey Hepburn’s Neck* by Alan Brown and the film *My Darling is a Foreigner* address how an intense, even fetishistic, desire for a cultural “other” complicates one’s sense of historical connectivity. Lastly, I further extend and complicate the Anglo-Japanese framework of interracial romance by exploring the inter-Asian relationships depicted in the short-films featured in *About Love*. Through an emphasis on interpersonal relations, these texts strive to connect individual viewers with those around them in ways that promote reflexive awareness and respectful engagement.

Chapter Three situates the films discussed in the first two chapters within their larger contexts of distribution and reception, online circulation in particular, in order to explore how fans and viewers participate in reflexive cosmopolitanism. The ways in which the nation-state strives to organize information, intellectual property, and creative works along clear lines that identify who owns, controls, distributes, and consumes are being broken down, fragmented, and complicated by online users’ activities. I analyze online user comments as primary texts in order to explore how the transnational aspects of online circulation problematize nationalistic ideologies and subjectivities by reconstituting conceptions of culture along the desires of active consumer-user communities. Emotional attachment and Orientalist desires are conceptualized as active maneuvers that might potentially loosen East/West binaries, pushing one towards a more critically aware transnational perspective on the multicultural spaces in which we operate.
Decentering Whiteness: Critical Multiculturalism in *Moon Child, Brother, and The Last Samurai*

**Introduction**

Their alignment with the ideological imaginary of Japan as cool is a key part of how the films featured in this chapter participate in a complex network of inter-Asian circulation of Japanese pop culture as well as Western interests in Japan. The vampire character and choreographed fight scenes, extremely violent yakuza, and philosophical yet deadly samurai, respectively, all lend themselves to the labels of “cool,” “sweet,” and “badass.” Indeed, on the back cover of *Brother*’s DVD box appears a quote from “Ain’t It Cool News” proclaiming, “Kitano is one of the most significant figures on the landscape of modern cinema! He exists on the highest echelon of coolness!” This type of immediate appeal helps to maintain an attraction for some fans whose continued interest and enthusiasm can instigate a critical engagement with the film that sees it as more than entertainment. In other words, the “cool” trope provides the alluring hook that grabs and pulls one in, thus providing the opportunity for the text’s critical multiculturalism to operate in more thorough ways than the film’s “cool” stylization suggests it will. While in isolation this may not amount to much, the piecing together of fan-objects into the larger tableau of one’s reflexive cosmopolitanism signals a dynamic interaction with the wider realms of producers, consumers, media, culture, race, and transnational subjectivity. What I mean by this is that as specific associations, such as Japan=cool, are reinforced by more and more specific media objects willingly consumed by an individual, the person may actually become more able to recognize this association itself as discursively constructed. While I am mainly speaking only for myself here, I think that it would be rather encouraging to confirm such a conclusion through further research; such a scenario would indicate that we do not need to always fear and bemoan entrenched, repetitive representational paradigms since it is possible that such images can lose their effectiveness through overuse. In other words, overexposure may result in disenchantment. So despite recycling well-worn motifs, these films critically engage with their subject matter to a significant enough extent as to prompt a reflexive cosmopolitanism that may persist and change as one encounters discursively constructed materials.
Fraternal bonds between male characters emerge as a mode through which these films align this “coolness” with social responsibility. This chapter complicates the assumption that fraternal bonds simply reinforce essentialist stratifications of power by offering a vision of how personal, interracial connections participate in larger discourses of critical multiculturalism to the extent that one recognizes oneself as able to reformulate center-periphery worldviews into a looser transnationalism through everyday activities. In “Diversity as Fraternity Lite,” Raymond Boisvert recuperates the more traditional term “fraternity” as an analytic for addressing socio-political problems. Criticizing the more contemporary discourses of diversity, tolerance, and multiculturalism as inadequate, Boisvert indicates that fraternity could do much to foster an ongoing, transformative interaction across cultures that embraces creolization, rather than assimilation or fragmentation (121). In other words, instead of the essentialisms of liberal pluralist multiculturalism—many “pure” racial categories coexisting—fraternity “urges amalgamations, mergings, and blendings” (124). To a significant extent, what Boisvert terms “fraternity” is what I am calling “critical multiculturalism.” I do not adopt his term, however, given its problematic gendered assumptions (a group of men) and connotations of privileged membership (only some are accepted). The use of the term “fraternity” in this chapter signifies a film’s theme of friendship between male protagonists. The thematic treatment of fraternity in these films entails a mixture of conservative and radical elements. For example, they perpetuate the disenfranchisement of women by including female characters who serve largely to reinforce the heterosexuality of the protagonists. Furthermore, violence is a key aspect of the films’ representations of cross-cultural fraternity in that whom one kills and whom one protects dictates how alliances are established, maintained, and dissolved. Such bonds, as shown in these films, still revolve around an Us and Them binary in that, while the friends may indeed be from different cultures, they both share a common enemy. In Moon Child, Japanese immigrants pair up with American and British immigrants to fight the Chinese and Taiwanese in a fictional Chinese city of the future. In Brother, Japanese yakuza pair up with African American, Mexican American, and Japanese Americans to fight the Italian mafia in contemporary Los Angeles. And in The Last Samurai, an American captain joins the Japanese samurai to fight the Imperial Army in Meiji Era Japan. Bringing these films together, then, provides a span of different historical timeframes (past, present, and future) in which to explore representations of cross-cultural fraternal alliances as resistance to existing hegemonies.
My reading of *Moon Child* and *Brother* participates in scholarship on gangster, yakuza, and kung fu films. In a chapter from *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Aihwa Ong explains that “As a genre, kung fu and gangster movies are all about brotherhoods, hierarchized allegiances, and kinship loyalty, which are frequently ways of defending against the authority of the state and uncertainties in society at large” (162). Through the tropes of masculinity and fraternity, then, such genres traditionally depict how communal relationships organized around a system of values can serve to resist hegemonic powers. As Ong continues:

The overall message of the kung fu and gangster movies is that the Chinese values of fraternal solidarity and justice are both vulnerable and vital in the chaotic world of Asian capitalism. … There is an implicit criticism of capitalism for shredding lives in its relentless pursuit of profits. In contrast, the criminal activities of the heroes are presented as necessary for survival in a difficult world, but they never corrode the sense of brotherly solidarity and fair play. (164-5)

Such a framework oftentimes evokes a center-periphery binary in which the protagonists are to some extent outsiders. Immigrants, as “outsiders within,” are a particularly common typecast for characters. Margaret Hillenbrand thus states in an essay exploring the challenges Asian American filmmakers face to effectively represent the experiences and struggles of Asian Americans that “ethnic gangsterdom has always been about the nature of identity in an immigrant society” (63). Immigrant subjectivity is apparent in both films as the main characters’ friendships evolve out of a need to survive, to just get by, in a dynamic, violent, and capitalistic world. Because the Japanese characters in *Moon Child* are positioned as immigrants struggling within a rampantly capitalistic system, their violence and theft—in contrast to the Chinese and Taiwanese power hegemony—is depicted as generally acceptable and necessary for survival. Similarly, despite the violence and drug-dealing of the main characters in *Brother*, their activity

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is depicted as an attempt to persevere in the face of powerful, money-hungry gangsters who want too large of a cut of the profits. Within the constructed narratives, then, viewers tend to root for the characters in *Moon Child* and *Brother* due to their status as underdogs. To an extent, we can think of this framework as what the introduction to *Minor Transnationalism* explains as minority subjects identifying themselves in opposition to a white hegemony while forming alliances with other minority groups (Lionnet and Shih 2). The characters in *Moon Child* and *Brother* make such cross-cultural connections as a means of resisting the major hegemonic power. Such “interethnic solidarity” (Lionnet and Shih 4) enables an empowered sense of identity based not on hierarchies of racial minorities that compete with each other for a position “closest to the top” but on the ways in which horizontal affiliations can actually enable a cooperative bond that resists the hegemonic power.

While both *Moon Child* and *Brother* are Japanese directed films that place Japanese protagonists at the center, they also undermine a privileged American viewer’s tendency to make sense of the world and organize culture by always relating things back to the U.S.-as-center ideology (or, if considering the nation itself, the white-as-center). In other words, it is not that these films abandon center-periphery models but that the viewer sees a different center-periphery model than the one to which he or she is accustomed, which thus *decenters* one’s own subjectivity and national affiliation. In contrast to, say, a Japanese film featuring Japanese characters speaking Japanese to each other in Japan—that thus enables many (white) American viewers to understand the film entirely as an Other in relation to the United States—the settings, characters, and languages of these films generate a critical multiculturalism that produces, to at least a limited degree, a reflexivity in the viewer that prompts one to see how she is inculcated in politically saturated situations on a daily basis and can thus choose to be passively complicit or actively resistant. Set in multicultural “global cities,” featuring characters/actors of different races, and involving at least two different spoken languages, *Moon Child* and *Brother* move beyond minority-minority relations of cooperation into a critical multiculturalism that engages the attention of a reflexive cosmopolitan. It is important to keep in mind how one’s conception of their racialized American identity complicates one’s ability to dissociate such “foreign” films from themselves and their definition of the nation. However, I would like to suggest that the simultaneous particular/universal treatment of the interpersonal compels a significant number of viewers to relate the thematic circumstances to their own lives. So while Ong discusses this
genre of film in order to show how they promote a set of Asian values for an Asian capitalism that competes with and contrasts Western hegemonies, I have selected *Moon Child* and *Brother* to indicate how these films depict a set of *transferable* values (i.e. differently racialized viewers can all recognize the values as applicable to their own lives). Adopting such values can help viewers choose to strive to form interpersonal alliances that not only offer a sense of support, loyalty, and love against the oppressive majority hegemony but cooperate with persons to change material inequalities and advocate for political reform. While this does suggest the discourse of universalism and global humanism, these films, as I discuss below, complicate both racial compartmentalization and homogenization through an exploration of specific interpersonal bonds that prompts the viewer to recognize the similar power dynamics operating in their own multicultural contexts.

**Multiracial Immigrant Community in *Moon Child***

Takahisa Zeze’s *Moon Child*, filmed in Taiwan and produced by Shochiku, was released in Japan on April 19, 2003 and featured at the 2004 Philadelphia International Film Festival. Known predominantly for his contributions to the Japanese “pink” film genre, a mode of softcore pornographic narratives that emerged in the 1960s, Zeze here appeals to a wider popular audience by combining elements of the cyberpunk, gothic, and gangster genres with a tragic storyline. I first came across the film on a website hosting various East Asian films and television dramas for streaming. It has been released on DVD in the United States as part of a three-film box set titled *Danger After Dark*, which includes the Japanese cult films *Suicide Club* and *2LDK*. As its regional production, themes, and circulation online indicates, *Moon Child* functions as part of both the inter-Asian circulation of Asian pop culture as well as Western interests in Asian media forms. Its three main characters are played by popular Japanese musicians Gackt (Sho) and Hyde (Kei) and Taiwanese musician Wang Leehom (Son). From my browsing of translated magazine articles online, it seems that the East Asian reporting of the film generally attempts to reassure readers of the friendly respect emanating from Japanese crew members and actors.\(^{10}\) While such commentary attempts to articulate the personalities of specific individuals, which fans would appreciate as brief “real” glimpses at these stars, it also simultaneously evokes and reconciles the underlying historical tensions among China, Taiwan,

and Japan, which the film’s plot explicitly addresses. Beyond what the filmic narrative performs, then, is the discourse of the film’s production as a transnational collaboration. Specific interpersonal relationships as well as an individual’s degree of effort to engage with and understand a culture become signifiers of the potential for improved future relations between East Asian nations. For example, Wang Leehom remarks of Gackt in the “Moon Child Making Video” television special, “He’s always asking questions. Coming to Taiwan, and learning Chinese, and trying new things, and trying new foods, and meeting new people. He’s a very adventuresome attitude. So, meeting Gackt is, I can’t say enough good things about this guy. He is very, very cool” (Making of Moon Child 3/5). Using such celebrities gives the film a mass appeal that it otherwise would not have had, propelling it into the desires of fans outside Asia. Although the small amount of English-language reviews I have come across on the film tend to criticize it for being little more than a vehicle for inflating their stardom, Moon Child, as my discussion below suggests, could generate a complicated critical multiculturalism that enriches one’s reflexive cosmopolitanism.

Although much of the settings and extras are explicitly marked as (East) Asian, an American viewer can also sense a degree of cultural pastiche, which is reinforced by the film’s opening sequence. Set in the near future, Moon Child begins by exposing a technological Asia of advancement and progress yet also corruption, dystopia, and decay. The classic cyberpunk environment—congested, dark, littered, high-tech—hints at the negative impacts of consumerism and unchecked global capitalism. From the opening sequence, I, and perhaps other American viewers, recognize a scenario reminiscent of a free-for-all based on the American bootstrap ideology. A news audio broadcast establishes Mallepa, a fictional global city in China, as a multicultural dystopia filled with racial tension and violence due to the influx of immigrants:

Resistance to new anti-immigration laws turned violent today in Mallepa’s southern district. This area is mostly inhabited by poor Japanese immigrants who have been worst hit by the recent economic downturn. Such frustrations are thought to play a part in today’s demonstrations. Casualties run into the thousands, but confirmation is still pending. According to police reports, stability has been restored tonight. As a Special Economic Zone, discrimination doesn’t exist. Mallepa’s founding principle is tax-free growth for people of all races.

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11 The “cool” and “hot” Asian men becomes an attractive feature of the film for many audiences but, beyond this, their presence in this film opens up an American viewer to the celebrity and fan system of East Asia. For example, if it were not for Moon Child I would never have heard of Gackt nor become so interested in his musical career, which has led me to research more into the production of idols in Japan, popularity of Japanese music in East Asia, and the operations of celebrity fan clubs.
After establishing the environment as a concentrated area of various peoples, particularly immigrants from Japan, trying to function within such circumstances, the film introduces us to a group of young Japanese immigrants: orphans who respond to their situation by stealing. A Chinese man, who walks out into the street wearing sunglasses and holding a suitcase of money, represents the hegemonic power that profits while others suffer. After the boys scheme to steal the suitcase, however, the man manages to catch up with them only to be killed by the vampire Kei. The film then jumps ahead in time, showing that the boys’ thieving schemes have become more sophisticated and violent. Essentially, they kill then steal from the dead. The actions of these main characters—the “good guys”—are depicted as a typical response of a group forced to survive in such a situation. While political discourses posit the benefits of the “tax-free growth for people of all races” that supposedly provides room for all to flourish with their own unrestricted efforts, the reality of economic downturns reveals these utopian discourses as facades for ongoing disenfranchisement and violence. A significant aspect of the film’s critical multiculturalism, then, is its indication of the negative effects of global capitalism.

Money, race, and violence are inextricably bound, penetrating the individual’s subjectivity. The coexistence of high and low—upper class and lower class, skyscrapers and slums, fashion accessories and cheap clothing—visually reinforces the uneven financial distribution and material inequalities among groups of people within a single nation. Violently acquiring wealth becomes the main characters’ chosen mode for achieving power and reaching for the higher-up hegemony. *Moon Child* evokes the ways in which social and material conditions make it difficult for immigrants and/or lower class citizens to acquire well-paying jobs, thus revealing the ideology of “hard work pays off” to be illusory. It is not that the characters do not have jobs—Sho’s brother Shinji is a fish-seller while Toshi is a pizza delivery man—but that the existing hegemonic reality makes it extremely difficult for such marginal persons to climb in status. The represented interpersonal confrontations and friendships of *Moon Child* explicitly evoke and criticize such a context. In one scene, for example, two Chinese men come to collect money from Sho’s older brother Shinji, who has not made enough profit from selling fish to meet their demanded amount. Sho, thrusting some of his own money in their faces, says in Japanese, “Take it and go!” to which one of the men responds in Cantonese with, “Speak Cantonese to us!” Sho retorts, again in Japanese, yelling, “Take it and fuck off!” After grabbing
the money and shoving Sho, the other man remarks, “Hey, did he say what I think he said? He thinks he’s got balls.” Although Sho is depicted as the weaker side of the binary, he asserts his native language as a form of resistance: Japanese is something that the dominant power does not understand or have access to. Rather than submit to the men by traversing the language barrier, Sho appropriates this boundary by withholding a translated version of his words. Sho’s speech-act here is an example of how, as Michel de Certeau explains in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, daily actions are imbued with a political dimension: “Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many ‘ways of operating’: victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’ (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.)” (xix). So instead of conceiving of such filmic representations as removed from the political sphere and capable of doing little more than eliciting the viewer’s sympathy for a victimized individual, we can recognize how such scenes indicate the ability of individuals to contest hegemonies through everyday behaviors as well as larger concerted protests. Sho’s linguistic and physical act on the behalf of his brother in this scene is one of many moments throughout *Moon Child* that prompt the viewer to connect, through the process of what I am calling “reflexive cosmopolitanism,” his or her own socially determined position with the system of power relations impacting discourse.

Through characters’ interactions with friends and foes, *Moon Child* shows how language can be manipulated depending on the situation and how the speaker wants to benefit. This treatment of language draws the viewer’s attention to the power and intentionality of discourses, an important aspect of improving one’s reflexive cosmopolitanism. Language can enable communication, serve as a barrier to understanding, function as a means of bonding across cultural difference, help maintain or break off friendships, assert racial pride, establish one’s cultural identity, resist hegemonies, etc. Binding up language with identity, the film presents a retributive, back-and-forth cycle of violence within which camaraderie in the face of an enemy become the redeeming attributes of one’s character. Interpersonal friendship is situated as a means of surviving in this global city: a place that operates along Chinese hegemonic structures yet enables a loose, dynamic system of bonds among the individuals living there. The Japanese fraternity among immigrants Toshi, Sho, and Kei widens to include a Taiwanese man named Son, whom they encounter during one of their violent escapades in which they realize he is killing the same enemy. While they find out later that Son is there to avenge the rape of his sister Yi-Che,
Sho and Kei’s alliance with Son in this scene is practical and circumstantial: combined numbers makes the attempt to kill off the enemy easier. This spontaneous grouping, which provides the beginning for a strengthened friendship, suggests a discourse of critical multiculturalism in which a common goal can propel relationships across differences.

While liberal pluralist multiculturalism tends to pretend linguistic barriers are either negligible (the characters are, perhaps unrealistically, fluent in the other language) or easily traversed (instead of speaking, characters perform non-linguistic communication, which is thus depicted as a universally understood “solution”), critical multiculturalism explicitly portrays individuals using and negotiating language differences to engage with others. When in a relationship of cooperation, friendship, and fraternity, characters make attempts to traverse language barriers through translation, or at least draw humorous attention to the lack of understanding. Language differences may make it hard to fully understand one another, sometimes to comic effect, but are not seen as a major deterrent to the formation of a fraternal bond. This is evident in the following scene in which the group of friends is out cruising at night:

Son (Mandarin): You’re going too fast.
Sho (Mandarin): That’s what cars are for.
Toshi (Japanese): Sho, you have a license?
Sho (Japanese): Of course not, idiot.
Toshi (Japanese): Then let me drive.
Sho (Japanese): No way!
Toshi (Japanese): Then let me out. Let me out!
Son (Mandarin): What’s going on? Don’t speak Japanese!
Kei (Mandarin): Sho’s never driven before so Toshi wants to get out.
Son (Mandarin): We’ve entrusted our lives with an idiot! But we’re idiots for trusting him!

Sho and Toshi’s conversation positions Son as an outsider distanced from comprehension. Kei thus bridges this gap by serving as translator. Given that this dialogue gives way to playful struggle and cheering, the potential danger, seriousness, and antagonism is bypassed in favor of friendly humor and excitement. Viewers know they are not really fighting, and Son, while perhaps a little annoyed, is not truly angry. The divisive potential of language, then, partially dissolves as language becomes a means of actually taking pleasure in the relationship. Given that this friendship is possible because Son and Yi-Che are not members of the upper-class hegemony—they are not actively attempting to constrain the Japanese immigrants’ efforts to
survive and gain wealth—Sho’s speech-act here operates as acknowledgment rather than resistance.\footnote{Not all viewers, however, can catch on to the film’s consistent linguistic layering. Indeed, after watching 
Moon Child with a few of my cousins, one of them responded to my remark about how much I enjoyed the way language 
was used in critically engaging ways with, “I couldn’t tell when the language changed. It’s all foreign to me.” The 
inability to differentiate between the spoken languages, then, impacts how one conceives of the film’s critical 
multiculturalism by making it harder to recognize cultural “others” as themselves diverse and particular. Given that 
he tended to view the Asian characters as similarly unlike himself—non-American and non-English-speaking—his 
natural inclination to engage in a reflexive cosmopolitanism while watching the film is relatively much lower than 
someone, such as myself, who has experience with the Japanese and/or Mandarin language.}

The relationship with Son is depicted as ultimately untenable given that the power struggles force the fraternal bond to break. After Toshi is killed and Son discovers Kei is a vampire, Son joins the hegemonic power: the large Chinese gang led by Mr. Chan. Given the historical relations in which Taiwan was a colony of Japan before assuming self-government as the Republic of China, this shifting of alliances symbolically signals Japan’s “loss” of Taiwan. Faced with Sho’s accusation of having “walked out” on his friends, Son states, “Chan said we Taiwanese have to rely on ourselves. I joined him to protect my people.” This complicates the historical implications of the theme of cross-cultural friendship further by suggesting the Taiwanese alignment in a sort of nationalistic manner with one’s “own” people. As a way of negotiating Japan’s actively aggressive imperial history, then, the film represents the Japanese as a marginalized weaker power within the Chinese mainland hegemony. Indeed, as the opening news broadcast suggests, 
Moon Child reformulates the image of Japan as a modern, economic empire by representing a potential result of its fictional 
downfall: the influx of Japanese immigrants into China. Son’s friendship with the Japanese immigrants gestures towards more of an equal relationship between these former colonized and colonizer. Yet his final alignment with Chan’s gang ultimately maintains a China/Taiwan vs. Japan barrier.

This divide provides an entry point for other immigrants to enter into the conflict and align themselves with the Japanese. Through this new group of friends, which includes Japanese immigrants and a British and African American immigrant, the film redefines this supposedly Chinese city as a multicultural space where nationalistic identities can be redefined as transnational relationships. Although these characters are not developed much, it is significant that Sho, unlike Son, aligns himself with other immigrants. In a conversation between Sho and the Chinese gang leader, Mr. Chan remarks, “Your district has prospered beyond all dreams. But don’t forget, it’s not your town.” Sho responds with a smirk, “Then whose town is it?” Chan
retorts, “Ours! Foreigners cause nothing but harm. These mainlanders have been smart. They joined us.” Chan asserts the insider/outsider dichotomy to legitimate their hold over Mallepa. From his perspective, immigrants may enter the nation, but their threat must be eliminated to maintain the power hegemony despite the nation’s loss of racial purity. The film thus suggests that cross-cultural fraternal friendships still evoke an Us/Them binary, but the terms have shifted: it is not that each different racial group competes with one another—Japanese versus Chinese—but that the heterogeneous, multiracial group of diasporic immigrants contends with the generally homogenous group of mainlanders. This perspective resonates with the debate about immigration in the U.S. context: how discourses and laws attempt to rigidify a white hegemony that forces such “outsiders within” to remain marginal, disenfranchised, and unable to significantly alter their conditions.

In short, this new alliance emerges out of their similar positions as outsiders. The following scene, which occurs directly after the above meeting with Mr. Chan and his followers (including Son), condenses multiple complex ideas into one short exchange. Sho, his brother Shinji, and African American immigrant Rick return to their home-base: a bar-restaurant run by Shinji whose improvement in occupation signals the group’s accumulation of wealth. Viewers, for the first time, see the rest of the group’s members: one is serving as a waiter while the other two seem to be playing with sheathed kodachi (Japanese short-swords). The waiter apologizes to customers about the noise the two are making while Sho approaches them and asks, “What are you doing?” The Japanese man yanks the kodachi out of the hands of the British man, who rolls up his sleeve:

British Friend (English): Sho, look, cool tattoo, huh? [It is the kanji character for ‘kitchen.’] Jun just lifted it in love.
Sho (English): It’s a fucking famous ninja’s name in Japan.
British Friend (English): You see, it’s ‘ninja.’ Maybe one day I’ll go to Japan and be a ninja.
Rick (English): Things like ninjas no longer exist anymore in Japan.
British Friend (English): Rick, don’t lie to me. All Japanese spies are ninjas.
Jun (Japanese): There aren’t any, idiot.
British Friend (English): My ninja doesn’t exist anymore?
Sho (English): Okay, I’ll make you a ninja soon.
British Friend (Japanese): Really?
Sho (Japanese): Really.
The placement and movement of racially marked bodies in this scene (see fig. 1 and 2) visually depicts the larger multicultural context in which interpersonal interactions across race occur on a daily basis. Racialized bodies interacting on screen convey a more superficial aspect of critical multiculturalism: surface stylization. This coincides with Jane Chi Huan Park’s definition of “Oriental style” as “an aesthetic product that appeals to multiple audiences due precisely to its seeming lack of depth, subjectivity, and history (‘style’)” (ix). Yet it is precisely this combination of seemingly hollow style with meaty vocal commentary that prompts the viewer’s reflexive cosmopolitanism. Within each frame shot and within the words of the conversation, multiple races and two languages commingle and interact in ways that are not blind to history yet also not insistent upon aggravating historical memories. The tattooed Japanese kanji character marks the non-Japanese as detached from complete comprehension, yet all the men seem proficient enough in Japanese and English to maintain the exchange (and, one also notes, the friendship). In this scene, Sho again chooses to withhold a translation. But unlike the earlier confrontation with the two men collecting money from Shinji, this control over language does not mark resistance but friendship. Sho tells him the character is a ninja’s name because his British friend wants it to mean ‘ninja.’ Although the Japanese immigrants are positioned as insiders—they get the joke—they do not acknowledge the British man as an outsider. As other scenes throughout the film indicate, humiliating, attacking, and criticizing someone as an “outsider” is reserved for antagonistic relationships. In the cross-cultural fraternal friendship of this scene, however, the characters enable each other’s insider status by not insisting upon a language and cultural barrier as problematic or divisive. And yet, the significance of cultural difference and misunderstanding is not elided in this scene. The British character’s attachment to the idea of ninjas shows how stereotypical images are associated with a culture despite their disjunction with the modern reality. Numerous critics concerned with the relations between
nations of the “East” and “West” have delineated how imperialistic, colonial ideologies align Eastern Others with the past, as if they are a people frozen in time while the Western non-Other continues to make progress towards modernity: “locking them forever into their traditional and folkloric signs and symbols” (Siapera 141). Rick’s comment, that ninjas no longer exist in Japan, provides a moment to engender a self-reflexive reaction. We recognize that the stereotypical image of Japan as the land of samurai, ninja, and geisha is an inaccurate and misleading representation. Indeed, the British man (who is, notably, wearing a shirt with a samurai on it) seems to enjoy containing the Japanese within the past. The country of Japan becomes for him a fetishized, contained object; he maintains his own imaginary Japan the way he wants it thus maintaining his longing for this place to which he could “one day” go. By drawing attention to the man’s inability to fathom and unwillingness to accept that ninjas no longer exist in Japan—he accommodates Rick’s remark by insisting that modern-day Japanese spies are still ninjas—the film highlights how cultural stereotypes are transposed onto a fetishized object that is thus desired. At the same time, this scene suggests that persons can combat and correct such misconceptions without sacrificing the bonds between human beings. The atmosphere of friendship and humor allows the film to tackle the problematic issue of stereotyping in an extremely effective way: if the characters were to angrily insist that the British man is wrong, or were to completely bypass the issue by letting his comment remain unchallenged, the conception of cultural difference as divisive would be maintained. However, by having the characters both confront and accommodate his beliefs through playful conversation, difference is handled without dismantling the bond.

The presence of these non-Asian immigrants, although minor characters, is quite significant in Moon Child given that it implies a multiethnic environment in which mutual accommodations can be made by all members. Without these characters, the film’s depiction of the future would suggest the furtherance of racially-based groupings and stratifications of power. With them, the future is a multicultural space that, although still tending to reinforce unequal power relations, enables cross-cultural bonds based on common experience, such as feeling displaced or isolated due to one’s status as immigrant minority, rather than simply racial sameness. Although some American viewers may not be familiar with the complex

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relationships between different Asian nations, the critical multiculturalism of *Moon Child* underscores the heterogeneity of the “Asian” population. And given that a typical American viewer would not expect to see “white” characters in a Japanese film, the inclusion of the British immigrant and the African American immigrant provides a more variegated model that does not assume Western centrality. Furthermore, the fact that the U.S. is explicitly signified not through a “white” American but a racially marked “black” American undermines any potential essentialist assumption the viewer may have of America as a legitimately white majority nation. This act of acknowledging the West without assuming whiteness as central is crucial to the critical multiculturalism of the film *Brother*.

**Afro-Asian Alliance as Resistance to Majority Hegemony in *Brother***

Similarly to *Moon Child*, Takeshi Kitano’s *Brother* situates its characters in a global city in order to depict transnational minority-minority alliances as a means of resisting hegemonic powers. Kitano is one of the few contemporary Japanese filmmakers to achieve significant international acclaim and mass popularity. As Darrell William Davis states in “Reigniting Japanese Tradition with Hana-bi,” “For Western critics, Kitano ‘Beat’ Takeshi is the greatest filmmaker to come out of Japan since Akira Kurosawa—to ‘come out,’ that is, into the international Euro-American art-cinema market” (55). His oeuvre, consisting mainly of yakuza films and comedies, has marked him as an auteur to be appreciated largely in art film houses, although he has been gaining more mainstream appeal. With *Brother*, a 2001 British-Japanese co-production filmed in Tokyo and Los Angeles, Kitano widens his repertoire of yakuza films to target and appeal to an American audience besides those reveling in the Japanese-ness of his films set in Japan. Some critics thus suggest that Kitano partially sacrifices quality and artistic merit by achieving a wider audience: “Mode of production and genre both appear to be expanded and ‘contaminated’ by the globalization of entertainment marketing” (Davis 71). As Kitano’s first, and perhaps only, venture to set and produce a film outside Japan, *Brother* can be construed as what Mette Hjort calls “auteurist transnationalism” in which “an established auteur and icon of a particular national cinema … decides to embrace a particular kind of collaboration beyond national borders” (23). Although Kitano seems to be generally complimentary about his experience working with an American crew, he actually tends to underemphasize the cross-cultural aspect of the film’s production. In an interview with Tony Rayns, Kitano remarks that
“when I look back at Brother, I feel it’s neither Japanese nor American. I didn’t choose typical Los Angeles locations for it, and the story doesn’t need to be set in LA. The only thing that’s very LA about it is the ethnic mix. There’s no point in saying it now, but the fact is that I could have built studio sets in Tokyo, flown in the foreign actors and done the whole thing here” (Rayns 27). As Kitano’s comment reiterates, the actual place is less important than the film’s explicit depiction of a mixture of ethnicities interacting in both cooperative and antagonistic ways. By situating the significance of cross-cultural fraternity in an ethnically diverse “global city,” the film decenters the nation-state in favor of a multicultural framework in which the nation-state is one of many functioning factors amidst dynamic power relations.

Yamamoto, the film’s main character, is a Japanese yakuza who early on in the film is exiled and leaves Japan for L.A. to see his step-brother Ken, who is part of a small group of drug-pushing friends. Despite their criminal activities, they are depicted somewhat sympathetically given their struggle against the more powerful gangs that demand an unreasonably high share of the sale profits. Indeed, after Ken is punched for insisting to a Mexican American gangster, “We can’t make any money on that price!” Yamamoto punches out the aggressor. This act implicates him in their cause; it is a rupture that sparks the antagonistic tensions into war. Yamamoto is an outsider coming in and aligning with minority “outsiders within.” As if knowing that larger social structures will render minority resistance futile, Yamamoto does not empower them to make positive changes to their oppressive material conditions but rather advocates that they latch out violently, ultimately to their deaths. Given Yamamoto’s destructiveness and suicide impulse, it is hard to see him as truly helping them. At the same time, Yamamoto does not directly turn his aggression upon the central group of characters but instead upon those nearby who are oppressing them. In particular, overtly racist remarks are represented as being universally understood, and the speakers of such derogatory language as necessarily punished. For example, one scene features Yamamoto sitting next to African American gang member Denny when a newly-recruited member walks past muttering to himself, “Japs and niggers. Big fucking deal.” Overhearing him, Yamamoto gets up and punches the man. His response reveals his identification not only with his native Japanese but also with African Americans, such as the one next to whom he is sitting, against the explicitly prejudiced sentiments that insist on viewing racial categories as mutually exclusive and necessarily antagonistic.
Such a retaliatory act, however, does not condone a sentimentalized support for one’s friends. Given Yamamoto’s volatile manner, it is more like he is revealing the empty, even insipid, nature of racism. By violently defending the principle of respectful language, Yamamoto’s actions emasculate the assailant. Viewers are left with the message, then, that it is actually weak to be racist. The film’s critical multiculturalism does not lead the viewer to feel, idealistically and superficially, that “We should all be nice to each other” but that a realistic multicultural system of power will be better, stronger, if it abandons racist ideologies to empower all citizens fairly. This message is most evident in the scene in which Ken and Yamamoto, who has killed five members of “the cholos,” meet with top gang leaders to discuss the conflict:

Man 1 (English): Do you think you can get away with what you did?
Ken (Japanese): They’re asking if we think we can get away with it.
Yamamoto (Japanese): So, want a war?
Ken (English): What you gonna do, go to war with us?
Man 1 (English): We’d wipe you out!
Ken (Japanese): They say they’d kill us.
Yamamoto (Japanese): Tell them try it.
Ken (English): Bring it on. Come on.
Man 2 (English): Just relax, okay. Let’s discuss this like gentlemen. We’ll give you the territory. We didn’t like those guys anyway. From now on you’re gonna be in charge, just as it always was. You don’t have any objection to that, right?
Ken (Japanese): They say they’ll give us the turf.
Yamamoto (Japanese): Say we accept.
Ken (English): Okay, we accept.
Yamamoto (Japanese): Okay, go.
Man 2 (English): You told them you’d let them have the territory. Now why would you do that to these fucking Japs?
Man 1 (English): Why not? We’re gonna massacre them all later anyway.
Yamamoto (Japanese): [after shooting them all] I understand ‘fucking Jap’ asshole.

In this scene, Ken is the only one able to understand both languages being spoken during the conversation. His power as translator is manipulated by Yamamoto, who is dictating the conversation by telling Ken what to say. It is significant that both parties are putting up a front through spoken words: Yamamoto’s assertion of his group’s size and power and the gang-leader’s assertion of their civility and agreeableness. Despite the extreme underlying tension, the overt language maintains a space for an agreement until it becomes racist. The derogatory phrase “fucking Jap” keys Yamamoto into the fact that their English does not mean cooperation and
their smiles are not genuine, but the men’s presumptuousness: it is as if they become too confident in their position and overly assume the cultural Other’s ignorance. By asserting in Japanese that he understood this English phrase, Yamamoto achieves the upper hand in the power relation: he speaks a language that the men cannot understand and he comprehends enough English to reveal that they have not successfully denied him access to their true intentions. The deadpan yet volatile Yamamoto, a classic character type in Kitano’s films, serves as a magnetic centering around which the events seem to revolve. As a part of his suicide mission, which is a symptom of his displacement due to the dissolution of yakuza family ties, Yamamoto sparks war with the mafia from the already existing tensions bubbling just in check. As Kitano states, “it’s a film about going to America to die” (Rayns np). The gang fights a losing battle knowing they stand little chance of surviving: a character declares that “we’ll all die” if they go up against the mafia. This motif of the “last stand,” however, is not executed in overly broad strokes that sentimentalize the good trying to defeat the bad despite the odds. Like Moon Child, the tone of the relationships is a bit impromptu, based more on recent meetings than long-term allegiance. Both films present a multicultural grouping that provides a space for the more humanistic sides of such violent characters to show themselves in interpersonal interactions and quotidian moments of respite.

These formed alliances are less a matter of Japan allying with minority Americans than a fragmented landscape of multiple interpersonal relationships, the most significant being that between Yamamoto and an African American gangster named Denny. Brother’s attention to racial slurs as inappropriate and empty aggression (hence, the violent retribution) provides a starting point from which the film develops this central relationship. Their friendship emerges out of initial antagonism. Early in the film, Yamamoto bumps into Denny in the street and, after Denny gets upset about the broken wine bottle, thrusts it in his face. Again, Yamamoto silently punishes the vocally aggressive. When his friends inquire a bit later, Denny says some “chink,” some “Jap motherfucker,” cut his face. The derogatory racist language suggests an aggressive unwillingness to understand or respect those deemed culturally other as well as an elision of one’s own responsibility in the conflict. After these remarks, Denny glances up to see Yamamoto sitting at the table. Recognizing him, Denny asks Ken if he was the one who injured him. Although Denny responds “maybe so” when Ken tells him that he’s misrecognizing Yamamoto because all Japanese men look the same to him, the viewer can tell that Denny is not at all
convinced. Indeed, during their final parting, Yamamoto says, “Denny, your eye. I did it.” to which Denny responds, “Yeah, I know, my brother.” This explicit recognition of the truth—and the fact that he is not holding it against Yamamoto—signals a cross-cultural fraternal bond, which is further reinforced by Denny calling him “my brother.” What, then, are the circumstances that have enabled the relationship to escalate to such an intense friendship between this silent, violent Japanese yakuza and this talkative, aggressive yet vulnerable African American?

As Ong mentions, friendship between a stronger elder and weaker youngster is a common motif of the gangster film genre: “Gangsters are recruited through an apprenticeship system in which an older member (‘big brother’) trains and protects a newcomer (‘younger brother’) in the arts of fighting, survival, and most important, brotherly love and sacrifice” (163). The main characters in Brother develop a close big-brother/little-brother friendship rather spontaneously given the particular circumstances rather than through any extensive apprenticeship. Throughout the film, Denny and Yamamoto joke around and play various sorts of games together, usually involving a bet. In many ways, teaching the younger one the arts of fighting and survival is not even apparent given that Denny actually seems rather inept with a gun: in the only time we see him fire a gun he misses his target, accidentally shooting Yamamoto. Soon after this scene, a recovering Yamamoto sits in the car near a standing Denny and, for the first time in the film, speaks English:

Denny: Hey aniki, want me to buy you some cigarettes?
Yamamoto: No thanks.
Denny: Why?
Yamamoto: My stomach hurts.
Denny: I’m sorry, man.
Yamamoto: [chuckling] Just joking.
Denny: You’re messing with me, man.

While Yamamoto could use this as an opportunity to, say, harshly criticize Denny for his incompetency, he chooses to cast his words in a playful light thus himself neutralizing the potential antagonism that he could be forming but is not. Indeed, this carefree, friendly attitude seems jarring given his violent disposition, and it is somewhat surprising that Yamamoto handles Denny so gently. Viewers sense that Denny, technically, has not earned the right to survive in the traditional sense of long-term loyalty, fighting proficiency, etc. As an experienced Japanese yakuza, Yamamoto looks out for Denny’s safety because it seems appropriate given the
circumstances in which solidarity can be dissolved by everyday animosities. Despite the physical harm each has incurred upon the other, both intentional and accidental, they seem to acknowledge the situational circumstances rather than internalizing some sort of resentment. A major factor in their ability to connect with each other and maintain their friendship comes from their choices to not hold grudges against each other. The undertone suggests Yamamoto is being nice almost simply because he feels like it. While this lack of solid cause and effect may initially seem to widen the gap between personal feelings and public society, it actually serves to tighten the viewer’s sense of connection with the social, political realm. A reflexive cosmopolitan can pull away from the film the determination that if one person can be kind, generous, and respectful towards another in such a spontaneous way, she too is capable of engaging with disenfranchised citizens not because of some long-held tradition or racial identification but out of a personal recognition of contemporary calls for action.

This Afro-Asian fraternal friendship culminates in Yamamoto saving Denny by ultimately enabling him to escape the death that claims all other characters in the film. Every member of Yamamoto’s group is killed off until he and Denny are the last ones alive. Within hearing range of a captured mafia leader, Yamamoto fires his gun in the air, gives Denny a bag, and shows him a hidden car: he fulfills the big-brother role by enabling the younger member to escape. By forfeiting his life and saving another, Yamamoto gives Denny a final lesson in survival, fraternal love, and sacrifice. The literal last stand in which Yamamoto stands in front of a mafia firing squad creates a stark contrast between that which was destroyed and that which continues out of this ruin; Denny becomes the sole survivor and figurehead for an engaged, reflexive cosmopolitanism that desires to embody a multicultural fraternity. The final scene of the film features Denny driving in the car and discovering there is a huge amount of money in the bag with an accompanying note that reads, “Here’s the $60 I owe you for cheating plus interest for you. Your brother, Yamamoto.” In this final act of recompense and sacrifice, Yamamoto supersedes the reconciliation of the initial antagonism with Denny thus eliciting the first explicit proclamation of fraternal affection: “I love you aniki, wherever you at man!” This declaration of love maintains the centrality of Yamamoto and Denny’s friendship to the film. In this environment of gang warfare and shifting alliances, their interracial friendship remains as the sign of “correct” moral behavior, which gestures towards the potential alliances that can emerge from increasingly transnational conditions.
The film’s choice to highlight such a bond can be considered as part of the discourse of Afro-Orientalism, defined by Bill Mullen as a counterdiscourse grounded in “the experience of black Americans and Asian Americans as indentured servants and slaves in the United States; the parallel routes of Western imperialism through Asia and Africa; the struggles of black and Asian Americans to be understood as global citizens in a diasporic world; … the parallel byways that African Americans and Asian Americans, Africans and Asians, have traveled in the economic and political routes of modernity” (xvi). Afro-Orientalism “foregrounds the relationship between peoples of African and Asian descent as a dialectical synecdoche of Western capitalist modernity” (xvii). The Los Angeles drug trade represents the larger Western capitalistic world against which the characters, as racial minorities, struggle through violence, language, and the formation of cross-cultural fraternal bonds. Amidst such a volatile environment, the moments of joking and playing between Yamamoto and Denny represent a form of survival dependent on cross-cultural fellowship. In regards to the film’s depiction of fraternity among Japanese yakuza, and African American, Japanese American, and Mexican American gangsters within the context of the illegal drug-trade in Los Angeles, Kitano remarks in an interview, “This film is about minorities in the U.S. I hope, since it is about people of different ethnic backgrounds getting together and going to war against the big organization or the Establishment, that minorities in America—Asian-American, African-American, whatever—will appreciate and enjoy the film. I don’t expect much more than that” (Hamid 32). Kitano’s rather modest comment explicitly states how the film depicts a cross-cultural network among minorities; in an all-too-often oppressive transnational environment, interethnic bonds become a means by which to resist hegemonies that are based on the ideology of racial demarcation. His comment also suggests that white-majority America is not his target audience, and that Caucasian viewers would appreciate and enjoy the film less, or at least differently, from viewers (self)identified as minorities. From seeing not so much a representation of resistance to whiteness as a representation that fails to assume white hegemony, the white member of the “Establishment” cannot necessarily sit comfortably in a detached

position of power while watching this film. Even when seemingly relegating the non-white to ethnic sub-communities, Brother agitates the white American viewer’s assumption of, complicity in, and comfort with the conception of America as a (white)center-(colored)periphery by the very fact that there are only a handful of whites in the film. The chosen set locations—inside, outside, public, and private—result in the viewer seeing hardly any “white” persons; those who do appear are themselves positioned more as peripheral add-ons, such as one of the many eating at a sushi restaurant, or even as working in jobs stereotypically filled by minorities, such as a taxi-driver. In fact, while writing this paragraph I almost forgot that there is a white man among the gang itself. Entirely silent throughout the film, he functions mainly to guard the door and occasionally participate in the leisure games with other gang members. Kitano’s sprinkling in of “white” characters is so unobtrusive that it seems almost negligible. As the Italian mafia ambiguously fills in this void, Brother seems to envision the mafia as both white and racialized given that the stereotype of Italian Americans as mafia gangsters is appropriated as a signifier for an American hegemonic majority. In this way, white as a category is itself rendered unclear and unstable, revealing the ways in which it is called upon in different situations to identify particular groups for a given purpose.

In regards to the gangster film genre, Hillenbrand explains that a process of inversion and adherence—American audiences aligning themselves with the non-white protagonists—enables “a fuller, more intuitive” understanding of the U.S. as multicultural (64). Such is the case with Brother: a foreign film with non-Caucasian leading roles that takes place in the United States demands a re-definition of the U.S. as nation. In other words, the film decenters whiteness without ever depicting it as central. Kitano thus manages to effectively evade the bind all producers face in which “the battle against stereotyping will always be a self-defeating one, for the simple reason that to resist a stereotype is to acknowledge, at a basic epistemological level, its representational power” (Hillenbrand 60). It is not that whiteness has become a vacancy or absence that thus allows white privilege to remain unchallenged; rather, the view of the U.S. as a white nation consisting of ethnic minorities—or even as a diverse “melting pot”—is replaced by a conception of the U.S. as multiethnic. In short, the film naturally compels the viewer to reflect upon his or her own position as “white” within power relations to the extent that the insistence upon continually privileging whites over minorities given the apparent multiculturalism seems ludicrous: stubbornly defending white hegemony when the cultural makeup has already changed,
and continues to do so, seems inappropriate and wrong. The adherence, to use Hillenbrand’s term, that a viewer watching *Brother* feels is not a temporary identification with the “other” (“Since the white characters are the bad guys, I’ll root for the minorities.”) but a piece of the viewer’s ongoing, evolving reflexive cosmopolitanism that sees the “other” as an American non-other being continually disenfranchised (“It is not fair for these Americans to be forced to struggle.”) While this does not necessarily mean one will significantly impact the actual structural and political environment, it does suggest that numerous American viewers may be prompted to change their worldviews, which can potentially lead to a mass advocacy of extended opportunity and legal enfranchisement.

**Complicating Orientalism in *The Last Samurai***

In my discussion of *Moon Child* and *Brother* I hope to have addressed the varying degrees to which producers, directors, crew members, viewers, performers and the characters they enact are reflexive cosmopolitans. Adding in the “average” white American viewer, which is inevitably based largely upon my own viewing experience, has hopefully articulated an approximation of the ways in which discourses of critical multiculturalism can challenge one’s complacency with a model constructed along a white American center and colored minority periphery. But if these two films place whites in secondary positions, mixing them in without assuming their centrality, the Hollywood film *The Last Samurai* directed by Edward Zwick features a white male protagonist hero performed by an icon of white American celebrity. Adding this film to a discussion of minority-minority fraternity extends and complicates the interracial friendship analytic by examining representations of majority-minority alliances. In particular, *The Last Samurai* provides an entry point for reassessing and challenging approaches to texts that confine them to traditional Orientalist constructions of Japan-U.S. relations. Shot in Japan, New Zealand, and a studio-backlot in California, the film’s production involved collaboration between American and Japanese cast and crew members over matters of translation, creative suggestions, and thematic concerns. Footage from the Japanese premiere in Tokyo on November 1, 2003 highlights the performers’ praise for such collaboration as well as the film’s respectful treatment of Japanese culture. Indeed, some Japanese critics note that, while clearly romanticized and not entirely accurate, the film has made a vast improvement upon Hollywood’s traditional representation of Japan. Goo Online remarks, “Hollywood has always depicted Japan
as something strange and peculiar, the unknown aliens, and I, as Japanese, have always felt uncomfortable with this created image of Japan. … There, Nathan is the alien, and the samurai folk that he encounters are illustrated as the heroes unlike many other (Hollywood) movies” (Chi np). Similarly, Yoshinobu Takebe writes in Yomiuri Shinbun, “the film did an unexpectedly better job at comprehending the spirit from a foreign perspective and visualizing it in the film. … The crew must have researched Japan's historical details exceedingly well. Therefore, the film was not disappointing at all compared to others in the past” (Chi np). Critical reception is thus rather mixed, with many feeling that The Last Samurai is an exception to the complicated and nuanced transnational approaches taken by numerous other contemporary films. Some viewers harp on the numerous historical inaccuracies and bemoan the romanticized view of the samurai, while others justify the film’s choice to simplify and consolidate historical events and the samurai class for the sake of the storyline and character relations.

Although its subversive capabilities are limited by its appeal to a wider mainstream audience, the film’s transnational negotiation does decenter and complicate Orientalist ideologies. To more effectively recognize and delineate the complexities, multiplicities, and contradictions of the film, then, we must resist binary thinking even if that seems the most obvious way of interpreting such a text. A nuanced reading of The Last Samurai indicates the ways in which texts such as this one actually do extend beyond the simplistic Orientalist binary through a critical multiculturalism that reconfigures cross-cultural dichotomies into transnational multiplicities (and, furthermore, how reflexive cosmopolitanism enables one to recognize this). My intentions are not to vindicate the film from its criticism but to extend and complicate discussions of Orientalist ideologies. I align myself with Lisa Lowe, who explains that Orientalism is heterogeneous since “the Orient” and “the Occident” are not homogenous entities. Edward Said’s explanation that “Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient … addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf” (20) does not adequately account for the fact that people are usually writing about a whole lot more than just the Orient, and that each of these things is itself not homogenous. Said’s tendency to posit the Orient as an “it”—“dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (3)—draws critical attention away from the ways in which Orientalist writers do not maintain a consistent image of the East, and in fact may actually contradict their own statements. Lowe thus
effectively argues that “orientalism is not a single developmental tradition but is profoundly heterogeneous … although orientalism may represent its objects as fixed or stable, contradiction and noncorrespondences in the discursive situation ultimately divulge the multivalence and indeterminability of those fictions” (ix-x). Within this framework, *The Last Samurai* can be viewed as a film about a plethora of different ideas. So while there are certain stereotypical claims being made in the film about Japan, there are many other claims being made, some of which directly contradict the film’s own Orientalist claims. *The Last Samurai* thus reinforces, dismantles, resists, reflects, and criticizes Orientalism *all at once*; it does not simply do what Orientalism does, period. Seeing the film as “within the [Orientalist] tradition yet critical of it” (Lowe 51) enables one to complicate traditional criticism that sees Hollywood’s treatment of culture as pure appropriation.

Films, directors, producers, performers, viewers, and fans participate in multiple relations of power; the director is one of many subjects, himself operating with an ongoing reflexive cosmopolitanism. Zwick’s self-consciousness throughout the DVD’s audio commentary is very significant given that he reiterates his desire to be respectful and tactful rather than exploitive and Orientalist. Right from the beginning, he acknowledges the risk of appropriation and admits—rather than elides or hides—the fact that some appropriation had to occur: “it’s a story of someone not of a culture journeying into that culture and trying to learn as much as I can, as he can, and to respect it as much as I can and yet also appropriate it to a certain degree for the sake of a Hollywood film. And, to that end, I’ll try to talk about those places in which that succeeded and those places in which I think we fell short.” Here, his Freudian slip and then accidental or intentional (it is hard to tell which) switch from “he” to “I” conflates the main character with the director. Zwick knows that he is conveying his own ideology through the protagonist and thus wants Algren’s behavior to reflect the genuine respect he feels for Japanese culture. At the same time, his admission of the fact that the film “falls short” in many places despite, and perhaps due to, his intentions suggests that such a desire is not always adequately shown in the film. Having been notified of the film’s acts of appropriation *early on*, one can view the commentary-accompanied film better equipped to recognize the ways in which its representations are inaccurate, problematic, or Orientalist but also critical, reflective, and respectful.
Interpreting *The Last Samurai* with Zwick’s sentiments expressed in the audio commentary in mind enables one to conceive of the film as an appropriation that does still successfully achieve critical effects. Of particular significance is the film’s ability to prompt further interest in Japanese culture and history. Orientalism may serve as an entry point through which to begin an ongoing, sophisticated engagement with the cultural and historical complexities of a particular (desired, fetishized) country. Indeed, my earlier attraction to *The Last Samurai*—it came out when I was a senior in high school—was preoccupied with such “sweet” samurai culture and my own Orientalist fascination with Japan as being “cooler” than the U.S. Although the film’s celebratory gesture entails incomplete simplifications, it does (hope to) attract some viewers to Japan in such a way that propels them to learn more by looking more deeply and closely:

I have a 17 year old son; he was 15 when the movie began. I think in some sense I imagined that he might look at this movie, or others like him, and consider a different culture; look outside of his own; imagine that there is beauty and richness to be found elsewhere than just at home. And that he might be moved to study more, to look at this oversimplification of something that’s philosophical and profound and be compelled to look deeper.

Zwick here both admits that the film is an oversimplification and hopes that it prompts viewers to look into the situation further to learn its details and historical circumstances. While there are perhaps many viewers who will take the oversimplification at face value, there are indeed some, such as myself, who are aware enough to recognize the film’s degree of appropriation rather than accept its representations as ultimate Truths. In other words, as I have continued to assess my own position in transnational power relations through extended scholarship—moving dynamically along a spectrum of reflexive cosmopolitanism—my more mature self now can more easily recognize Orientalism as not only a constructed fantasy but texts themselves as always grappling with this fantasy in some way. Through listening to the audio commentary while watching the film, one comes to see that the director exhibits an awareness of Orientalist ideology. Given such evidence of Zwick’s acknowledgment of the types of criticisms that could be made against *The Last Samurai*, the film exhibits an informed intention of combatting the historical trend of Hollywood’s filmic treatment of racialized Others. This does not mean that Orientalism is always dismantled but rather that the film presents a complicated negotiation of racial identity and unequal power relations.
Given that much of the motivation for someone who has tended to see whiteness as invisible and a-racial to “look deeper” into the position of race and culture in social, historical, and political realities is generated from particular exchanges with individuals (at school, in public, at home) or from particular encounters with texts (such as *The Last Samurai*), interpersonal relationships, both actual and represented, serve to help connect one’s understanding of her position with the circumstances inhibiting or empowering those around herself. The romantic relationship between Algren and Taka is an aspect of the film quite susceptible to exploitive appropriation yet also particularly capable of causing a viewer to reassess the ways in which he or she interacts with others. Hoping that the scene confirming their love would be one moment in which the film does not regurgitate Hollywood stereotype, Zwick explains that he strived to represent their love in such a way that would not reinforce the white-man-dominates-saves-and-seduces-colored-woman trope:

Rather than some kind of expression or something that wouldn’t be true that would be inappropriate and even exploitive, that instead we would do something so true to the culture: the idea of one person dressing someone else in a kimono that would have in it all of the feeling, all of the sadness, and all of the connection between them and would be an opportunity to do a very different kind of a love scene that was respectful of the period, of the culture, and of the obstacles between these two people. [sic]

Zwick here implies that any sort of love scene even only slightly reeking of the typical “make-out” or “sex” scene would be an extremely disrespectful exploitation of the situation in order to cater to a popular audience. His attitude towards this scene, and the characters’ relationship, is one of delicacy and tastefulness. He indicates how he wants the emotional complexity to resonate with viewers, and this scene of the film does indeed effectively carry out this goal. Its lack of dialogue enables the slow, subtle movements of the characters to resonate strongly with viewers’ emotions while still maintaining the complexities of the characters’ circumstances and feelings. The acting is restrained and delicate in such a way that explicitly conveys desire, tension, and fragility rather than a broad-stroked redemptive love that covers over the historical and cultural circumstances. Much of the criticism against Orientalism felt by viewers throughout the film comes not from wider social commentary evident in larger events but in interpersonal moments, such as this dressing scene with Algren and Taka. As I show below, this attention to relatively subtle behaviors is what most effectively transfigures the film’s apparent binary
encounters between U.S. and Japan into a critical multiculturalism that engages the viewer in the processes of reflexive cosmopolitanism.

And yet one must ask to what extent this is truly possible for such a film, one that seems doomed from the beginning to fail to challenge white-centered Orientalist models given the centrality of the white American hero played by Tom Cruise to its plot and appeal to the masses. The core of whiteness embodied by the character of Nathan Algren becomes a fixation for Sean Tierney’s argument in “Themes of Whiteness in Bulletproof Monk, Kill Bill, and The Last Samurai” that the film is “beneficially understood through a theoretical framework of strategic rhetoric of whiteness expressed in four common themes: The supraethnic viability of whiteness, the necessary defeat of Asians, the disallowance of anti-White sentiment, and the presence of at least one helpful and/or generous Asian cohort” (607). In order to explore the film’s nuances and heterogeneous representations, I choose to complicate interpretations such as this one by citing examples from The Last Samurai that condemn white attitudes, praise the Japanese, make viewers feel complicit, and generally counter stereotypical constructions of Japan. To support his argument of the invisible whiteness that permeates the film, Tierney draws attention to how it depicts Algren as an American having a superhuman-like capability to quickly master swordsmanship. He criticizes the extremely unrealistic speed and facility by which the white protagonist ascends in martial arts:

In 6 months, he masters the art of the samurai sword such that bystanders acknowledge him as equal to his instructor Ujio, a man who has studied the skill his entire life. Later in the film, Algren uses his newfound swordsmanship to single-handedly defeat six Japanese men who try to kill him. Not only has he mastered a skill he literally just began to learn but he has become so adept as to dispatch with ease six people who have likely spent a lifetime studying the same art. (Tierney 611)

He is therefore “good enough” to “be” a samurai. Because Algren’s skill with the katana is learned from a Japanese man, his rapid ascension to being able to fight his former antagonist to a draw is seen as that much more valuable. He is just as capable in the Japanese skill as the Japanese man. (Tierney 614)

Tierney’s concerns effectively draw attention to the ways in which the film situates power and ability in the White Man’s body. Indeed, the film does seem to suggest that while the samurai have trained their entire lives to master their skills, Algren has a natural predisposition to such mastery. For example, in the two scenes Tierney mentions here, Algren visualizes the fight in a sort of superhuman, out-of-body vision. Furthermore, this unique proclivity is also attributed to
Tom Cruise himself. In a DVD special feature titled “Tom Cruise: A Warrior’s Journey” Hiroyuki Sanada, who played the role of Ujio and was the martial arts choreographer who trained Tom Cruise, remarks that “After shooting everyday, we had rehearsal one hour or two hours. [sic] But he never gave up. When I told him some pointers, how to grip, how to use the body, he could do that first time. [sic] He’s a quick learner. It was very wonderful collaboration. And, finally, he became great samurai.” This comment attempts to reassure viewers that this rapid ascension to mastery is more or less genuine: it is really happening in the actual human body of the actor. Such discourse to a significant extent reinforces white male virility; Japanese instruction becomes the means through which the American hero can surpass his own strength. Given this Orientalist premise—the already superior white man uses the inferior Japanese man’s expertise to improve his already stronger position—the film actually expends a lot of energy persuading viewers of Algren’s inferiority and conceptualizing whiteness as weak, even cowardly.

It does this mainly through its mapping of Colonel Bagley, Algren, Katsumoto, and Omura. Broadly speaking, Bagley and Katsumoto become the two poles representing whiteness and Japaneseness, respectively, while Algren becomes more Japanese through his alignment with the samurai and Omura becomes more white through his alignment with American imperialism. And yet it is important to keep in mind that each of these four characters move among the power relations in dynamic ways, meaning that their identities are malleable rather than pure and solid. All the characters, or least every major character, act: they exert power over others and have power exerted over them. So although the historical context determines the characters’ possible field of actions (and, for that matter, the contemporary context determines the director’s options in creating the film), they do to a certain extent act as free subjects. By consistently questioning whiteness, rather than rendering it invisible or assumed, the film propels the viewer to be constantly aware of how Americans, including Algren, behave towards the Japanese. The complexity of the film shows that the Japanese and Americans are not always in a relationship in which whites are superior to the Japanese. By directly tackling whiteness, and even explicitly associating it with negative attributes, the film rejects the assumption of white superiority as an invisible, uncontested thing. So instead of “flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (Said 7), the power relations among characters and cultures can be viewed
productively as much more loose than this. Much of the white complicity felt by viewers comes not from the wider social commentary made by characters about the Meiji Era, but in particular interpersonal behaviors: remarks at a small dinner party, daily conversations, a simple affectionate embrace, a subtle nod of acknowledgment, etc. So it is in particular interpersonal moments involving these four main characters, such as the selected scenes below, that the viewer sees the most effective condemnation of Orientalism and evocation of the multicultural contexts in which transnational encounters occur.

Early on in the film, Captain Algren, Colonel Bagley, and Sergeant Zebulon Gant meet with Japanese government official Omura and his associate to discuss Japan’s proposition to have them train the Imperial Army. This conversation depicts the Japanese players in the deal as actually in the superior position within the power relation. While watching this scene, a culturally informed audience actually feels somewhat embarrassed by white attitudes. Bagley’s remarks seem purely presumptuous: “I’d like you to meet Mr. Omura from Japan and his associate whose name I’ve given up trying to pronounce. … Now, Japan’s got it in mind to become a civilized country, and Mr. Omura here is willing to spend what it takes to hire white experts to train their army.” There are multiple notable signs here indicating Bagley’s disreputable, racist character traits: he is unwilling to learn the language; he aligns the West with civilization and thus the Japanese with a lack of sophistication, development, and modernity; he believes that White outsiders are needed to save the Japanese since they are not capable of helping themselves; and he assumes the military efficiency of Imperialist strategies. Not long after Bagley’s Orientalist remarks, Algren responds to Omura’s offer to pay him $400 a month by insisting on $500, and then another $50 when their work is completed. He concludes sarcastically, “How many gen-u-ine heroes you’ve got lined up?” The Japanese associate then says in Japanese to Omura, “He’s rude,” to which Omura responds, “That’s how it is here. A land of cheap traders.” This scene guides the viewer through a progression of various feelings, all of which reject the Western characters’ attitudes: we are repulsed by Bagley’s assumptions of supremacy, critical of Algren’s selfish demands and immature form of communication, then in agreement with the Japanese men’s assessment of Western attitudes, which Bagley and Algren have essentially proven to be true. Referring to this side exchange between the two Japanese men during this scene, Zwick comments, “This moment here when we actually hear the Japanese is very important because it suggests that their intelligence and their understanding is actually in
some ways more sophisticated than those who they’re dealing with and that sort of starts a, strikes a note in the piece that is very important.” Zwick’s suggestion that from this exchange viewers get the sense that the Japanese are actually more sophisticated than the Americans reverses the White/superior-Japanese/inferior relationship. What makes this Japanese superiority even more important here is that it does not fall into the tendency to confine the cultural Other to the past. These Japanese men are not members of the samurai, and they exhibit an awareness of imperialistic tactics. Although the film does to a significant degree align itself with the Orientalist construction of the Orient as static tradition and the Occident as progressive modernity, it also disallows viewers from remaining comfortable with this dichotomous ideology. This scene thus complicates the film’s own placement of samurai tradition as superior to Western modernity by representing the superior/inferior binary as dynamic.

The first major conversation with Katsumoto also compels the viewer to criticize Algren’s attitude and recognize the power relation as complex. Similarly to Moon Child and Brother, language functions as a way to maintain power and cultural identity. Katsumoto, unlike Algren, can speak the other’s language and is able to undermine Algren’s Western assumption of superiority:

Katsumoto: My name is Katsumoto. What is your name? [no response] Are my words not correct? I will practice my English with you, if you would honor me.
Algren: [sarcastically] You kept me alive just to speak English? Then what do you want?
Katsumoto: To know my enemy.
Algren: I’ve seen what you do to your enemies.
Katsumoto: The warriors in your country do not kill?
Algren: They don’t cut the heads off of defeated, kneeling men.
Katsumoto: General Hasegawa asked me to help him end his life; a samurai cannot stand the shame of a defeat. I was honored to “cut off” his head. Many of our customs seem strange to you, and the same is true of yours. For example, not to introduce yourself is considered extremely rude even among enemies.
Algren: [giving in] Nathan Algren.
Katsumoto: [bowing] I’m honored to meet you. I have enjoyed this conversation in English.

In this conversation Katsumoto establishes a desire to know the Other, which Algren stubbornly refuses initially, and a graciousness to allow this arrogant white man to live and witness their lives. The perfectly layered acting of Ken Watanabe disrupts an American mainstream audience’s sense that American attitudes are correct or superior. Katsumoto’s witty responses
and justifiably defensive tone of voice depict Algren’s resistant attitude as unnecessary, disrespectful, overly aggressive, and ultimately weak. The characteristic of strength clearly remains attached to Katsumoto while Algren seems more emblematic of the stubborn, whiny American. Entirely in control of the conversation, Katsumoto rationalizes away Algren’s resistance, forcing him to submit by stating his name, and then, by immediately ending the conversation, denies Algren access to further comprehension. And, as his parting remark indicates, he has done all of this through the language of the Other. Up to this point in the film, viewers have yet to see any behavior by Algren that would merit praise or admiration. Any praise of his character is thus bound up with his transformation.

The reinforcement of Algren’s white supremacy is thus complicated by the film’s emphasis that the training itself, in which Algren inhabits the role of humbled student following his teachers, is the only reason for his achievement. In the audio commentary, Zwick states that the film actually runs the risk of failing if it does not effectively resist the white supremacist attitude: “I think the only reason this movie works, if it works at all, is his willingness to not be the brilliant, white leader showing something but rather more of the humiliated pupil.” Zwick here anticipates the criticism that may arise. The success of the film, not as a money-maker but as a creative representation conveying ideological messages, seems to hinge on viewers seeing Algren not as the awesome white superior teaching, helping, and using the inferior Japanese. There is a sense, then, that no matter how adept, emotionally mature, or strong Algren may become, he owes it all to his training with the samurai. Algren’s unrealistic ascension does not necessarily override the fact that viewers align themselves with the greatness of the Japanese masters. In other words, the power and ability that Algren displays is found in the Japanese body as well. While he is the hero of the film, Algren does not adequately fulfill the position of white supremacist dominating the inferior Japanese. Indeed, the film draws attention to the various ways in which Algren is lacking in order to indicate how becoming strong means being respectful, nurturing one’s interpersonal relationships, and becoming an advocate for victimized groups to become enfranchised. The Last Samurai’s use of violence as a signifier for strength is similar to that in Brother: the main protagonist is indeed violent, but his efficiency is due to his alignment with the minority cause against the hegemonic, oftentimes racist, majority. In a moment of conversation with the Japanese boy Higen, the film thus makes it clear that Algren’s strength is used for Japanese interests and against Western interests. After Higen asks Algren,
“Will you fight the white men, too?” Algren responds, “If they come here, yes.” When Higen asks why, Algren replies, “Because they come to destroy what I have come to love.” This reference by a Japanese boy to the white men underscores the relativities of racial labels and cultural othering. Rather than assume whiteness as central—rather than taking it for granted—viewers see how from the perspective of these samurai, Westerners are invading and destroying what they have been upholding. This scene provides a moment of transnational rupture by envisioning identity as not based on static, preconceived categories of nationality but rather on cultural and political affiliation. Labeling an army consisting mostly of Japanese soldiers as “white men” thus reflects the ways in which those involved in these dynamic power relations have aligned themselves with particular subject positions. Algren, then, is an American man who has aligned himself with the samurai to the extent that the boy dissociates Algren from his white identity. By having a white “samurai” fight against Japanese “white men,” the film complicates and resists racial essentialisms. In the beginning of the film, then, Algren’s aggression is empty, weak, and aimless due to his assumptions of white dominance while later in the film it is calculated, strong, and effective due to his rejection of racism and Orientalism. This change in his fighting ability coincides with his emotional maturation in which he comes to fulfill a role as loving father/husband figure able to recognize the legitimacy of cultures other than that which he was born into. Algren’s transformation becomes a fictional example of a phenomenon potentially occurring in the viewer’s daily life: larger political circumstances and one’s feelings and worldview are intimately linked, mutually enforcing one another to the extent that the interpersonal is particularly relevant to one’s ability to advocate for social change.

It is quite significant that The Last Samurai sets up Algren’s change in contrast to Colonel Bagley’s relative stasis because it explicitly creates a space within the film for the criticism of Western Imperialism and Orientalism. To some extent, these men are two sides of the same coin—Bagley as the racist and Algren as the domesticator. So if Bagley seeks to dominate through aggression and force, Algren seeks to dominate through claiming to understand and know the Other. For example, contrary to Algren’s opinion, Bagley says that since the newly formed Japanese army has “superior firepower and a larger force” than the samurai “savages with bows and arrows,” it is ready to fight its first battle. So while Bagley is overtly racist since he considers them inept savages, Algren can be considered an Orientalist praising the samurai via the trope of the “noble savage.” Constructing Bagley as a foil character,
however, highlights certain aspects of Algren’s changed attitude as worthy of emulation. Bagley is represented as unchanging: he maintains his Orientalist beliefs that his nation and race are rightfully superior over other cultures throughout the entire movie. Referring to Tony Goldwyn’s enactment of the character, Zwick comments that “I think what he chooses to do is to make him a man of his time, a man who genuinely believes in the superiority of his race, of his obligations, and of the guarantee of his future.” Bagley is a condemnatory antagonist who literally represents that which is so problematic about imperialistic ideologies. Since this flat character clearly signifies white supremacy and racism, Algren’s behavior, while not necessarily completely positive, is depicted as more praiseworthy due to his willingness to let go of his ideological assumptions.

To bring my discussion full circle, then, Algren’s sword-fighting mastery is bound up with his own critical awareness of Western ideologies. Colonel Bagley and Japanese political advisor Omura, then, are the clear “bad guys” in the film due to being too white. By complicating Omura’s racial identity in this way, the scene in which Algren kills four Japanese assailants ordered by Omura to kill Algren takes on new meaning. While, as Tierney points out, this scene can be read as a white man unrealistically overpowering the Japanese, it also suggests that their relative weakness is due to the fact that they are Omura’s henchmen. They are weakened, even tainted, for giving into Westernization and following the selfish, profit-seeking ways of Omura. The clothes they are wearing—jackets rather than traditional samurai garb—serve as a signifier for their loss of power and cultural identification. There is a sense, then, that Algren would actually have had much more difficulty in killing them if they had not aligned themselves with Imperialism. Just before Algren kills the last Japanese assailant, the man says, “The samurai are finished.” While this statement seems a ridiculous proclamation that this white man somehow is a samurai, it is enabled by this Japanese swordsman dissociating himself from and aligning Algren with the samurai. In other words, this scene marks Algren as semi-Japanese and those whom he kills as semi-White. The complicated character dynamics evoked throughout The Last Samurai disable a view of people as “pure” racialized subjects. Through having been utterly humbled and revealed as weak to then be taught and strengthened, Algren becomes more respectful and willing to acknowledge the complexities of a person or culture.

This praiseworthy behavior, discursively constructed as “true” strength and something to be emulated, is most apparent in a relatively short scene just after Algren has returned to Tokyo.
As Algren, and viewers, see the Imperial Army, the camera angle from above and crescendo in the music carry with them the intensity and weight of this image of power, vast numbers, order, and efficiency. Surveying the transformation of the once disorganized peasants mishandling their weapons into a militarized group, Algren is interrupted by an approaching Bagley who vocalizes his disbelief that Algren is indeed still alive. Algren then turns past Bagley to nod at the Japanese N.C.O. trailing close behind who reciprocates with a small bow. Returning his eyesight to the training ground, Algren begins conversation with Bagley about the new Howitzer guns. This nod particularly stands out to me every time I watch *The Last Samurai*, and it is one of my favorite parts of the entire film. In terms of characters’ actions that directly impact the historical and political situation of the film, this nod obviously ranks low on the list, if it makes it at all. However, this greeting nod of acknowledgment makes a powerful statement. Given that Bagley is the vocal one approaching Algren while the Japanese man silently accompanies him in a subordinate position, Algren is actively reaching beyond the primary to acknowledge the secondary. Furthermore, this moment of corporeal recognition is quite significant given that Algren here interacts with Bagley without making any eye contact. The officer is also a member of the group opposing the samurai, yet he is acknowledged simply for being Japanese. This wordless gesture signifies the core of Algren’s transformation more than any other act in the film, even the more overt acts of alignment and identification with the samurai. It is a subtle action that reflects the more complicated power relations in which persons, such as Omura and Bagley, have been trying to take advantage of others rather than acknowledge them as equals. The interpersonal is political here, which reminds viewers that their own mode of carrying themselves in public and private relationships makes some sort of statement regarding their worldview and prejudices. The dynamic positioning of characters, some of which are depicted as overly “white,” within complex power relations propels a reflexive cosmopolitanism in American viewers that may lead to feeling complicit in the arrogant, imperialist, Orientalist, ethnocentric worldview of White Supremacy. Although unable to extricate itself entirely from Orientalism, *The Last Samurai* complicates such a paradigm, thus revealing it to be heterogeneous, problematic, and condemnatory. The traditional Hollywood treatment of the Japanese-mentor-American-pupil in which “the protagonists’ desperate need to imitate and absorb what passes for Japanese culture—especially those traits associated with honor, integrity, and productivity—is crucial to the films’ resuscitation of what might be called the (Anglo-
American spirit” (Park 86) is effectively dismantled given that the viewer comes to recognize that the resuscitation of an American spirit hinges on being un-American. In other words, the Americanness of imperialism, racism, stubbornness, arrogance, etc. is recognized and criticized to the extent that becoming a “stronger” individual, citizen, nation, and world means detaching oneself from a historically entrenched whiteness.

Conclusion

Given the general time period from the early nineties to early twenty-first century in which Americans associated Japan largely with hip, modern technology, *The Last Samurai* emerged at a kairotic moment that could appeal to this ideology of cool Japan while drawing Americans’ attentions to the historical, philosophical aspects of Japanese culture. Essentially, the film attempts to convey that honor, loyalty, discipline, pride, and respect are “cool” too. Considering the ways in which globalization and transnational capitalism make it harder for the U.S. to maintain an edge, the film’s emphasis on the bushido code indirectly conveys that it is necessary to adapt other models if the U.S. is to persevere in a hegemonic, leadership role. Released in the same year, *Moon Child* participates in Japan’s impetus to address its interrelatedness to other parts of Asia. While the narrative keeps the regional tensions intact, it also asserts the potential for friendly relations, which is fulfilled by the performers’ attitudes and behaviors during production. *Brother*, which precedes both films by a couple years, addresses contemporary U.S.-Japan exchange by transforming historical animosity into a reconceptualization of the nation. These films suggest how the interaction of racialized bodies in Japan and the U.S. is becoming more mundane, assumed, and expected yet potentially violent. The friendships formed, then, suggest that while our contemporary transnational context risks regressing back into antagonisms based on race, it also provides opportunities to forge meaningful bonds across culture. Interpersonal bonds entailing emotional investment and active effort at maintenance emerge as necessary attributes of one’s critical engagement with multicultural contexts and reflexive response to unequal power relations. Even though *Moon Child* and *Brother* feature cooperation between peripheral groups in opposition to the center, it actually complicates and disrupts center-periphery models. *The Last Samurai* also works at dismantling core-based dichotomies by depicting how individual subjects move within, across, and in-between the supposed center and its margins. Everyday interpersonal moments emerge as
able to reformulate the binary logic the inter-prefix suggests into a critical multiculturalism that insists upon the transnationalism inherent in contemporary cross-cultural encounters.
Chapter Two

Empowering the Mundane: Romantic Desire in Audrey Hepburn’s Neck, My Darling is a Foreigner, and About Love

Introduction

This chapter explores the intersections of race, language, gender, culture, education, travel, history, and fetishes within the field of interracial and/or cross-cultural romance. Of particular significance is how representations of culture in the media—particularly movies, photos, and television—draw one towards fetishization. Given a context in which, as Arjun Appadurai aptly states, “[m]ore persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms” (53-4), viewers can envision how their lives could be if they were of that cultural group represented in a particular media-object. By fetishizing such depictions, persons idealize the Other as preferable and desirable. Those struggling to accept their own circumstances, then, “see their lives [not] as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit” (Appadurai 54). Life in Japan for the Western characters, such as the protagonist in My Darling is a Foreigner, is one such possibility witnessed through media representations, while the compromise that must be made emerges from an inability to truly become Japanese and even to fully identify with its historical identity and cultural imagination. In other words, there is always a gap, which may be filled by fetish-objects that try to make up for a sense of disenchantment that comes from the limits set by material and social conditions. From the perspectives of Asian characters, however, the historical conditions bind them up to a significant degree with Japanese persons. In About Love, for example, we see young adults from Japan, Taiwan, and China seek opportunities for their possible futures in the East Asian diaspora, yet the weight of the historical past of violence and colonization is too intense of an implication for the producers to depict these characters as being attracted to fetish-objects. Significantly so, About Love does not make any direct reference to history because the producers hope to simply move beyond such historical animosities, and yet they are obviously fully aware of the serious, tension-filled past that resonates with Asian audiences. So, while none of these texts are entirely and explicitly focused on historical relations—indeed there is an intentional elision to some degree—we can see how, generally speaking, there is more fetishization when less historical intimacy and vice versa. What I mean by this is not that the historical or social context is less
significant but that the Orientalist exotic fetish weakens history’s resonance with producers, characters, and viewers. From the discussion that follows, then, we can see a spectrum of fetishizing and of identification with history: fetishes significantly motivate some characters while being negligible in others; some characters feel a sort of blasé detachment from their historical relation to Japan while others’ are more inextricably bound to history.

In order to fully comprehend the complex ways in which persons fetishize cultural “others” as well as the varying extents to which individuals feel linked with a historical past, it is important to see how current modes of critical multiculturalism have emerged out of a trajectory of anti-miscegenation and anti-immigration sentiment prevalent from approximately the 1850s to 1960s. Scholars have delineated how American feelings revolved around a fear of the Other combined with a desire to protect a national sense of self free from contamination and ambiguities. The political, legal, and social context purported the importance of the surveillance of borders between races in order to contain the potential threat inherent in increasingly multicultural spaces and to maintain some sort of racial purity (i.e. a stable identity). Anti-miscegenation laws thus defined interracial sex as deviant, abnormal, and dangerous (Koshy 1). In the United States, legal discourse labeled those choosing to deviate from normative white-white sexuality as unpatriotic transgressors. The Cable Act of 1907, for example, stripped any American woman of her citizenship if she married an Asian male alien. Asians in the American imagination were conceived of as sexual, lazy criminals in order to justify aggressive legal measures taken to impede the male Asian immigrant labor force’s incorporation into the nation. Such representations fueled the fear of urban vice in clustered Asian immigrant communities as well as the stigmatization of white-Asian relationships. In other words, “from the late 1800s to the mid-twentieth century, miscegenation laws worked in conjunction with immigration and naturalization laws to impede the reproduction of Asian immigrant communities, position Asians as racial aliens and sexual deviants, and secure the future of the United States as a white nation” (Koshy 2). The significant increase in immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century compelled a panicked reaction and effort to protect the supposedly endangered racial core of the U.S. nation-state.

But as the movement of racialized bodies to and from nation-states became less of a “new” phenomenon, and thus the complete segregation of white and non-white groups impossible and, as more and more Americans began to protest, blatantly racist, the ideology of cultural pluralism and liberal multiculturalism emerged and was popularized. Christina Klein effectively demonstrates how the post-World War II cold war context in which the United States desired to reap profits from an international free market system contributed to the rise of middlebrow sentimentalism that encouraged American citizens to feel emotional and sympathetic towards Asians (but, as Caroline Chung Simpson aptly observes, not Asian Americans). Such discourses helped to warm up Americans’ minds to the huge flux of Japanese women that came to the United States as the wives of American servicemen, whom they had met during the post-World War II occupation of Japan, under the War Brides Act of 1945. Koshy states that, in fact, “Approximately 80 percent of the forty-five thousand Japanese immigrants who entered in the 1950s did so as wives of U.S. servicemen” (11). She goes on to explain how this phenomenon added to the hypersexualized image of the exotic, even dangerous, Asian woman an attribute of docile, feminine domesticity (12). But as the shortcomings and false promises of liberal pluralism became more apparent given the continuing racism, war in Asia, and anti-communist fervor, protests and civil rights movements helped to create a climate that would enable some sort of positive change, such as the repeal of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967. Immigration quotas now serve to regulate the number of persons from various nations existing within the U.S., while the assumptions of liberal pluralism are still prevalent in the terms “diversity” and “multiculturalism.”

In regards to Japan, the transnational capitalistic context in which products, companies, and people move within and across national boundaries has at least partially loosened its relatively homogenous and self-contained racial makeup. Interracial marriage, for example, has continued to increase. Of particular note is the academic nature of such relationships; more and more persons, many of which are privileged by their class, race, or gender, are finding themselves in Japan to study, teach, or conduct research. Scholars come on research grants from universities or programs such as Fulbright; college students study abroad for one or two semesters; and others teach English for a year or more. For example, the highly reputable JET

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16 Susan Koshy explains that these Japanese wives entering the United States were one of the few exceptions to the strict restriction placed by the American government on immigration from Asia during the post-war period from 1945 to 1965.
(Japanese Exchange and Teaching) Program, which began in 1987 when the already existing “British English Teachers Scheme” and “Mombusho English Fellows Program” merged, is currently the world’s largest teaching exchange program, with over four thousand participants drawn mainly from the United States. When I tell people that I have received a position teaching English in Japan through JET, I have received multiple responses of “Oh. My friend/relative did that and loved it. He even ended up marrying a Japanese woman he met there.” There are particularly gendered operations at work here in that material conditions tend to allow men more mobility than women, which suggests that interracial marriages tend to involve a foreign husband. However, statistics by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare indicate that as recently as five years ago, more Japanese men married a non-Japanese than Japanese women did. The “Specified Report of Vital Statistics in FY2007” found that out of 735, 132 total marriages in Japan in 2006, 40,154 (just over five percent) involved a foreign bride while 8,708 (just over one percent) involved a foreign groom. The non-Japanese brides were predominantly from the Philippines, China, Korea, and Thailand, while the non-Japanese grooms were mainly from Korea, the United States, China, and the United Kingdom. We can notice, then, how the East Asian diaspora contributes to the development of interracial relationships, which will be explored further in my discussion of the film About Love. Also of significant note is that the appearance of foreign spouses from Western nations pertains mainly to non-Japanese husbands, which suggests that the forms of travel—often for military, business, or academic purposes—from England and the U.S. to Japan still predominantly privileges men.

The selected texts in this chapter indicate how study abroad programs and jobs teaching English in Japan are two particular factors impacting the level of multiculturalism in Japan as well as the degree of reflexive cosmopolitanism adopted by non-Japanese viewers (who may or may not themselves study or teach in Japan). The extensiveness of contemporary international capitalistic networks means that cross-cultural, interracial encounters are oftentimes bound up with a feeling of isolation amidst an environment over-saturated with consumerism and fragmented representations of culture. I am thus particularly interested in the ways that larger political, legal, or social discourses on interracial romance play out in these texts with individuals. Although a person’s ability to connect with another individual is socially determined—two

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17 But, as scholars such as Karen Kelsky demonstrate, the trope of static, victimized Asian woman and traveling Western male is inadequate to account for the fact that a significant number of Japanese women travel outside Japan in order to find non-Japanese lovers or husbands.
people being in the same place at the same time is a result of a complex historical context—these texts present interpersonal relations as a site from which subjects can actually resist, complicate, reject, or even attempt to transcend such socially determined situations. An emotional connection between two individuals of different backgrounds to some extent dismantles the ideological rigidities of the nation-state. These texts draw attention to the role of emotions, language, and fetishes in the establishment and maintenance of transnational bonds between individuals, who may or may not feel closely connected to the cultural and historical conditions shaping such encounters. Critical multiculturalism complicates the ideology of liberal pluralist multiculturalism by drawing attention to how the mundane, everydayness of contemporary transnational identity influences the ways in which characters and readers/viewers perceive, conduct, and represent interracial and cross-cultural relationships. I ask, then, to what extent do these texts evoking the trope of cross-cultural romantic love ignore, confront, acknowledge, or imply historical implications? How do fetishes both inhibit and enable “reflexive cosmopolitanism?” To what extent do their representations of interpersonal relationships serve as an elision of or direct confrontation with social and material conditions?

As I address these questions, I wish to keep in mind Susan Koshy’s definition of the function of romance in narratives of white-Asian miscegenation from the late nineteenth to late twentieth century:

interracial romances provide a site where crucial political questions of the time came to be contested so persuasively because the domain of the romance represented a space removed from the material and political interests that contaminated the ‘real’ world; this purported isolation of the romantic from the real was mobilized to legitimate its imaginative resolutions, endowing them with the force of ‘universal’ ideals. (19-20)

One major aspect of the “real world” historical and material conditions rendered invisible by such narratives is the uneven gendered power relations created by a context of war, imperialism, and military occupation in which mobile white men travel to Asia and become sexually involved with Asian women. 18 Scholars have drawn attention to negative effects of war on women, such

as being raped, forced into prostitution, kidnapped, or made into comfort women, in order to
criticize the ways in which men have exploited women in such interracial “romance.” Sexual
encounters and romantic relationships between white men and Japanese women—from the Meiji
Era through World War II to the contemporary American military presence in Japan—are
situated in a context that affords power and sexual license to American men stationed in treaty
ports, military bases, or occupation forces (Koshy 11). Although the impact of World War II is
of great importance to Audrey Hepburn’s Neck, the relation between a history of violent cultural
conflicts and interracial relationships is absent from My Darling is a Foreigner and About Love.
While the texts do evoke a degree of broad sentimentalism that seems utterly detached from (and
thus unable to significantly impact) actual material conditions, they also indicate how the current
social and political climate is shifting Japan-U.S.-China-England-Taiwan-Australia relations
towards more of a fragmented, spontaneous network of interpersonal relations that are not
entirely determined by the historical conditions reinforced through state formations. Such texts’
omissions of explicit reference to larger historical and political tensions does not mean they are
detached from the real material and social conditions impacting how individuals function; rather,
the mundane, quotidian nature of the plot events and conversations between characters make the
representation so real as to situate it in the realm of the personal, emotional, and universality of
human nature. The texts thus move in and out of everyday reality and fantasy; the quotidian
elements of these texts provide a sense of groundedness while the evocations of love draw us
into the idealistic realm of universal emotion. So while to a large degree these texts do translate
“systemic political conflicts of racism, exclusion, and imperialism into personal choices of love
objects based on subjective truths and universal ideals” (Koshy 20), they also do not entirely
elide the larger context. At times, the perspective taken by these texts is so microcosmic that the
larger unequal relations of the macrocosm are not apparent. Focusing on two specific human
beings gestures towards a fake parity that ignores the unequal historical, social, and material
conditions that have brought them in contact with each other; the texts thus seem to recuperate
their general omission of inequality by emphasizing the importance of making a real, genuine
effort to maintain the emotional connection as a mutually beneficial and equal relationship.
Romance is to a varying degree bound up with power dynamics. So while love is depicted as a
sort of universal human sentiment, it is also racialized, cultural, and shown to be influenced and
determined by a context of travel, displacement, diaspora, language, and desire.
Expatriates in Japan: “Gaijin” Literature

A relatively recent mode of writing concerned with expatriates living in Japan, which is sometimes referred to as “gaijin literature,” thematizes the personal, academic, and political aspects of life abroad.\textsuperscript{19} Although I have only read a handful of expatriate genre literature, it seems that traditionally such texts center around a Western, oftentimes male, protagonist studying, working, or teaching English in a foreign country.\textsuperscript{20} The main character may ultimately be unwilling to give up the power he holds as an expatriate, someone who, in his mind, interacts with a cultural Other for his own benefit (sexually, financially, etc.) without letting his sense of self or worldview be significantly altered. Typically written by a Westerner who has lived temporarily in the featured country, such texts reflect the unequal power relations that have enabled the travel of such students, scholars, and teachers. As neocolonial discourses reveal, many places that have technically completed official “decolonization” continue to be forcibly ordered along lines of “Americanization,” such as an educational curriculum that projects English and capitalism as rites of initiation into networks of power. The problematic implications—that the Japanese need to be taught by the West in order to participate adequately in transnational capitalism—are something that texts unevenly reinforce, resist, and elide. Furthermore, scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which indigenous, racialized subjects become agents of colonial power by themselves serving as English teachers in countries such as Japan.\textsuperscript{21}

Given that the authors of “gaijin literature” are also people who have sojourned in Japan to study and write, the academic characteristics of these narratives exist on three levels: the authors, characters, and readers are all people interested in Japanese culture who have lived, will live, or want to live in Japan. So although fictional works, the authors’ own experiences manifest themselves in what happens to characters and how they feel about it. Characters tend to struggle to find a sense of belonging not only in Japan but in their home countries as well. The lack of a close attachment to home allows for a space in which these characters can desire Japan in some way. Expatriates bond due to the commonality of being foreigners but also due to their feelings

of not being closely attached to people or places in their own nations. These texts frame the time spent in Japan as a temporary switching point: characters come to Japan as sojourners who, even if choosing to delay their move, will eventually return “home.” To an extent then, these are persons who have had a privileged mobility writing fictional accounts of such travels. Moreover, these literary texts tend to be to a significant extent Orientalist modes of writing: characters observe their exotic surroundings and endure culture shock just as the writer once had done.

Some contemporary texts, however, are beginning to challenge, reformulate, and complicate the traditional expatriate mode. In her collection of short stories In the Empire of Dreams, Australian writer Dianne Highbridge depicts a handful of Japanese, American, British, and Australian characters that reappear in multiple stories throughout the text. The Western characters signal towards the academic nature of expatriates: the character Cathy is teaching English since her thesis scholarship has expired; Liz is conducting research on a renewable year-long grant; and “Elaine was a Fulbright scholar, once. Her research, which seems to be going on forever, long after her fellowship has ended, is about some monk who brought a particular kind of Buddhism to Japan” (116). In the Empire of Dreams complicates the trope of American men desiring Japanese women by suggesting a looser, dynamic network of interracial attractions that is not limited to heterosexual non-Asian men coveting Japanese women. For example, her collection of characters includes an American homosexual attracted to Japanese men as well as a Japanese man attracted to an Australian woman. By having a Westerner as part of a cast of characters rather than as the central protagonist, Highbridge decenters the Orientalist perspective. Transnationalism allows us to understand this text not simply as depicting cross-cultural encounters with a foreign “other” but as a looser amalgamation of cultural overlaps. Just as transnationalism rejects the term “international” due to its connotations of simply linking two homogenous nations, it helps the reader to engage with the text’s critical multiculturalism. For example, the cast of characters seem not to be representatives of their respective nations interacting in the same place but complex subjectivities unevenly influencing and being influenced by others. Highbridge’s organization of the text reinforces this in that she chooses to have characters reappear inconsistently in different stories and from different perspectives (central protagonist, reference in a character’s verbal comment, presence described by the narrator, etc.) rather than simply compile stories each focusing on one character that does not reappear in other stories. Such a looser structure—indeed it is at times hard to follow who’s
who—demands a more transnational perspective that enables the theme of multiculturalism to achieve significant critical effect. This prompts the reader’s sense of reflexive cosmopolitanism as one is able to situate oneself as a probable character among this cast. Because not overly romantic, exaggerated, or idealistic, the text’s quotidian plotlines, mundane behaviors, and everyday relationships enable the “Western” reader to not only identify with characters but to naturally reflect on one’s own subject position. For example, while reading this book it is impossible for me not to consider the political reasons for me being a selected candidate for the JET Program: how my race, class, and education signify the “proper” English and “Americanness” to be taught and demonstrated to the, oftentimes rural, Japanese. Due to this awareness, my goals while in Japan are not to force-feed patriotic or stereotypical representations of the U.S. but to challenge assumptions by drawing attention to the uneven social climate and diverse range of experiences. This is obviously not to claim that I will completely escape ideological assumptions, many of which I have internalized, but it is a call to acknowledge the radical potential of textual representations of the everyday.

Following specific characters’ interpersonal relationship, then, still maintains the reader’s connection to the historical/social/political realm and one’s potential for helping to change cultural assumptions. Through the interracial relationship between Australian Liz and Japanese Tomokazu in the short stories “Salted Blossoms” and “The Mole Game,” Highbridge indicates how the interpersonal can play a real role in transforming one’s understanding of culture and history, which, as I state in the Introduction, can lead to actual structural changes in existing material conditions if enough people’s views are reformulated into awareness and concern. By depicting the differences in Liz’s attitude before and during her marriage with Tomokazu, Highbridge propels the reader to see the benefits of doing what Liz now does. Just before Liz begins dating Tomokazu, she complains to Gwyneth, a fellow expatriate, of corrupt Japanese politics and claims that the Japanese education system does not fully explain to its students the militaristic activity of Japan during the twentieth century. While listening, Gwyneth thinks to herself:

As for the war, Gwyneth herself, remembering her mother’s distressingly often-expressed nostalgia for a mythologized version of the Blitz, would much rather not hear any more about it, so she can hardly blame the Japanese for feeling the same, especially as their memories are made up of both suffering and shame—in varying proportions, no doubt, but incapable of transformation into something more bearable. Perhaps I’m wrong, thinks Gwyneth, but surely it’s more
important to care about keeping the peace now, and as far as I can see they do. (145)

Gwyneth wants to forget the negative historical elements in favor of reveling in the pleasures of her (fetishized) appreciation of Japanese culture. This passage highlights the belief in promoting peaceful coexistence here and now rather than continually harping on the violence of the past. Continually re-representing the past, often in nostalgic forms, seems to inhibit a progression forward. She thus implies that the cacophony of historical voices evoking a violent past make it harder to recognize and promote a peaceful multicultural environment. Liz, then, is viewed by Gwyneth as unnecessarily antagonistic. The text, however, is not suggesting that Liz needs to change—Highbridge is not rejecting this confrontational manner as wrong since Liz is making valid points—but that her awareness can become better-rounded and her knowledge more sophisticated. It thus seems that her initial aloofness despite Tomokazu’s genuine romantic interest is due, at least in part, to her unwillingness to detach Tomokazu himself from Japan’s historical past. Although not personally involved, he is Japanese and thus, in her mind, complicit in past Japanese imperialistic activity. But after becoming his wife (the text does not feature a story detailing the courtship and engagement), Liz is more generally content, willing to align herself with Japanese customs, and eager to ask questions and learn from her in-laws. Readers recognize the stark contrast between her feelings in each story. Highbridge thus suggests that through the relationship with Tomokazu—an ongoing, interpersonal effort to understand and be emotionally invested in another individual—Liz has at least partially let go of her stubborn attitude towards Japan’s past. It is as if she was initially able to generalize the Japanese and condemn their historical failings because she was not yet familiar with specific Japanese persons. The “moral” of the story, then, is not to forget history by failing to acknowledge it, but to instead have an awareness of history and a desire to connect with others in such a way that remembers history without making unjust generalizations and treats individuals as complicated subjectivities.

**Erotic and Historical Attachment in Audrey Hepburn’s Neck**

*Audrey Hepburn’s Neck* written by Alan Brown, a New York resident who lived in Japan for seven years as a Fulbright journalist, reveals the complex negotiations made between transnational identity and individual desire. By including Japanese men desiring Western women, American women lusting after Japanese men, as well as Japanese/American homosexual couples,
it takes up and challenges the prevalence of gendered relations that privilege men’s desires over those of women. Brown’s novel effectively complicates the trope of American men desiring Asian women by depicting fetishization across the East/West divide as a two-way street—Americans desire Japanese and Japanese desire Americans—and as not confined to heteronormative frameworks. Infatuation with people of a certain race, even to the extent of obsessive sexual attraction, is a major theme of the book. Indeed, its title comes from the fact that Audrey Hepburn’s neck is a fetish for the main character, Toshi, who subsequently becomes fascinated with attractive American women. The omniscient author-narrator explains, “He has never had a Japanese girlfriend, not even when he was in high school and there were only Japanese girls to choose from. He never wanted one. What Toshiyuki Okamoto has wanted, has desired, has dreamed erotic dreams about since the day of his ninth birthday, is a girlfriend who looks like the movie star Audrey Hepburn” (Brown 16). This excerpt highlights the fetishization of the Other by showing that this attachment is so intense as to result in Toshi rejecting the non-Other as even an option; he wants an American girlfriend or no girlfriend at all. Hepburn’s celebrity status signifies how the exportation of commoditized American pop culture to Japan and elsewhere redirects subjects’ fascinations onto a discursively constructed cultural imaginary of what the U.S. means. There is an implication, then, that “normal” Caucasian American women are a sort of compromise for Toshi while he also imbues them with a degree of status from having consistently associated them with American media celebrities. Being conceived of as national representatives, Americans may need to negotiate the disjunction between the face of the U.S. shown to the world and the everyday realities of their own citizenship status. Jane Borden, Toshi’s first American girlfriend in the novel (the narrator mentions that Toshi has had past American girlfriends), serves as a parody of the “gaijin” teacher: she is an English Conversation instructor in the Very Romantic English Academy. Brown thus also sexualizes and objectifies these women as “hot” Americans that Japanese people such as Toshi can admire while learning a bit of English. Jane proves to be a volatile, sex-obsessed woman who drinks religiously, bombards Toshi with erotic letters, and ends up setting his apartment on fire. In one of her letters, she states, “The first time I wanted to make love to a Japanese man was when I was fifteen years old and saw Toshiro Mifune in Rashomon” (Brown 82). The reader thus recognizes how her erotic infatuation parallels that of Toshi: both saw an actor/actress in a film and were instantly struck sexually by his/her exotic, cultural beauty and sexual appeal. The novel, then,
alludes to the role of media (mis)representations in shaping interpersonal encounters without mocking or passing judgment on these characters’ somewhat irrational infatuations; they are just one of many types of human impulses. Recognizing how such desires for a particular cultural Other become entrenched enables readers to see that bonds between two individuals are marked by race, culture, and history.

Brown further extends and complicates the link between race and sexuality through a homosexual expatriate named Paul, who desires Japanese men younger than him. Similarly to Toshi and Jane’s sudden attraction to a particular figure, Paul explains to Toshi that he came to Japan due to his infatuation with a photo of Japanese author Yukio Mishima:

‘there’s something you need to understand about people. We don’t always do things for good, smart, logical reasons.’
‘What do you mean?’
‘I mean I ended up in Japan because I saw a picture of Yukio Mishima in a book when I was sixteen. I read his novels. Next thing I knew, I was studying karate. I learned Japanese from cassette tapes. My mother said my eyes were going to slant if I didn’t stop. I went to college and majored in Japanese. Then I came here for my junior year. … Look, there are a lot of things that interest me about Japan. But let’s be honest. What got me here? I mean, what was the pivotal event, the thing that changed the direction of my entire life, that carried me halfway around the world?’
‘What?’
‘A photograph of Yukio Mishima in a loincloth. That’s what. … I’m here for the men.’ (Brown 85-6)

Paul’s response suggests a sort of Japanophilic tumbling in which a very specific impetus leads to more and more exploring of and exposure to particular pieces of a culture. Despite this evolving energy, the major impetus is entirely quotidian: it was not that his feelings were influenced by a major life-changing event but that he happened to stumble upon a picture in a book. The fact that such a page exists in his American home signals the broader power relations in which fragments of Japanese culture circulate daily and evoke a sense of Japan as entertainment for the Western gaze. It is also significant that he describes this process as irrational, which highlights how a fetish is one’s image of Japan in one’s own imagination. His reference to the many things that interest him is a direct reference to Japan as a complexity, as heterogeneous. However, he reminds Toshi that the original attachment—as well as that which maintains the longing, despite the possible disenchantments of reality—is a homogenous simplicity: the erotic allure of a particular Japanese author. By drawing attention to people—or
images of people in the media—as objects of desire, Brown disallows interracial romance from taking on the connotations of universal love. The fetishization of race is hyper-embodied and sexualized, and yet it is not simply a mistreatment of a cultural Other since there is the impetus to love and be committed to someone (for example, Paul is not merely using his partners). Indeed, by addressing head on, rather than eliding, the fetishization of the Other, Brown forces readers to negotiate the ways in which this phenomenon is problematic yet also a very real part of how some conceive of their own transnational identity. From this, readers can recognize how their desires for an exotic Japan perpetuate their fandom but also how such fetishization can develop into a reflexive cosmopolitanism able to see the Japanese as plural, complex, ideologically and discursively constructed, and caught up in power relations.

Within this context of two-way East/West desire, Brown inserts Toshi’s connection to history. The chapters more or less alternate between Toshi’s relationships with the Americans Jane, Paul, and Lucy and his family situation, most of which is depicted as flashbacks. His parents had always had a silent tension between them and, after they live apart for fourteen years, Toshi’s mother divorces and remarries. As the family-oriented strand reaches the real-time narrative, Toshi receives a call that his father died of a heart attack. Then, upon hearing that an earthquake and tsunami have hit his hometown, Toshi rushes over to make sure his mother is okay. During this visit, she sits Toshi down to tell him the truth about their past, revealing to him that she is actually Korean. She was kidnapped by Japanese soldiers during World War II and shipped to an island off the coast of Hokkaido to work in a factory under extremely poor conditions: they were starved, raped, and abused. Toshi’s father was a Japanese soldier who, however, was kind to Toshi’s mother. He conversed with her, gave her food, and after the war ended came back to the island to take her to live in Japan with him. After hearing his mother’s story, “He’s angry and ashamed. Angry at Japan, and ashamed to be Japanese. But he’s not really Japanese. He’s half-Korean. A foreigner” (Brown 249). So while the East/West divide perpetuates Toshi’s fetishization of American women, Jane’s erotic desire for Japanese men, and Paul’s infatuation with Japanese men, the East Asian historical intimacy in relation to the war disables fetishization and instead evokes the weight of history as a remembering of inter-Asian connections.

This shocking disruption of Toshi’s worldview leads him from anger to a more mature understanding of the historical and social realities embedded in daily life, including his sexual
relations and interpersonal friendships. Similarly to Liz of *In the Empire of Dreams*, Toshi negotiates his frustration with history through an average but comfortable interpersonal relationship. By the end of the novel, Toshi has extricated himself from his unhealthy relationship with Jane and has begun a relationship with an American woman named Lucy, which looks to become a generally happy marriage. Toshi’s romantic relationship with Lucy signals the point through which he will continue to negotiate his relationship to a problematic past and his intense fetishistic desire for American women. In other words, both strands of the narrative culminate in this final interracial relationship. Conversing with her, Toshi says he hates the Japanese, to which Lucy responds, “Don’t say that. You can never hate a whole race of people, a country” (Brown 257). This moment marks a point of reconciliation in which Toshi can begin to come to terms with the impact of Japanese imperialistic activity on his family. In other words, historical memory has *forcibly inserted* itself into Toshi’s complicated system of fetishistic desires. His initial sense of a distance from historically-determined social and material conditions, which was thus filled in by American women as fetish-objects, can no longer be consistently maintained since he personally has been explicitly tied to history. Brown thus suggests that Toshi will continue to negotiate his own complicity with the past—and thus aversion to his identity as Japanese—*while* fetishizing American women and loving Lucy.

Brown concludes his novel by drawing attention to language as a third term interacting with history and sexual desire. Language’s role in daily living suggests a potential, future state of critical multiculturalism that, while not forgetting the past, can enable individual subjects to function within everyday circumstances. The following scene highlights the importance of making an effort to understand another’s language in order to suggest that individuals can work to shift historically determined unequal power relations towards more of an equal, mutually beneficial dynamic. The challenges entailed in linguistic differences are directly referenced in order to show how surpassing them is not an unrealistically easy option but rather a condition achieved through mutual effort:

A different life. And words! So many new words. There are Japanese-English dictionaries scattered throughout the house, on the kitchen table, by the bed, by the garden door. Toshi reaches for the small dictionary in his jacket pocket. On the subway, Lucy’s long fingers tap, tap, tap the keys of a Canon Wordtank, an electronic dictionary that displays the stroke order and meaning of thousands of *kanji*. Together they are mining two languages to express new, shared ideas and beliefs. (Brown 277)
This passage suggests the satisfaction to be found in the couple learning each other’s language together. Rather than treat a language barrier as something static that either will or won’t be a problem, Toshi and Lucy revel in the acquisition of language. Toshi seems to have found a renewed vigor for his life, which has achieved a fresh newness after having fallen in love with this American woman. Language is depicted here as unexplored terrain waiting to be discovered. While their vocabulary may be limited, it can do nothing but expand. There is also the implication that a significant part of maintaining a respectful interpersonal relationship is a willingness and desire to learn the other’s language while recognizing one’s own position amidst discursively constructed and ideologically reinforced power relations. Such effort helps to combat the superficial gestures made by liberal pluralist multiculturalism in favor of “A more genuine cosmopolitanism [that] is first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other” (Hannerz 103). Efforts to learn another’s language, rather than lethargically insist he or she adapt to your own language only, signals one of many pieces of a willingness that all of the texts discussed in this thesis depict as integral to a reflexive cosmopolitanism that has the potential to alter power relations in significant ways through the small, mundane actions of individuals.

Audrey Hepburn’s Neck is a particularly significant piece of gaijin literature to examine given that all of the “gaijin” are secondary characters to the Japanese protagonist. By having Toshi inhabit a central role in the novel, the text gives a voice and subjectivity to the Japanese rather than granting the reader access to Japanese characters’ opinions and feelings only through remarks made to a white protagonist. While an American author is bound in a dilemma—creating a Japanese protagonist means he, the author, must speak for the Japanese while creating a white protagonist means he, the author, must always be speaking about the Japanese—Alan Brown effectively presents the multilateral exchanges made between various individuals instead of reiterating the traditionally imbalanced East/West binary. Similarly to the films discussed in chapter one, In the Empire of Dreams and Audrey Hepburn’s Neck use various specific cross-cultural bonds to generate a critical multiculturalism that upsets U.S.-as-center constructions and challenges the American audience member to reevaluate the supposed legitimacy of his or her privileged position.
The Rude Gaijin and Happy Ending in My Darling is a Foreigner

My Darling is a Foreigner directed by Kazuaki Ue takes up similar issues raised by gaijin literature, but in ways that seek to wrap things up neatly into more idealized pictures of interracial romance. So while Toshi is deeply impacted by his past and the characters in In the Empire of Dreams struggle in existential-like ways to find purpose in their lives and relationships, the two protagonists in this film overcome specific roadblocks in their relationship with relative ease. The film opened in movie theaters in Japan in April 2010 and was released on Japanese DVD in October. The first thing to note, then, is that this film does not have an official avenue of release or distribution in the United States. In fact, the only reason I even knew it existed was because I stumbled upon it while browsing a collection of Japanese films available to stream online. The question of circulation in terms of where the film is available, who has access to it, and how they view it, is of importance to critical discussions of transnationalism given the increasing amount of channels through which texts move.22 In terms of plot, screenplay, and acting, this film is not actually of very high quality; the non-Japanese acting is good enough to pass but definitely not impressive. It is also at times overly sentimentalized, simplistic, and unrealistic, which reminds us of Koshy’s definition of interracial romance as a space of the fantastic, universal, and utopian. In fact, the English-language version of the official website proclaims, “Love Knows No Boundaries.” Love, then, represents a universal ideal that surpasses the existing racial tensions and the problematic historical treatment of cultural “others.” However, the original content on which the film is based enables it to make some insightful commentary on cross-cultural relationships, stereotyping, fetishization of the Other, and language differences. The film is an adaptation of parts of Saori Oguri’s autobiographical manga series, first released in 2002, in which she depicts various episodes from life in Japan with American husband Tony Laszlo. Since the original manga is autobiographical and episodically organized, viewers tend to assume that the film’s idealism is not necessarily a problematic attempt to glaze over actual struggles but rather a more or less accurate set of snapshots of daily situations. Actual viewers can link the couple’s experience to their own interpersonal relationships given the sense of realism behind the narrative. In other words, the sense that the events of the film have really

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22 So while the film’s plot entails U.S.-Japan relationships, the filmmakers did not much consider an American audience. And yet, Americans have access to it via websites and third-party distributors (often from China or Hong Kong).
happened to two real people alive today functions to legitimate the film’s gestures towards an actually-occurring reflexive cosmopolitanism.

Marriage between Japanese women and non-Japanese men is the overarching context of the film. It begins and ends with snippets of interviews with interracial couples in Japan. The couple responds to the question posed while a subtitle indicates where the non-Japanese spouse is from and how long they have been married. While the responses provide some humor as they draw attention to the quirky idiosyncrasies or cultural faux pas of the foreign husband, the subtitles suggest a longevity that the viewer finds exemplary: despite being an interracial marriage, they can last. One is also immediately struck by the fact that all of the couples are of Japanese wives with non-Japanese husbands. The film’s omission of Japanese men who marry non-Japanese women suggests that the historical gendered division in which men travel and marry native women persists as more prevalent. Despite their gendered inequalities, the interviews do extend the breadth of interracial romance by showing more than just Japanese-“white” couples. The non-Japanese men hail from Nigeria, New Zealand, the U.S., France, Mexico, Myanmar, Canada, Holland, Spain, Germany, and India. So, the film maintains the traditional Imperialist binary of non-Asian men who travel and meet Asian women, but given its contemporary transnational circumstances it has diversified and expanded to persons of varying backgrounds and circumstances. In other words, this film shifts away from the historical emphasis on miscegenation as transgressing a clear East/West, Other/non-Other, white/Asian divide. By depicting how the contemporary context loosens this binary, it frames its discussion of cross-cultural romance within a slightly more fluid, dynamic, multiculturalism. Such a framework, like Moon Child, Brother, and In the Empire of Dreams, decenters whiteness by mixing in Americans as one of many operating subjects in a particular network of power relations. Even if husbands from such areas as Africa, South America, and the Middle East are technically less common, we should view the film’s critical multiculturalism as an explicit rendering of whiteness as one subjectivity among many rather than as simply an elision of white privilege. Similarly to The Last Samurai, the film’s critical multiculturalism complicates the centrality of its white male protagonist; although Tony Laszlo is a co-main-character, the opening and closing sequences of the film remind viewers that he is only one part of a larger phenomenon that is not confined to “white” Westerners.
The protagonist Tony can be beneficially conceived of as a Japanophile who is attracted to a specific aspect of Japanese culture. He serves as a representative of the scholar who, in this increasingly mobile world, is able to travel to Japan to pursue a subject of interest. The excessiveness of the desire—the official website for the film labels him a “language-freak”—aptly captures how fandom prompts the interest while transnational capitalist power relations enable a white, male, middle-class American to literally pursue this fetish object. The scene depicting why Tony came to Japan, which is animated rather than live-action, shows him seeing kanji calligraphy then instantly and excitedly flying on a plane to Japan. As Saori narrates “One day he saw kanji,” a manga version of Tony stands in front of the framed picture gawking and stunned. The scene implies that he is utterly overwhelmed: he drops his suitcase, and exclaims, “It’s beautiful!” Saori then states, “And he came to Japan.” as a head-bobbing Tony flies across the ocean on a plane. Here, the oversimplification is what makes this scene’s implications so notable. It is as if, as soon as he sees and is overwhelmed by the kanji character, he instantly heads over to Japan. The sense that this was impulsive and lacked any sort of planning also emphasizes how much of one’s attachment to a culture or country is sparked by a somewhat irrational infatuation with a particular fetish object. Viewers with an itch to travel to places that they have long admired from mediated texts, such as the picturesque calendars crowding much bookstore shelf space nowadays, may recognize themselves in Tony. A privileged class status becomes the capability to act upon the impetus that such exposure to pre-packaged chunks of “genuine” culture has caused. As the cliché “taking advantage of the opportunity” evokes and elides, not all citizens are allowed equal opportunities to become tourists or well-paid workers abroad.

Once there, an individual’s behavioral choices can exhibit respect and even enact social change. At the same time, however, a traveler can continue to reinforce the ideology that a “different” place is to be consumed, evaluated, and criticized without allowing it to mature one’s worldview. Characters in My Darling is a Foreigner that carry such an attitude, trying to maintain Us/Them dichotomies, are portrayed in a negative light. It is as if the insistence upon lumping persons into a generalized category set against the broad category to which one belongs is simply untenable, even anachronistic. A minor character named Chris, a British expatriate acquaintance clearly full of himself, is one such character: he himself is a stereotype of the cocky, womanizing foreigner. Chris is thus a sort of caricature whose comments are expectedly simple
and ignorant. So just as Colonel Bagley serves as a foil to the main character Nathan Algren in *The Last Samurai*, Chris serves as stark contrast to the character of Tony, whose attitude is thus recognized by viewers as more complex, respectful, and laudatory. In the first of only two total scenes in which Chris appears, he and another non-Japanese approach Saori, the female protagonist representing the author of the original manga. She is standing awkwardly alone against the wall, clearly uncomfortable with being the only Japanese person there at the party to which her soon-to-be-boyfriend Tony had accompanied her only to get pulled away into other conversations. This exchange among Chris, Saori, and an unnamed American woman depicts the Orientalist desire to maintain superiority as horrible, ridiculous, and untenable:

Chris (English): So you’re the one who wants to be a manga artist, right?
Saori (English): Yes.
Chris (English): But they’re not for adults, right?
Saori: Eh?
Woman (Japanese): In Japan, adults are still reading comics.
Saori (Japanese): The comics are high quality. Tell him that.
Woman (English): She’s saying that Japanese manga are high quality.
Chris (English): Oh please, but most of them are pornographic. They’re not good. They’re bad for kids.
Saori (English): Bad!? (Japanese): What did he say?
Woman (Japanese): That has nothing to do with manga as a medium. Say that.
Woman (English): Chris, you’re being rude. For your information, a lot of my friends come to Japan because they love manga.
Chris (English): Don’t worry about it. Besides, she doesn’t understand what we’re saying.
Saori (Japanese): What?
Chris (Japanese): Learn some English already.

Although it may seem at first glance that Saori’s position is compromised, this scene actually quite blatantly stigmatizes Chris’s overtly discriminatory behavior. Chris relies on the West’s general association of comics with children to belittle the Japanese as somehow immature, juvenile, and unsophisticated. Saori is put in the position of defending not only herself but her culture. However, the viewer recognizes that she does not allow Chris to maintain the upper hand. Rather than respond by speaking of the Japanese readers, she chooses to define manga. By switching from Chris’s generalizations about *people*, she evokes a more nuanced and accurate conception of the *medium*. Chris makes moral declarations, implying that manga is wrongfully pornographic, while Saori draws viewers’ attentions to the invalidity of his argument and the
faulty evidence upon which he makes it. There is also an interesting treatment of language in that the woman serves as translator for Saori, who is distanced from comprehension. And, as we find out from Chris’s parting comment in Japanese, he may have more access to comprehension than he was letting on. The woman’s choice not to accurately translate Saori’s comment about manga as a medium is noteworthy. In this scene, the two non-Japanese characters are represented as ignorant, disrespectful, and arrogant thus encouraging viewers to align themselves with Saori in opposition to Chris’s problematic assertions. The woman failing to translate Saori’s great comeback thus reveals how they evade actually tackling the complexities in favor of a simplistic, stereotypical view. While to a very minor extent, the woman is defending Saori by telling Chris that many of her friends love manga, this remark actually only maintains the unquestioned assumption of manga’s typical content as offensive. And Chris’s final rude remark indicates the cocky assumption that others should be learning one’s own language. Chris, in typical Orientalist fashion, maintains his positional superiority over Saori despite her shifting of the terms—if she signifies a woman potentially successful in an occupation, he belittles her artistry as child-oriented; if she insists upon the sophistication of her work, he labels it inappropriate or immoral; if she encourages him to think in more accurate and complex ways, he evokes the language barrier to assume her ignorance and inability to combat his opinions. However, as I have shown, viewers are made aware of how ridiculous and indecorous is this insistence.

Setting up Chris as an example of a “mean” foreigner early in the film reinforces Tony as more genuinely charming, respectful, and unconceited. His presence in the film clearly shows that traveling and being immersed in a culture do not necessarily mean a more respectful and reflexive attitude. Chris is emblematic of the more traditional definitions of cosmopolitan worldliness in which one tastes different cultures without allowing his worldview to shift, while Tony represents my own term of “reflexive cosmopolitanism:” one willing and able to engage with others as legitimate subjects. In the second scene in which Chris appears, eating sushi with Tony and others from the party, he spews out the stereotypical Japanese schoolgirl generalization by claiming that most Japanese women are giggly girls infatuated with non-Japanese men. He remarks, “I felt like I was superman. Everyone, they all just go, ‘Kakkoi! Sugoi!’ just because I speak English. All I have to do is ask for a phone number.” His mocking of a high-pitch squealing girl as well as his exaggerated self-confidence in his supposed charm, good looks, and foreign appeal clearly turn off the viewer. His generalizing nature is further confirmed when he
concludes, “But Japanese girls, they’re kind of all the same, right.” Here Tony immediately responds, “I’ve never felt that way,” which disallows viewers from buying into Chris’s rubbish, and indeed helps us confirm it as rubbish. And, to clarify how the film thinks people should conceive of others, Tony mentions that “She’s not Japanese, she’s Saori.” This remark suggests a sort of universal humanity in which race is transcended in favor of one’s individuality. However, instead of falling too far into utopian multiculturalism—“we are all just humans”—Tony’s statement reminds the viewers that one’s own interpersonal relationships reflect political standpoints and impact the lifespans of discursively constructed ideologies. Through the two scenes featuring Chris, the film establishes the inappropriateness of generalizations in favor of an approach that keeps in mind individual variations. Viewers are thus reminded that it is by rejecting Chris’s behavior and adhering more to Tony’s that they can cause a multicultural world to function in more respectful ways.

Framing Saori and Tony’s success story both in contrast to the worldviews of people such as Chris and within the multicultural context indicated by the opening and closing interviews “attribute[s] a positive value [to multiculturalism] through the alignment of a story of individual happiness with the social good (Ahmed123). Such a ‘happily ever after’ ending suggests optimistically that interracial marriages can indeed be sustainable and fulfilling as long as one is willing to put forth effort to maintain the relationship. The couple serves as an exemplar of emotionally fulfilling cross-cultural lifestyles. Similarly to discourses of liberal pluralist multiculturalism, the film’s tone of idealism necessitates that the number of potentially problematic issues are kept to a minimum. The language barrier, for example, is not as prominent as in the other texts included in this thesis due to Tony’s proficiency in Japanese. His searching for the right words, and often getting them wrong, provides simple humor to the relationship in the film while Saori’s lack of sufficient English is represented as negligible. Since it domesticates the potential exasperation with language differences, the film turns to behavioral choices and commentary made by characters about the relationship (or, in Chris’s case, the culture) to generate its critical multiculturalism.

The major struggles in their relationship throughout the film are Saori’s father’s disapproval and the underlying tensions surrounding gender roles. The character of Saori does combat the assumptions regarding gender roles given that she is an aspiring manga artist working very hard throughout the film to succeed in the profession. She also draws attention to how
gender role stereotypes result in exhausted, overworked women when she tells Tony that she has to cook, clean, do laundry, and wash dishes on tap of her own work. Tony responds by making a genuine effort to help out, which aligns the viewers with the necessity of resisting traditional gender roles. His domestic ineptitude, however, is shown by his failure to rinse the dishes thoroughly enough and follow laundry instructions correctly. The film thus makes subtle yet compelling commentary about the ways in which the contemporary situation is beginning to challenge traditional gender roles. Saori’s original complaint is indeed entirely merited while Tony’s genuine effort is seen as praiseworthy even if not entirely competent. Indeed, since Saori recognizes that Tony is trying, she lets things go. This silence, however, becomes a bigger temporary estrangement in their relationship.

The other difficulty involves Saori’s father, who fits the stereotypical role of dominant father disapproving of his daughter marrying outside her own race. He comments, “I’m against it. You and him. A cross-cultural marriage will be trouble. … you left home to become a manga artist. What happened to that? Are you just going to drop it and get married? I won’t have it, not in a million years. Two strangers don’t turn into family just like that.” Saori chooses not to tell Tony about her father’s opinion, which adds to the estrangement. However, the film quickly wraps up these two loose ends in order to reach its idealized resolution. Saori’s father dies, after which she finds out from her mother that he did not actually disapprove of the relationship. In the most complex and serious scene, Saori is conversing with her mother after Tony has left alone to visit his family in the United States:

Saori: I think we might be through. I guess Dad knew this would happen. That’s why he was against it.
Mom: Look, Dad had this. … He bought this English textbook so he could talk to Tony’s family. … Saori, give it another chance.
Saori: … we were so happy. We laughed so much. And then it all fell apart over nothing. It’s difficult even between two Japanese. And Tony is just too different. He’s a foreigner after all.
Mom: That’s just an excuse. We were the same. … Before I got married I fell in love with breakfasts, the kind you see in foreign movies. The toast jumping out of the toaster and the smell of fresh brewed coffee. But your father liked Japanese food. So for three months, every day, I fried fish. Finally I’d had enough. I flipped the plate over and said ‘I’m sick of this!’ Your father was amazed. ‘I had no idea’ he said. ‘Make whatever you’d like. But at least make me miso soup, all right? I love your miso soup.’ And so, forever after, our breakfast was toast and miso soup. … Japanese, foreign, it doesn’t matter. Of course people are different. But
isn’t living with someone recognizing those differences little by little and accepting them, sharing them?

The contemporary transnational, multicultural context is nicely alluded to by the mother. The coexistence of miso and toast, signifiers of Japan and the West, reveals the cross-cultural mixing evident through much of contemporary Japanese life. Her remark also reiterates the point in *Audrey Hepburn’s Neck* of how attachment to particular cultural signifiers shown in movies can transpire into a sort of fetish. Saori’s realization that her father was actually applying himself to learn English suggests a willingness to communicate as being important in cross-cultural relationships, which, as the viewer has noticed, has given way to a silent tension between Tony and Saori. Her mother’s comment about cultural difference as just an excuse to not put forth effort is particularly insightful. Difference has always been appreciable; it seems to be part of the human condition to struggle to accept something deemed as unlike oneself. Saori’s mother draws viewers’ attentions to the incompatibility of differences as a default position. She thus calls Saori out for falling back onto this stance—taking the easy way out—rather than attempting to live with difference. It is not a matter of ignoring or sanitizing the differences but rather accepting them as regular parts of life and something to share with your partner.

After this conversation, Saori immediately hops on a plane to Tony’s hometown, miraculously finds a taxi driver familiar with the address she mentions (a single street name only), and walks around aimlessly for awhile only to unrealistically stumble upon Tony standing outside in a park. Tony’s family is represented as more than willing to accept Saori. The film paints a hyperbolic image of the American family: it is large, boisterous, and always laughing. At dinner, in front of his family, Tony proposes to Saori who immediately accepts. The rushed “happily ever after” ending aside, the film does draw our attention to the increase in successful interracial marriages in Japan—which are enabled through the specific gendered, political, and material conditions that the film fails to directly acknowledge (but does imply)—by showing viewers that it is admirable to function with difference, to respect culture rather than stereotype and generalize it. The film intentionally evokes the mundane everyday in an attempt to create a more realistic, nuanced depiction of interracial romance. Despite an apparent impetus to keep the personal and the public from entirely overlapping, the film does enable a viewer to see in the characters of Tony, Chris, and Saori behaviors that are very likely similar to their own or those of others near them. In other words, even with a bit of a sugar-coated narrative, *My Darling is a
*Foreigner* still manages to prompt viewers to relate their own behavioral tendencies to the political circumstances incompletely acknowledged by the film itself. Although at times relying on outmoded stereotypes, it falls under neither of the two typical depictions of interracial romance: sexual, exotic, Orientalized transgression and sanitized, universal, human love. Instead of making sweeping claims—as if these two featured individuals symbolize the larger historical clash of cultures—*In the Empire of Dreams, Audrey Hepburn’s Neck*, and *My Darling is a Foreigner* explore how the social context permeates and is shaped by individuals’ quotidian behaviors.

**About Love as a Part of East Asian Deimperialization**

In order to extend my discussion of interracial East/West romances, which are still positioned within multicultural contexts, I now turn to representations of Inter-Asian relationships in the 2005 film *About Love*, created by Japanese director Shimoyama Ten, Taiwanese director Yee Chin-yen, and Chinese director Zhang Yibai. Such a turn to East/East dynamics enables us to see how critical multiculturalism’s portrayal of interpersonal emotional connections is part of a *global* transnationalism in which subjects are continually operating as reflexive cosmopolitans to differing degrees. The film was co-produced by Japan-based Movie-eye Entertainment Inc., Toho Company, and China-based Tianjin Film Studio. It was released in Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, and China (April 2006). It was also featured in various film festivals, including the Romania International Film Festival, Berlin Asia-Pacific Film Festival, and Lyon AsiaExpo Film Festival. I stumbled upon *About Love* on the same website in which I found *My Darling is a Foreigner*. The way in which the film highlights inter-Asia imagining provides a point of entry through which transnational theories can be taken up and challenged. Like all of the films discussed in this thesis, *About Love* is transnational on the levels of production, plot/theme, and circulation. I bring this film into this chapter in order to extend beyond the tendency of American discourse on interracial romance to revolve around an East/West division. Just as the interviews in *My Darling is a Foreigner* render visible non-white/non-white couples, the all-Asian cast of *About Love* reminds American viewers that the plurality of differences and historical circumstances means that all Asians (or Mexicans, African Americans, Muslims, etc.) are not the same and even have their own conflicts.
Violent imperialistic activity and colonization is part of a complex set of historical power relations in East Asia from the mid-nineteenth-century through World War II to the present-day. While the average American feels a distance from the fighting with Japan—except for the attack on Pearl Harbor, which still was a naval base removed from the continental mainland, the soldiers were fighting “over there”—the memory of World War II in many Asians’ minds is much more close to home. As Liz’s remark and the story of Toshi’s mother show, Japanese soldiers in Taiwan, Korea, and China were entering into villages, raping women, kidnapping children, murdering, and pillaging. In the Introduction to *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Kuan-Hsing Chen provides a clear, succinct summary of the major historical points of the complex colonizer/colonized relations in the East Asian region that is worth quoting in full:

Japan annexed Okinawa in 1872 and occupied Taiwan in 1895, after the First Sino-Japanese War. At the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Korea became a Japanese protectorate; it was formally absorbed into the Japanese empire in 1910. Although in 1911 the first republic in Asia was established in mainland China, Taiwan, still occupied by Japan, was not part of it. Then in 1932, the Japanese puppet state of Manchuko was established in the northeast part of China. The Japanese officially invaded China in 1937, which marked the beginning of an eight-year war that became part of the Second World War … In retrospect, the difficulty with Northeast Asian regional integration is partially caused by … the strain of prewar Japanese imperialism and colonialism. … In 1945, when Japan was finally defeated, the deimperialization process had just begun, but Japan was then occupied for seven years by the Allies, who put General Douglas MacArthur in charge of the country, and its status shifted quickly from that of colonizer to colonized. This new condition prevented Japan from doing the reflexive work of deimperialization within its own territory and from grappling with its historical relations with its former colonies … The cold-war segregation of the region went on for two decades, until the Chinese mainland began to reopen to the world in the late 1970s. It was during these difficult cold-war times that Japan, Okinawa, South Korea, and Taiwan became U.S. protectorates. As I see it, one of the lasting legacies of this period is the installation of the anticommunism-pro-Americanism structure in the capitalist zone of East Asia, whose overwhelming consequences are still with us today. (5-7)

As Chen so effectively indicates, productive work towards positive relations among East Asian countries has been stalled by the U.S.’s cold war maneuvers and postponed due to the increasing emphasis on capitalistic, economic development. Because it has yet to fully be tackled, there are still persistent feelings of insurmountable animosity between Japan, Taiwan, and China and overall tension in the region fostered by democracy-versus-communism sentiments. Although
“regional reconciliation is beginning” (9), Chen calls for a more extensive East Asian effort towards fuller decolonization and deimperialization: “decolonization is the attempt of the previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically. This can be a painful process involving the practice of self-critique, self-negation, and self-discovery, but the desire to form a less coerced and more reflexive and dignified subjectivity necessitates it” (3). As his reiteration of the prefix “self” indicates, significant reflexivity is needed for the manifestation of tangible change. To use my terminology, then, more individuals need to engage and grapple with their own reflexive cosmopolitanism if structural decolonization is to persist.

*About Love* can be viewed as one specific step on this road of deimperialization and reconciliation in East Asia; it prompts Asian and non-Asian viewers alike to recognize the role they play and ability they have to use historical memories to remedy contemporary injustices. There is an evident desire in the makers of this film to create a bond with other Asians, to establish a sense of inter-relatedness and cooperation with nearby countries. The movie consists of three shorter films, depicting a relationship between a Japanese woman and Taiwanese man, Japanese man and Taiwanese woman, and Japanese man and Chinese woman, respectively. The pairings are quite significant—each represents, as indicated above, very specific historical relations between the nations that they represent. Of particular significance, then, is the film’s promotion of future relationships between nations that work through bitter grudges and animosity. Considering the ways in which the film seeks to extend the bonds between East Asian nations, we can think of it as one piece contributing to the larger discussion on Asian diaspora and inter-relations presented by such scholars as Aihwa Ong, Shih-mei Shih, Grace Hong, Gyatri Gopinath, and Kuan-Hsing Chen.

Koichi Iwabuchi draws attention to the role of Japanese media, particularly television dramas, in this network of relations among East Asian nations. He effectively reminds us of how such intentions to make positive connections are bound up with the larger East Asian historical memory: “a strong interest has emerged within Japan in the potential for Japanese popular culture to improve Japan’s reputation and soothe—even suppress—the bitter memory of the Japanese invasion of Asia through the dissemination of an enjoyable Japanese contemporary culture throughout Asian countries, particularly among younger people who did not experience Japanese imperialism in the first half of this century” (75). Younger generations are thus the
targets for such ideological intentions. The fact that all of the characters in About Love are young adults evokes the idea that “all the possibilities are before you” and optimistically suggests how newer generations of people can create meaningful friendships across cultures, nations, and languages. Such intentions are made clear in a 2006 article from news website China.org.cn titled “Sino-Japanese Movie About Love to Be Released in China:”

Ren Huanqi, vice director of the Tianjin Film Studio, told Xinhua News Agency they made the movie to reflect the amicable communication between the two countries’ youth. “The communication among the youth, who are the spokespersons of our times, is not only that of people but of culture. Friendship, love and the irrelevance of national boundaries are the perpetual themes. The passion for life and for people shown by young people is most powerful,” he said.

This comment corresponds to the remarks made in the Introduction on how the generational gap contributes to the extent to which subjects feel connected to history. While some members of the older generations, due to their memories of the past, may be mired in political grudges and racial prejudices, the younger generations are represented as a set of people who can be moved emotionally towards more positive conceptions of culture. In a sense, then, Huanqi is drawing attention to the opportunity available to contemporary artists and producers to influence impressionable youths towards a more cooperative transnationalism.

Despite this desire to help create a better future, the film does not fall into the trap of utopian idealism by utterly eliding history nor does it actually reference historical circumstances directly. The three plot-strands in About Love are less about praising how successful and enjoyable contemporary lifestyles are or about how people are embedded in painful historical animosities so much as the ways in which persons struggle to make connections within an environment of travel, displacement, fragmentation, and multiculturalism. In other words, the film does not elide the difficulties of modern-day living nor make unrealistic evocations of love as a universality that can conquer all challenges. The overall mood of the film conveys a sense of the mundane perseverance entailed in diasporic life. Given their general lack of rootedness, the characters do not seem to feel an intense attachment to a particular place, although they perhaps feel homesick at times. As the title indicates, the featured relationships are less about romance and marriage so much as the complexities of love. Instead of suggesting that entering into interracial relationships is seamless and easy, the film draws viewers’ attentions to feelings of loneliness, unrequited love, frustration with language barriers, and uncertainty with one’s future.
About Love raises various concerns regarding the everyday functioning in a multicultural world, such as how academic travel augments racial mixing and how part of the operation of reflexive cosmopolitanism is making efforts to communicate through language barriers. The first and last film segments use study abroad as framing devices in which the plots unfold. Such characters are thus operating in transition periods of their lives in which learning, both formally and informally, about not only a profession or subject matter but also culture, language, and emotions is of utmost significance. In the first short film, a man from Taiwan named Yao is living in Tokyo while studying to become a comic artist. He narrates, “Last Spring, I came to Tokyo from Taipei, hoping to be a professional cartoonist. It’s like New York City is the place for baseball players, Madrid for soccer players, Hollywood for filmmakers, and London for rock-and-rollers. Tokyo is the city for cartoonists.” His commentary is particularly interesting given that it stereotypes places themselves, rather than people or cultures. The rootedness of a city within a particular nation means that one must travel to, enter into, that place. He thus highlights his movement from his home to this foreign land as simply the way things have to be: in order to achieve his goal, he has to go to the place that represents the achievement of such a goal. As an American viewing this scene, I was reminded of how the discursively constructed ideology of the “American Dream” is represented over and over to the extent that many are compelled to travel to the United States in search of attaining this elusive goal. The spreading popularity of manga and widening appreciation of its artistic merit leads Yao to concentrate his ideas of what “good” comics are in the city of Tokyo itself. He, however, is very aware of his status as outsider, remarking, “I live an unstable life in this foreign country.”

The last short film, which features a Japanese man named Shuhei studying abroad in China, also begins with a summative narration of coming to a foreign country:

I’ve been in Shanghai for a week. The spring is colder here than in Tokyo. I wanted to see ordinary peoples’ lives, so I rented an old apartment. The mother and daughter downstairs run a variety shop, which makes my life convenient. I met a man named Mr. Xu. He is a Chinese who has lived in Japan before, then he returned to Shanghai to open a Spanish style bar. I am happy to meet someone who speaks Japanese. I go to his bar to read or help out whenever I have time.

Many notable features of contemporary diasporic life are mentioned here. First, we see that Shuhei differentiates between the tourist’s glimpse of a culture and the citizen’s perspective. He alludes to the ways in which temporary visitors to a country cannot witness the complexities of a
community. It also reminds viewers of the standard opinion that living with a host family allows one “real” access to daily living and what the culture is “really” like. His mentioning of Mr. Xu also helps viewers recognize that in the present context numerous people are traveling to various places throughout the world: a fluid transnational community of moving bodies. The postmodern aspect of such a contemporary environment—the ways in which culture is reduced to visual flourishes, simplified stereotypes, and made desirable—is evident in the fact that Mr. Xu has traveled to Japan only to return and open up a Spanish style bar of all things. This detail makes the subtle implication that it is enough to see representations of a culture in order to reproduce them yourself. Lastly, we see that present life means an increase in the amount of multi-lingual speakers, or, rather, the amount of people studying and/or semi-familiar with a language. By introducing a brief background of what prompted Yao and Shuhei to live outside their homelands, About Love provides viewers an intimacy with two specific examples of what numerous young adults from a wide range of countries are doing. Study abroad programs through universities are just one of the ways in which persons (albeit specifically privileged) can choose whether or not to engage in amicable, emotionally supportive cross-cultural communication.

The first short film constructs the friendship between Yao, a Japanese woman named Yuka, and a woman from Shanghai named Min as an illustration of what is possible and desirable for a viewer that travels abroad: being open to any opportunity for a positive interpersonal relationship regardless of one’s cultural background, and then being mature enough to maintain it respectfully and willingly. After they have all spent the day helping Yuka with her photography project, there is a scene in which they relax in a park. Through the visuals and dialogue, the scene evokes the degree of loneliness and displacement felt from being away from home, the difficulty and frustrations of not knowing a language, and the longing to make new connections as well as maintain one’s connection to the past:

Min (Mandarin): I’m studying at a beautician school.
Yao (Mandarin): Beautician school!? (Japanese): Min is a beautician!
Yuka (Japanese): Yes, a beautician.
Yao (Japanese): That’s great.
Min: (Mandarin): At the beginning, I didn’t have any friends. I didn’t speak Japanese. I wanted to go home so badly. I met Yuka through taking pictures. (Japanese): She took a lot of pictures of me.
Yuka (Japanese): Yes, lots of pictures.
Min (Mandarin): But, when I think of my parents who work so hard to support me. (Japanese): But, I won’t give up. I’ll keep it up. But, I really want to go home.
Min (Mandarin): Where are you from in Taiwan?
Yao (Mandarin): Taipei
Min (Mandarin): They say Taipei is fun!
Yao (Japanese): Where are you from in Japan?
Yuka (Japanese): I’m from Otaru in Hokkaido.
Yao: Ho-kai-do? Hokkaido. Where is that?
Yuka (Japanese): [draws map in the sand] Here is Tokyo. And here is my furusato Otaru.
Yao: Furusato?
Min (Mandarin): Hometown. [extends map] The most important place to you, where someone is waiting for you to return. (Japanese): Mine is here and Yao’s is here.
Yao: Furusato. (Mandarin) Hometown
[Then Yuka tries to pronounce it in Mandarin but keeps not quite getting it]

(Fig. 3) (Fig. 4) About Love, Shimoyama Ten, Yee Chin-yen, and Zhang Yibai, 2005

Given that these three are students studying to pursue their goals, the context is one in which leaving one’s home is necessary for their plans for the future. The general homesickness Min feels is exacerbated by not knowing the language. This scene resists the tendency to say to viewers, “Don’t worry. Everything will be fine. It’s easy to make friends in a foreign country.” but rather shows how a simple connection may eventually happen one day and could perhaps lead to a friendship. The map serves to remind the film’s target audience of their proximity with one another. Drawing in the sand and putting straws in as city markers explicitly depicts the East Asian diaspora (see fig. 3 and 4). Lastly, the fluid interweaving of Japanese and Mandarin shares similarities with the scenes of playful joking between friends in Moon Child: there may be linguistic differences, but they are not detrimental to maintaining a cross-cultural friendship.

In About Love, then, language barriers exist but are surpassed to some degree. This is not to say that linguistic differences are insignificant but that people struggle through things, finding a way to communicate. The film seems quite preoccupied with the sorts of emotional connections people make with each other, particularly ones that are not dependent on verbal
communication. In the first short film, Yao becomes attracted to a Japanese woman, whom he sees crying one day while walking along a busy Tokyo street. This brief, instant moment of recognition that she is sad (due, we assume, to her boyfriend breaking up with her while away in Spain) provokes Yao to post illustrations to her art studio window on a daily basis that slowly transition from crying to smiling. So, as the woman progresses with her painting, she is collecting Yao’s illustrations. It is almost as if the two are having a conversation through images; the visual communication of hand-drawn pictures and painting enable the romantic attachment. Tears and a smile serve as signifiers of universally felt human emotions. If it may be impossible for the woman to have a conversation with Yao in which she explains why she is depressed, Yao can at least convey his concern to her through wordless visuals. Although reminiscent of liberal pluralist multiculturalism, this depiction of interpersonal communication does not necessarily elide reality in favor of an imaginary universalism. Rather, it conveys the importance of a creative adaptability to transnational circumstances. The film thus seems to posit that one should seek alternative forms of communication rather than digress into unwillingness or frustration with a linguistic or cultural divide. Indeed, as historical circumstances have shown, allowing barriers to subsume a relationship can all too often fall into antagonistic relations between people who, instead of making efforts to understand and connect with others, stereotype and criticize them (or much worse).

This message carries strongly into the second short film of the movie in which the two main characters, a Taiwanese woman named A-Su and a Japanese man named Tecchan, earnestly pursue a friendship. The bond between them is endearing and supportive rather than explicitly romantic. Embodiment is a major concern given that the film begins by emphasizing physicality through A-Su constructing a bookcase. As she saws wooden boards and hammers in nails, the viewer soaks in her bodily exertion and implied emotional state. When she realizes that she cannot pick the shelf up off the floor, she calls Tecchan to come over and help. Viewers recognize immediately that he does not know much Mandarin as he struggles over the phone to understand why she has called and then repeats her words in confusion when he arrives. The communication between them is thus largely physical, entailing gestures and movement. Their focused actions of painting the bookshelf lead into flirtatious playing and paint-fighting; it is as if the silence due to the language barrier has to give way to a sexual, bodily communication. But when he begins to kiss her, A-Su pushes him away. She then proceeds to explain her feelings by
writing out with chalk the Chinese/Kanji characters “boyfriend” “break up” “sad” “sleepless” “make bookshelf” “sorry” “just used your body” “miss him.” In response, Tecchan writes two characters saying he understands. This relatively silent, physical form of communication becomes a bombardment of words later on in the film. After A-Su has had Tecchan ask her ex-boyfriend if he’ll meet with her, Tecchan returns to her to relay the message. During this climatic scene, Tecchan’s mispronounced Mandarin and A-Su’s repeated attempts to understand it saturate their communication. His urgency to convey the meaning accurately and her urgency to find out how her ex-boyfriend feels both collide with the language barrier, thus producing a sort of frenzied conversation. Given the relative silence beginning the film, the viewer is struck in this scene by the density of vocalized words. But, as the scene unfolds, we recognize that the words themselves are far less important than the characters’ behavior: their genuine, emotional intensity shows that they care about one another and are making efforts to maintain the friendship. Similarly to all of the other texts discussed in this thesis, this short film presents to the viewer specific characters that serve as proper models of how she should carry herself responsibly in everyday life; whether or not social change is an overt aim of such a text, the degree of pertinence one feels when viewing it can help her impact the public realm.

If the first two segments in About Love suggest the establishment and ongoing maintenance of a cross-cultural friendship, the third short film depicts a missed opportunity for doing so. The language barrier between the Japanese Shuhei and Chinese Yun is handled through the use of English, a language in which both are generally proficient. For example, when addressing a package, Shuhei tells Yun in English, “My girlfriend. Would you please check the letter for me?” to which she responds with “okay.” This limited vocal communication between them alludes to the problematic “Global English” ideology that purports proficiency in English as a requirement for entry into successful capitalistic endeavors. Translation from Japanese to Mandarin, however, is the central focus of the short film, which signals the movie’s wider call for an attempt to negotiate the animosity between two nations that has been historically deemed insurmountable. Very similarly to the first film, Shuhei’s girlfriend is in Spain and writes to break up with him. Yun finds this letter torn up, choosing to reassemble then translate it. The convergence of language, diasporic loneliness, and international travel occurs in a scene in which Yun asks Shuhei for help translating:
Yun (English): Do you know what this mean?” [he reads “watashi wa ima Baruselona ni imasu”] “Baruselona?”
Shuhei (English): A famous city in Spain, you know?
Yun: “Oh Barcelona!”
Shuhei (English): But why?
Yun (English): I’m learning a Japanese song. Can you teach me how to read this? [He reads and she repeats] Ok, thank you.

We see that Yun is trying to access the realm of the man she loves. Translation becomes a vehicle to learning about his inner feelings. With English serving as a lubricant to their conversations—although in many ways negligible since they could probably manage in their own respective languages and limited knowledge of the other’s—she is able to cross over the language barrier and bring back his Japanese words to her own side of the boundary through translation. Ultimately, however, her love remains unrequited. After completing the translation, she does not tell Shuhei how she feels except to say “I love you” in Spanish. Thinking that “Te Quiero” means “goodbye,” he leaves only to return a year later to find the district in which the store was located torn down. We have, then, four languages (Mandarin, Japanese, English, and Spanish) coexisting in a manner that effectively conveys a fragmented, disporic, transnational existence. Like persons, bits of phrases interact to, at times, make significant connections while at other times remaining isolated fragments.

Such is the overall atmosphere and mood of About Love, whose commentary is thus partially inconclusive. The short films do not strive to ultimately claim or persuade viewers of a truth so much as suggest the ways in which contemporary transnational identity impacts us emotionally. The film suggests that there is a quotidian aspect of transnational lifestyles: we are all just trying to survive without getting too hurt. This film thus suggests to Asian and non-Asian viewers alike that we all desire genuine connections, and may even have the opportunity to act ourselves to form a bond across cultural or linguistic divides. Through an attention to cross-cultural interpersonal relationships, the film attaches the featured scenarios to viewer’s lives, which generates a critical multiculturalism. While many viewers are not Japanese, Chinese, or Taiwanese, they may encounter similar situations given the increasing interconnectedness of transnational capitalism. Films such as About Love thus enable us to develop our senses of reflexive cosmopolitanism, recognizing the power relations, and our positions within them, that break-down national borders and reconstitute them as dynamically maintained linkages between nations.
Conclusion

All of the texts included in this chapter suggest that a multicultural world means that persons of different backgrounds can just-so-happen to meet, perhaps becoming casual acquaintances, good friends, or even lovers. They point to an environment in which our relations with one another are complicated by a mixture of desire, fetishes, animosity, historical memory, and fragmentation. *In the Empire of Dreams* effectively captures the mundane aspects of expatriate life in Japan as they influence the emotional connections people make with one another. The narrative of *Audrey Hepburn’s Neck* oscillates between extreme fetishization and historical identity in order to suggest that the various people in multicultural contexts are motivated by complex desires and memories. Published in 1996, this novel is as an example of how “gaijin literature” serves as a predecessor to recent fictional accounts of academic travel and teaching abroad. *My Darling is a Foreigner* takes an everyday living perspective in order to look at interracial marriage. Although overly sentimentalized and unrealistic at times, the film does offer an interesting glimpse at an increasingly multicultural Japan in order to suggest to viewers that cultural idiosyncrasies manifest themselves in individuals who can choose to pursue a cross-cultural bond or can let the challenges get the best of them. *About Love* points to a future in which collective cultural memories will be acknowledged without lending themselves to a furthering of animosity between peoples. Gathering these texts together enables one to see how the ongoing process of reflexive cosmopolitanism can compel individuals to strive to make emotional and political connections with those around them on a daily basis. In short, their focus on realistic, quotidian interactions between two individuals enables these texts to present a hope for a positive future without falling into a universal utopianism that completely ignores historical implications. They thus reformulate white-man-centered ideologies through a critical multiculturalism that attempts to forge connections across historical and material differences without erasing them.
Chapter Three

Reflexive Cosmopolitanism Online: Activities and Discourses of Japanese Media Fandom

Introduction

While the texts in chapters one and two focus on characters as traveling bodies, this chapter focuses more on viewers watching texts that travel across national borders. Using Ong’s notion of flexible citizenship as an analytic for examining the online circulation of Japanese films enables us to see how a text exists simultaneously in multiple places and actually shifts and mutates due to the participatory activities of fans and viewers. By conceiving of films as texts that operate in transnational capitalism similarly to how “flexible citizens” travel and adapt to achieve some sort of advantage, this chapter explores “the transnational practices and imaginings of the nomadic subject [i.e. the film] and the social conditions that enable [its] flexibility” (Ong 3). So while the first two chapters focus mainly on the films’ contexts of production and themes of cross-cultural relationships between persons, this chapter delineates the multiple sites in which these films exist as well as the routes through which they move, adapt, and change. Texts are embedded in complex global markets, both material and digital, thus continually shifting as they are released in different countries, transformed into multiple versions, and consumed and spoken of by a variety of audiences. Films thus exist in numerous forms—digital video discs, video files stored on a computer, DVD-rips, fansubs, creative fan music videos, movie reviews, etc.—all of which are capable of crossing national boundaries to be viewed, translated, discussed, and passed on by users. The digital circulation of texts impacts how we understand and conceptualize the workings of transnationalism given that the internet breaks down the borders of the nation-state, reconstituting them in fluid, dynamic networks of cross-cultural users’ experiences. By looking closer at the material circumstances in which an American viewer watches Japanese films, this chapter delineates part of the complex context in which the films discussed in this thesis are situated as well as how such a context impacts one’s self-reflection and outward engagement with power relations.

I am one such “American viewer” for whom the online circulation of Japanese media plays an influential role in my emotional and academic attachment to Japanese culture. As mentioned in the Prologue, this thesis is in many ways a form of a negotiation of my fetishistic-like desire for Japan and my serious scholarly engagement with Japanese texts. The average fan
of a particular Japanese entertainment form plays a significant role in the American imaginary of Japan, the transnational network of film, and the circulation of cultural representations of Japan, America, and Japan-U.S. interactions. This chapter thus draws connections between fan studies, cultural studies scholars’ interests in anime and manga, and film studies scholars’ interests in Japanese cinema in order to examine the role of Japanophilia in shaping how transnationalism works in the context of online video file circulation and viewer blog comments.

By complementing the first two chapters with such a discussion, I hope to effectively capture the expansive, heterogeneous, and fragmented ways in which individuals such as myself intensify a reflexive cosmopolitanism. Much of the discussion in this chapter draws upon my own personal online experiences as a viewer of Japanese films. In many ways, this thesis would not have been possible if it were not for the ways in which digital technologies and user-generated websites have widened the amount of Japanese media forms available. Indeed, I would probably not even know that the films *Moon Child*, *My Darling is a Foreigner*, and *About Love* existed if it were not for their inclusion in the list of Japanese films provided on DramaCrazy.net. Throughout this chapter, brief anecdotes and personal observations serve not as generalizable truths but rather as starting points to reflect on the dynamic ways in which Japanese cultural products circulate and in which viewers actively engage with a text, write about it, remediate it, travel to the nation featured in it, etc. While such activities do not in and of themselves imply a respectful, politically active presence, it is important to acknowledge the significant influence fandom has on the dynamic process of reflexive cosmopolitanism we are all constantly engaging in to differing degrees at different moments and in relation to others.

Although I have noticed a recent increase in the amount of scholarship on fans of anime and manga, it is my general impression that criticism has not yet fully tackled the complexity and

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variety of the Japanophilia phenomenon. Adding television series and films into this conversation is particularly necessary given that a significant number of titles begin as manga, become anime, then are made into live-action television series and/or films.26 Although the number of fans exposed only to anime and manga far outnumbers those familiar with television dramas and films, more do seem to be gaining interest in live-action texts. Japanese film and television are a very likely next step of interest; indeed, many fans of Japanese live-action drama transitioned from anime and manga. For example, user Regan12 posts on a DramaCrazy.net messageboard, “I transitioned from Anime to Drama's so easily and because of that I will always love JDrama,” thus suggesting that live-action Japanese entertainment may be a significant part of the continuum of Japanophilia. American fandom of Japanese television drama and live-action films is what Sean Leonard calls a “cultural sink,” “the early stages of demand formation before centralized suppliers organize themselves” (284). While anime used to be in the cultural sink stage, it has now become more mainstream and commercially available. The majority of Japanese films, and nearly every Japanese television show, however, are still off the radar of official distributors who have not yet felt that this niche demand is enough to jump on to reap substantial profit.

From my own experiences conducting research, Western scholarship on Japanese films seems to be largely confined to this smaller group of texts that have some sort of “official” presence in the scholar’s native country. I would imagine that legitimate concerns regarding legality and copyright infringement compel academics to choose to discuss texts that have clear channels of distribution through which the legal rights and ownership can be traced. Because, generally speaking, any Japanese live-action film that has reached official distribution in the United States is either a “cult,” “art,” or “classic” film, academic and critical discussions tend to neglect addressing “pop” Japanese films circulating online. Films deemed popular or “average” are not much of a priority given the relatively small fraction of the U.S. population interested in them. Hence, Brother was released on DVD due to its status as one of a Japanese auteur’s art films, and Moon Child was released as part of a DVD box set catering to Japanese cult-film enthusiasts; but the romance genre films My Darling is a Foreigner and About Love will likely never be acquired by an American distributor. Before making it to DVD, many of these foreign films are shown at film festivals, which serve as officially structured means by which national

26 Such as Crows Zero, Death Note, Gokusen, I Love My Sister, One Pound Gospel, and Nana
ideologies are promulgated: the films are seen as representatives of a particular culture. In other words, they tend to become signifiers for essentialist depictions of culture within a clearly organized forum for the official discourses of nation-states to be conveyed through artistic media. The film festival’s “tendency towards canon formation” (Czach 78) gives the films a stamp of approval and creates a niche market audience interested in consuming them. Commercial distributors then attempt to exert control over a film in order to reap profits; achieving distribution rights is a way of monopolizing the money garnered from consumption of the film and its related merchandise. The movement, interaction, and exchange between companies, in other words, are intentional and strategic choices made in order to profit in transnational networks of power and money. Within this context, many official American distributors of Japanese films exhibit an intense desire to differentiate the Other, contain it, domesticate it, appropriate it, etc. These defensive maneuvers, then, become the guarding of representation: who can and cannot represent something (a “culture,” “nation,” “company”) and how that something “should” be and actually is represented. To an extent, then, we can conceive of American commercial distributors as purveyors of nationalistic ideology protecting the nation by filtering and actively (re)constructing what is imported.

But given the current context in which films exist digitally as downloadable or streamable files and physically as DVDs by foreign distributors sold online by everyday consumers (on sites such as eBay), traditional scholarly approaches would benefit from a full account of the ways in which creative texts that exist as numerous digital fragments are prevalent enough to actually influence the ways in which transnationalism functions. While many are beginning to notice and recognize unofficial circulation—including pirated, bootlegged versions—as a legitimate area for scholarly attention, most of these discussions seem to address the phenomenon itself rather than the actual texts and user comments that are circulating. This chapter is an attempt to take a step in this direction while opening up new avenues for future research and scholarship: What are the different ways in which Japanese (popular) films are imagined and consumed? How do certain conditions enable their circulation? What is the


relationship between the film’s content and form on impacting reflexive cosmopolitanism? To what extent do the practices of official distributors and fans change both the meanings of the films and the interpretive approaches taken? To what extent does a fan’s behavior involve fetishization? How do viewers engage with, promote, or resist a critical multiculturalism? To address such questions, I lay out the major aspects of the current digital internet context that are relevant to my discussion, fan activity in particular, before examining comments on Japanese live-action drama generally, then the films discussed in this thesis specifically, in order to explore viewers’ emotional responses to and active engagement with the text as a site for complicating traditional product-based transnational scholarship.

**Online Circulation of Japanese Media**

The dominance of official distribution of digital media by actual companies has been shifting drastically due to the emergence and popular usage of online technologies. Sites such as YouTube have changed the face of video circulation by providing a space for everyday users to present video files saved on their computers. While such file-hosting websites may have begun mainly with personal home videos, they now host full-length movies (often broken down into smaller parts), television programs, commercials, etc. Add peer-to-peer torrenting software to the picture, and the fluid, transnational, online network expands even more. As Kelly Hu mentions in her article on how Chinese fans of Japanese television dramas maintain online communities and circulate fan-subs:

> Undoubtedly, new P2P protocols such as BitTorrent, in correlation with the digital technologies, have radically transformed the structural oppressions/exclusions from TV or theatre, cinema and distributors’ marketing strategies with the result that audio-visual contents can be multiplied and can move more smoothly and freely across various geographical boundaries, to be consumed by audiences at low cost and sooner than before. (180)

Given this context, DVDs are becoming significantly less ubiquitous than they were when first introduced. In addition to routes through which one can download or stream video files for free,
online accounts with services such as the popular NetFlix enable one to access their selection of films for a flat monthly fee. In fact, NetFlix has recently discontinued its service of mailing DVDs to members’ homes. Kelts similarly mentions that, among the youth and teenage population in particular, DVDs are following in the footsteps of books: becoming old and obsolete. He explains how the context of digital textual-audio-visual data reveals the physicality of books and DVDs to be limiting while the cyberspace of the Internet enables the creation and circulation of digital data in a much faster and limitless manner:

books, as we are constantly reminded, are old media. They are physical, and if they are published by a company, then they can be and usually are edited, vetted for inaccuracies, checked for potential offenses. The same can be said of DVDs, whose rapid rise as an entertainment technology may well be accompanied by an equally rapid dive. Many tech gurus and anime fans have echoed versions of the same prognostication: It is all going to the high-speed Internet. (143)

If one is to more fully understand the implications of online media circulation on the transnational imaginaries and capabilities of texts, then, the high-speed Internet must be given serious consideration. It is what Appadurai calls a “technoscape,” that is, “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (34). From such above reflections, we see that the selectiveness of American distributors and the physical limitations of “hard” products result in many seeking out other channels.

To an extent, then, there seems to be a sense of dissatisfaction with the limits of hegemonic nation-state structures that propels users to form transnational collaborative alliances (such as a fan-subbing team) to actively alter a text to meet their own wants (such as having access to and being able to comprehend a text originally made in Japanese). In other words, the transnational aspects of online circulation problematize nationalistic ideologies and subjectivities by reconstituting conceptions of culture along the desires of active consumer-user communities. Henry Jenkins draws attention to this increasingly prevalent phenomenon of “grassroots convergence” in which “digitally empowered consumers” actively shape the production, distribution, and reception of media (155). While the slow, step-by-step process of buying distribution rights, translating the film, then releasing it in stores may benefit a company careful to maximize profits and protect national boundaries, it is seen by many as frustrating and
unnecessary given current technological capabilities. Everyday users, viewers, and fans thus play a large role in “attempting to break down the time-space constraints and the official distribution hierarchy” (Hu 171). Individual user-viewers are resisting the selectiveness and time-restraints of commercial distribution channels by creating “fan-sub” and/or DVD-ripped versions of Japanese media texts that circulate online, thus slipping through the cracks of official distribution:

The transglobal community of American, Japanese, and other otaku has undergone its own hentai-like transformation. Among other mutations, there are now ‘fanslations’ (translations of manga and anime into other languages, most commonly English) and ‘fansubs’ (subtitled by fans). The most popular, the most striking, or just provocative anime titles across a variety of subgenres can be found on the Internet within days of their release in Japan. (Kelts 143)

Within this participatory fan community, viewers familiar with another language can upload the raw original language version to their computers, use a software program to add their own translations, then host the completed file online for other users to read or watch. Without a doubt, the legitimacy and legality of this ripping-subtitling-streaming phenomenon is a highly debated issue. Many have pointed out that the popularity of anime, manga, and drama outside Japan would not be nearly as widespread and intense as it is if it were not for the “illegal” activity of pirating, bootlegging, and unauthorized distribution. Due to this pervasive and fast-spreading interest, communities have formed around activities of cultural appreciation and distributors have increased the amount of Japanese media available. Others bemoan the lack of profit made by the original Japanese creators due to viewers being able to download or stream such fan versions rather than purchase originals.

Although there are legitimate concerns with legality—it is pretty common to see the removal of files due to copyright infringement—the phenomenon is extensive and adaptive. Even when some files are removed from certain sites, other ones are uploaded elsewhere. Or, when a particular fan-subber’s operations are shut down, others pop up. Given the extremely huge number of websites out there, many of which are capable of hosting mp3s, video files, images, and text, it is nearly impossible for official, commercial distributors to actually contain

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fans’ activities. Critics of manga scanlation and anime fan-subbing, such as James Rampant and Gilles Poitras, explain how fans do to a large extent try to self-regulate online circulation by taking actions such as removing their files once a series has been released in their country. Indeed, I have found it to be pretty common to see statements advocating the purchase of official releases appear in the beginning of video files. At the same time, however, the larger impetus behind such activities seems to be granting access to a wider audience. The ways in which the nation-state strives to organize information, intellectual property, and creative works along clear lines that identify who owns, controls, distributes, and consumes are being broken down, fragmented, and complicated by online users’ activities. Positions of privilege, then, emerge less from one’s nationalistic identity so much as one’s digital knowledge, ownership of technological products and/or the original texts, cultural or linguistic comprehension, and active participation in transnational online spaces. Fan-subtitling can be conceived of as an alternative, even resistance, to official commercial distribution given that it involves different user-viewer-consumers with varying expertise, such as software program experience and comprehension of the Japanese language, collaborating together to produce and circulate a text without reaping monetary profit. The Japanese films, anime, manga, television shows, etc. circulating, then, are geared towards other fans that desire Japanese media but may not yet have access to particular products.

Due to the Japanophilia of this particular community, then, texts translated by fans tend to make a particular effort to keep the Japaneseness of the text intact and visible. While companies have traditionally tended to domesticate and localize a film in an attempt to gain a wider mass audience, many fans endeavor to spread a fuller awareness of Japanese culture so that viewers can gain a more sophisticated understanding of the anime in its original form. As Rampant remarks in the context of scanlation—scanning in the original Japanese manga pages, whiting out the text, and replacing it with an English translation—fans tend to emphasize, contextualize, and appreciate such Japanese features:

‘Scanlators’ threw off the naturalizing constraints employed by commercial translators and instead used techniques of foreignization … In opposition to domesticating a text, which implies diluting its ‘foreignness’ by adding language and cultural concepts of the target culture and thus making the text appear less of a translated product and more like a domestic product, foreignization overtly stresses the product’s exoticness by retaining the cultural differences requiring knowledge from the reader, or footnotes. (222-3)
Because part of fandom is feeling a part of an in-group, as Rampant explains, fan-subbing techniques often attempt to educate viewers on Japanese culture, thus allowing them to feel in the know. There is less an impulse to easily and fluidly watch the film so much as discover the significance of cultural referents. The “footnotes” he speaks of is something I have personally encountered a lot. For example, before episodes of Sailor Moon, the fan-subber had a “Culture Notes” section which explained the explicitly Japanese elements of the upcoming episode. So while official distributors may, say, change a joke so that viewers can “understand” the humor, fan-subbers will translate it accurately but then explain in a footnote why it is funny. The Japanese-ness, then, of the text is grasped onto for its appeal as exotic, “authentic,” interesting, and unique. But what this also shows is a willingness and desire to understand a cultural Other on its own terms. Fans’ translation and contextualization activities signal how online users actively situate themselves to varying degrees in a position of cultural translator or expert able to shape how a larger audience understands and reacts to a particular media form. Given its emphasis on conveying a “correct” version accurately following the original, fan translation can be seen as a mode through which to correct cultural misconceptions. The process itself, which requires active online, interpersonal relationships, is an example of how the convergence of media, emotions, desire, and technology prompt collaborative relationships. If this happens for distributing the media itself, it is possible (and perhaps likely) that not only these fans but also the viewers of such media are becoming more politically active and/or fostering a desire to help enfranchise others. For example, a fan of anime may befriend Japanese Americans in his or her community, which could lead to an interest in changing the American myths of the model minority, yellow peril, etc. from having heard of these friends’ experiences firsthand, which could mean addressing material conditions and inequalities in such realms as the curriculum of the public school that he or she attends.

While online activities can seek to extend cultural understanding and develop critical multiculturalism, another byproduct of this hyper-mediated cyber environment is an internet user’s frequent, habitual exposure to textual and visual fragments: small signifiers imbued with cultural resonance. As Park laments, “The world appears to be shrinking into sound bytes and snapshots mediated through global popular culture” (161). It is, in Jean Baudrillard’s terms, a “hyperreal” world in which the “precession of simulacra” obliterate the difference between the
real and imaginary “leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated
generation of differences” (2-3). We have lost the ability to find “authentic” culture and try to
recuperate this loss by divulging in the fragmented representations themselves and by
nostalgically longing for tradition. One of the most striking features of this hyperreal cyber-
environment is the bombardment of advertising one now faces: animated banners, pop-ups, and
videos weave in with actual website content. Numerous advertisements are needed to cover the
costs of maintaining such media-intensive websites; indeed, it is becoming progressively harder
to watch a video without first being forced to watch an opening advertisement. This jumbled
amalgamation is a sort of chaotic transnational mixture of advertisements, movies, photos, user
comments, and reviews. On websites hosting Japanese media, then, users access and watch
videos while seeing words and images beckoning them to lose weight, go on a dream vacation,
buy a condominium, eat a granola bar, change their cell phone plan, etc. The capitalistic
practices of hegemonic powers, then, penetrate and seek to operate within dynamic online spaces,
which themselves both resist and participate in transnational capitalism.

The websites MySoju.com and DramaCrazy.net are just two illustrations of these media-
rich multicultural, capitalistic online environments. Both sites present organized lists of links to
video files of Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese, Chinese, and Hong Kong television shows and
movies. Given that these websites link out to videos hosted at different sites, they serve as
switching points: junctures from one online space to another. For example, clicking “play” and
waiting for the new page, the China-based tudou.com, to load virtually simulates being
transported to another country. It is as if you have traveled without moving. Suddenly, the
Western viewer can no longer read anything on the site. The commercial clips that play, such as
Chinese eating KFC, seem familiar yet strange and exotic. Given that it is Kentucky Fried
Chicken of all things, such a commercial points to the fact that a significant part of globalization
has, unfortunately, been the “McDonaldization” of the globe. The images, advertisement, and
text thus combine to form a spectacle of Otherness. The experience is sanitized and safe,
however, since one does not have to encounter the discomfort, culture shock, and danger of
actually traveling to a foreign country. Following Lisa Nakamura’s argument in “Where Do You
Want to Go Today? Cybernetic Tourism, the Internet, and Transnationality,” one can see how
sites such as Tudou.com cast many American viewers in the position of cybernetic tourists. I see
a pop-up advertisement for Bauhinia-brand paints, watch a 10 second commercial consisting of
Chinese young adults excited for the KFC menu options, then settle in to watch the fan-subtitled Japanese film I have selected, which is situated within a wallpaper prompting one to purchase a particular Chinese brand of electronics. In an extremely short amount of time, viewers have felt a momentary rush of travel to China and a frenzy of cultural fragments and consumer desires.

This experience is only one example; I have also been forwarded to similar French, Arabic, and Spanish sites. The traditional approaches to texts that explore their production—who made it, when, and for what reasons—do not fully allow us to delineate online users’ experiences in this hyperreal, advertisement-saturated media environment. The linear tracing back to a text’s origin does not adequately account for the ways in which viewers enter in medias res. Although representations have obviously not popped up out of nowhere—they are pieces of a large, complex, dynamic, and ongoing system of ideologies and material, social, and political conditions—our scholarly methodologies should extend to include the various ways in which users feel both disconnected from the system in which they are operating yet are also actively involved in its evolution. On the surface, this online phenomenon is an ideologically-structured discourse of rampant capitalism, cultural essentialisms concentrated in visual flourishes or stereotypes, and superficial fetishization. But, as my following discussion of user comments suggests, viewers do not always merely follow blindly and passively but also actively participate in ways that both reinforce and resist such hegemonic constructions of culture. As I stated in the Introduction, reflexive cosmopolitanism is a malleable, evolving continuum in which subjects look inward and outward, move backwards and forwards, consume ideas and produce ideas. This thesis has attempted to delineate how specific texts become markers of an individual’s movements: from engaging with and coming back to these Japanese films throughout my life, I am able to see the sort of “progress” I am making in my worldview and actions. Below I turn to specific posts as one of the manifold indications of an individual’s ongoing reflexive cosmopolitanism, which is greatly impacted by an intense emotional attachment to media-objects.

**Loving a Culture: Fans’ Posts on DramaCrazy.net’s Online Forums**

Although DramaCrazy.net does not actually host the files themselves, the site’s popularity, as is evident from the numerous users that upload files, post film reviews, Facebook “like” files, and participate in its online forums, is due to its effective organization of video files into lists according to regional location and title. Trying to find every episode of a series by using
search engines or through the primary hosting sites directly is an overly scattered and fragmented experience that has been solidified through DramaCrazy’s collections. Those who contribute such links to files, however, are everyday users not in charge of running the website. It is a participatory culture of fandom in which those who have found certain titles available on various websites then contribute this information to DramaCrazy’s database. Furthermore, frequent visitors to the site may choose to participate in its online forums after signing up for a free user account. Comments on forums such as these provide an entry point to explore how online communities form around active fan-user participation. As forms of cross-cultural bonding across national borders, online forums can be transnational activities that break down the limits of the nation-state in order to reconstitute them according to a shared love for a media form. Given that DramaCrazy is the site I visit most often in order to watch Japanese film, I browsed through their online forums to select user comments whose content provided a mixture of sentiments regarding their love of Japanese drama. Examining the following responses to a thread that asks, “Why do you watch Japanese dramas?” enables one to identify not only the most prevalent types of imaginaries currently circulating but also how individuals use them to shape their subjectivities and develop an awareness of other subjectivities.

Before delving into the various attributes of such fandom, it is important to emphasize an obvious but crucial marker of how interest in Japanese films, television dramas, and non-Japanese films about Japan differs from, say, an interest in anime, manga, woodblock prints, novels, or kanji calligraphy: real human beings. A sense of realism—you are looking at human beings actually moving through a literal film-set—fills the space that purely textual or illustrative media forms maintain. For me personally, after watching anime for so long I naturally developed an interest in actual Japanese people. I began to consider the fictional work as a produced document coming from real people in a real place removed from myself. But since the normal, average illustrator, animator, or voice actor working in an office is not all that exciting, I turned to the characters in live-action drama and films as a means of partially engaging in the Orientalist

32 Although it lies outside the scope of my current discussion, future research could explore how forums serve as a meeting place for fans of Japanese media from numerous different countries. Although there is a degree of anonymity involved given that a person goes by a username, the gendered and racialized identity of a user complicates one’s online experience in various ways. As Lisa Nakamura explains in Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet, the internet is a place where race “happens.” For example, when one signs in as a DramaCrazy user, there is an option to fill in one’s “location.” In addition, the avatar one selects, next to which is shown a Chinese character designating “man” or “woman,” provides a way in which the user can perform race and gender through online commenting.
fantasy while also extending my exposure to and understanding of Japanese media. On the one hand, the fictional storyline and characters enable one to fantasize while still feeling like you are getting a glimpse at Japan and its culture. On the other hand, rather than a fantasy realm, one sees an actual place to which he or she can travel. Characters are walking down real streets, and the performers more closely embody the fictional persona. User 13eautiful’s comment that she watches Japanese dramas “for the cute and hot guys! and also if it has a good plot line, that and unlike with anime you can go hug them if you ever meet them *day dreams*” vividly captures the feelings of excitement inherent in knowing that these people actually exist. The indication of a sexual attraction to Japanese people—the “cute” and “hot” men—reminds us of the characters in Audrey Hepburn’s Neck. In that text, as well as with these fans’ opinions, this erotic desire is not to be dismissed as entirely superficial but rather one of many ways through which one negotiates their subjectivity and relationship with others in the context of interracial encounters. While they are all highly mediated forms of representation, live-action films do provide a space where a slightly more realistic vision of Japanese culture can develop since you are seeing potentially more ordinary, typical portrayals of persons. As I have shown in the first two chapters, seeing performers in scenes depicting everyday interactions is a means through which viewers can relate the film’s critical multiculturalism to their own daily experiences.

Although a significant part of users’ desires for Japanese live-action drama and film, the Orientalist fascination with the desirable-yet-repulsive Other does not adequately account for the complexity of such fandom. This phenomenon can be analyzed as a mode of what Henry Jenkins terms “pop cosmopolitanism,” which “may not yet constitute a political consciousness of America’s place in the world (and in its worst forms, it may simply amount to a reformation of orientalism), but it opens consumers to alternative cultural perspectives” (156). He further explains that, “pop cosmopolitan walks a thin line between dilettantism and connoisseurship, between orientalistic fantasies and a desire to honestly connect and understand an alien culture, between assertion of mastery and surrender to cultural difference” (Jenkins 164). In the online spaces in which user-viewers function, then, one can notice a mixture of impulses: to appreciate, to desire, to connect, to know, to exoticize, to celebrate, to control, to bond. I depart from Jenkins’ suggestion that a fan walks between two dichotomous entities by suggesting that Orientalist binaries cannot fully account for the dynamic heterogeneous combination of varying emotions, opinions, and data circulating online. Furthermore, I reject his term of “pop
cosmopolitanism” due to its implications of superficial pleasure and activity motivated more by temporary fads than an ongoing interest in cultural complexities. My term “reflexive cosmopolitanism,” however, accounts for multiplicities, shifting power relations, and the renegotiation of identity that takes place. Through an analysis of the following four comments, I hope to complicate Orientalist infatuations by pointing to the ways in which a desire for the Other not only prolongs the fandom, but can actually potentially motivate a reflexive cosmopolitan to (continue to) develop more complex, nuanced perspectives on Japanese culture.

User Alvari provides an oversimplified answer that, despite its overt Orientalism, still manages to point to an underlying complex reservoir of fandom:

I have a few reasons:
1. I like to compare cultures. I think it's very interesting to see what is different here in America and over there in Japan. I love studying cultures.
2. I love the story lines! They are absolutely amazing and never fail at capturing my heart in ways that I didn't know were possible.
3. I think Asians are cute.

Alvari’s first reason solidifies “culture” into a solid entity that is inherently consistent, allowing her to feel able to compare American culture with Japanese culture. She states that she takes pleasure in discovering the ways in which “we” are different from “them.” This reinforcement of the East-West binary as two homogenous things does not help to understand Orientalism as heterogeneous, and yet the degree of emotional investment, as well as the impulse to exaggeratedly praise the storylines, suggests that fetishes lead one to feel that a “different” culture is more desirable than one’s own inadequate cultural group. Physical and emotional attachment to an entire race of people, which is contained and fetishized, is apparent in her infantilizing claim that Asians are “cute.” Such a declaration signals a distanced survey of the Other, which becomes a simplified group to be labeled with generalized adjectives. But at the same time, this maneuver is not simply a racist Orientalist generalization—such as the comment I heard in a recent conversation with an uncle: “What would the police be able to say to identify a suspect in Japan? ‘The suspect is short, thin, with black hair, and brown eyes?’”—since it appears to not be tinged with an implicit prejudice, contempt, or utter ignorance. Indeed, her sentimentalized language and exaggerated praise for the ability of the storylines to capture her feelings suggests that the shows she watches repeatedly have consistently impacted her in this way. This indicates how a degree of reiterated Japanophilia contributes to one’s tendency to view
people of that race as more attractive and desirable; a fetish that is more complicated than the ignorant notion that “all ____ look the same.” Alvari both distances herself from an objectified racial Other and closely identifies herself with a cultural experience through emotional attachment.

Such emotional attachment participates in the discourse of sentimentalism given that unequal power relations enable the privileged space of distance from which one can then emotionally identify with “the Other.” Simultaneously, however, fans complicate their own subject positions by elevating what they determine to be a particularly “Japanese” way of doing things above their own “American” worldview. Emotional attachment plays a significant role in keeping the relationship between an individual and Japanese culture viable to the extent that one’s own position is decentered and more easily conceptualized as one of many operating subjects. In other words, the act of reversal that elevates the Japanese “other” over one’s in-group suggests the instability and relativity of subjects. So from continuing to follow these good-looking Japanese actors and continuing to be fascinated with comparing cultures, fans such as Alvari could indeed reach the realization that American and Japanese cultures are interpenetrative, multiply constituted, inextricably bound with the numerous other “cultures” participating in transnational networks of exchange, etc. Like the films’ processes of dismantling center-periphery assumptions, elevating the Other over the non-Other is an initial act that indicates to oneself that ideas are mobile and discursively constructed, which means subjects can and are always playing with the terms. In short, the superior/inferior binary is at first reversed (the “other” is better than “us”), then dismantled (critical multiculturalism), then constantly engaged with (reflexive cosmopolitanism).

In all of these featured posts, then, there is an underlying, or explicit, dissatisfaction with domestic media forms. They do not like what they see here, so they come to be attracted to how the Japanese do things over there; or, rather, it is from enjoying the Japanese media forms more and more that one comes to find what they had been watching as problematic, or simply not as “cool.” Hence, user bekichan, after beginning with the oft-cited attractiveness of Japanese actors, mentions that the emotional resonance of the drama is more satisfactory than American drama:

I love so much about Japanese dramas <3
Let's see... first of all, the boys are prettyyyyy and I very much enjoy looking at them. Also, on a less superficial note xD I really love the storylines. They tend to be more innocent in a way, than regular American dramas. They are a lot sweeter,
and there is always a message that makes you feel good inside. Of course, this doesn't apply for all dramas, but it does for the ones I watch ^^ And on the final note: watching J-doramas has done WONDERS for my efforts to learn Japanese. Huzzah!

Bekichan readily admits the pleasure to be gained from gazing at the Other, which indicates her position as privileged subject objectifying the actors as fetish objects. Finding racially marked bodies physically attractive, then, signifies a non-Other’s infatuation with the Other. To the extent that Japanese actors and actresses are just eye candy adorning the screen for the gaze of the West is obviously quite problematic. But such a declaration is acknowledged upfront as superficial in order to transition to the more substantial reasons for her feelings. Her opinions become more sophisticated as she shifts to content and language. Instead of a simple, distanced gaze, she is invested enough in Japan—or at least the object of her fandom—to make an effort to learn the language, which is, as the films of this thesis argue, a step towards a more critically aware perspective of cultural relations. Similarly to Alvari, bekichan cites the emotional impact of the storylines in particularly sentimentalized language. Within her language, however, is also a condemnation of American dramas as inadequate—specifically, not as “innocent”—compared to Japanese alternatives. Scholars have explored how fetishized Japanese products fill in the gap left by this dissatisfaction with American television. As Kelts explains, fans “are experiencing a similar sense of transcultural longing. It may be the result of sheer irrational exoticism, an infatuation with a somewhere else that is consecrated by the quality of the art itself. It may also reflect dissatisfaction with the homegrown product. Several recent studies have shown that American brand names have dramatically slipped in their cool quotients worldwide” (211). Following my argument, then, we can say that finding American media forms “uncool” is an alteration in one’s worldview that may evolve into a more sophisticated sense of reflexive cosmopolitanism.

To a significant degree, bekichan intentionally and explicitly relegates Western media forms to an inferior position. Similarly, TandokunohaHa sets up the ways in which Japanese dramas are more nuanced, subtle, and rich than American dramas, which tend to move towards simplistic generalized binaries, in order to make a celebratory gesture of emotional identification with the Japanese:

The entertainment is amazing. Way better than a majority of American TV shows.
Most of American TV is either really sugar coated or way too adult for me, if you catch my drift. J Dramas are just right. They have great story lines, great messages, and let's face it gorgeous actors/actresses. The culture is wonderful and the language is beautiful. *sigh*

I wish a was Japanese. [sic]

There are certainly Orientalist impulses at work in this comment, but there is also the implication that such an infatuation can transpire into an interest in the culture, language, and/or persons. The phrase “let's face it” points to a reflexive awareness and self-consciousness that admits the objectifying fetishistic tendency. By neither overemphasizing nor denying this, her post does not render invisible the Orientalist gaze but rather draws attention to it as a personal, enacted choice and impulse. While it is problematic how she claims to know enough about the culture from such limited exposure to fictional representations on TV to label it “wonderful,” this comment does draw our attention to the ways in which viewers literally identify—or long to identify—with a culture of which they feel to be not truly a part. Her connection with the “wonderful” culture and language manifests itself as a desire to be Japanese. Saying that the culture is so wonderful that she wishes she were Japanese requires both a distance from and an intense emotional attachment to the Other. While some scholars tend to dismiss such emotions as too superficial to merit serious attention, Napier reminds us that “[t]he importance of emotional involvement with the Other is worth emphasizing because it is an aspect of East-West interaction either ignored or underrated by Said and his followers” (13). Fleshing out the emotional aspects of one's relationship to a cultural Other effectively complicates traditional criticisms of Orientalism by revealing how an intense emotional desire may cause one to resist the power relations that relegate Japanese people to an inferior position.

Such declarations to a significant extent signal an escapist fantasy that divulges in an exotic Oriental Other as a better alternative to Western civilization. It is fruitful to consider, however, how these elisions of material inequalities also function as resistances to American hegemonies. In a way, these fans' comments signal their own steps towards realizing Zwick’s hope that viewers “consider a different culture; look outside of [their] own; imagine that there is beauty and richness to be found elsewhere than just at home. And that [they] might be moved to study more.” Using my own identity as a fan who has many times Orientalized Japan, yet who has also spent the past hundred pages trying to delineate the position of Japanophilia in
transnationalism, I would argue that pure Orientalist celebration of a cultural Other is not a static entity being continuously reinforced. It is, rather, one of numerous ways in which persons negotiate their own subject positions in dynamic ways. Furthermore, emotional investment can actually shape how one literally acts and functions as a transnational subject. As user Boutux suggests, fandom can lead to more serious and sophisticated forms of interaction with a cultural Other. Specifically, she mentions the role of dramas in helping her learn Japanese and desiring to visit Japan:

i watch j-dramas cuz they are different from american shows. there is just smtng special about the way japanese culture changes even slightly the most cliche things on tv. i appreciate dramas more than anime cuz watching anime got me thinking about wanting to learn japanese but watching dramas made me start learning. oh and i should thank oguri shun for his hotness cuz he made me realise the wealth of hot japanese entertainers out there. … watching dramas has made me want to take a trip to japan so badly. it's now my top country in the world to visit.

Not only has Boutux made the shift from animated to live-action drama, but she has made the shift from disinterestedness in the language to a desire to learn it. But one can also see from this comment how her interest has intensified enough that she wants to go to Japan. To an extent, then, we can actually conclude that the Orientalist desire for “hot” Japanese men has, overtime, caused her to want to understand the language these men speak and visit the country in which they live. This is one precise reason why such impulses are not to be discredited but rather seriously examined as making contributions to transnational activities. Attraction to cultural art forms can actually contribute to international travel, can actually promote the moving of bodies between the United States and Japan. So while the contemporary context and technologies entail persons sitting at computers gazing upon visual fragments representing a culture, it also involves people who from extended exposure to these fragments choose to move their formerly stationary bodies. The ways in which fandom propels one to travel adds an important piece to discussions of other forms of travel (business, tourism, immigration, etc.) given that it situates the desire to appreciate a culture as an avenue through which one can engage in a self-reflexivity that challenges existing inequalities. In other words, Japanophilic fandom can prompt one to move into a material world of challenges that require serious negotiation of cultural and power differences—the tension-filled and emotionally dynamic multicultural context in which the characters in chapters one and two act.
This brief analysis of random fans’ forum posts has partially addressed the extent to which repeated exposure to media leads not only to desire for a cultural Other but also a willingness to engage with its language, history, and contemporary existence. From these four posts, we can catch a glimpse of the extent to which fans internalize their attraction, which then serves as a means of connecting their sense of self with Japanese culture, people, or the country itself. The ways in which emotional involvement propels fans to make real and ongoing connections with Japan is a key point made by critic Susan Napier who remarks that, “Although it is impossible to discover any single overarching reason behind an individual’s emotional involvement with another culture (be it negative or positive), a respect for those emotions is one of the bases for understanding transcultural flows” (13). Fans fetishize, but they also admire, respect, and actively participate in ways that exhibit sincere efforts to learn the Japanese language, study the culture, and even work in the country. While some fans’ attractions to Japan may be superficial or fleeting, there are fans that develop a deeper, long-term attachment to Japanese culture that may enable them to begin to recognize the complex material inequalities inherent in such cultural appreciation. The possible lives depicted in film and drama are, ultimately, fictional. But the emotional investment one feels while watching may end up being displaced onto “second-best” alternatives such as dating a “hot” Japanese man, taking a vacation or finding employment in Japan, studying the language, or following a particular celebrity actor. I do not mean to suggest that such activities effectively alter power relations, alleviate racial tensions, and remedy material inequalities but rather that they signal a dynamic network in which varying subject positions, conceptions of culture, and desires can potentially propel one to actively study, acknowledge, and engage with such complexities.

User Film Reviews

In order to further extend my discussion of how online spaces function as sites where discursively constructed subjectivities interact, negotiate their viewpoints, and alter the larger cultural imaginary of Japan, I now turn to user film reviews posted online. Viewers of Japanese films—from academics who publish books to fans that make translations to “normal” people who just consume—participate in, reinforce, resist, and complicate modes of discourse to varying degrees. Through this sampling of movie reviews posted by users on The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Asian Media Wiki, and DramaCrazy.net, one can begin to address the
complex ways in which a filmic text continues to operate in the popular imagination after its release. My methodology for finding the comments entailed searching the film title through Google then selecting the website links listed first. Even without listing the director’s name, The Internet Movie Database, along with Wikipedia, was listed on the first results page for every film searched. Rather than seek out film review articles, I intentionally went to easy-to-find, commonly visited websites and browsed through the first five or so pages of user comments in order to simulate a typical online experience one interested in learning information about a particular movie is likely to have. My selections reflect an environment in which services maintain hegemonic power by organizing information according to users’ tastes and desires. Google searches and Wikipedia articles are popular starting points for users to access information, which has significantly influenced the phenomenon of summative websites accruing users’ comments, opinions, and reviews. Indeed, in this digital social networking context, everyday individuals have a significant amount of opportunities to post words publicly online. My selection of movie review posts indicates a common method via which viewers’ opinions disseminate online: blog-style commenting. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which commenters are emotionally invested in the activity versus lethargically doing it to pass time, these posts seem to be short, isolated parts of one’s average day rather than parts of an intense, larger effort to convey one’s views. The form in which this expression has taken place—a personal anonymous (although some websites, such as IMDb, list the user’s “location”) post to a website already inundated with everyday people’s reactions—is thus a quotidian activity that adds another small piece to the larger shifting of a text. One can also notice how making such statements requires a negotiation of one’s degree of complicity with historical circumstances, which includes a disavowal of the current impact history has on cultural relations as well as an impetus to improve relations so that the problems of the past are not repeated. By resisting the tendency to feel as if the typical viewer is an unreflective person blindly following ideologies, we can begin to explore the ways in which the opinions of common viewers not only signal an active engagement with the text but also the potential to take a critical perspective that confronts the problematic aspects of cultural representations. Rather than dismiss the average viewer’s reaction to a film as uncritical, I choose here to analyze how user comments reveal a somewhat sophisticated engagement with the text and some sort of reflexive cosmopolitanism. Taken as a whole, these selected reviews (listed in the order in which I discuss the films in previous
chapters) acknowledge the need to recognize the nuanced aspects of films and the complexity of their critical multiculturalism.

In a review of *Moon Child* posted to the “Internet Movie Database,” user nohohon-1 effectively captures the features of the gangster film genre in that the older, more experienced Kei necessarily functions to raise Sho to be capable of surviving in a threatening environment of violence between factions:

I see Kei as a fatherly figure to Sho. Kei was there throughout the earlier life of Sho, he took care of him, and taught him to live in a world where power between gangs controls their lives. … I love the part where Lee Hom, the actor who played Son, first appeared on the screen. The way they met up was quite cool indeed. Son also has a big part within this movie, the fact that he's from a different race, a Taiwanese, made quite an impact to the friendship theme within the movie. The way how friendships were developed despite background differences was portrayed excellently in this movie.

This review uses “cool,” an adjective frequently used to describe contemporary filmic media and Japanese pop culture in particular, to cite the scene of choreographed gun-fighting in which Son emerges as an ally to the protagonists. Specifically, this character introduction occurs through the classic Mexican standoff stance made popular by John Woo, which indicates the ways in which he and Hong Kong action films have influenced global cinema production. Nohohon-1 also commends the film’s attention to interracial and cross-cultural bonding as a means of fulfillment and friendship despite the ways in which the world differentiates groups and pits one against another. While such a discursive maneuver requires one to problematically essentialize racial differences, it also acknowledges the fact that power struggles inculcate individuals into a network of relations with self and other. So although the larger historical context of Taiwan-Japan relations is not acknowledged—indeed it is quite possible that the reviewer is not entirely familiar with such a loaded past—this viewer did take away an important kernel: the ways in which individuals can function positively despite existing racial tensions. While such a remark participates in discourses of liberal pluralist multiculturalism that posit a superficial understanding of differences and power inequalities, it also participates in critical multiculturalism by suggesting that interpersonal friendships can serve as a means of decentering hegemonies and changing material conditions.

The emphasis on friendship also appears in user Bogey Man’s review of *Brother*, also on the Internet Movie Database:
The main theme in Brother is loyalty and friendship that becomes even love. The last scene is fantastic and very unusual for Kitano; never has he underlined his message this clearly as he does in Brother's finale. It is so purifying scene and really makes the point clear, but still, most people don't understand anything about Kitano's films, because they are so personal and different compared to Western mainstream films.

Elevating the theme of yakuza loyalty and cross-cultural friendship to love, Bogey Man draws our attention to the significance and intensity of the bond between Yamamoto and Denny. The final scene is applauded for being clear and memorable; the viewer does not forget the importance of emotional connections between different racial or cultural groups. Such an unambiguous finale lends itself to making a lasting marker in one’s process of reflexive cosmopolitanism. Bogey Man’s differentiation between a “real” connoisseur of Kitano’s films and a casual viewer indicates the role of identification in positioning oneself and others along this continuum. Although the declaration that many Western viewers cannot understand Kitano’s films suggests a belief that he is just too different to comprehend, which could easily slide into an Orientalist construction of the “foreign” Other, this review retains specificities by acknowledging Kitano’s personal style. Focusing not on his “Japanese” approach but on his skill as an auteur points to the ways in which cultural perspectives are particular. Pairing these two above reviews together enables one to see how some viewers approach a film with sentimentalized language of love and friendship that simultaneously simplifies and complicates the text’s themes. At the very least, these reviews reflect an awareness of the films’ critical multiculturalism, which may help to decenter users’ binary assumptions.

Indeed, the tendency of films involving characters from the “East” and the “West” to fall into Orientalist stereotypes is acknowledged by multiple user-viewers. In the film The Last Samurai, as Chapter One has indicated, there are both problematic cultural constructions that garner deserved criticism and praiseworthy resistance to racist ideologies. This is reflected in mixed user reviews, many of which themselves entail a mixture of praise and condemnation. From the two responses below, we can see how non-academic viewers attempt to negotiate the complex cultural representations prevalent in the film. The following post to the Internet Movie Database by user mstomaso indicates the ways liking a film compels one to ignore the problematic operations of the film; and yet, it also challenges overly broad or generalized conceptions of culture:
My interpretation of this journey is that Allgren has found a place and people that offer him redemption, where, in his own world, he can find none. But Allgren's is only a small part of the story - which ultimately revolves around what is right for Japan, for the subjectivity of a whole nation, and how to portray such a subject from its own perspective. Traditional Japan is treated with empathy here, not aggrandizing exaggeration, as some of the film's critics seem to suggest. This is not a film about what is objectively right and wrong, but a film about struggling to understand and empower tradition as a means to control and benefit from change. I find no grand moral statement here, but rather an intense, sympathetic, human drama with a strong sense of honor and sacrifice. Edward Zwick has made a film which operates well at every level, carrying simple but profound philosophical ideas, but avoiding the mistake of making these ideas and the characters that express them super-heroic.

Mstomaso purports trite generalizations and nuanced specificities, many times within the same sentence. So while “what is right for Japan” suggests grafting an essentialism onto an entire nation, the phrase “from its own perspective” reminds the reader of the necessity of resisting speaking always for another. Similarly, “Traditional Japan” sounds like a single entity pitted against Modernity, and yet the next sentence effectively summarizes the complexity of the historical context during the Meiji Era. Mstomaso’s final verdict is thus that the film manages to resist a final sweeping gesture in favor of a profound and intense depiction of individual human connections, which is the chosen mode through which these films handle history and combat racist ideologies. I agree with this review in that the simplicities of the everyday serve as an effective vehicle for the film’s critical multiculturalism; rather than making the “mistake” of depicting characters as overly heroic, the film makes an effort to humble and criticize the American protagonist.

But while non-Japanese viewers of The Last Samurai seem more able to disengage themselves from the historical and racial implications, the following post by Japanese American user t_man_jp reveals how a viewer of Japanese descent may be unwilling to disregard the film’s problematic inaccuracies or exaggerations:

I am a Japanese. In this movie I see many false misunderstandings and errors on Japanese culture. For example, they try to overlap Samurais and Native Americans, which is very difficult for Japanese to comprehend. In one scene, Samurais were fighting in a jungle. We do not have a jungle in Japan. They try to depict that swords are the most important thing for samurais, which is not true at all. Bushido is not that shallow.

The only notable thing I observed in this movie is that the Hollywood finally learned to be capable of treating foreign cultures positively. I know it is very
difficult to make a movie about foreign cultures free from misunderstandings and prejudice.

Of particular note in this review is the way in which t_man_jp deems it necessary to establish his racial identity immediately in order to legitimate his criticism as authentic. Through self-racialization, he explicitly binds himself to history and place. Thus, he clarifies that Japan as nation-state does not have jungles and that the historical Bushido worldview emphasizes more than swords. There is an underlying impulse to speak from the perspective of the Japanese who to a significant extent are being spoken about. He thus acknowledges that the film is indeed making a genuine effort; its failings are attributed to the extreme difficulty of the task it takes up, a task that Zwick himself acknowledges as more complex than his simplified representation can fully account for. As these two posts on The Last Samurai indicate, some everyday viewers do see Orientalist representations as fantastic and/or false. Hence, t_man_jp criticizes the film for being Orientalist while mstomaso praises the film for not falling into Orientalism. Either way, both are aware and critical of Orientalism as something unproductive, negative, and to be rejected (which is a key attribute of reflexive cosmopolitanism).

Many fans, then, do realize that common representations are inaccurate or problematic. For example, user Jim’s following comment about My Darling is a Foreigner reveals that he is aware of the reoccurring tropes that problematically handle interracial romance. Expecting exaggerated stereotypes, Jim posts on “AsianMedia Wiki” his surprise at the realistic portrayal of the lead characters:

I usually cringe at treatments of foreigners and “international couples” in movies and tv. I was ready to dislike this one too. But the characters, being based on real people, come off as individuals, not stereotypes. They are quirky and unique. I thought it was a rather refreshing take on the topic. It’s probably even a step forward for more down to earth treatment, and surprisingly non-negative portrayal, of intercultural marriages. Overall, cute ‘romcom’ movie about intercultural relationship, that while laughs at quirky differences, doesn't descend into stereotypes. Quite a pleasant surprise.

This comment reveals the role of the quotidian and everyday in reproducing more nuanced, humanistic depictions of race and culture. The film’s degree of realism, which comes largely from having been based off of the manga’s portrayal of a real-life couple, helps to fully engage the viewer given that it departs from the unrealistic stereotypes of traditional representation. It is as if the traditional approach was stereotypical while the contemporary approach is to be more
individualistic. The statement that the film is a “refreshing take on the topic” aptly captures how the film attempts to tackle cultural differences in new, more progressive, ways by providing viewers access to the mundane, emotionally rich, lives of individuals within a multicultural context.

Even more non-hyperbolic than *My Darling is a Foreigner, About Love* strikes some viewers, such as myself, as a “pleasant surprise” due to its unassuming nature. While the following review on DramaCrazy.net considers this aspect to be unoriginal, however, user Spawn of Hell does still draw attention to how the mundane manner in which the cross-cultural relationships transpire propels some reflection on the viewer’s part:

> The movie itself is very slow-paced and truth be told, nothing big really happens, but it does offer a nice perspective on love and language barriers. The 6 out of 10 rating I gave to this movie can be justified by the fact that the film brings us nothing new. The three love stories aren’t unheard of and are not really portrayed in any special manner. The treatment of them seems slow and reflective. That does not mean however that this movie isn’t worth seeing. It does show three entirely different stories which are not to be qualified as boring even if they aren’t the most original (frankly speaking, in the world of romantic stories, nothing is really original or unheard of anymore…). A good watch if you’re lazizing around and have a mind to watch some love movie; just be warned that it is not the kind that makes you squeal but the kind that makes you think, at least a little.

The tone of this comment reveals how the film chooses not to make broad, sweeping gestures that in one stroke remedy a complex transnational identity. Rather, the average, even boring, elements of daily living become the means by which individual viewers can begin to “think, at least a little” about their own position amidst multicultural power relations. Pairing the above two reviews together captures how an increasingly hyperreal environment makes it more difficult for representation to take an original perspective. Recognizing this is one of the many ways in which reflexive cosmopolitans can see representation as discursively constructed and empty of any truthful core. A narrative’s evocation of critical multiculturalism, then, is more easily seen as being extended through viewers’ interpretations and public activities.

**Conclusion**

These reviews are only a small handful of the huge amount currently online (there are currently 1,088 total listed in IMDb for these five movies alone) that cover a wide range of opinions. An extensive account of user reviews in future research would help to flesh out the
ideas briefly presented in this chapter. By considering these, and other, user reviews posted online as actual pieces of reflexive cosmopolitanism, we can begin to delineate the participatory role fans and viewers play in perpetuating and redefining Orientalist ideologies, engaging in a reflexivity that evaluates one’s own subject position, and shaping how multiculturalism functions in both material and digital spaces. If all the films discussed in this thesis reveal the ways in which characters negotiate racial tensions, horizontal interracial alliances, desire for the Other, linguistic and cultural differences, and historical memory, then this chapter provides a glimpse at how various online-user subjects are also doing so. Although the attraction may initially lean heavily towards a fetishizing infatuation—Japan as “cool” and “exotic”—it can indeed become something more nuanced and sophisticated due to one’s increasing interest in taking pleasure in such representations. Films—many of which are being accessed via websites—have an influential part to play in promoting nationalist subjects to experience and work through both the affordances and challenges of transnational spaces. I do realize that my argument throughout this thesis that real material change can happen from feeling a sense of connection with representations of the everyday and the interpersonal has been made without adequate evidence of such change being implemented by these individuals. My hypothesis could be put to the test through further research that traces how particular American Japanophiles are active in their communities and the role their fan-objects, desire for Japanese (pop) culture, and self-reflection play in such activity.
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