

MULTICULTURALISM AND ALIENATION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY
AS SEEN IN THE FILMS OF TAKASHI MIIKE

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ABSTRACT

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Through his films, Takashi Miike reminds audiences of the diverse populations within Japan. He criticizes elements of the Japanese sociological structures that alienate minorities and outcasts. Through the socialization process, Japanese youth learn the importance of “fitting in” and attending to the needs of the group. Clear distinctions of who are “inside” and “outside” are made early on and that which is “outside” is characterized as outcast and forbidden.

In three of his films, "Blues Harp," "Dead or Alive," and "Deadly Outlaw: Rekka," Miike includes individuals who have been situated as outsiders. In "Blues Harp," Chuji, due to his obvious heritage, cannot find a place in society, and thus exists on the fringes. In "Dead or Alive," Ryuichi has felt that the country in which he lives has placed him in a disadvantaged status: therefore, he must strike out on his own, attempting to achieve happiness through criminal means. In "Deadly Outlaw: Rekka," Kunisada, an outsider by blood and incarceration, cannot relate to his peers in the world. As a result, he lashes out against the world in violence, becoming an individual who is portrayed as a wild beast.

When these outsiders attempt to form their own groups, they often face eventual failure. Their outsider status, and the methods available to them to survive, drives wedges within the groups. They long for a group identity, forming bonds made with fellow outsiders. However, society shatters these bonds, circumstances break the group, and the end is often tragic for all involved. Miike's films exist as surreal parallels to the real world. Using these dramatic and tragic scenarios as morality tales, Miike shows the need for group formation within Japanese society, beginning at the very early stages of youth, and the consequences of not being a part of a group. Through the tragic end that meets these

characters, Miike criticizes this system, illustrating how these outsider characters have been placed into the fringes of society, and though all the long for is some form of happiness and contentment in their lives, they are unable to do so because they do not “fit in.”

To Rich and Fran,

For everything

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I see my situation as an illusion. If I become marginalized or fall from grace even while making more low budget films, more violent films, or more tender films, it's not a big deal. To simply have the occasion to make films is enough for me.

Takashi Miike

In my training as a social studies teacher, I was required to enroll in a class called “Junior Field Experience” during the fall of 2002. For this class, the students were assigned to a local high school, where we would then teach for half a day for three weeks. I was placed in Cambridge Springs High School, which was located in a small rural community in Northwestern Pennsylvania. Of the four classes I was instructed to teach, one was a junior World Cultures class. My three weeks were spent teaching the students about East Asian culture, with the first section focusing on Japan.

As any new, inexperienced teacher would do, my first step of preparation was to turn to the relevant chapter in the students' textbook. This particular book was World Cultures: A Global Mosaic, written in 1995. One of the first sentences of the section concerning the people and culture of Japan was “Japan is a homogeneous society.” Reading on, I found that the chapter relied heavily on such stereotypes of the Japanese people, and rarely deviated from these clichés. This viewpoint on the Japanese people is what I was both expected and forced to teach, and so I left my fifteen students with the idea that the Japanese were an exceptionally polite, respectful people who, after World War II, were never involved in any internal or external conflicts, and had, to Western eyes, strange and mysterious practices. I will not deny that to this day, I feel a pang of regret as a teacher who failed on that occasion to challenge the textbook for fear of repercussions on my own grades: there are fifteen more adults in this world who have a narrow viewpoint on the Japanese people. I can at least console myself with the fact that they are not alone.

Japanese culture, as viewed through the lens of American popular culture, is often perceived as a uniquely homogenous society. Such media as popular Hollywood films, comic books, and even high school World Cultures texts perpetuate this idea of a unified culture within Japan. This is, however, a distorted viewpoint, and one that under close examination rings false. While there is a public, albeit surface-level, face of the culture that does suggest a group-oriented society, there is another side to Japanese culture of which Americans are, on a whole, ignorant. Indeed, when placed under the proverbial microscope, one may find that Japan is hardly homologous.

An examination of the various entertainment media produced in Japan reveals the diversity within Japanese culture, as well as an ingrained resistance to that diversity. Indeed, theatre, literature, and film can provide insight into the overarching and underlying tropes within any society. Japanese film director Takashi Miike grants such discernment. Throughout his sixty-plus movies that span a plethora of genres, Miike continually comments on the role of the individual within Japanese society, particularly that of the outcast or outsider. Though his films range from *yakuza* gangster films, to brutal and bloody horror, to warm-hearted family comedies, he always includes a conversation of the struggles of those who are “different.”

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore this myth of Japanese homogeneity and how contemporary film director Takashi Miike artfully dispels said myth in select films. Throughout most of his films, Miike depicts characters thrust outside of mainstream Japanese society due to their mixed race, their sexual preferences, or other factors that have caused them to become outsiders within the culture. In addition, most of these films center on struggles such characters face when they deviate, willingly or by force, from the norm. By examining Japanese culture

through the lens of both historical/sociological studies and selected cinematic works, I hope to paint a clearer picture of the divisions that exist within Japanese society.

In addition to further exploring the disparity between Western perceptions, and genuine Japanese society, I hope to bring greater insight to considerations of Takashi Miike as a director. His work has garnered attention at international film festivals throughout the world, earning him a variety of awards. A cursory Internet search on his name gives evidence to ever-growing attention from critics and fans the world over. The very scope of his work demands attention: at the time of this writing he has directed sixty-three movies, three television series, three music videos, and one stage production, as well as working as an actor in thirteen films, and writing a column for a Japanese cinema magazine, all in the past fourteen years. Despite this growing portfolio of varied work, little critical attention has been given to Miike. With this study, I hope to, at least in a small way, begin to rectify that neglect.

Methodology

This study will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of Japanese sociological structure, focusing on the existence, creation, and treatment of marginalized individuals and Japanese insider/outsider culture. As a part of the Japanese socialization process, there are two terms often introduced to young children. The ideas of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) are important concepts for a Japanese, especially while growing up. Children are also indoctrinated to associate “outside” with “danger and fear” which provides a basis for discrimination against those different from the norm (Hendry 49). Children initially learn this at home, and the educational system, primarily kindergarten, reinforces the belief. Because “schools are an important source of shared knowledge and national identity,” this chapter will examine the effects of education on Japanese students’ worldview (Hendry 82).

Another facet of this first chapter explores the relationship of *jibun* (self) to *hito* (others), as developed and ingrained through socialization. The expression “*hito ni warawareru*” means, loosely, “to be laughed at by others” and is used as part of socializing young children (Kuwayama 143). In Japan, the individual self is valued only in its relation to the larger whole of society. In kindergarten and preschool, for example, “fun and friendship is only for cooperators. Non-cooperators learn that the other children ostracize them” (Smith 42). Thus, if a student does not adhere to the values of the group, he or she cannot expect fair treatment in the society.

The chapter will then examine minority status within contemporary Japanese society. Ainu, Burakumin, and Koreans can often expect unfair, discriminatory practices by both the government and the society at large. A significant number of Miike’s outsider characters come from ethnic minority groups. Thus, it is necessary to explore the actual treatment of minorities in Japan to begin to understand Miike’s films. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a brief overview of *Nihonjinron*, the “study of Japaneseness,” and its effects on the Japanese psyche towards outsiders.

The remaining three chapters consist of an in-depth analysis of selected films by Miike. By looking primarily at the narrative structure of his work, I will demonstrate how Miike portrays the outsider based upon the sociological structure described in Chapter One. Each of these chapters will deal with a separate film: Blues Harp, Dead or Alive, and Deadly Outlaw: Rekka.

Value

The value of this study is its timeliness. While there is considerable scholarship in the history of Japanese cinema, as well as on classic Japanese films, there is little written in English

about more contemporary films. By focusing on Miike's work in a scholarly way, I hope to give validity to his works as objects of study and to generate more critical attention of contemporary Japanese works. Secondly Miike's films are known in popular culture primarily as "shock cinema," which does not garner much respect outside of limited film aficionados. Thus, by proving that his films do honestly reflect the culture and have merit beyond being simple entertainment, I hope to critique Miike as a serious artist and cultural critic working to engage his cultural moment.

Background

Takashi Miike is an eclectic and unusual individual. When accepting a cameo appearance in Eli Roth's recent horror film Hostel, Miike presented Roth with a pair of rubber breasts and a ceramic kitten, for both good luck (the kitten) and company on lonely nights (the breasts) (Roth 19). Despite his eccentric nature and international renown, Miike came from rather humble beginnings. On August 24, 1960, Miike was born to working-class parents in the small town of Yao, located in the Hyogo Prefecture of Japan, just outside of Osaka. Both Yao and Osaka hold significant sway over Miike, and he continually sets his films in locations reminiscent of the two cities. During his youth, one of Miike's favorite past times was "playing" with animals, which meant activities such as using firecrackers to explode frogs (Mes 16). In junior high, Miike played rugby, but eventually gravitated towards the less socially acceptable hobbies of pachinko¹ and motorbike racing. The latter was his first real passion, and the inevitable loss of friends to accidents would later influence his adult lifestyle. He describes the emotional connection and reaction to motorbike racing as follows:

¹ Pachinko could be loosely described as a cross between pinball and slot machines. Though gambling for money is illegal in Japan, players may win small prizes that can be cashed in for money. Pachinko dens are often associated with organized crime.

You would be talking cheerfully to one of your friends before a race and several minutes later he would be dead. Two or three people would die in bike accidents like that every year. I lost much, but at the same time I would experience many emotions from constantly being so close to death. Just after an accident you feel fear and you sense the danger of what you're doing. But probably because we were so young, after one week we would really start to miss racing. When I got back on my bike on those occasions, it would be twice as exciting as normal. (Mes 16)

After high school, Miike realized he had neither the talent to become a racer nor the will to study to become a bike mechanic, and so he was left with little ambition.

Due to this lack of direction, Miike opted to enroll in the Yokohama Hosoeiga Senmon Gakko (Yokohama School of Broadcasting and Film), apparently because the school did not require an entrance examination. His first two years at the school were characterized by a lack of attendance in class; during this time he also began a job in a nightclub frequented by American military personnel. When, during his second year, a production company asked for an unpaid assistant to work for a project, the school sent their most unproductive student. After this brief assignment, Miike worked as a freelance crew member for the next ten years, taking on approximately forty to fifty jobs a year (Mes 17). In 1987, Miike worked for director Shohei Imamura as an assistant director, a position he would retain for various directors over the next four years.

Miike began a new direction in 1991 when he was asked to direct Toppuu! Minipato tai – Aikyacchi Jankushon (Eyecatch Junction), a low budget, direct-to-video release involving four policewomen dressed in leotards who use gymnastics to catch criminals. For yet another four-year period, Miike directed twelve V-Cinema releases, working for anyone who would hire him and with little concern for the genre of the film. Miike's first theatrical release, Shinjuku Triad Society, was produced in 1995, though for the following year Miike returned to V-Cinema

releases. In 1996, however, Miike had his first significant success with his film Fudoh: The Next Generation. Although it was originally intended for video release, the producers felt that the film had potential for popularity and announced a theatrical release (Mes 102). This tale of surreal and violent conflict within a *yakuza* family earned Miike his first international exposure and was rated by *Time* magazine as one of the ten best films of the year for 1997.

Between 1996 and 1999, Mike directed twelve films, climaxing with perhaps his best-known film and the movie that launched him into international circulation, Audition. Often characterized as a horror film, this movie, like much of Miike's work, transcends genre definitions with a bizarre and ambiguous nature. Perhaps more accurately, Audition could be described as "a character study of two lonely souls searching for happiness" (Mes 181). The movie played at film festivals throughout the world, including Vancouver, FantAsia, Noir In Festival, and Rotterdam, often resulting in large numbers of the audience leaving in disgust, fear, or horror, in response to the film plot's unexpected and graphic turns. More importantly, the screenings resulted in a bevy of awards and heightened international exposure for Miike and his work. This movie started his international success, followed by additional award winners such as Dead or Alive (also in 1999), Visitor Q (2001), the notorious Kuroshiya 1 (2001), and Gozu (2003). Miike's impact on American cinema can be seen today in his ranking at number eleven on Bravo's special 100 Scariest Movie Moments, and his place as the only non-American director on Showtime's Masters of Horror series. Mainstream directors such as Quentin Tarantino and Eli Roth also cite his work as an inspiration for their own.

Since 1991, Miike has compiled an extensive and impressive resume. He has directed sixty-two full-length films, three television series, one music video, one stage production, and a one-hour American horror short for Showtime's Masters of Horror series, of which was, at the

time of this writing, pulled from the series lineup because, as producer Mick Garris states, “it was the most disturbing thing I’ve ever seen.” Additionally, he has acted in twelve films, (including Hostel and a film from Thailand), written one film, worked as the cinematographer for another, and, during 2001, written a weekly column on his production of Kuroshiya 1 for a Japanese film magazine. At an average of four movies a year, not including his work in other capacities, Miike has been an undeniably prolific artist. Considering Miike’s views on his role as director, the quantity of his work is all the more astonishing: “I don’t like effort. So being a film director is a suitable job for me, because a film director doesn’t need to make effort” (Mes 337).

A study of Miike’s body of work as a whole is difficult for several complicated reasons. He rarely works in any one particular genre, preferring to both continually switch genres as well as overlap genre categories, and the quality of his films is uneven. While a more thorough analysis of several of his films will be the subject of the final chapters, it is necessary at this point to give a general description of his work. The most prevalent quality of Miike’s cinema, and the most criticized and acclaimed aspect of it, is his tendency to portray extreme violence and gore. As one film critic writes in regards to Miike’s films Dead or Alive and Kuroshiya 1, “I just want to let you know that you will never need to purchase syrup of Ipecac ever again – and I mean EVER. All you need to do as a substitute is pick up these two vids by Takashi Miike, and that’s all the emetic agent you’ll ever need” (Lee 35). As Mr. Lee humorously implies, Miike utilizes extreme and brutal visual imagery to the extent that it could make a viewer physically ill.

The forms of violence contained in these films are exceptionally gory. One example from the closing moments of Audition, serves as an illustrative example: Asami Yamazaki systematically tortures and disfigures a paralyzed Shigeharu Aoyama (played by Ryo Ishibashi)

by first using his eyes as a pincushion (to the innocent and cute sound of her voice saying “*kiri kiri kiri*”²) and then sawing off his foot with piano wire. This scene, as stated in Canadian horror magazine Rue Morgue magazine, caused audiences to walk out of theatres worldwide, required theatres to provide access to “barf bags” at all showings, and finally was Miike’s addition to the Bravo Top 100 Scariest Movie Moments.

Beyond pain, his images include sexual torture and debasement. Dead Or Alive: Hanzaisha clearly demonstrates the sometimes grotesque nature of his cinema. A scene from this 1999 film, rated by Rue Morgue to be Miike’s “Meanest Moment,” features stripper Mizuho Koga in the aftermath of being violently tortured and raped, drowning in a pool of her own waste. In addition to standing alone as an example of extreme imagery, this scene shows another side of Miike’s work that has aroused criticism. Often in reviews of his films, critics accuse Miike of misogyny because of the high volume of violence against women. Miike counters this, arguing that he does not intentionally depict women in roles and situations that could be considered misogynistic. However, he also realizes that there exists a difference between his intent and his films’ reception. He addresses criticism of his work:

Generally if the audience feels that it’s like that, then they are right. Because that is their reality, their real feelings. If they criticize me because of that, there’s nothing I can do about it. I don’t think there is only one way to look at a film. There isn’t one truth. I always try to have some kindness for the female characters, I allow them to try and realize their own desires for example... I’m not always sure that I was able to make my feelings clear enough in a film, so if the audience misunderstands it, it’s okay. I accept the misunderstanding (Mes 347).

Limitations

It would be impossible conduct an in-depth study of the portrayals of diversity and discrimination in all sixty-three of Miike’s films within one thesis. Therefore, several of his

² These words represent Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound that a drill makes.

better-known films have been chosen to serve as examples due to their explicit portrayal of outsiders. Blues Harp features two characters distinctly outside the norm, one because of his racial heritage and the other as a result of his sexuality. Deadly Outlaw: Rekka features frequent comments regarding the main character's ethnic identity, and all of his actions throughout the film are, for the other characters, directly connected to his heritage. Finally, Dead or Alive: Hanzaisha centers on a group of Chinese gangsters, outcast by both their ethnicity and profession. While the majority of Miike's other films contain characters and circumstances that present a similar theme, none do so as explicitly. Miike's films also center on many themes besides that of the outsider. However, further exploration of his films beyond this trope will be left to future scholars, as it exceeds the scope of this study.

Literature Review

In my examination of Miike's work, it is useful to begin with Miike's own "words," that is the films themselves. Many of his works are still difficult to access legally in the United States. His more prominent films, such as Audition, Koroshiya 1, and Dead or Alive, are more easily obtained, and so I will be using the American DVD releases of these movies. For his less well-known films, such as Blues Harp and Deadly Outlaw: Rekka, however, I must utilize other avenues, and so will be referring to the British and Hong Kong releases. All of these DVDs include English subtitles of various degrees of quality. While a few of his films have been dubbed in English, I will not be using them, because I believe the original actors and musical scores more accurately reflect Miike's intent.

Despite Miike's large body of work over the past thirteen years, little has been written about his films in English, and even less in academic scholarship. Agitator: The Cinema of Takashi Miike by Tom Mes, however, is a rare exception, and gives a detailed analysis of

Miike's work. As the only book written in English exclusively about Miike, Mes's work is foundational for any English-speaking scholar studying Miike's films. In this book, Mes argues that Miike does not work in any particular style, but rather that Miike takes what he needs from any film genre so that each film adheres to six reoccurring themes. These six themes are central to all of Miike's films, and all of his works include at least several of them. Mes asserts that Miike always features "The Rootless Individual," meaning that the characters "float between two elements, part of neither one nor the other," as well as thematic portrayals of "The Outcast," "The Search for Happiness," "Nostalgia," "The Family Unit," and finally "Violence" (Mes 23). Mes then analyzes these elements within thirty-two of Miike's movies and his three television series.

In addition to his primary focus on this analysis of Miike's work, Mes also includes several other chapters of use to this study. Agitator contains the most detailed biography of Miike written in English. Mes follows Miike's life from birth through his career in V-cinema and then touches on his life throughout the 1990s. Mes also includes an extensive interview with Miike, in which Miike discusses topics such as his reasons for filmmaking and his responses to the critical attention his films have received. Finally, Mes concludes with a ten-part production diary Miike wrote about Koroshiya 1, which gives insight into his style of directing and his personal thoughts and feelings about the movie.

Beyond Miike himself, several important texts will be used to explore Japanese sociological structure, the subject of the first chapter and the framework within which Miike's films will be placed. Converse to the lack of information on Takashi Miike, a plethora of books have been written on the subject of Japanese society. Of these, three books in particular serve as the primary basis for my information. The first, Understanding Japanese Society by Joy Hendry,

serves as an extensive overview to a study of the culture. Hendry covers a significant number of topics in a limited space, and so her work is more of an introduction than an in-depth study. Of particular interest, however, is her treatment of the socialization process and social outcasts, such as Koreans, Ainu, and Burakumin. Hendry highlights the methods in which Japanese socialization creates an insider/outsider culture and thus encourages discrimination against individuals who belong to a subculture outside the norm (47). More importantly, Hendry briefly addresses the topic of violence and eroticism in contemporary Japanese entertainment media, and suggests that “excessive violence of films, comics and television programmes makes it possible for people to live in quiet and apparently uneventful harmony in the real world” (Hendry 199). She indicates that the extreme violence of Japanese entertainment allows a release for the populace, thus preventing conflict in day-to-day life.

Diversity in Japanese Culture and Language, edited by John C. Maher and Gaynor Macdonald, is a collection of essays on various aspects of diversity within Japanese society. The authors in this volume highlight such topics as ethnocentrism in Japan, maintaining culture as a Korean while living in Japan, and the difficulties that other outsiders, such as Burakumin and women, have in finding a fair life in Japanese society. This book brings in to focus the variety of problems with diversity, particularly the failure to accept outsiders, within contemporary Japanese society.

Herman W. Smith in his book The Myth of Japanese Homogeneity conducts a more in-depth discussion of those factors in the educational system which result in a diverse and fractured society. Smith traces the life of the average Japanese individual throughout their entire educational career, from kindergarten to post-secondary school. He focuses on the methods employed by the school systems to create a culture in which most members hold similar goals

and values, which results in the exclusion of certain other groups. His purpose is to challenge the “dominant image [...] of a classless and conflictless society” that western popular culture often holds of the Japanese (Smith 1).

Another, more recent text on Japanese culture is Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin edited by Sonia Ryang. In this book, Ryang has compiled a series of articles about the living conditions and situations faced by Koreans living in contemporary Japan. The purpose of this text lies in the little known about the Korean minority in western studies and discourse. For Ryang, by “unfolding these experiences, we hope to open the way to understanding the human condition of Koreans and other minorities in Japan and beyond” (11). The issues tackled by the various authors range from the amorphous political and legal status of Koreans in Japan since World War II to discussing the problems resident Koreans have historically had in establishing and maintaining ethnic Korean schools. Drawing from a variety of fields to highlight the Korean experience in Japan through several lenses, this text is essential in beginning an understanding of the situation of Koreans currently living in Japan.

Apichai Shipper’s article, “Criminals or Victims? The Politics of Illegal Foreigners in Japan,” illustrates the current problems of Japan’s treatment of foreigners, especially illegal immigrants. Shipper traces the history of Japan’s official policy towards foreigners, and how these policies, dictated by the elite, change with the political climate. Shipper’s assertion is that political leaders “cultivated fear of foreigners in order to strengthen political control over their own citizens” (326). Recently, however, activists in Japan have attempted to counteract these institutionalized beliefs and provide an opposition to the political and social propaganda.

Finally, Donald Richie provides insight into the history of Japanese cinema in general in his book A Hundred Years of Japanese Film. In his book, Richie exhaustively summarizes the

important movies and trends in Japanese film throughout the previous century, broken down into five distinct time periods. By covering many topics within each section, Riche provides an excellent overview of Japanese films, highlighting what is most important. Thus, this book functions as a foundation for my study of the trends in Japanese portrayals of outsiders throughout Japan's film history.

Chapter One: Japanese Sociological Structure

In a certain sense, the existence of others is nothing more than a landscape around you. We all pass many people every day, in the train or on the street. That we pass these people is a miracle of probability, but we don't think of such things romantically and don't use our imagination. Our ability to relate to others has become very weak.

Takashi Miike

Japan, along with other Asian cultures, receives from the west a title of “Other,” and descriptions of the country and its people are often categorized by how they differ from the west. Westerners seem to feel compelled to discuss the uniqueness of the Japanese. Nor is such an idea limited to outsiders looking into the culture, but is also held by Japanese scholars themselves. *Nihonjinron*, literally “the study of being Japanese,” is an idea that has existed for the last century in literary, academic, and popular works. This concept defines the Japanese in the negative; that is, by what they are not (Macdonald 5). Because of this limited idea, that somehow the Japanese are a people apart from the rest of the world, many important facets of the culture go unnoticed in both mainstream and academic thought. Popular viewpoints of Japan do not often recognize the extreme wealth of diversity found within the society. Indeed, according to Smith, the “dominant image [of Japan] is one of a classless and conflictless society without individual distinctions” (Smith 1).

Takashi Miike, on the other hand, presents his audience with a divided Japan, torn by ethnic and social conflict. His films show a society that has as many differences as it does individuals, one in which differences in opinions, living styles, and backgrounds can cause extreme strife. The question remains, then: does Miike portray Japanese society accurately? Before that question can be answered, however, the Japanese sociological structure itself must be examined. This chapter provides an overview of that structure.

Some Japanese scholars hold a belief commonly referred to as *Nihonjinron*, the “study of Japaneseness.” This structure of viewing the Japanese culture provides one view of how Japanese society may alienate outsiders. *Nihonjinron* as a movement began to form in the 1970’s, though its roots extend further into Japanese history. At its core, *Nihonjinron* argues for cultural nationalism, a movement aimed to “regenerate the national community by creating, preserving or strengthening a people’s cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking, inadequate, or threatened” (Yoshino 1). The idea of *Nihonjinron* provides a framework for many genres of writing, from popular to scholarly works, thus reinforcing perceived differences between the Japanese people and all others, and establishing the Japanese as culturally unique. Although it would be a gross generalization to state that all Japanese share the beliefs touted by *Nihonjinron* literature, this idea does hold considerable weight for a significant portion of the population. *Nihonjinron*, therefore, is problematic in several ways.

Nihonjinron literature does not hold a codified set of viewpoints, but its arguments are generally elitist and reflect unwillingness to accept outsiders. One such argument derives from the Japanese phrase *junketsu-shugi*, meaning “pure-blood-ism.” That is, in order to understand the Japanese, a person must be Japanese. This idea is tied to “race thinking,” which holds that “particular cultural traits belong to a particular group with particular phenotypical or genotypical traits” (Yoshino 24). According to this belief, all Japanese, linked by Japanese blood, share similar modes of behavior which are held by no other groups in the world. This position leads to a positive identification with “us” (Japanese) and a negative identification with “them” (anyone else), based in a perception of immutable difference between Japanese and all others. In reality, however, Japanese blood is not biologically distinct. Historically, as well, the Japanese are not of a “pure” racial stock: there is evidence of various Asian populations intermixing earlier in

history (Smith 207). Therefore, *junketsu-shugi* is not based in scientific data, but in a desire to remain separate from anyone without pure Japanese heritage.

In addition, *Nihonjinron* writers utilize two theoretical pillars to separate the Japanese from any other group. First, Japanese express themselves through unique communicative and linguistic modes. Unlike western societies, they rely “less on logical presentation – and therefore the use of language – and more on affective means of communication” (Yoshino 13). *Ishin denshin*, emphatic understanding, holds more weight than logical communication. Importantly for *Nihonjinron*, therefore, western logic relies on rationality, dichotomy, and eloquence, while Japanese modes of communication rely on situational ethics, emotions, and taciturnity. This disparity in modes of communication, to some, upholds the belief that if one is not Japanese, one will not be able to understand the Japanese.

The second primary theoretical tenet of *Nihonjinron* develops out of Japan’s history as an agricultural, rice paddy culture. Harvesting rice requires a certain amount of group coordination, while the accepted model of Western civilization is based in a pastoral, nomadic background, which relies primarily on the individual. Additionally, the groupism of an agricultural society, it is believed, breeds harmony and peace, but the nomadic lifestyle leads to aggressive behavior (Yoshino 19). However, the idea that the Japanese are a group-oriented society comes from a western dichotomy of group versus individual. Instead, *Nihonjinron* authors oppose such a view and instead espouse the idea that Japanese society actually lies somewhere in between the two. This belief is supported by the term *kanjinshugi*, which refers to “mutual dependence, mutual trust and human relation in itself” (Yoshino 20). Essentially, then, according to *kanjinshugi*, Japanese sociological structure falls between the western analytical extremes of group and individual.

The entire purpose of *Nihonjinron* is to establish that the Japanese are unlike all others, and to prove that if one is not Japanese, then one cannot ever relate to the Japanese or fit into Japanese culture. The philosophy has both positive and negative effects upon society. Although it promotes national unity, which may result in a positive concept of self for the Japanese, it also causes the Japanese to negatively define all outsiders as simply “not us.”

Japanese society attributes value to persons according to their rank. Because of this stratification, it is important for individuals to be continually aware of where they stand within the overall hierarchy. That is, the “overall picture [of Japanese society] is one of vertical stratification by institution or group of institutions” (Nakane 87). Such institutions and groups figure largely in the overall picture of Japanese society. In order to explicate the importance of groups and the way individuals are ranked within a group, it is first necessary to establish a basic understanding of how groups function in relation to the larger Japanese society. Group participation, for the Japanese, “becomes simple and unitary” (Nakane 10). The power and influence of groups affect both individual’s actions and his or her ways of thinking. Chie Nakane asserts that people may be defined in society by either *attribute*, which is acquired by birth or achievement, or *frame*, which is an institution or relationship that binds people together in a group. According to Nakane, the Japanese are more likely to use frames rather than attributes as their reference point (Nakane 3). That is, in Japanese society, a person is judged by his affiliation with a group, not by who he is as a person. This concept becomes especially important within a deeper study of Japanese society and the socialization process.

Looking at the socialization process greatly assists in the understanding of Japanese society and the process by which individuals become outsiders. Joy Hendry describes socialization as the process through which “a child learns to classify the world in which it lives,

and to impose a system of values upon it” (46). Thus, a child learns at an early age how to view the world around it, and these views may remain with the person for a lifetime. Within this process in Japan, the seeds of prejudice and discrimination, against those who live outside the norm, are firmly planted.

Two of the most important concepts related to the socialization of Japanese children are *uchi* and *soto*. Literally meaning “inside” and “outside” respectively, these terms are first learned as they relate to cleanliness, but have a much wider meaning as well. The distinction between the cleanliness inside the house and the dirtiness of the outside world is made quite clear to the young child, and solidly reinforced by the parents. When entering a Japanese house, for example, the shoes, which have been contaminated with the dirt from outside, must be removed. The firmly ritualized greeting and parting phrases expressed when entering or leaving the house also reflect the physical separation between the inside and outside. The words, which are rigid and inflexible, are a constant reminder of whether one is inside or outside. Not only is the outside world polluted and separate, but it is also dangerous for the young child. Caretakers keep young children close at hand, and in early, formative years, children are not allowed to wander far from their parents. While this is practical, it also breeds an “association of outside with danger and fear” (Hendry 49).

Uchi and *soto* become further ingrained in the psyche of Japanese children through the introduction of *tatemae* and *honne* modes of behavior. The Japanese adopt speech patterns and mannerisms based upon circumstances. *Tatemae* is the public behavior when in the outside, while an individual will utilize *honne* behavior, their real feelings, only when in an inside group. Young Japanese are taught the “importance of choosing the appropriate ‘face’” (Hendry 50). Therefore, in order to do so, an individual must be acutely aware of the inside/outside position of

those with whom he or she is interacting. Because of this differentiation, an individual never shows his true feelings to “outsiders.” When studying *hone* and *tatemae*, it is important to note that the terms are not true dichotomies. There are many facets of “inside,” as in the distinction between family and friends, while “outside” includes a wide variety of people with different status. Despite this range in distinction, there is an unbridgeable line between them. Because of this complex structure, the Japanese must continually be aware of how to relate to others based upon their status, which cements a barrier between *uchi* and *soto*.

These concepts of *uchi/soto* and *hone/tatemae* are further developed within the Japanese school systems, as the schools are important sources of shared knowledge and national identity. Indeed, schools are vitally important to the socialization of Japanese because, once entering into school at kindergarten they affect every aspect of the student’s life. In addition to being important simply because of the amount of time being spent in classes, schools have a heightened impact on the minds of young people in Japan because, as Herman Smith states, the “educational structure in Japan does not exist to educate, but indoctrinate” (27). Because of this focus, education in Japan is important not because it teaches a student how to think, but rather because it teaches a student how to be a functional member of society.

Students learn at an early age to attempt to “fit in.” In Japan, children begin school early kindergarten, where they learn that it is unattractive to be different. According to Hendry:

Children are expected to be happy, and anyone who is not, like the crying child, is classed as “strange” or “peculiar”. A child who shows reluctance to participate is encouraged to join in, but, if it refuses, it will simply be ignored, as the teacher goes about the business of making life ‘fun’ for all the other children. (53)

Thus, even for young children, differences immediately result in ostracism. Fun and friendship are only for cooperators, and non-cooperators are placed into a *soto* grouping, forced to the

outside. Indeed, the ability to cooperate is frequently stressed throughout a child's life, not only in the educational system. Television programs, for example, reiterate this theme. Japanese television shows such as Voltron feature the lone hero being unsuccessful, but once teaming up, the five lions become one giant robot that can overcome any obstacle. Harmony takes precedence over individualism and creativity. This is not to say, however, that students therefore lose their individualism or creativity, but rather that they must learn to put on an appropriate "face" for a given set of circumstances.

Beyond *uchi/soto* differentials, there are other important ways that Japanese identify themselves and the world around them. The Japanese sense of self is defined entirely by its social context. For the Japanese, according to Kuwayama, relation to other people defines growth as a person. He posits that there are four ways in which a Japanese individual may see himself: *jibun* (self), *mawari* (immediate reference others), *hito* (generalized reference others), and *seken* (reference society) (143). In other words, an individual constantly judges his *jibun* only in reference to other individuals or societies. Of greatest importance during the socialization process is the *hito*. *Hito ni warawareru*, a popular saying to younger children in Japan, can be translated as "to be laughed at by others." This phrase reminds children not to act in a manner that would result in being laughed at by other individuals. These "others," while ambiguous and not readily defined, refer generally to anyone outside of one's *uchi* groupings.

The importance of *uchi/soto* and *jibun/hito* concepts lies in their relationality. Both sets of ideas are integral to the Japanese psyche and the functions of a Japanese individual in society and both depend on the relationship between self and other. Japanese society puts extreme pressures on individuals to conform and adapt, and to be continually aware of one's placement within a group. While this feeds into the stereotyped image, it is important to note that it does

not produce the intended result of a harmonious and homogenous society. The two modes of looking at the world in some ways contradict themselves. *Hito*, the others by which an individual references himself, are part of the outside *soto* grouping. Therefore, while society at large pressures the individual to conform, acceptance is never truly possible, because the society to which one is expected to conform is part of an outside group. This can lead both to isolation and a need to discrimination against those who are different.

The socialization process continues throughout Japanese education, which reinforces a heterogeneous culture. The origins of the Japanese educational system lie in the 1872 Decree for Encouragement of Learning, which mandated a basic school system for members of all classes and both genders in Japanese society. While this established mass education, it did not necessarily create equal education. A casual observation of Japanese schools seems to “verify an inordinately homogenous picture” (Smith 10). For example, school uniforms are standardized and strictly enforced and the students may use only certain types of schoolbags. Monbukagakusho, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, controls textbooks and curriculums, so that students in northern Sapporo will be covering the same chapter as students in southern Kagoshima at the same pace. High school graduation rates have a mean average of 95% (Smith 10). However, these and other apparent indicators of a homogenous society do not hold up under close scrutiny, and the reality of the education system shows a divided culture.

One marker of bias and inequality in the Japanese education system is in high school graduation and university entrance. If the system truly were equal, as suggested by mean graduation rates and standardized curriculums, one would expect to see a lack of variance in different high schools sending students to top rated universities. However, less than 7% of all

5,512 high schools produced all successful test takers for the 44 top-rated universities over a ten-year average. In 1988, only 4.3% of Saitama's high school graduates entered elite Japanese universities, while 33.14% in Tokushima passed the entrance exams for such schools (Smith 11-12). In these two statistics alone, one can see inequality within high schools, despite surface-level appearances to the contrary.

Despite mandatory education for all members of society and Monbukagakusho's assertion that all schools throughout the region are equal, the truth of stratification becomes apparent under scrutiny. One of the most markedly stratified societies is found in junior high school. Junior high is particularly stressful for students because entering top high schools significantly increases chances of entering top universities. To help them succeed, junior high students intent on entering a good high school often enroll in *juku*. *Juku* are preparatory schools, held after normal school hours, which provide additional education and study time for students. The more time a student spends in school and studying, the greater his chance of entering into a better high school. *Juku*, however, are expensive, and not all are equal. Schools in Tokyo, for example, are known to be significantly more effective at producing top students than in other regions. Therefore, students in lower-income households may find it nearly impossible to enter top high schools and universities, as they are unable to afford both tuition and travel expenses. Because social mobility in industrialized nations often hinges on the quality and credentials of an individual's education, stratification often occurs along lines of geography, familial background, and economic class.

Beyond dividing Japanese society through educational opportunities, the junior high years have further impact on the alienation of some students. The intense pressure placed upon students during their junior high years can negatively affect their lives in several ways. One

problem facing junior high school students is the prevalence of bullying. Bullying in Japanese schools happens most often during times of intense competition for educational opportunities, which indicates that the stress of the competition causes the action. In addition, females are rarely either the victim or the aggressor, since they are most often excluded from climbing the educational ladder.³ With the standardized educational system, victims of bullying do not have the opportunity to escape from the aggressors, because students remain with the same set of classmates throughout their years at a particular school.

The inequality of the educational system leads to other methods of pressure, including school vandalism and truancy. Incidents of both increase dramatically during the stressful times of junior high school. In junior high, one in three schools was vandalized in 1988, versus one in six senior high schools (Smith 64). For institutionalized truants in 1988, 86% were junior high students. When surveyed, truants most often cited problems with friends and feelings of isolation as their reasons for delinquency. Because of the importance of “fitting in” and the prevalence of bullying, one may infer that these truant students had become outcasts, and attempted to escape the problem in the only way they could: by not attending mandatory school. Therefore, not only does junior high school provide an indicator of the dissonant nature of Japanese society, it also shows one example of how outsiders in the society are both created and treated.

The Japanese school system is also unequal in its treatment of the “largest minority in Japan,” females (Nishizono-Maher 214). From early childhood to higher education, women can expect to face sexual discrimination in school. According to the 1988 statistics of female attendance in four Japanese universities, only 25.5% of students were female; in the top three universities, females made up only 10% of the student population (Smith 87). These numbers

³ Discrimination against females in education will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

have not improved significantly: by 2001 37% of university students were female (Hendry 96). This is largely due to the Japanese perception of higher education. Four-year universities are considered *otoko no michi*, or “the male track.” Females, on the other hand, are generally expected to attend two-year junior colleges, which function much like finishing schools, and indeed 90% of all junior college students are female. Therefore, women are not considered to be part of the educational race. Virtually all women who do attend the top universities major only in *bungakubu* or *kyooikubu* (liberal arts and education). Not only are females also in the minority as students, but there are few female faculty members as well. Kyoto University, for example, which has produced many of Japan’s Nobel Prize winners, did not have any female professors or assistant professors until 1991.

Beyond sexual discrimination, there are other groups which can expect to be alienated and cast out from the majority. Members of ethnicity classifications other than Japanese struggle with finding a measure of equality within modern Japan. The reasons for discrimination are as countless as there are groups, but all such individuals as members of Korean and Ainu ethnicity, as well as Burakumin, have one commonality: they are treated as outsiders within Japanese society.

Japan is a diverse and complex society, with many cultural and ethnic heritages. However, a reader of popular literature about and from Japan would not likely know about the minorities that exist. This has to do in part with the creation of a national image, which requires the inclusion of certain groups and the exclusion of others, which places the excluded individuals into categories of ‘otherness’ (Maher 297). Japanese individuals who do not conform to the national image, whether because of education, gender, social interaction, or ethnic background, may experience emotional or material hardships and discrimination.

Japanese society, in many ways, hinges on the appearance (though not necessarily the actuality) of a harmonious society. Therefore, there exists a fear that ethnic diversity will upset the social order. Thus, to contain ethnic diversity, limitations are placed on the expressions of such diversity, which often results in various forms of discrimination against these outcast groups. Before delving further into the subject of minority discrimination, however, it is important to note that Japan does not experience or perpetuate any more discrimination than other modern industrialized nations (Maher 300). Japan is not unique in its attitudes towards minorities, and should not be treated as such.

As an island nation, much of Japan's history has involved trade with other countries. Scholars have long documented the convergence of Chinese and Korean influence on Japan's early society. However, for as long as Japan has been in contact with other nations, it has also discriminated against members of those nations. While instances of such behavior could be traced back indefinitely, this study concerns itself more with contemporary society. The roots for contemporary discrimination of outsiders formulated during the Tokugawa Shogunate, whose seclusion "contributed to creating the specific Japanese attitude and practices which tended to reject and segregate things which were seen as 'foreign' or 'outside'" (Maher 65). The Tokugawa government, in addition to cutting off most ties with the outside world, highly stratified the society, placing all individuals into particular groupings. Foreigners had no real place within this structure, and so were simply limited to being outside and unimportant for consideration.

The Meiji Restoration, along with Commodore Perry's persuasive ships, reopened Japan to outsiders. While foreigners were then allowed in the country, they were not necessarily accepted. During the Meiji period, Japanese children were taught that Westerners were in fact

oni, which, roughly translated, means a devil or demon. Such negative images were not restricted only to Westerners, as young Japanese were informed that other Asians were underdeveloped and both stupid and dull (Maher 66). This belief in the inferiority of other Asian cultures (which discounted the impact these cultures had previously had on Japan) led the Japanese to expand, colonize, and exert their dominance throughout Asia.

In the modern democracy of Japan today, viewpoints on foreigners have not improved considerably. Although they are no longer described as devils (at least not officially), there is still great distrust and fear of foreigners, as evidenced by the Alien Registration Act. This law states that all “foreigners,” a loose and deceptive term, living in Japan must be fingerprinted (Maher 67). The fact is that all descendents of foreign residents, no matter how long they or their families have lived in Japan, are still considered by law to be foreigners. Therefore, if an individual was born in Japan and has lived there his or her entire life, but has a grandparent that moved to Japan from, say, Korea, that person would still be considered a foreigner and therefore fingerprinted. A foreigner may escape this legal necessity by becoming a naturalized citizen (Maher 142). However, naturalization is a difficult process in Japan, and often people will suffer the indignity of the fingerprinting over a long and arduous legal procedure. One part of this process involves the Nationality Law, which stipulates that any individual wishing to become a Japanese citizen must take a Japanese name. A third-generation Japanese-born Korean must therefore shed a portion of his heritage by abandoning the name of a grandfather and adopt a Japanese name.

This legal discrimination does not limit itself to full-blooded minority groups. According to Japanese law, Korean-Japanese and Chinese-Japanese, individuals with parents of an identifiable mixed heritage, are considered *teichaku ijusha*, or permanent residents. Such a

person may hold dual citizenship until the age of twenty-two, at which time that person must renounce his other nationality in order to remain a Japanese citizen. Otherwise, that individual will remain *teichaku ijusha*, and the government may deport him at will. Thus, he becomes a permanent outsider (Smith 181).

The educational system also provides for generalized discrimination of minority and ethnicity groups both by the administrations and by peers. For example, school districts may not appoint non-Japanese to permanent positions (Maher 140). This almost ensures a lack of ethnic minority viewpoints within the classroom. In addition, teachers are often considered role models to their students, and minority students do not have a teacher with whom they can identify. Another institutionalized form of discrimination in the educational system comes from the Japan Amateur Athletics Association (JAAA). As of 1995, the JAAA, which handles many of the sports activities of colleges, limits participation to individuals of Japanese nationality only (Smith 14).

Less officially, among students, bullying is a serious problem within the Japanese school system. The situation for minorities, though, often intensifies. As Peter Payne remarks in his weekly newsletter concerning being an American living in Japan:

“One of the biggest problems facing Japanese schools is *ijime*, or bullying, when a group of kids gangs up on weaker children to torment them. The bullying can be open, like hiding a person’s shoes so he can’t go home or putting a sharp push-pin on his chair for him to sit on, or more subtle and psychological, like group ignoring. Every school in the world probably has some of this going on, but there are special reasons why *ijime* is so bad in Japan. First of all, students stay in the same classroom all year long – teachers come for one hour to teach, then leave, but the students are always together. Also, the concept of counselors who listen to students’ problems is quite alien here. My own daughter, who stands out because she looks very American, has been the target of more than a few incidents of bullying by bigger kids, so my wife and I are always trying to come up with proactive ways to handle problems.”
(Payne)

Though Payne's child is just one example, and there are undoubtedly cases which result in the exact opposite experience, it is undeniable that bullying of this sort does exist and may seriously impact the victim's abilities to function within the society. Minority students, already having been placed on the outside due to their ethnicity, are less likely to have a strong friend base. Because targets of bullying in Japan are typically those that have no support group, minority students are more likely to be the victims of bullies.

Table 1.1 *Foreign Nationals in Japan, 1982*

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Korean	669,854	83.5%
Chinese	59,122	7.4%
American	24,825	3.1%
Filipino	6,563	.8%
English	5,642	.7%
Vietnamese	3,132	.4%
West German	2,960	.4%
Indian	2,232	.3%
French	2,206	.2%
Thai	1,974	.2%
Canadian	1,847	.2%
Brazilian	1,643	.2%
Indonesian	1,494	.2%
Australian	1,419	.2%
Others	15,666	1.9%
No Nationality	2,078	.3%
Total	802,477	100.0%

Hideichiro Nakano, p. 55

The above table indicates the number and ratio of foreign nationals living in Japan in 1982. While the numbers have certainly increased, the ratio of foreigners has not changed

considerably (Nakano 55). The high ratio of Korean nationals to any other group is abundantly clear. As the largest foreign national minority, they therefore desire the most consideration when discussing minority relations within Japan. That being said, however, Koreans make up only approximately 1% of the total population of Japan (Maher 63).

Japan and Korea have interacted, through both trade and conflict, for almost as long as the two countries have existed. In the early part of the twentieth century, Japan successfully invaded and colonized Korea, and it is at that time that the contemporary discrimination against Koreans truly began. With Korea firmly under their imperialistic grasp, the Japanese attempted several methods of control over their colony's population. It was mandated, for example, that the Japanese language must be taught within Korean schools. Koreans had to abandon their ethnic names and instead adopt Japanese names. Also, to help produce Japan's war machine, many Koreans were taken from their homeland and forced to work in Japan. Thus, the majority of Koreans whose descendants would live in modern Japan arrived by force.

After World War II, with the imperialistic regime of Japan defeated, Korea was liberated from its oppressors. Many of the Koreans who had been forced to move to Japan returned to their home, but others decided to remain. Perhaps they believed they could have a fresh start, and hoped for equality under the new democratic government. Unfortunately, that was not the case. In 1945, the government temporarily suspended the rights of any non-Japanese to participate in the political process. In 1947, the Alien Registration Act was ratified, and so began the indignity of continual fingerprinting. In 1948, a mandate forced Korean children to receive Japanese public education, thus denying them the right to receive an ethnic education. (Maher 128) These rulings show the contradictory and complex attitudes of the Japanese government towards its Korean residents. On one hand, the laws of 1945 and 1947 deny

Koreans of the right to be fully considered Japanese and reinforce their lack of acceptance within the country. However, the 1948 education mandate reflects a desire for forceful integration. The final answer came in 1952 when Japan recovered its sovereignty through the San Francisco Peace Treaty, and Koreans in Japan lost their Japanese nationality and became aliens. Thus, even second or third generation Koreans living in Japan were denied their rights as members of the country. According to Makiko Hanami, the “history of the contemporary experience of the Korean minority as foreign residents in Japan began on the day they formally lost their Japanese nationality” (Maher 129).

In 1992, 700,000 Koreans living in Japan were classified as non-citizens, despite the fact that 80% of them spoke no Korean (De Vos 145). Because the Korean minority makes up only 1% of the total Japanese population, it is difficult for these residents to achieve enough notice or support to battle for equality effectively. In addition, political and ideological differences internally divide the Korean population. Koreans in Japan are split between those with ties to North and to South Korea, and their views on what it means to be Korean and how to live as Koreans in a foreign country are divided by that political split. Their segregation from the mainstream of Japan, low numbers, and political disparities make the Koreans convenient scapegoats for the Japanese, who apply “stringent expectations concerning self controlled behavior” (De Vos 177).

Turning again to the educational system reveals more evidence of the Japanese alienation of the Korean minority. Few ethnic schools exist, and those that do have high tuition rates; therefore 86% of Koreans attend Japanese schools (Maher 168). These schools do not provide any form of bilingual education, so that students who speak Korean at home have difficulty adjusting to a fully Japanese language education. There are no full or partial immersion

programs to assist new Korean students to Japanese schools, and in addition to not having opportunities for bilingual education, the Japanese educational system does not offer supplementary language programs for ethnic communities. In order to “fit in” and be accepted by their peers, Korean students must essentially deny their Korean identity.

Koreans living in Japan, therefore, must decide whether or not to attempt to assimilate into the larger society. However, assimilation is not an easy path, nor an easy choice, due to internal pressures. That is, many Koreans are unwilling to drop their cultural practices and adopt a completely Japanese lifestyle. This results in a certain amount of ethnic persistence, which keeps them separate from the larger culture. Also, there is a belief that in order to be accepted, Koreans must attempt to “pass” as Japanese. The problem with this, however, is that it leads to loneliness and isolation, as these Koreans would have to cut themselves off from their backgrounds. Also, “passing” requires the denial of one’s heritage and an implied acceptance of the negative perceptions of one’s native culture. Koreans trying to pass, therefore, have to face a decision based on integrity. As a result, Korean communities can be torn internally by this question of integration. This decision of whether to pass as Japanese, to retain Korean heritage, or to find some middle ground between the two, causes many Koreans to be faced with an amorphous sense of self, and thus feel alienated and isolated.

Charles De Vos establishes five ways in which Koreans in contemporary Japan respond to and cope with these possible feelings of alienation (186-188). In the following chapters of this study, I will revisit these methods to explain how closely Miike’s characters follow the same paths. Each method (save one) reinforces negative stereotypes of Koreans in Japan. These behaviors also tend to have negative effects on the individual’s life.

First, as a result of feelings of powerlessness, an alienated individual may opt to engage in social protest. This comes from a downtrodden state of existence that blames one's inability to succeed in the government and the social system. While, historically speaking, social protest has produced many positive results, it can also be a double-edged sword. When a minority group engages in public social protest, the larger culture may take offense and resent the action the protestors are taking. Also, a fear of political and social violence may take root within the majority, further fueling the discrimination against and negative stereotypes of the minority. Consequently, this method of releasing frustration can have uncertain, even volatile results.

The second and third methods are similar, as they both deal with some form of socially detrimental activity, such as crime. An alienated individual may join in goal-oriented criminal activity, such as the *yakuza*, Japan's primary organized-crime syndicate. In the *yakuza*, a person's background may be conveniently forgotten, because professional criminals are not likely to scrutinize their associates' origins. Indeed, there exist a "high percentage of individuals with Korean background who comprise underworld gangs" (De Vos 187). The expression of alienation can also manifest itself in what De Vos refers to as "expressively active deviant behavior." In other words, rather than being a member of a criminal organization with clear goals, the alienated individual will instead involve himself in delinquency and petty crime. In this case, the deviancy "is expressive either of a deep sense of emotional and material deprivation or an angry antagonism toward any form of official authority" (De Vos 187).

The fourth method leads to the most positive results. An isolated individual may resort to innovative social behavior and professional goals. That is, a person who cannot survive in the dominant culture finds a way to survive outside the mainstream. Success as an actor, musician, or athlete is based more on talent than on ethnicity. Unfortunately, however, only a limited

number of people are successful in entertainment industries, so while innovative social behavior such as this could prove beneficial, it is very much the exception rather than the rule.

Finally, the socially and psychologically alienated may opt to withdraw completely from society. This results in a high rate of alcoholism amongst Japanese-born Koreans. Alcoholism, which reduces the chances of success and integration into a society, consequently furthers the cycle of alienation. Because Japanese-born Koreans are likely to feel alienated but have no widely successful avenue for response, these Koreans are easy targets for continued discrimination and face increased difficulty in staking their claim within Japanese society.

Koreans are not the only minority group in Japan that finds itself alienated by the mainstream society. Both the Buraku and Ainu communities suffer from discrimination which pushes them to the fringes of society. The Buraku are a class of individuals with no physical distinction from other Japanese. Instead, the difference comes from the employment of their ancestors. Pre-modern Japan considered certain jobs to be unclean, and so the relegated individuals who performed these undesirable jobs to an outcast status, or Burakumin. Over time, the class became institutionalized, so that the descendents of Burakumin were also Burakumin. During the Meiji Period in 1871, the government officially declared Burakumin to be *dowa*, or “same Japanese” (Hendry 108). Unfortunately, government decrees do not always change popular opinion, and so the majority of society continued to segregate these outcasts. As recently as 1998, Japanese companies purchased information on the *dowa* status of potential employees, so that they would not inadvertently hire individuals of Buraku descent. Today, despite efforts to end this discrimination, Buraku are still segregated to fringes of society, suffering from poverty and poor educational achievement.

Buraku in Japanese society now suffer from low levels of self-confidence, competence, and social acceptability. Because of this lack of acceptance by the larger society, Buraku children tend to score lower than average on individual and group IQ tests, which both reflects the early effects of racism and aids in the construction of the aforementioned low self-confidence. Buraku children also have a significantly higher rate of delinquency than do the average Japanese children (De Vos 141). The delinquency, however, rarely manifests itself within Buraku communities. Buraku tend to remain in the same neighborhoods together because of their inability to move up on the economic and social ladder, and because of the Japanese tendency not to move far away from their birthplace. Buraku delinquents rarely commit criminal and delinquent activities in these neighborhoods, instead lashing out against the outside majority (De Vos 142). According to scholars such as De Vos, this indicates their frustrations with being alienated by the larger social structure, as well as their inability to overcome the difficulties of being born Burakumin.

Because of their lack of physical distinction from other Japanese, the Buraku have a much better chance of fitting in than the Korean minority. However, the same difficulties are present for the Burakumin as for the Koreans. Attempting to pass as a “normal” Japanese means moving out of Buraku communities and subsequently cutting familial ties. This results in a loss of identity and a feeling of isolation, because that person is removed from his *uchi* group and alienated from his roots. Therefore, as with many Koreans, isolated Buraku may see the *yakuza*, allowing them to fit in with another socially unacceptable group.

The Ainu are a final example of a minority group discriminated against by the Japanese majority. The Ainu are considered to be the original inhabitants of Japan, and parallels have been made between their situation and Native Americans’ relations with European settlers.

Much like other marginalized groups, the Ainu have been placed outside mainstream society, and exist on the fringes within their own communities and groups. One typical example of mainstream thought on Ainu is found in a 1903 Japanese textbook, which describes the Ainu as unable to read, write, or count, and also says that they do not wash regularly or dress their hair (Maher 85). Today, those nineteenth century stereotypes of the “illiterate” Ainu continue to exist. In a 1986 survey, 71.6% of Ainu studied stated that they have experienced some form of discrimination in their lives, while 85.5% maintain that discrimination of those with Ainu blood continues to exist (Maher 73). The Japanese phrase, “*Ainu no chi hiku*,” meaning “to have Ainu blood,” though fallen out of popularity, is still considered an insult.

Clearly, the Japanese social structure is far from homogenous despite the dominant interpretation. Ethnic and sexual discrimination are almost institutionalized within the society, reinforced by both educational and governmental systems. Divisions exist between who is and is not Japanese, and those placed on the outside are not accepted into the mainstream. Invisible membranes divide the society into a number of distinct pockets, formed by geographical, economic status, and ethnic heritage. It is important to remember, however, that none of these traits are distinct to the Japanese. Any culture is likely to practice some forms of discrimination and separation. That is, although outsiders are clearly alienated in Japanese society, this does not mark the Japanese as unlike the rest of the world.

Chapter Two: Blues Harp

The Japanese, even if we live in Japan, we are all drifting. Especially me. My family is originally from Kumamoto in South Kyushu. When Japan was defeated in World War II, my grandmother was in Korea. When she came back, she went to live in another town in Japan. So since my grandmother, my family hasn't lived in Kumamoto. I grew up in Osaka, but for this reason I don't think Osaka is my hometown. I've always felt that I'm drifting, that I don't have a hometown that I can go back to. Portraying such people in my films is very natural for me, even in the *yakuza* stories.

Takashi Miike

One of Takashi Miike's most prominent themes is the portrayal of outsiders. He always includes at least one character that suffers from persecution and alienation by the society. In Blues Harp, Miike examines both Japanese society at large and, more specifically, one subset of society: that of the *yakuza*, a term referring to Japanese organized crime. Through the two principal characters, Miike shows not only the hierarchical stratification of the Japanese, but also the way outsiders rank themselves within the same system.

Miike released Blues Harp in 1998 as a follow-up to Andromedia, a vehicle for two pop music groups and his foray into popular cinema. With Blues Harp, Miike returned to the *yakuza* film genre (in which a large amount of his work falls) as well as to his generalized themes of alienation and the outsider. The film had a brief theatrical release, with mixed reception by critics and audiences. What distinguishes this movie from many of Miike's other *yakuza* works is its lack of explicit violence. In comparison to Miike's other films, Blues Harp is quite tame in regards to its violent episodes, although other thematic elements mark it as unmistakably Miike's.

Blues Harp functions as a character study of two individuals, nearly equal in their outcast status. The first character, Chuji (Hiroyuki Ikeuchi), is of mixed heritage: half Japanese, half

African American. He works as a bartender at a local club, which specializes in what seems to be a strange mixture of blues and punk rock music. As the story unfolds, however, Chuji reveals his hidden talent at playing the blues harp. The film also follows Kenji (Seiichi Tanabe), who works as a lieutenant within a *yakuza* group. Despite his rank, his fellow members treat him as an inferior, beating him for the smallest mistake. While Kenji is accepted into the *yakuza* “family” and exists as a member of that group, he feels he must hide his true identity from his adopted group. In truth, Kenji is a homosexual, and due to his treatment by the other *yakuza*, Kenji seeks to kill his boss and become the next leader.

The two characters meet when Chuji leaves the bar for a cigarette and sees Kenji lying in the gutter, hiding from *yakuza* from a rival gang. Chuji convinces the pursuing *yakuza* members that no one has run by, and thus saves Kenji’s life. Thus, the two form a small group unit, complimented by Tokiko (Saori Sekino), a woman whom Chuji defended from the unwanted advances of two Americans in the bar. As the plot unfolds, Chuji and Tokiko fall in love and begin dating, culminating in the revelation that Tokiko has become pregnant. Kenji, on the other hand, stays fairly distant from them, hatching a complex and thoroughly ridiculous plot to assassinate his boss. Chuji, due to past encounters with *yakuza*, finds himself unwittingly drawn into Kenji’s scheme, and when he is set up to kill the gang boss, Kenji quickly comes to his rescue. The film ends tragically, however. Kenji’s betrayal of the *yakuza* results in his death, and Chuji’s assistance, despite his intent, in Kenji’s plan causes his death as well.

The plot of the film illustrates the plight of Chuji and Kenji as outcast characters, living as outsiders in their world. Miike cares little for the lifelike portrayal of events, but rather attempts to illustrate how these characters develop under harsh circumstances. The film works outside of strict realism: throughout the movie, both characters make decisions that seem

thoroughly unrealistic. Perhaps the clearest indication of the film's unrealistic attitude comes in the contrived and unreasonable methods which Kenji uses to achieve his goal. The character himself is unconcerned with how far-fetched his idea is. He does not care if he succeeds; he simply feels compelled to fight against the system in which he lives. As he states, if he did not strive to free himself from his outsider status, he would "have nothing to live for."

In addition to Kenji's improbable methods, Miike employs certain cinematic devices to separate from realism and plot coherence. In the montage of images during the opening credits, Miike juxtaposes shots of Kenji fighting with shots of a video game in which two characters are fighting. This contrast acknowledges that what the viewer watches is fake, a cinematic and unreal depiction of events. When Chuji and Kenji's attempt to assassinate the leader of the gang proves to be an ambush, Miike departs from his usual conventions. The ensuing gunfight takes on more of the style of John Woo than anything Miike had previously done. Kenji leaps backwards with two guns blazing, fighting off a hoard of *yakuza* to assist the two in their flight. The battle itself is irrelevant to outcome of the story. Miike simply needs to show that the two escape, giving them one last breath of freedom before their eventual death.

The entire film, at its core, centers on the behavior and circumstances of Chuji and Kenji as outcasts. Miike lays the foundation for Chuji's outsider status early on in the film. The movie opens with a shot of the sea, the gentle music of a blues harp giving a depressed, lonely feel. The camera cuts to an empty city street, once again evoking loneliness and isolation. This culminates with a shot of a young Chuji, sitting profile on a dark street, playing the tune we hear. The character wears only a loose-hanging tank top and short shirts, both looking quite dirty and unkempt. Immediately, the audience recognizes that this young child is alone and without support.

The next shot shows that the boy is sitting outside his house, which is in what appears to be a poverty-stricken area. The colors of the lighting and set are dull and muted, though a bright light shines on Chuji in the corner of the screen, drawing attention to him. The boy's mother then appears from within the house. From the interaction between her and a deliveryman, the audience learns several important facts about the life of this child. For one, his mother is sexually promiscuous, implying that she either has no husband or has no attachment to one. Also, she asks why Chuji is not at school, and he replies that it is summer vacation. Thus, it seems that she is completely unaware of her child's life and has no strong relationship with him. Chuji looks longingly after her as she enters the house with the deliveryman, revealing both his awareness of her situation and his desire for the affection of his mother. The shot cuts to a low angle of a forlorn Chuji, giving a full view of him for the first time. He appears to not be of purely Japanese racial stock, and the American military plane flying just over his shoulder hints at the possibility of his other heritage. Finally, the film cuts to the title, then to Chuji walking alone down a dirt path. He stops and turns to stare at the camera, with sadness and loneliness in his eyes.

Chuji's situation becomes clearer with knowledge of the Japanese social structure. As a result of the apparent negligence of his mother, Chuji's sense of *uchi* was never fully formed. Chuji remains on the outside of the house, in dirty clothing, separated from his mother, a reminder of his *soto* placement within society. His mother and her lifestyle have aided in placing him as an outsider. Without this connection to a family, Chuji, even at a young age, has difficulty making unifying bonds with others. Also, Chuji does not have a group formation outside of the home, as indicated by his solitary lifestyle while on summer break. He does not play with other children, but instead sits next to his house, playing his blues harp. When Miike

shows Chuji walking alone down the dirt path, the audience sees his loneliness in its fullest extent. He is alone because he can find no one to walk with him. When he turns to the camera, Chuji is asking the audience to accompany him on the journey through the rest of the film.

Also, Chuji's racial identity indicates his feelings of alienation. While Chuji does have distinctly Japanese features, Miike initially leaves his race undefined, though later in the film it is revealed that he is in fact half African American. As indicated in the previous chapter, there is significant racial discrimination in Japanese society. The Japanese audience, which understands this problem, can assume that his classmates may subject him to bullying (Due to his lack of friends and his mixed race), further alienating him and causing difficulty in his proper socialization. Other larger minorities in Japan, such as Koreans and Burakumin, have the possibility of passing as fully Japanese; Chuji does not have even that option. Chuji's partially black heritage and mixed racial background is unmistakable, and so he cannot deny who he is.

Following the opening credits, the audience first sees Chuji as an adult, tending bar and appearing out of place within the Japanese-filled club. Here, Miike shows the first evidence of the inner struggles of Chuji regarding his heritage. Two Western men, probably American, are harassing a young Japanese girl (Tokiko). Chuji comes to her aid, siding with the Japanese over the American, which indicates the ethnicity with which Chuji most identifies. He speaks English haltingly and with a heavy accent; although his meaning is conveyed, the actual phrase makes little sense in the context it is used. The singer of the band comes to his aid, indicating that Chuji has found, if not a friend, then at least an ally in this club. However, it is still Chuji, alone, who removes the American from the bar, and shuts himself outside for a cigarette.

Other scenes indicate Chuji's identification with his Japanese heritage. At one point, Miike shows Chuji playing a video game (the same game from the opening montage). Chuji

plays as the Asian character, winning in a fight against a Caucasian dressed in an American military uniform. To a certain extent, this shows both Chuji's rebellion against his American heritage, and the side with which he chooses to identify.

Though Chuji has clearly chosen to identify himself with the Japanese, he experiences conflict as a result of his mixed heritage. Chuji's father is a homeless man who lives in a cardboard box. From his paternal side, then, Chuji is an outcast both from being half American and from being the son of the ultimate outcast, the homeless. Although he makes time to visit his father in several scenes, Chuji speaks Japanese to him, unwilling to use his father's native tongue. Chuji sought out his father in an attempt to remain in contact with him. Even though his father continually refuses to accept Chuji as his son, Chuji still goes to see him. Chuji's reluctance to speak English yet his instance in seeing his father indicates the conflict within Chuji regarding his heritage.

One of his favorite places to spend time is nearby the local American military base, deriving comfort from the sounds of the planes screeching overhead. At one point, Chuji and Tokiko stand on a balcony, overlooking the American military base. Chuji compares the base to Dejima, where in pre-modern Japan foreigners were forced to remain in order to do trade with the Japanese. When Chuji speaks of Dejima, he speaks of it as a window looking out into the outside world, taking his viewpoint from the Japanese side. Tokiko, on the other hand, argues that instead, Dejima functions as a window for the world to look into Japan. Chuji quickly changes the subject, uncomfortable with changing from a Japanese viewpoint.

A final indication of the pull Chuji feels towards his American heritage can be seen in the music he prefers. After Chuji successfully defeats the American in the video game, he walks aimlessly down the street. As he passes a record shop, he is drawn into the store by the sound of

blues music playing over the stereo. Blues anchors Chuji to his American heritage; both his preference for the sound and his talent playing the blues harp indicate that American music is in his blood. Despite his attempts to deny his heredity, Chuji's appearance and preferences do not allow him to do so. Holding onto the American side of his life keeps him an outsider within the Japanese society. Thus, though Chuji chooses to be Japanese, he tries to root himself in the history from his American side.

Throughout the movie, Miike indicates that Chuji's outsider status is caused by other factors besides his race, most importantly his family life and his means of employment. As previously stated, Chuji's mother had a callous attitude towards his upbringing, taking little care of him as a young boy. Kenji at one point asks Chuji about his childhood and Chuji responds only that his mother placed him in an orphanage at the age of ten. Although Chuji's mother was negligent in raising him, he still had contact with her and lived in the same house until he was ten. When placed in the orphanage, Chuji lost all sense of family unit, which may explain why he reaches out to the man who is not necessarily his father.

After Chuji first appears on stage playing with the house band, Miike cuts to a shot of Chuji's father, drinking and laughing with his fellow homeless friends. The shot quickly cuts to Chuji as a young boy, alone outside his house, beating ice on the ground with a stick. The box the deliveryman brought to the house sits next to him. Miike then immediately returns to Chuji's father and his merriment. This juxtaposition of images, following so closely to Chuji's success, gives the audience another insight into Chuji's emotions. It shows first that Chuji's father was not there to see Chuji's success and subsequent happiness, much he like was not there for Chuji as a boy. In addition, it reinforces the lack of a family for Chuji, and thus the lack of a close *uchi* grouping.

Later, the lead singer of the house band at the club where Chuji works leaves the band to take care of his family. As he tells Chuji the news, he begins to walk off. The camera follows Chuji as he turns and shadows his friend. The camera movement, following Chuji's face to include a medium shot of Chuji staring after his friend hints at Chuji's emotions. He realizes that he will miss his friend, but, more importantly, Chuji wishes for a life like his friend. Chuji has no family to take care of, or to take care of him. Thus, he longs for the family that cannot be, and to be there for the family that does not exist.

Another indicator of Chuji's alienated position in society comes from his means of employment. The first job at which Miike shows him working is that of a bartender. Although bartending requires significant interpersonal skills and the ability to relate to customers, it pays little and is on the lower end of the social ladder. Further, Miike never actually shows Chuji tending bar. When he stands behind the bar, his boss accompanies him; it seems that his job may actually to clean, run for various supplies, and do other such menial jobs.

Chuji's low standard of living and his unimpressive apartment also indicate that he does not make significant income. Therefore, he supplements his job at the club with work as a drug dealer for the *yakuza*. However, Miike portrays Chuji as ineffectual in this profession as well, largely due to his ethnicity. In two scenes, Miike shows Chuji's method of dealing, which involves walking around on a crowded street, approaching people at random. However, no passersby even acknowledge Chuji's existence; instead, they walk right by him, refusing to make eye contact. Even when Chuji places his body into the path of oncomers, they brush right by him without a glance.

Chuji does, however, achieve success as a musician. When he first goes onstage to play the blues harp in the club, the crowd is skeptical and unresponsive; as he begins to play, they

respond, enjoying the music. With each successive scene of Chuji's music, the crowd increases, culminating in a record deal being offered to him.

As a drug dealer and musician, Chuji illustrates two of De Vos's five methods for minorities in Japan to cope with their alienated status. The employment with the *yakuza* shows De Vos's second method, that of joining goal-oriented criminal activity. Although Chuji seems only casually involved in the *yakuza*, he still turned to them for money, as a result of his inability to gain employment elsewhere. As a musician, Chuji embodies De Vos's fourth mode of coping with alienation, that of innovative social behavior. Chuji gains the opportunity to break out of his humble and downtrodden beginnings to pursue a better life. In the end, however, this proves to be impossible, as his dealings with the *yakuza* lead to his downfall, and he pays for his association with his life.

The second character in Blues Harp, Kenji, exists as an outsider in a significantly different manner than Chuji. Kenji is a lieutenant in a local *yakuza* gang, but the rest of the gang treats him poorly. In the opening credits montage, Miike intersperses various images from the city with shots of Kenji being brutally beaten and pursued by fellow *yakuza*. Thus, Miike portrays Kenji as a bitter man, part of a group unit, but still an outsider within that group. Though Kenji has formed a place for himself within the *yakuza* society, his peers do not accept him, making him feel alienated and alone.

As a *yakuza*, Kenji already falls into a subset of society that is not accepted by the mainstream. Because criminal gangs function on the fringes of society Kenji is automatically an outsider. Furthermore, he is placed further along the periphery of society by his low status within his gang. The beatings he receives for trivial mistakes serve as more than punishment and humiliation. They show that Kenji cannot reach acceptance even with fellow outsiders. This

further his sense of alienation and lack of a group to which he can belong. Pushed to the lowest depths of Japanese society, the criminal, Kenji rebels and attempts to gain acceptance and empowerment by a method that will eventually lead to his downfall.

To do so Kenji makes a deal with a rival gang to assassinate the head of his group. Then, by sleeping with his leader's wife, he convinces her to replace her husband's will with a forgery that names Kenji as the successor to lead the group. The fact that this seems to be a roundabout way to achieve his goal does not bother Kenji. He concerns himself only with fighting against his status. The majority of the plot of the film follows Kenji's discreet alliances, seductions, and murders to aid in his rise to the top. However, Kenji's outsider status dooms him from the start.

Kenji's outsider status is complicated by the fact that he is a homosexual. Miike implies, by the fact that Kenji keeps his homosexuality a secret, that such sexual orientation would not be accepted within the *yakuza*. Therefore, Kenji must deny his identity in order to function within his chosen society. Miike subtly presents the first evidence of Kenji's homosexuality shortly after Chuji saves his life. Kenji wakes up in the middle of night in Chuji's apartment. The room is dark, with the only light coming in from the window next to Chuji's bed. The first shot shows Kenji leaning against the refrigerator in the foreground, with Chuji sleeping in the background. The camera lingers in this position, as Kenji slowly, guiltily looks over at Chuji's sleeping body. The camera cuts to a shot of Chuji in full view, appearing from Kenji's perspective. The light streaming in from the window only illuminates Chuji's naked buttocks. The camera then cuts back to a close-up of Kenji's face, sweating and breathing heavily. He moves as if to say something, but then the shot cuts back to Chuji, slowly panning up his naked body. The camera once again cuts to Kenji's face, and he stares for a few moments, then, with regret, turns away.

In this short sequence of shots, the audience gains valuable insight into Kenji's character. For one, the longing in Kenji's face and the attention given to Chuji's body show Kenji's homosexual desire. However, Kenji's inability and reluctance to say anything indicates his repression. He finds Chuji attractive, but due to the restrictions set upon him in the *yakuza* society, as well as his fear of rejection, Kenji cannot act upon his desires. Thus, the audience discovers that Kenji is bitter and repressed, and that his actions will be based on this repression.

Miike gives further evidence of Kenji's torment in the two brief instances of sexual interaction between him and his boss's wife. While having sex with her, Kenji has an expression of contempt and self-hatred. His body language indicates a need to finish as quickly as possible. In the first scene, the shots of intercourse are interspersed with two shots from previously in the film, when Kenji is talking to his boss and the wife walks by. This time, however, these shots are given different meaning. The first cut shows a focus of Kenji's face, ignoring the woman walking by, even as she is staring at him; the second shows the wife staring at Kenji. This shows the wife's emotions and desires towards Kenji, with his subsequent indifference towards her. During the sex, Kenji gives every indication of having no desire for her. Afterwards, Kenji begins talking to her about his plans to replace the boss's will. She, in turn, ignores his words, and attempts to continue their previous interaction. Kenji remains oblivious to her actions, only concerned with discussing his plan. Thus, Miike not only reinforces the fact that Kenji is gay, but also that he has a single-minded purpose from which he will not be distracted.

The camera cuts from the bedroom to a medium shot of Kenji, staring into the bathroom mirror and furiously brushing his teeth. Once again, this illustrates Kenji's hatred of what he must do, and his loathing of contact with a woman. The intensity in his eyes shows the passion to go through with his plan, whatever the cost. His need to hide who he is, however, complicates

his inner problems. Not only has he become alienated from both mainstream society and the smaller subset of the *yakuza*, but also has alienated himself. The only way to achieve and further himself is by passing as “normal” and denying his identity. However, his denial of his true self results in his downfall. After the second sex scene, the wife sees Kenji’s furious acts of self-cleansing. Her hurt and betrayal are shown as the camera focuses on her legs, and the blood running down her leg. She then informs the boss of Kenji’s intentions, leading to Kenji’s eventual death.

While hiding his identity destroys Kenji, it also causes him to be unable to find happiness in the form of his underling, Kaneko. Kaneko, like the two previous characters, also functions in an outsider status, though significantly less screen time is given to his plight. Kaneko, like Chuji, is of a mixed racial background although his specific heredity is impossible to distinguish. He looks further out of place because he is overweight, balding, and wears colorful but ugly jackets. Kaneko is also a homosexual, and has a secret passion for Kenji. Throughout each sequence featuring the two together, Kaneko intently focuses his attention on Kenji, always staring at him. For example, when Kenji repays Chuji for assisting him earlier, Kaneko waits in the background. Throughout the scene, the camera cuts to Kaneko’s face, which is watching the interaction between the two men, reminiscent of the way Kenji looked at Chuji earlier. Also in this scene, Kenji asks Chuji if he likes him. When those words are spoken, the camera cuts to Kaneko, walking away from the other two. He stops, and slowly looks back over his shoulder. This indicates to the viewer Kaneko’s homosexuality and his jealousy of Kenji’s affection towards Chuji.

Throughout the film, Kenji continually favors Chuji with attention, seeing his band’s shows and visiting him in Chuji’s apartment. He gives Kaneko no attention, however.

Eventually, Kaneko's jealousy causes the death of both Kenji and Chuji. To complete Kenji's plan, the rival gang needs a fall guy to assassinate the boss. Kaneko convinces the gang to use Chuji, thus sending him to his death. When Kenji learns of what Kaneko did, he rushes to save his friend, resulting in the death of both individuals. The irony is that Kenji has the means of happiness throughout the movie. Had he not hidden his identity, the sexual orientation of both Kenji and Kaneko would have become known, and thus the two could have found comfort in each other. Indirectly, therefore, Kenji's inability to express himself causes his death.

Blues Harp gives the audience several insights into Japanese society. Chuji, as a representation of individuals with mixed heritage, shows the difficulties of not being purely Japanese within modern Japan. His physical features, obviously indicating his African American background, cause him to stick out in any setting. As a drug dealer, he is unable to find clients because everyone on the street avoids him. The audience may infer that he has been ignored and pushed to the fringes of society throughout his life. While he accepts his fate, and even finds potential for recognition from his musical talent, he always has a feeling of longing to be accepted by those around him. Chuji's lack of family (and the repercussions this absence has on his personality) creates a void in his life. His attachment to a homeless man and the occasional flashback to his lonely childhood show the rootlessness of Chuji's existence. In Japanese society, where great importance is placed on group formation and socialization in childhood, Chuji's lack of an *uchi* group has hampered his ability to properly develop and function in society.

Kenji's and Kaneko's homosexuality, their status as *yakuza*, and their repression of their personalities and desires, cause the downfall of those around them. Kenji's passionate drive towards his goal leads him to hide his identity. He embarks on his path alone, thus alienating

any potential allies. Miike illustrates in *Kenji* the results of extreme individuality in Japanese society: a person who does not depend on others will have no chance of success.

In the end, Miike shows the importance of group formation and the need to be accepted by peers within Japanese society. In addition, he argues that the inability to be part of an *uchi* grouping eventually leads to an inability to function within society, and, therefore, the doom of the individual. He critiques this aspect of this society, painting Chuji as a man who wishes to be accepted by society, and indeed would be an asset to society, but who instead is pushed outside. *Kenji* and *Kaneko* represent the conflicts within subsets of Japanese society, and that even in outsider groups, there are those pushed ever further. One year and six films later, Miike revisits conflict within *yakuza* society, and how this both portrays and affects outsiders.

Chapter Three: Dead or Alive

I think human beings are complicated. My principle is to not make characters easy to understand, either for the audience or even for myself. I always respect the characters, I let them behave and make the decisions that fit with their personalities, even if that means the movie will become a commercial flop as a result. I feel that it's not necessary to consider an audience when you make a film. You just make the movie you want, the way you want to make it.

Takashi Miike

1999 was a big year for Miike. He directed two television series and five feature length films, two of which are among his most famous of works. Among those, Dead or Alive, which deals with the *yakuza* world, is known as one of Miike's most excessive and violent films. The tagline for the movie, as listed on the Internet Movie Database, reads "WARNING: This motion picture contains explicit portrayals of violence; sex; violent sex; sexual violence; clowns and violent scenes of violent excess, which are definitely not suitable for all audiences" (Internet Movie Database). This line does not understate the levels of excess throughout the film. However, Miike does not choose to linger on the violent episodes, but rather utilizes them as a means to an end. The purpose of this film, like Blues Harp and so many other Miike works, is to establish the plight of the outsider within contemporary Japanese society.

In Dead or Alive, Miike deals with individuals of mixed racial background, the importance and difficulty of group formation, and the role of family within the lives of the characters portrayed. The plot of the film revolves around the conflict between two characters, a criminal, Ryuichi (Riki Takeuchi), and his nemesis, a police officer named Jojima (Sho Aikawa). The conflict between the two, despite being the central narrative element, is not explicitly given much screen time. Ryuichi and Jojima only encounter each other three times throughout the film; in one of those they only meet in passing and do not even acknowledge each other. Instead

of devoting screen time to the war between the two, Miike juxtaposes their lives against each other, showing how the characters rise and fall, and how they mirror each other. Miike focuses on the struggles they face within their own groups; only when they are alone together does he allow them to confront each other.

The opening montage of the film figures as one of the most prominent sequences. Covering seven minutes of screen time, it is a fast-paced barrage of images set to rock music. This montage establishes all the themes to be explored throughout the film, as well as introduces the audience to the type of world they are about to view. It shows the various forms of excess found in this world, and the types of individuals who participate in such excess. From the opening shot of a woman falling to her death from a building, the audience becomes aware of the violence that exists in this world.

Three primary extremes are pursued throughout these seven minutes: drugs, sex, and violence. Drugs figure prominently from the very beginning. A blond Japanese man wrenches a packet of cocaine from the hand of the woman who just fell to her death. From a high angle, the camera gives a close up of the cocaine, mixing with the woman's blood. The man grabbing the blood-soaked cocaine indicates the violence that comes from dealing in the drug business, and the death that will come from further encounters with drugs.

The second instance of drugs comes in the inordinate amount of cocaine ingested by a character identified as Yan (Ren Osugi). In this brief scene, the camera cuts to close-ups of Yan's feet and the one hundred yen note he uses to snort the cocaine. Cut into these repeated shots are close-ups of another character, later identified as Chan Feng, consuming an exorbitant amount of su chi noodles, focusing on the food entering his mouth and the empty bowls being stacked next to him. Here Miike shows the fine line between addiction to a controlled substance

and the overconsumption of something else, such as food. After six cuts between the money, feet, and food, the camera shows the level of cocaine snorted by Yan, which amounts to a line approximately ten feet in length. The fact that both the amount of cocaine and the eight bowls of noodles consumed by Chan Feng are both unrealistic is unimportant. Rather, the purpose is to show that in this world, individuals consume as much as they choose, whatever the consequences.

Sex figures throughout the montage in two different ways. The first is a strip club, with the focus on the various states of undress of the women on the stage and the rapt attention of the customers. The montage continually cuts back to the club, giving it more screen time than any other location or individual. The other focus on sexuality comes from the blond Japanese man. Towards the middle of the montage, he is shown raping another man in a public restroom. Here Miike contrasts the legalized and accepted strip club against the less acceptable homosexuality and the illegal rape. Miike suggests through these two images that there exists little difference between the normal and the fringe worlds, much like he suggests above with the contrast between legal food and illegal cocaine.

Both of these themes argue against socially permissible standards. This sets up Miike's thesis regarding the outsider in the society. He illustrates that what is outcast by society (drugs and homosexuality) is really no different from what is accepted (food and strip clubs). Thus, the individual outsiders, removed from society for varying reasons, are no different from members of mainstream culture. Throughout the montage, sex and drugs, although shown repeatedly, are not as important as the violence. There are only three instances of extreme violent action throughout the montage, but they stand out due to their brutality.

The nameless blond Japanese meets his end first. A point-of-view angle takes the viewer into the bathroom, moving behind the blond. The camera then cuts to a close-up of the man's face, with another individual directly behind him. The second man pulls a knife, and inserts the knife into the blond's neck. Miike cuts to a shot of the man being raped, and it appears as if the pain of the knife affects the victim. The camera then cuts to a high-angle shot looking down on the three men. The knife is removed, and blood sprays in extremely gory fashion over the walls.

The second violent episode comes to Chan Feng, the man eating the noodles. Here, Miike shows two young Japanese men ransack the restaurant where Chan Feng is eating. They use grenades, automatic weapons, and a shotgun; throughout the carnage, Miike graphically shows the bodies fall. Chan Feng makes an attempt to run, but a shotgun blast to the back causes the contents of his stomach, through Computer Generated Images (CGI), to spray across the lens of the camera.

Finally, Yan is brutally killed by the criminal Ryuichi. Yan, obviously feeling the effects of the cocaine, sits in a car, incoherently mumbling. The camera cuts between a close up of Yan's face and a medium shot of Ryuichi walking through the streets of the city, a shotgun held up against his shoulder. Ryuichi eventually reaches Yan's car, climbs to the top of it, and fires two shots through the ceiling. The first shot is shown from outside the car, so the audience sees both Ryuichi fire and the figure in the car slump over. The camera cuts to a point-of-view from inside the car, looking out at the windshield on a slight angle. There is another blast and blood sprays forward onto the windshield. The camera then cuts to Ryuichi, calmly walking away.

These three violent episodes give the audience significant information about both the film and Japanese society. Within the context of the film, the violence indicates the extremes to which Miike will go throughout the movie. Violence is clearly an everyday part of this world,

and the audience will be subjected to much of it. Also, because the three murdered individuals were involved in some form of excessive behavior, the montage indicates that those highly involved in sex or drugs will meet a violent end. Finally, two of the three murdered were given names that clearly indicate their Chinese heritage. Thus, the audience learns that there is conflict between the Japanese and Chinese, and this conflict is somehow tied to criminal dealings.

Miike also comments upon the willingness of Japanese people to ignore those outside the norm. He does so through the use of a hidden camera following the scowling, gun-toting Ryuichi. In the shots before Yan is killed, Miike shows the criminal Ryuichi walking through city streets with the shotgun on full display. The camera shakily follows Ryuichi in profile. While Ryuichi takes up the majority of the screen, Miike allows the audience to view the faces of those passing by him. A few people nervously glance at him, then look away, but most ignore him completely. No one raises any alarm over the fact that a man is carrying a shotgun through crowded streets. This is not the only film in which Miike utilizes a hidden camera to discreetly view the reactions of normal people who do not realize a film is being made. In Blues Harp, Chuji wanders the streets trying to sell drugs, but is ignored by all those around him. In Graveyard of Honor, the actor Goro Kishitani walks through the streets covered in blood. In an interview, Miike commented on filming that scene in Graveyard: “It was scary to see that no one in the street reacted” (Mes 355). In all three films, Miike shows the majority’s willingness to ignore behavior that falls outside the norm. Thus, because such behavior is ignored, the audience can infer that outsiders and outcasts are avoided as well.

With the opening montage establishing the environment for the rest of the film, Miike moves to the next important theme, that of the outsider’s status caused by ethnicity. Two scenes after the montage has concluded, Ryuichi meets his brother Toji at the airport. Toji indicates that

he has been away for some time, and wants to see their mother. In the sequence where Ryuichi and Toji visit their mother's grave, Miike gives the clearest indication of their outsider status.

From their conversation at the airport, the scene cuts to a long shot of Ryuichi standing in what appears to be a swamp. The area is completely in tones of grey, and looks like a desolate wasteland. In the background, the audience can just barely see the city through the fog, some distance away. Scattered around the ground of this grey desert lay tombstones in various states of disrepair. None of these grave markers stand upright, but are all tilted and look thoroughly neglected. The camera pans away from Ryuichi, showing more of this landscape, and finally resting some distance away on Toji, kneeling in the grey mud at his mother's grave. The entire setting gives the ominous feeling of hopelessness, that the people buried here were without from any happiness or joy.

When Toji speaks to his mother, he does so in heavily accented Chinese. He speaks the words haltingly, as if he only marginally knows what he is saying or how to say it. In addition, the words are read from a piece of paper, showing that though he can make the basic sounds necessary for the language, he does not actually know it. Finally, when he asks his mother if she has seen his father, the audience realizes that Ryuichi and Toji are orphans, left without parents. Since their mother is buried here, but Toji does not go to see his father, the audience realizes that their father died someplace else, and that Japan is not his final resting place.

The language and the setting give the audience several important clues about the brothers' situation. First, Toji's inability to speak Chinese indicates that he is unfamiliar with the language, and thus was raised speaking Japanese. However, his need to speak Chinese to his mother shows that she did not know Japanese. They are clearly Chinese in ethnicity, but have lost their roots. They no longer identify with their Chinese heritage, and so do not have a past,

making them the typical rootless characters found in Miike's films. The setting shows their outcast status due to their Chinese heritage. Their graveyard is placed on the fringes of society, not allowed near the city. In addition, the place is in disarray, with no care given to it. Because they are Chinese living in Japan, they are not nor ever will be accepted by the mainstream society. The graveyard tells of the dismal situation of their lives at the moment, and indicates that they have no hope of their status ever improving.

In a later scene, the status of Chinese living in Japan is most clearly stated. The policeman Jojima, pursuing Ryuichi, attempts to gain more information on his quarry by interviewing two local thugs. The setting provides evidence of the status of the two men. The area of town looks to be an old industrial area, sunk into disrepair. The truck on which the two hoodlums sit is old and decrepit. They are dressed in torn and dirty clothing, looking poor and out of place next to the detectives in suits. The two are obviously on the lower rungs of society, outcasts both by what they wear and where they live.

The dialogue, which gives the clearest indication of their placement in society, and is the only time Miike explicitly states his view on outsiders in Japan. The two thugs seem to idolize Ryuichi, believing that he represents a figure that they can follow and believe in. Ryuichi represents hope for his people. When questioned as to what their particular group is, the men reply, "We look Japanese, but we ain't. Then again, we look Chinese, but we ain't. We're not really anything." Here, Miike shows the feelings of those who are of Chinese-Japanese ancestry. They find nothing with which they can identify, as they have no clear or strong roots. Identifying with their Chinese heritage means they cannot be accepted in modern Japanese society; however, identifying with their Japanese heritage forces them to lose all sense of their history. They are therefore the ultimate outsider with no placement anywhere in society.

A third indicator of the outsider status of Chinese in Japan is shown through their thoughts regarding Japan as a physical place. Early on, Miike establishes Ryuichi as the leader of a group of Chinese criminals. After a bank heist, one member of this group, Hitoshi, steals the money that is intended to be shared among them all. However, Hitoshi takes the money in an attempt to send his mother back to China. However, before he can go through with his plan, Ryuichi and the others find him and execute him. Hitoshi attempts this because he believes if he could escape the physical limits of Japan, he and his mother would be able to achieve happiness. He is portrayed as not being thoroughly Chinese, however, through his interaction with his mother. He speaks fluently in Japanese, while she speaks with a halting accent, showing that her primary fluency is in Chinese. If Hitoshi's roots were truly in China, the conversation would have been in her native language. Therefore, his plan is doomed, and he can never flee the rootless status in which society places him.

The second commentary on the country takes place during the first meeting between Ryuichi and Jojima. Jojima interrogates Ryuichi at the police station, attempting to gain any information on Ryuichi's criminal intents. When Ryuichi speaks, he only asks of Jojima's family and his background. After Jojima answers that he is married and has a daughter, Ryuichi only says, "Unlike you, this country's done nothing for me." He indicates that Jojima has been able to become successful and achieve happiness in a family because he is Japanese. However, Ryuichi has no choices in Japan. Living in the country has forced him into the life he leads, so that he cannot be anything but what he is. As a man of Chinese nationality, he is restricted, and it is the country that has restricted him.

Finally, Miike shows the Chinese as outsiders through their employment opportunities. Ryuichi is a criminal because that is what Japan has allowed him to do. When Ryuichi speaks to

his brother, Toji attempts to sway Ryuichi away from crime by comparing Japan to the United States: “In the U.S., minorities aren’t all gang members. Even in the ghetto you can study and really make something out of your life.” Ryuichi responds by saying he hopes it works out for Toji. However, his refusal to look at his brother and the unemotional tone of his voice shows his disbelief of Toji’s chances of doing anything but participating in crime, and he promptly leaves his brother. Toji later attempts to assist his brother, saving his life in a shootout with the *yakuza*. Toji tried to leave the life of crime and poverty through education, but due to his Chinese roots, he could not escape the status he was born into. Miike portrays the Chinese outsiders as having no choice in their lifestyle, forced into crime by the lack of other options.

The second theme in Dead or Alive is the need to form a group unit, and the tragic ending that befalls those who separate from the group in Japanese society. The first scene that establishes the primary group in the film occurs directly after the opening montage. The four individuals that committed the violent crimes throughout the montage gather at the strip club and show their solidarity as a group. First, the man that stabbed the blond in the bathroom rushes into the back room of the club, where the stripper then applies clown makeup to his face, showing a connection between the two. The camera cuts to him on the stage, dressed as a clown, spinning down the pole. As the audience gives mixed applause, the camera pans to the right, so that the viewer sees the two men who committed the shootings in the restaurant. Both are stripped to their underwear, one sitting on a stationary bicycle, the other strapped to a giant, colorful wheel.

The camera cuts to a close up of the clown, holding four knives, then cuts back to the wheel. As the man on the bicycle begins to pedal, the wheel spins, until the man on the wheel becomes nothing more than a blur. The clown then throws the knives at the wheel, and the

wheel stops to reveal Ryuichi, fully dressed, attached to the wheel with knives imbedded around his head. The camera lingers on Ryuichi for a moment, the focus implying that he is the leader, and then the scene ends. This shows the commonality between the four men, as well as the stripper, and establishes the five as a group unit. Thus, we learn that the killings during the montage were all intertwined, masterminded by Ryuichi.

The aforementioned graveyard scene not only illustrates the plight of the individuals as Chinese outsiders, but also signifies the importance of their group formation, and foreshadows the breaking up of that group. After Toji speaks to his mother's grave, the other four members of the group arrive at the graveyard to celebrate Toji's return. During the celebration, Miike shows that the individuals are not quite as happy as they seem. Throughout the entire scene Ryuichi stands off to one side, observing the revelry of his comrades. His inability to join in the fun indicates that he exists apart from the rest, and thus cannot fully identify with them.

Miike also shows Hitoshi as being separate. He "films" the group's antics by way of a glass, peering through it as one would a camera. To emphasize this, Miike cuts to a distorted point-of-view shot, as if the audience, too, is looking through the glass. When Mariko, the stripper, and a male member of the group appear in various states of undress, the camera follows the man, showing Hitoshi's focus. From this point of view, the camera cuts to Hitoshi's face: he appears to be in pain and has blood streaming from his nose. His unwillingness to join in chasing Mariko, as well as his focus on the man, indicate his hidden homosexuality. Like Kenji in Blues Harp, Hitoshi's incapacity to express his desire keeps him disconnected from the rest, making him feel alone and alienated.

Miike once again suggests that in modern Japanese society, individuals need to conform to a group; should that group fail, it means the downfall of the members. With the first few

sequences demonstrating the apparent closeness of the group, Miike devotes the rest of the film to the consequences of the destruction of that group. Hitoshi, not feeling comfortable with the company, strikes out on his own, stealing the bank heist money in an attempt to achieve happiness elsewhere. When his mother declines the offer to return to China, Ryuichi and company finds Hitoshi, now truly alone. Ryuichi executes Hitoshi for his betrayal, which begins the disintegration of the group.

Mariko leaves the group next, as she is told by Ryuichi to spy on the *yakuza*. The boss of the *yakuza* gang degrades, rapes, and finally kills Mariko by drowning her in a pool of her own excrement, in a truly repulsive scene. Mariko's willingness to leave the group and head down the path leading to her eventual death is caused by Ryuichi's callous attitude towards her. Miike implies a former relationship between the two, with her simple comment of "I wish we had the baby," to which Ryuichi responds by walking away. His lack of desire to form a connection with her results in her death.

Finally, Toji dies defending Ryuichi. After having attempted to escape Ryuichi's criminal world, Toji returns, just in time to save Ryuichi from being killed by a Chinese triad boss. When Toji dies, Ryuichi no longer has a connection to anyone. At the end of the film, he is alone, and for Miike, being alone in Japanese society means he must die in the climactic final scene.

Family is also a primary theme in Dead or Alive. When Jojima researches Ryuichi's background, he finds that Ryuichi and Toji are orphans. Like Chuji in Blues Harp, this makes them unable to form a normal viewpoint on the world. As was established in Chapter One, the family functions as the most important means of socialization for youth in Japan. Thus, without that important structure, Ryuichi and Toji's worldview has become skewed; compounded with

their Chinese heritage; this makes them unable to properly achieve success and happiness within society. Toji and Ryuichi have each other, though their relationship is strained as a result of differences in their goals. Because one is a criminal while the other wishes to live a straight life, they are unable to communicate with each other. When Toji dies, Ryuichi, now left alone by the death of all members of his family, barrels onward towards his own demise.

Similarly, Jojima also begins the film with an unstable family relationship, though this improves with time. His wife is having an affair, and his daughter has a potentially fatal heart condition and resents her father. Jojima seems unconcerned about the situation. When his wife asks about money for surgery to cure their daughter, he simply responds that he will think of something. Also, in the middle of the night, his wife receives a call from what Miike implies to be her lover, but Jojima seems disinterested and stoic, and goes back to sleep. However, Jojima secures the money to finance an operation for his daughter. As the family begins to unite, Ryuichi kills both Jojima's wife and daughter in retribution for the death of his brother. Like Ryuichi, then, Jojima has nothing more to live for. When he and Ryuichi battle in the final scene, this confrontation is all either has left.

For this last scene, Miike's style turns surreal. After the two remaining and nameless members of Ryuichi's gang have been eliminated, Ryuichi and Jojima face off. When they fail to kill each other with guns, knives, explosions, and car crashes, they turn instead to ridiculous weaponry. Jojima pulls a bazooka out of nowhere, while Ryuichi removes a glowing orb from his chest. As these two weapons collide, Japan and the world explode. Here, Miike metaphorically speaks to the obsession both men have with their final dispute. With their groups and their families dead and nothing left to live for, all they have is their hatred for each other.

Thus, the death of each other brings about the end of their respective worlds. The purpose of this massive destruction shows the inevitable ending to those alone in Japanese society.

With Dead or Alive, Miike repeats some of the statements he previously made in Blues Harp. Once again, this reflects De Vos's theory of the methods minorities use to cope with alienation in Japan. Given no other choice, the Chinese outsiders turn to crime to survive. Also, Miike shows and critiques the importance of group formation and relation in Japanese society. Dead or Alive portrays the Japanese as wholly dependent on group mentality, and he shows the effects such overemphasis has for individuals. His film indicates that the stereotype of the Japanese people as group-oriented is true, and that it creates a country of alienated individuals.

In Dead or Alive, however, Miike adds another element of criticism to his representation of Japanese society, in that he tackles the failure of education for outsiders. Toji received the best education his brother's money could purchase, both in both Japan and the United States. However, regardless of the high level of education he received, because he was Chinese and therefore dependant on criminal activity in Japan, he was eventually doomed. Miike shows that there is no true escape from the outsider position placed on those different from the norm in Japanese society. Miike does not abandon this theme after Dead or Alive, however. Instead, he more fully examines the position of members of a different ethnicity in Japanese society, and more importantly the viewpoint of the Japanese on such individuals, in Deadly Outlaw: Rekka.

Chapter Four: Deadly Outlaw: Rekka

This doesn't mean the characters themselves are similar to me, I just like these stories. They're not reflections of myself, they exist independently. Normally, a director creates a character from his own point of view, his own frame of reference. But in my case, I think that human beings are strange. I don't believe you can understand them entirely, so I don't create the characters from my own point of view. My approach is that even if I don't understand the character, maybe somewhere in the world a person like that exists.

Takashi Miike

Noboru Ando was a *yakuza* who, in the 1960s, decided to give up the gangster lifestyle and enter acting. Since that time, he has starred in numerous films, all within the *yakuza* genre, and eventually became famous enough to lend his name to a series of films loosely based on his life. These *Ando-gumi* take significant liberty with the true story of Ando's life. In 2002, Miike decided to make an entry into the series about Ando's life, called Jitsuroku Andô Noboru kyôdô-den: Rekka, though released in English titled as both Deadly Outlaw: Rekka and Violent Fire. In Miike's installment, the main character is a *yakuza*, but there the similarities end between the film and Ando's life.

The original title translates as "Noboru Ando's true outlaw stories: raging fire." The "raging fire" refers the explosive and unruly nature of the main character, though Miike takes the tone of the film primarily from the other part of the title, the idea that these are "true" outlaw stories. Miike plays upon that idea by attempting to make the events of the film as far-fetched and ridiculous as possible, indicating that although Noboru Ando was a real person, his films are not.

Deadly Outlaw: Rekka follows the story of *yakuza* Kunisada (Riki Takeuchi) and the revenge he takes against a rival *yakuza* gang for killing his boss and surrogate father, Sanada (Yuya Uchida). Kunisada has been imprisoned for "interfering with official procedure;" at the

beginning of the film, he is released, only to discover that his boss is dead. Moreover, rather than going to war with the killers, his gang instead attempts to make a peace agreement with them. In reality, the two gangs are actually in cahoots, trying to remove old leadership so that they can combine to become a more powerful group. Because Kunisada's psychopathic behavior and need for revenge stands in their way, by the end of the film he is in an all-out war with everyone else.

Kunisada's outsider status can be seen in several ways. For one, Miike establishes him as an orphan twice over. His father, the sworn brother of Sanada, was killed when Kunisada was young. Sanada adopted Kunisada, but when he too is killed, Kunisada is left without a father yet again. Second, Kunisada's time in prison has disconnected him from the world, and he enters a society he no longer knows and to which he cannot relate. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Kunisada's father was Korean, meaning that Kunisada is outcast because of his ethnic heritage.

Unlike many other Miike outcasts, Kunisada not only acknowledges his status, but also accepts and proclaims it. Shortly after being released from prison, and while preparing for his revenge, Kunisada dyes his hair blond. When asked why he did it, he simply replies that he "felt like it." However, from this point forward in the film, it becomes obvious that Kunisada does not fit in with anyone around him. His behavior and his background cause him to be an outsider, and the blond hair physically separates him from *yakuza* society.

Kunisada also indicates his awareness of his status within the larger Japanese society. In a meeting the current heads of the gang, Kugihara (Rikiya Yauoka) and Iguchi (Kazuya Nakayama), tell Kunisada that the gang has decided to settle the dispute over the murder of Sanada peacefully. Kugihara says that now they have the ability to stop the violence and

peacefully coexist with the rival Otaki gang after years of bad blood. Kunisada replies, “We’re *yakuza*, you know. What kind of fairytale is that?” Because he accepts his position outside of mainstream society, the rules that normally bind people, as well as ideals such as peace and nonviolence, have no sway over him.

The final indication of Kunisada’s awareness of his outsider status, which leads to his eventual downfall, comes in his treatment of the group he forms with other outsiders. Throughout the course of the movie, Kunisada has four devoted subordinates, and begins to date a Korean singer, Myonghyang (Mika Katsumura). However, once Kunisada begins his plans for vengeance, he attempts to break up the group, so that they will not suffer the same fate he expects to meet. While his lieutenant Shimatani (Kenichi Endo) will not leave his side, he forces the other three to accept a severance fee for their services, and promptly leaves them. For the same reason, he gives his new girlfriend Myonghyang and her friend into the custody of the bar, run by a retired *yakuza*, where they were singers. Thus, for Kunisada, the circumstances of his life in society have caused him to be an outsider, but he also accepts that status, and further distances himself.

Throughout the film, the primary characteristic of Kunisada that makes him an outsider is his Korean blood. Through this character, Miike comments upon the Japanese views on and their treatment of Koreans. The film opens with a voiceover, illustrating Kunisada’s mental and emotional characteristics. The narrator says:

There’s a man born with the blood of a wild animal in his body.
This man, a blood relative of wolves, has no concern for danger,
gains, losses, or pride and walks alone on a path of wild animals.
His eyes gaze at the fires of hell. They say it’s all due to his evil
nature.

Here, the audience learns what sort of man the main character will be. The narrator's description of Kunisada's blood as a wild animal's is a reference to Kunisada's Korean heritage. This is the first indication to the audience that Koreans are viewed as lesser beings, no better than beasts. In addition, this brief speech argues that the reasons for Kunisada's eventual violence are rooted in his Korean heritage, and that heritage that brings about an "evil nature."

When Miike first introduces Kunisada, his wild nature quickly becomes clear. After the opening narration and the title card, Miike cuts between two events: the assassination of Sanada, and Kunisada's meeting with a lawyer behind a glass window in prison. Miike establishes the bond between the two men through showing Kunisada's telepathic awareness of his surrogate father's death. When Sanada moves to strangle his assassin, Kunisada also reaches out his hands, as if to strangle an imaginary person before him. With each gunshot into Sanada's body, Miike cuts to Kunisada's face, which is feeling the pain. When Sanada finally falls, so do Kunisada's hands, and he slumps over.

Kunisada's insane and violent tendencies are then shown as Sanada finally dies. In response, Kunisada leaps through the glass window, and then breaks a metal door in two. As he runs down the hallway of the police station, police swarm him, attempting to restrict his movements. However, Kunisada keeps moving forward, as more police arrive to assist in his restraint. Finally knocked to the ground, and with no less than ten police officers on top of him, Kunisada continues to move forward. Miike focuses on his facial expressions, showing the rage and madness in Kunisada's eyes. He continues to slowly crawl forward, yelling "Father," until eventually he succumbs to the sheer weight on his back. It becomes clear that, once he becomes enraged, little will stop Kunisada's anger.

The next indication of Kunisada's wild nature comes when he meets with the gang leaders, Kugihara and Iguchi. Iguchi irritates Kunisada with his desire for peace, and the two nearly come to blows until Kugihara attempts to separate them and to calm Kunisada down. Miike utilizes several jump cuts to emphasize the length of time it takes Kunisada to finally sit back down. He behaves like a child in a school brawl, not backing away even when he is restrained from fighting. Miike demonstrates that Kunisada's Korean blood causes him to be wild and unpredictable, as well as childish and immature. This lack of maturity is reinforced later in the film, with Kunisada's rampage against all his adversaries.

After Kunisada leaves, Kugihara attempts to explain Kunisada's actions and behavior, attributing both to his Korean heritage: "I bet it's in the bloodline. It's his Korean blood. There's no stopping men of that sort once they lose it." With this line, Miike shows that not only is Kunisada violent, but that he is representative of all Koreans, at least from the Japanese perspective. Kugihara groups all Koreans together, saying that the ethnicity supercedes any other factors in their personality.

Iguchi's later comments also reinforce the idea of Kunisada's nature as that of a wild animal. When the Sanada and Otaki gangs decide that to become united, the current head of the Otaki gang must be assassinated, and Iguchi is given the task to tell Kunisada to do the killing. Afterwards, Iguchi tells Kugihara that "He's like a mad cobra. As soon as I dangled prey in front of him, he bit into it."

Perhaps the most explicit example of Kunisada's violent nature comes while he is on a date with Myonghyang, accompanied by Shimatani and Myonghyang's friend, Suhi (Miho Nomoto). Five Otaki gang members taunt Kunisada, claiming that the Sanadas are weak for appearing to reach a peaceful settlement rather than fight after their boss was killed. Kunisada

approaches the men calmly, asking them if they are members of the Otaki gang. When they reply affirmatively, Kunisada's aggression is unleashed and his wild, Korean blood takes over.

Miike films this encounter utilizing a Dutch angle and a shaky camera. Through these two cinematic devices, he illustrates both the insanity and the rage within Kunisada. At first, Kunisada only beats the men with his fists, but as his anger increases, he picks up a crowbar. He beats the men mercilessly, dragging them by the prongs of the crowbar and eventually killing three of them. The extreme nature of the violence, and the way Kunisada does not stop even what it becomes clear he has won the fight, reinforces the idea that he is a wild animal. When Shimatani tries to restrain him, Kunisada even lashes out at his friend, punching him in the face.

Once Shimatani grabs hold of Kunisada from behind, the audience realizes that Kunisada is indeed insane. Miike switches to slow motion, focusing on Kunisada's face as he futilely struggles against his friend. His half smile and crazed look give evidence to his wild nature, while the hissing sounds he repeatedly makes make him seem more animal than human. Kunisada turns to look at the two girls, who had hidden during Kunisada's rampage, watching behind a corner. They draw back in momentary fear of the incomprehensible expression on the face of the blood-soaked Kunisada.

It is through these two women that Miike attempts to move briefly away from the Japanese image of Koreans, instead defending them to an extent. The two girls are both fully Korean and from Korea, as opposed to Kunisada's half Korean, half Japanese heritage. They become fearful of Kunisada's rage and anger, and are unable to relate to his emotions. While Myonghyang does attempt to calm Kunisada down and bring him back from the brink of insanity, she still shows some fear of him. Miike thus shows that, in truth, it is not the Korean blood that has made Kunisada this way. Rather, it is the circumstances of his life and his

upbringing, particularly the outsider position into which he has been placed, that have caused him to become the violent and animalistic man that he is.

Miike's final commentary on the Japanese perspective on the Korean outsider comes with Kunisada's final acts of vengeance against the gangs that orchestrated his surrogate father's death, and the battle with the two hitmen who carried out the murder of Sanada. When hiding after they kill the head of the Otaki gang, Kunisada soaks in a bath while Shimatani finds a beetle outside. He brings the beetle to Kunisada, saying, "doesn't it make you feel like a kid?" From this point forward, Kunisada behaves like a child playing a game instead of a man on a violent rampage. Miike shows this behavior through the choice of weapons. Kunisada employs a rocket launcher to destroy the Bando Alliance building, a group that had a hand in orchestrating all the events in the movie, and the Otaki building. As both buildings explode unrealistically, Kunisada dances, smiles, and laughs. The ridiculous nature of the weapons and Kunisada's playful behavior shows the unrealistic nature of his vengeance and actions. For him, childlike, death has lost its meaning and violent episodes simply become play-acting. Through this absurdity, Miike comments on the Japanese view of Koreans as lesser beings, with Kunisada being representative of the way they are viewed. However, with the unrealistic nature of the scenes Miike counters the Japanese argument, identifying it as a fallacy.

Beyond criticizing the Japanese view on Koreans and those of mixed heritage, Miike also once again explores the theme of group formation in Japanese society. Kunisada begins the film as a rootless individual, without a group, due to his imprisonment and his orphan status. Upon being released, he forms a group with his four subordinates. However, he dooms the group by attempting to send them away. By forcefully leaving the group, he causes its disintegration, and as has been seen in Miike's films, this leads to death.

Two of the group members, however, opt to wait for Kunisada's return, and to be faithful to him and the group. Nonetheless, because Kunisada left, the group, unbeknownst to them has already failed. When two hitmen come to the group's hideout in search of Kunisada, the faithful members are interrogated and killed. Here, Miike shows both the need for the Japanese to belong to a group, and the results from blind adherence to group formation. Interestingly, however, one of the underlings decides to accept Kunisada's severance pay and leaves, returning to his family. Unlike the others, he survives. Miike may be commenting on the fact that, as a full-blooded Japanese, this third man is able to function within the society in his transition from the *yakuza* group back to his family.

The fate of the two women is another deviation from the typical consequence of group destruction in a Miike film. They too are sent away by Kunisada, and while Miike never explicitly shows their fate, the audience may assume that no ill fate befalls them. While they do not die, Miike still dooms them to a different fate. Myonghyang and Suhi became romantically attached to Kunisada and Shimatani, but by being sent away, they are removed from the ones they love. Thus, they meet a different type of death.

Deadly Outlaw: Rekka is Miike's most obvious and dedicated criticism of Japanese views on minorities and foreigners. Throughout the entire film, Kunisada appears as a beast, lower than the Japanese around him. At the same time, Miike shows Kunisada as the only character in the *yakuza* with a sense of honor, respect, and honesty. He fights against the Sanada and Otaki gangs, which lie, deceive, and murder to achieve their evil ends. Thus, Miike shows that the Kunisada and his enemies are really no different, and while Kunisada is the outcast, those that placed him on the fringes of society are not truly any better than he is. Through this

comparison, Miike shows that even in Japanese society it is not ethnicity that separates people, but instead an individual's actions.

Conclusion

I enjoy making movies, but not like people who describe themselves as filmmakers. The fact that I'm apparently also one of those filmmakers makes me sick too. It causes pus, which looks like sperm and smells like starch, to fill the crevices of my frontal lobe, turning me into a wonderful lobotomy patient.

Takashi Miike

Takashi Miike's films stand as a counterpoint to the myth of Japanese homogeneity.

Miike's films demonstrate that Japanese society is composed of individuals who differ significantly in ethnicity in life philosophy, and that mainstream society places such people into outsider roles, disabling them from positively advancing in society. By illustrating the plight of outsider characters, Miike makes pointed criticisms of the modern Japanese social structure. Not only does Miike make this criticism towards the majority, but he also indicates that subsets of the society, such as the criminal *yakuza*, also utilize this hierarchy, and so even in larger outsider groupings, outcast individuals cannot truly integrate.

The value of this study exists first in its reinforcement of what is already known in the academic world. Significant scholarly works have been devoted to painting a truthful picture of Japanese society. Popular western depictions of Japan, from movies to literature, attempt to show Japan as a harmonious society, one without conflict where everyone is the same. However, increasing numbers of academics debunk this idea, showing Japan as a nation with just as many problems as any other. This study takes the same stance, furthering such scholarship. In an increasingly interconnected world, where people from one side of the globe can instantly contact people from the other, a clear understanding of different cultures is essential.

In addition, this thesis focuses on Takashi Miike, giving credibility to his body of work. Miike's films have largely been ignored by academia, and so this study fills that void. By

showing the honest reflection of Japanese culture in Miike's cinema, as well as his criticism of the society, this study gives validity to Miike as a serious artist and cultural critic.

Through a variety of different means, Japanese society, and especially the socialization process, creates an environment that enables the majority to outcast minorities. *Nihonjinron*, a popular movement in Japan, is a framework that describes the Japanese on the basis of how they are different from others. *Nihonjinron* promotes a degree of national unity, dictating that all Japanese are, at their core, the same, and so results in a positive concept of self for all Japanese. However, by focusing on the differences between the Japanese and other peoples, it isolates non-Japanese living in Japan.

Japanese youth, in their early stages of development, learn of the differences between *uchi* and *soto*, inside and outside. This heightens their awareness of the discrepancy between the two categories, and causes young Japanese to equate outside with dangerous and dirty.

The educational system furthers this attention to insiders and outsiders, and allows for the creation of significant academic, economic, and social disparity between the two. The Japanese school system indoctrinates students as to how to become functioning members of society. Those that do not adapt properly through this system are therefore ostracized by their peers, causing isolation, loneliness, and poor self-image.

The system itself persecutes members of lower economic standing. Examples of the difficulties to succeed academically by students in poor districts are manifold. Though the Japanese educational system can be perceived as equal, graduation rates and entrances into top rated universities dispel this myth. The inability to afford *juku* also places poor students at a disadvantage.

Ethnic minorities suffer the most from the stigma of being outsiders. Throughout Japan's history, such groups as Koreans, Burakumin, and Ainu have all suffered from discrimination, from a lack of ethnic schools to difficulty in gaining Japanese citizenship. Bullying by peers and difficulties in achieving in an academic setting puts minorities at a significant disadvantage to succeed in Japanese society.

Miike's films illustrate the effects of these indoctrinated discriminatory practices. Blues Harp is the first film analyzed to show the difficulties of being an outsider in modern Japan. Chuji's obvious ethnic heritage has placed him in the lower rungs of society, from which he cannot escape. His attempts to move beyond his station through his musical talent are futile. In the past, his outsider status forced him to work as a member of the *yakuza*, and these previous dealings result in his death. In addition, he is unable to come to peace with his heritage, alternately being pulled to both American and Japanese influences. His inability to accept his ancestry causes him to feel rootless and adrift, not Japanese and not American.

For Kenji, his homosexuality forces him to be an outsider within his chosen society, and prevents him from achieving happiness. He seeks to move above his place as a lieutenant in his *yakuza* gang, but his plan ends in failure. By concealing his homosexuality, he alienates the two people who care about him: the *yakuza* boss's wife and Kaneko. Because he cannot be honest about himself with others, he is left alone, and in Japanese society, for Miike, that means his death.

In Dead or Alive, Ryuichi is unable to function as a member of mainstream society because of his Chinese ancestry. Miike clearly shows the position of the Chinese in Japan through the location of their graveyard. The dark and desolate landscape in which Ryuichi and Toji's mother is buried indicates its removal from the city and its inhabitants' removal from

society. Ryuichi states to Jojima that the country has done nothing for him, and that his only recourse, given his ethnicity, has been to become a criminal. His criminal status places him in the position of becoming a hero to those like him. The two thugs interviewed tell Jojima that they are neither Chinese nor Japanese, and therefore not anything. Ryuichi provides an example for a way to advance in their outsider status.

For Ryuichi and his gang, the formation of a group allowed them some means of happiness and a place to fit in. However, the destruction of the group brings about their own individual downfalls. Here, Miike shows the importance of group formation in Japanese society, and the result of not adhering to a group mentality. As each member leaves the group, he or she dies.

Kunisada faces similar challenges as Ryuichi through his Korean blood. For him, however, he is not simply outcast from mainstream society, but also from the criminal subset to which he belongs. The other members of his *yakuza* gang attempt to kill Kunisada throughout the film, as well as degrade him with their comments regarding his parentage and actions.

Deadly Outlaw: Rekka gives insight into the Japanese mentality towards Koreans. Kunisada is continually accused of being like a wild beast, and his violent nature is attributed to his Korean heritage. However, Miike disproves this viewpoint through two different means. He depicts the full-blooded Japanese *yakuza* as being corrupt and selfish, in contradiction to Kunisada's noble endeavor to avenge his surrogate father. Kunisada's respect towards his subordinates and his attempts to save their lives also show the strength of his character in contrast to the Japanese gang bosses, who only seek personal gain and will sacrifice all others for that gain. Secondly, the characters of Myonghyang and Suhi are fully Korean, and exist as

perhaps the most sympathetic characters in the film. Through this film, Miike is able to both establish popular Japanese thought on Koreans and refute such views.

This study is in no way comprehensive of Miike's portrayal of outsiders. In his sixty-two films, he frequently revisits this theme, each time with a new approach to it. One area for further research includes exploring the different methods Miike utilizes to shed light on the status of the outsider in Japanese society. Several of his movies, including the three analyzed in this study, use a linear narrative with characters who are explicitly shown as outsiders. However, in other films such as Ichi the Killer, Three... Extremes, and 4.6 Billion Years of Love, the characters' outsider status is more veiled and less obvious. It would be interesting to explore the various formalistic cinematic elements Miike uses to portray outsiders and their plight, rather than a narrative analysis.

In addition, Miike's films examine more than just this one trope of outcasts. His films are rich in their thematic approaches, and thus should be subject to closer scrutiny. Tom Mes indicates in his book that all of Miike's films include at least one of the following themes: "The Rootless Individual," "The Outcast," "The Search for Happiness," "Nostalgia," "The Family Unit," and "Violence." These six basic categories that Mes identifies could be expanded and delved into, exploring not only the existence of these themes in Miike's works, but also what this means in regards to Japanese society.

Also, Miike is not the only modern Japanese filmmaker that attempts to deconstruct Japan's sociological structure. Works by such individuals as "Beat" Takeshi Kitano, Katsuya Matsumura, and Shinya Tsukamoto also delve into the same thematic fields as does Miike. It would be valuable to study Miike's connections with these other filmmakers, and their different approaches to the same idea. Additionally, Miike has stated that his favorite film is Starship

Troopers, a science fiction action film directed by Paul Verhoeven. How do Miike's films, then, compare with this movie, and what possible links could be made between Miike, Verhoeven, and other filmmakers?

A final area of further interest would be an exploration of the violence inherent in Miike's cinema. Miike has been perhaps best known as a cult gore director, endeavoring to both offend and sicken his audiences. How does Miike utilize violence to reinforce his thematic approaches to cinema? What does his violence comment upon in Japanese society? Also, how do the violent episodes in his films compare to the work of someone like Takeshi Kitano, also known for his extravagant and excessive brutality?

Miike frequently alludes to the fact that he became a director for lack of anything better to do. His writings make him appear to be an apathetic and eccentric individual, making the next film simply because he has nothing better to do. Regardless of both his motivations and the results of his films, Miike indicates in interviews that he will continue to make movies, because that is what he does. At the same time, his dedication to his work can be questioned: when asked what he holds more precious, films or mayonnaise, Miike simply replied "mayonnaise" (Mes 335). His films, however, are finely crafted works of art, making pointed and articulate criticisms on the state of modern Japan. He illustrates the plight of the outsider in Japanese society, and through the doom that frequently follows such characters, Miike seems to call out for a reform of the Japanese perspective. Aloof and eccentric, controversial and powerful, Miike's works undoubtedly impact their audiences, speaking to the need for change within a society that alienates the different.

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