

IDENTITY IN THE SHELL: HOLLYWOOD FILM REPRESENTATIONS OF JAPANESE
IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

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With the advent of technology and globalization, our societies have become more connected than ever before, especially in the ways that technology has enabled us to gain awareness of different cultures and identities. Although there are many benefits to this exchange, powerful mass media often produce misrepresentations of culture and identity such as stereotypical images that do not fully express reality. This thesis aims to explore American film representations of Japanese identity and culture. Specifically, this thesis focuses on two American films from different time periods as cultural artifacts—*Gung Ho* (1986) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)—in order to examine how American-produced media view Japanese culture, and how media representation plays a role in international and intercultural communication. By analyzing specific scenes and dialogues, we can describe and interpret the stereotypes and misrepresentations of Japanese identity and culture. Moreover, a brief summary of the history of Japanese immigrants, racial concepts and ideologies, and Hollywood's general approach to Japanese identity and culture helps us to understand problematic portrayal of the Japanese in the United States. Although these two films are categorized in different genres and time periods, they present similar portrayals and concepts of Japanese identity and culture. One of the key findings of this thesis is the significance of Orientalism ideology. Specifically, this concept sustains the arguments of racial hierarchy and obscure cultural portrayals under the larger category of "Asian" or "oriental". While exploring media representations of Japanese identity and culture is perhaps very complicated because Japanese culture has historically been influenced by its Western counterpart and it is difficult to define cultural traits, it is important to

acknowledge the continuity of problematic representations. Ultimately, this thesis provides recommendations for both Japanese and non-Japanese people toward better communication practices and understanding.

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Thank you.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Stereotypical images of Japanese culture and identity have been presented and reinforced by mass media. Hollywood movies are one of the most influential entertainment platforms for people to perceive different cultures. Living in the United States as an international graduate student coming from Japan, I have often experienced the powerful influence of films. I have often been asked by American friends about Japanese culture; for example, do ninja¹ exist in Japan? The Ninja Museum of Igaryu, which is the largest ninja library in Japan, notes that “[m]ost people imagine that ninja flew through the sky and disappeared, like Superman, waving ninja swords around, sneaking into the enemy ranks and assassinating generals... This is a mistaken image of the ninja introduced by movies and comic books” (Ninja Museum of Igaryu). The ninja have been commodified as a mysterious and cool warrior of Japanese culture throughout the world, as well as in Japan.

In fact, there is a Hollywood film, *The Last Samurai* that contains scenes of ninja depictions. *The Last Samurai* is a 2003 American film directed by Edward Zwick, starring Tom Cruise with Ken Watanabe in a supporting role. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards in 2004, and won the award from the Japanese Academy as the Best Foreign Film in 2005. Tom Cruise and Ken Watanabe were both nominated for Golden Globe Awards—Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture respectively. Moreover, the film attracted public attention with a star-studded cast in supporting roles such as Timothy Spall and Koyuki. Eventually, the film earned over \$456 million at the box office. Ninja is now widely known in

¹ The ninja are well-known as an individual or a group of spies, assassins and destructive activists who were thought to exist until the end of Edo shogunate in Japanese history. Edo shogunate is one of the names of Japanese era before the Meiji period (1868-1912) between 1603-1867. Meiji is also one of the name of Japanese era.

our contemporary world. However, because there are so many theories of their origin and little reputable historiography, the concept of the ninja is still ambiguous in its origin and existence. While it is extremely difficult to articulate what the “real” ninja is, the usage of ninja in films strengthens the stereotypes of Japanese culture as opposed to embracing its authentic value (Yoshitomi). Thus, the representation of ninja in films cannot fully express the virtue and expanse of Japanese culture; instead, it merely communicates a “Japanese-ish” exotic essence of the culture. Although the media contribute to the dissemination of elements of Japanese culture, misrepresentation creates a misguided dominant ideology that becomes a lucrative commodity.

Online communication has made our societies more connected than in previous eras with the advent of technology and the rise of globalization. Globalization has enriched our lives by means of communication, transportation, and economics, especially in the ways that technology has enabled us to gain awareness of different cultures and identities from across the world. James Lull insists that “[c]onsciousness is a mindset—a synthesis of what a person or a group of people knows or thinks about, and how they think. Clearly, the mass media play a very influential role in consciousness formation” (29). While changing someone’s mindset is difficult because it is constructed by dominant ideologies, mass media have the power to implant or supplant ideologies.

There is a study on how the media construct our beliefs and social norms, by Catherine Happer and Greg Philo. They apply content analysis of news coverage in order to examine changes of people’s beliefs and social behaviors. They conclude that “the media play a facilitating role – in the easing through of policy action by repetition and reinforcement of media messages, and the absence of proposed alternatives – and also a possible role in shaping behavior” (333). Media (including film) representations of culture and identity have the power to

establish and change our recognition of experiences. Although there are many benefits and positive aspects of technological innovations, the powerful mass media often produce misrepresentations of culture and identity, such as stereotypical images that do not fully express reality. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and critique this phenomenon to prevent misunderstandings, and to have better intercultural relationships in contemporary society.

Topic and Research Questions

My primary research focus is on film representations of Japanese identity and culture. Specifically, I am interested in depictions of Japanese identity and culture in American films and media. In order to examine film representations of Japanese identity and culture, this thesis will answer the following research questions:

- What are the stereotypical images of Japanese people that have been portrayed in American films? How are Japanese stereotypes depicted in specific scenes and dialogues of American films in the history and the contemporary society?
- How have representations of Japanese identity in American films changed/not changed American media culture? How has the depiction of Japanese identity and culture as constructed in American films evolved between *Gung Ho* (1986) and the more recent *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)?
- What gaps exist between how Japanese people and culture are portrayed in American films, and how Japanese perceive their own identity?
- How does the stereotypical portrayal affect Japanese-American identity? Who are the audience of *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell*?

- Are these stereotypes of Japanese culture and identity mediated by American films “Americanized”? What are the messages delivered by *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell* to the audience?

Rationale

There are primarily two reasons why I focus on American films as text in order to analyze media representations of Japanese culture and identity. First, this research describes and interprets the stereotypes and misrepresentations of Asian identity; specifically, Japanese identity and culture. Second, this research makes recommendations to both Japanese and American people toward better communication practices and understanding.

Being an Asian student in the United States, I have experienced a strong tension of perceptions on race and ethnicity that I never experienced in Japan. This is best explained using the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality studies have become popular in cultural studies in the United States for many years. Intersectionality refers to multiple aspects of identity such as race, economic class, and gender identification that come together in a relationship or interaction. However, the term “intersectionality” in Japan is not as disseminated as in the United States. In fact, there is no direct translation of the term in Japanese². After *Doctor Strange* (2016), *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and *Death Note* (2017) were released, the discussions of whitewashing have caused a huge controversy in the United States. Although *Ghost in the Shell* and *Death Note* are films based on Japanese animation, Japanese people do not seem to care, or are not aware of the controversy. In a YouTube video clip created by That Japanese Man Yuta, he interviewed several Japanese people in Osaka (Japan) asking what they think about the whitewashing

² There is a “direct” translation of the term, but it does not contain meanings of the context such as race, gender, and sexuality. It needs a couple of sentences to translate the term in order to fully understand all its ramifications.

controversy in *Ghost in the Shell* and *Death Note*. He had to explain the concept of whitewashing before the interviews because most of the Japanese people were not familiar with the concept. In addition, every interviewee in the clip answered positively when asked: What do you think of casting Scarlett Johansson as Motoko Kusanagi³ in *Ghost in the Shell*? While those interviewees were selected by Yuta and perhaps did not know the original context, he proved that Japanese people are less concerned about the whitewashing controversy.

Since American film productions have dominated the global box office, it is one of the most popular artifacts for people to acquire images and ideas of culture. American films are extremely influential media in constructing ideologies. Thus, this thesis focuses on two American films from different time periods as cultural artifacts, *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell*. By analyzing American films in the context of cultural portrayal, we can gain awareness of how Japanese people are portrayed in the American media. In addition, this thesis provides a deeper understanding of cultural contexts and media influence on contemporary society. Therefore, this research will fill the gap between the Japanese and American perspectives on media representations of the former. This will lead us to have better international and intercultural communication in the future.

Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

Orientalism

Edward Said was a scholar who contributed to developing post-colonialism and constructed the theory of Orientalism. Orientalists divided the world into two areas—a West and an East, called “the Occident” and “the Orient” respectively. Orientalist scholars who specialized in studying this discourse discovered masculine characteristics in the West and feminine

³ The main character of the film.

characteristics in the East, which led to the power relationship between the two to be one of dominance and submission. Said criticized this implication because it was “a useful justification for colonialism” (Vijay 188) and imperialism. The term “the Orient” is prejudiced: it creates a biased homogeneous lens that “the Occident” uses to view the heterogeneous Asian continent. While “Occident” and “Orientalism” are broad terms and concepts that contain both the West and East, usage of the terms often obscures the distinctive identity of Asian people. For example, Japanese mustard or Indian mustard is frequently called “oriental mustard” in English. In this case, the term is used only to differentiate whether the product is Western or not. Although Asian cultures and nationalities are very different and unique, those identities become inappropriately amalgamated and viewed monolithically, thereby allowing Western stereotypes to foment and reproduce. Therefore, the concept of Orientalism contains Western prejudice and a preconceived image of Asian cultures.

Yellowface

Ono uses one entire chapter in his book to discuss the notion of yellowface. He defines yellowface as “when a non-Asian or non-Asian American plays the role of an Asian or Asian American [in the films]” (46). He introduces historical media examples, particularly films, and analyzes how this notion problematically and continuously exists in media culture. The chapter specifically focuses on the logic of yellowface, such as unequal power hierarchy between whites and Asian/Asian Americans in terms of racial inequality, by raising the significant question: “Why would Hollywood and those regulating the movie industry not want Asians and Asian Americans writing stories about or playing of Asians and Asian Americans?” (45)

One perspective to unpack the yellowface logic (Ono 52) is yellowface as cultural appropriation. Yellowface is “a form of mimicry and mockery; it is a substitution of an object for

a subject, a substitution of a mocking mask for a human being” (Ono 49). This process of mimicry and mockery shows the absence of Asian and Asian American characters which reinforces the power dynamics of whites as superior, and Asians and Asian Americans as subordinate. In addition, he argues that “audiences were more familiar and comfortable with stereotypes than with the actual people being portrayed. White European audiences wanted to see Orientalism without seeing Asian and Asian American people and their bodies” (50). Continuous yellowface psychologically constructs audiences’ mindset and marginalizes Asians and Asian Americans as the racialized Other.

Perspective and Method

This thesis mainly consists of two case studies; two American films *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell*. In order to analyze the films, a rhetorical and critical approach will be applied to interpret and critique the cultural meanings of the texts.

For the case of *Gung Ho*, I examine what and how stereotypes of Japanese culture and identity are demonstrated therein, and explore what rhetorical contexts are involved. I will look at specific scenes and dialogues, and focus on the interracial relationship between the main characters—the American and the Japanese—to elucidate the message the film delivers to its American audience. Thereafter, I politically and critically analyze the film’s message for its audience by applying concepts and theoretical frameworks.

For *Ghost in the Shell*, I proceed the same method—selecting scenes and dialogues—in order to grasp the film’s principle message to its audience. Since the main character of the film was played by a Caucasian actor, I gather and summarize whitewashing discussions. These discussions are primarily from news articles because the film just released in 2017. Due to the

small time gap between the film's release and this thesis, there is not much available literature to review here.

Analyzing such a relatively new cultural artifact may be both the strength and limitation of this research. The strength lies in that this research will contribute to further discussions on whitewashing and benefits the field of study in the future. However, such contemporary material lacks the variety of perspectives which may restrict a wider range of understanding. In addition, while these two case studies provide fundamental media depictions of culture and identity, critical analyses of numerous films is needed.

Outline of the Thesis

To explore the topic and elicit answers to the research questions, this thesis will focus on two American films from different eras which represent Japanese culture and identity. These two American films are *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell*. The thesis will also introduce historical backgrounds and literatures in relation to media representations of Asian and Asian Americans that will support the value of this research. Overall, this thesis will consist of five chapters, including introduction and conclusion.

Chapter I is the Introduction of the thesis, which will acknowledge theoretical and intercultural tensions in the field. This chapter will explain the initial summary and organization of the thesis by addressing how it develops: initiating with the topic, rationale, literatures, theoretical frameworks, and outline.

Chapter II will discuss the general media representations of Japanese culture and historical background of Japanese media portrayal. This chapter will overview the general idea of stereotypes and perceptions of Asian and Asian Americans in the media. By considering

discussions in terms of media representations that have been done in the past, we will be able to closely analyze the films from the next chapter.

Chapters III and IV will implement two case studies of the American films that demonstrate Japanese culture and identity by employing the concepts and frameworks addressed in Chapter II. Chapter III is the case study of the film *Gung Ho* (1986). Since it was released in 1986, the chapter will analyze media representations of the Japanese in the 1980s in America. The 1980s is the time when Japanese high-tech products such as electric home appliances and cars are exported to America. The film focuses on economic and social relationships between Japanese and American auto companies.

Chapter IV is the case study of the film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). This chapter will analyze one of the latest examples of Japanese portrayals in American films. The film is based on the Japanese manga, *Ghost in the Shell*. As explained earlier, recently the controversy of “whitewashing” Asian identity in American films has become a popular topic of conversation. This chapter aims to explore this controversy of “whitewashing” and the concept of “yellowface”. In addition, analyzing films from different time periods enables us to examine how stereotypical media representations have changed, or not, over time.

Chapter V will be the Conclusion. It will briefly summarize the key findings of the thesis, assessing its strengths and limitations, and discuss the future direction and development of the study.

CHAPTER II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF JAPANESE MEDIA PORTRAYAL

This chapter describes the conditions and historical background of Japanese ancestry in the United States, and relationships between Hollywood and Japanese culture. It also aims to introduce several key concepts and theories that are significant in order to explore the textual richness of American films that portray Japanese culture and identity. Historical background of Japanese mainly explains the origin and political situation of Japanese immigrants in the United States. It also covers social phenomena such as war and racial discrimination, and how social and cultural environment have affected the positionality of Japanese immigrants in the United States. While exploring key concepts and theories, this chapter focuses on both early and modern cinema from Hollywood. Early cinema helps to elucidate the roots of concepts and racial representations. Modern cinema demonstrates the continuity of problematic representations and stereotyping from the early cinema era. By exploring Hollywood's general approach to Japanese representations and the interconnectedness of the historical foundation of Hollywood influence, we can understand the spectrum of films and apply critical concepts and relationships to the later chapters in this thesis.

Historical Background of Nikkei⁴ in the United States

According to a historical study by Eiichiro Azuma, the first 148 Japanese immigrants entered the kingdom of Hawaii as workers on a sugar plantation in 1868. Most of them were from the southern prefectures of Japan, which had suffered severe blows from drought, famine, and overpopulation. While people were looking for jobs and new opportunities for their life, the Meiji government did not allow the immigration until 1885. Although the government finally

⁴ Japanese emigrants or descendants who are living abroad as citizens of other countries. It generally refers to those people of Japanese ancestry who are not citizens of Japan.

permitted it in order to reduce problems of rural unrest and gain international connections, the history of Japanese immigration has been strongly connected to the history of racism in the United States. For example, it is apparent in the Gentleman's Agreement between Japan and the United States in 1907 and 1908 that stopped Japanese labor immigration to the United States. Again, after 1885 in Hawaii, as white elites started losing their political and social power to the immigrants, they began to resent the increasing number of Japanese people and communities in their state. In the 1910s, a number of discriminatory laws were enacted wherein Japanese people were described as "aliens ineligible to citizenship" (Kikumura-Yano 280). The Immigration Act of 1924 prohibited the entry of any Japanese immigrants until 1952 (Kikumura-Yano 280).

Many Japanese immigrated to the United States seeking political asylum from the Meiji government's persecution in the 1880s. However, the legal barriers and racial discriminations in the United States created many hurdles for them. Much was related to their performance of identity as Japanese Americans, and how this was perceived by the Americans. International social conflict such as war was one of the main factors that affected Japanese American identity in the United States. For instance, the Japanese colonization in China in the 1930s had a large impact on the relationships between Japanese Americans and Americans in the United States. Japanese Americans' support for the Japanese side in the war made Americans refer to Japanese Americans as "anti-American" (Kikumura-Yano 283). In addition, the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 put Issei and Nisei⁵ in a much more difficult position in the United States.

"Starting in the 1950s, Nisei increasingly took part in a wider range of sociocultural activities, producing literary works of their own, creating their own art pieces, and becoming

⁵ Issei are first generation Japanese immigrants who moved to the United States. Nisei are second generation Japanese immigrants, descendants of Issei.

visible in the performing arts” (Kikumura-Yano 286). After the war, continuous effort by the Nisei gradually improved the social and cultural positionality of Japanese Americans in the United States. However, in the exchange of social recognition of Japanese Americans, their “successful assimilation” (286) constructed a new stereotype of Japanese Americans, the model minority.

Early Cinema and Japanese Representation

Model minority is one of the concepts and discourses in Asian and Asian American studies. It helps us understand stereotypes of Asian and Asian American identity and its problematic representations. There are several notions that are necessary to explore media representations of Asians and Asian Americans such as model minority, yellowface, and gender stereotypes. One of the most significant aspects of exploring early cinema and its representations of Asians and Asian Americans is the consistency and continuity of similar representations of Asian and Asian American stereotypes.

Model Minority

Kent Ono’s important early work in Asian American studies argued that mainstream media began characterizing Asian Americans as model minorities during civil rights movements, and demands for educational equality and social justice (80). He describes the definition of model minority as “one who is quiet, hardworking, stays out of trouble, listens to elders, and takes upon themselves the responsibility for change rather than assigning blame and advocating for social change to the government” (80) by introducing Keith Osajima’s work on the term and media characterization of Asian Americans. According to Osajima, media portrayal of Asian Americans usually showcases them as academically sound, economically stable, with statistically low criminal records—all leading to the impression that Asian Americans are racially

exceptional and not needing social support. This is in sharp contrast to other minority racial groups such as African Americans and Jewish Americans (80). Moreover, Ono reiterates Yuko Kawai's research on model minority and its relation to the concept of yellow peril in both international and national representations of both stereotypes. Whereas the model minority implies hard-working, well-educated, and competitive figures of Asians and Asian Americans, she uses *Rising Sun*⁶ as an example to suggest that the correlation with yellow peril establishes those images as an economic threat (discussed in detail in Chapter III), and functions to reinforce Asians and Asian Americans as "others" in the United States. With a close analysis of *Rising Sun*, she explains the racial relationships between Whites and Blacks versus Asians and otherness of Asian identity:

[Model minority and yellow peril representation] "exaggerates the [country's] foreignness" (ibid., 122) ... Essentially, whites benefit from blacks despising Asians, which prevents minorities from joining hands against white supremacy... the model minority image is implicated in the depiction of Japanese as villains and gangsters, since "the Japanese characters are associated with 'passivity' and 'docility,' which are part of the model minority stereotype, even when they are gangsters. (90)

This "otherness" of Asians and Asian Americans is continuously presented onscreen by Hollywood. Let us take the example of *Gung Ho*. As the film mainly focuses on intercultural and interracial conflicts between Japanese and American automotive industry in 1980s America, Japanese people are demonstrated as hardworking and also threat in terms of economic

⁶ *Rising Sun* is a 1993 American crime film directed by Philip Kaufman, starring Sean Connery. The film portrays the conflict between workers in a Japanese company and American Police Detectives.

influence. Such depictions of Japanese people are effectively applied in order to draw a racial border between Japanese and Americans.

These characteristics of Asian identity, portraying them as hardworking and villainous established the “model” image of a specific racial identity. Although the notion of the model minority perhaps helped American audience to conveniently identify racial identity onscreen, it reinforced the stereotypes of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. Accordingly, Asians and Asian Americans’ foreignness resulted in them becoming the Others in the United States.

Yellowface

Yellowface is the practice of a non-Asian actor playing an Asian character on screen. This practice caught scholarly attention, especially in early 20th century Hollywood films (Ono, 45). It strongly reflects historically racial relationships and power dynamics in the United States. In early cinema, one of the most explicit examples of yellowface was the character of Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. This Japanese character was played by Mickey Rooney, a Caucasian actor. As I have mentioned in the introduction, yellowface demonstrates the power relationships of who is dominant and who is subordinate. Ono analyzes the case of Mr. Yunioshi thus: “His broken English, excessive clumsiness, and implausible sexual fantasy are there for the comedic pleasure of the non-Asian audience” (49). In the last decade, people have become more critical of casting choices in Hollywood movies with regards to race and ethnicity.

The act of casting a white actor to play the role of a non-white character is known as “whitewashing,” and it has become a controversial and contested issue about misrepresenting culture and identities. For example, the main character of *Ghost in the Shell*— Motoko Kusanagi,

a Japanese —was played by Caucasian actor Scarlet Johansson. Chapter IV will discuss further on the film and the notion of whitewashing.

Like yellowface, blackface is the phenomenon where a non-black actor plays the role of a black character. Recently, a British production house faced backlash over a film on the life of Michael Jackson in which a white English actor Joseph Fiennes, was cast to play the black American superstar. More recently, there was global tension toward Japanese comedian Satoshi Hamada, who appeared in a year-end special TV show disguised as black actor Eddie Murphy. His face was painted black, which is reminiscent of how white actors paint their faces black to portray black characters on screen. While public reaction to his appearance was highly critical in certain countries, certain audiences defended Hamada's act of blackface. One comment in support of his portrayal on Twitter stated: "Have you actually paid any attention to how much detail Hama-chan (the comedian) cares about? The clothes, shoes, he really wanted to be Eddy Murphy. We can see his love and respect for Eddy Murphy's epic comedy" (@photonka). Despite misspelling Eddie Murphy's name, this tweet received a decent number of "likes"⁷ which demonstrates that there were many people defending his position. Summarizing Twitter users' comments defending Hamada, Specia argues, "Unlike the United States, ... Japan does not have a history of systematic discrimination against black people, and a Japanese performer painting his face black does not come with the same cultural stigma" (*The New York Times*). This is a crucial point for this thesis—due to cultural differences, there are gaps in how people perceive different cultures and identities. Chapters III and IV will focus more on this perception gap between Japan and the United States.

⁷ The tweet got 790 likes and 139 retweets.

Although there are both pros and cons about this controversy, it is important to be aware that racial representations are problematic not only for Asian identities, but also for black people and other racial categories as well, and that it has been continuously practiced over time. As Megan Specia introduces Baye McNeil's argument that "...the Japanese media should work with people from diverse backgrounds to prevent offensive content from surfacing," (Specia) this incident clearly testified the lack of awareness of world history and representations in terms of race and ethnicity in Japan. This is especially relevant to note now, because we are living in the 21st century when it is becoming easier for people to be aware of different cultures and what is happening in the world with the advancement of technology. Therefore, yellowface (and blackface) is definitely continuing problematic representations of racial identity that we should keep recognizing as a cultural and social phenomenon.

Gender Stereotypes

In the 1910s, Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa (1886-1973) became the first Asian to play a role in Hollywood. He is also known as the only Asian actor in the early silent films of the United States. He played the supporting role in the film *The Cheat*⁸ as a rich Japanese art dealer Hishuru Tori on Long Island, which propelled him to stardom. Tori was a brutal character who assaulted the heroine, Edith Hardy (played by Fannie Ward). While the film was banned in Japan because of the offensive portrayal of the Japanese, Hayakawa's attractive looks and sensational performance in *The Cheat* established a stereotypical and Americanized image of Japanese men in the United States. It was a sensational appearance considering the time period in the United States. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the 1910s was a hardship era for Japanese

⁸ The American silent film released in 1915, directed by Cecil B. DeMille, starring Fannie Ward as the heroine.

immigrants in the United States. In spite of the social tension against the Japanese, Hayakawa became a star. However, it was strategically led and constructed by the production company, Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company⁹. Daisuke Miyao explains:

In short, Lasky's strategy was to locate Hayakawa in the movable middle-ground position in the racial and cultural hierarchy between white American and nonwhite other. On the one hand, Hayakawa's (and his characters') status had to be raised and distinguished racially or culturally from other nonwhite actors (and their characters) in order for the American middle-class audiences to sympathize with, identify with, or even desire Hayakawa more easily. On the other hand, Hayakawa's status had to be clearly differentiated from white Americans in terms of race. Any sexual relationship between Hayakawa's characters, no matter how heroic they were, and white women must be avoided in order not to cause any anxiety around miscegenation. (88)

This strategic establishment of racial and cultural portrayal presented by Hayakawa set a standard model representation to the American audience. Since early American cinema was largely consumed by local audiences, villainous and asexual portrayal of Japanese characters was created with the purpose of maintaining the racial and cultural hierarchy of the Americans as superior to other racial groups such as Asians and Asian Americans.

One of the significant aspects of Hayakawa's representation of the Japanese male was its ironical acceptance and demand from white female audiences. According to Miyao, "To a certain extent, Hayakawa also was represented as a fascinating consumable ethnic other for white female audiences in his publicity" (105). Hayakawa was fundamentally consumed by white female

⁹ Later became Paramount Pictures.

audiences, and objectified for fulfilling the female gaze which formed certain expectations toward Japanese male representation. However, his appearance onscreen in *The Cheat* and other successful films such as *Forbidden Paths* was already an “Americanized” body image. Miyao called the Lasky production’s technique of lighting in *The Hidden Pearl* as “Lasky lighting” (99). Such lighting technique made Hayakawa’s skin lighter (whitening of appearance) on the screen. In addition, he wore his clothes in a Western way. While his appearance in the United States was after the modernization and Westernization of Japan, his body image on screen represented the model of a successfully assimilated Asian male. Therefore, the stereotypes of Japanese male representation are strategically constructed by the film industry, and Hayakawa’s Americanized representations were widely accepted and consumed by American audiences.

There was a Japanese actress who appeared in the same era as Hayakawa and became popular in early American silent cinema, Takuko Takagi (1891-1919). Like Hayakawa, Takagi became the first Japanese actress in American silent cinema. Although she died young, she gained popularity in the United States and played a role in *The Birth of Lotus Blossom* and *For the Mikado*. In terms of cultural authenticity, she explained in an interview that the hardest part of performing in an American production “is that they want me to play an Americanized Japanese. They want me to play just like a Japanese girl the American imagines” (Abel 148). Similar to Hayakawa’s case, there were certain expectations from both Japanese male and female representations in American films in which they were expected to act as “Americanized” Japanese. Those stereotypical representations continue to exist in contemporary society as well.

In the recent Hollywood film *The Last Samurai* (2003), there was a Japanese female character Taka played by Koyuki. Taka was positioned as a submissive and voiceless character compared to Algren, the white leading role played by Tom Cruise and Katsumoto, Taka’s

brother, played by Ken Watanabe. While the film likely did not intend to illustrate Japanese female character in negative ways, it clearly showed the stereotypical power balance of gender and presented it as a virtue of Japanese culture. The portrayal of Taka in the film fits the definition of the stereotypes of Asian and Asian American women as discussed by Ono. He notes stereotypes by analyzing the characteristics illustrated in *Lotus Blossom* and *Madame Butterfly* that women are “sexually attractive and alluring and demure, passive, obedient, physically non-imposing, self-sacrificial, and supplicant (especially to white male suitors)” (66). In the film, Taka was ordered by Katsumoto to take care of Algren even though she knew Algren had killed her husband in battle. After living with Algren for a while, she pleaded with Katsumoto, “Brother, please make him leave. I cannot stand it [...] The shame is unbearable. I ask your permission to end my life” (Zwick). However, Katsumoto replied, “You will do as you are told!” (Zwick) Although eventually Taka forgave Algren and recognized him as a respectful man (which presents its own problematic readings), her voice was consistently overruled or muted. In this case, Taka sacrificed her happiness and home to support Katsumoto’s will. The film adhered to previous studies of stereotypes of Asian and Asian American women. Therefore, by exploring similarities through different time periods, we can infer that Western misrepresentations of Asian and Asian American women that they are submissive “Orientals” (Americanized stereotypes) were employed consciously or unconsciously in order to construct Taka’s identity as Japanese (Ono, 100).

Although Japanese characters are often portrayed as sexually attractive, we hardly see sexual scenes or intercourse depictions of Japanese characters on screen. For example, in *Gung Ho* (detailed discussions on female stereotypes in Chapter III), there are flirtation scenes between a white heterosexual couple, but there is no such scene involving a Japanese married couple in

the film. In addition, in *The Cheat* Tori (Sessue Hayakawa) was in no romantic relationship with Edith Hardy (Fannie Ward). Along with the discussion on stereotypes of asexual Japanese men such as Sessue Hayakawa, Ono argues, “The woman is free to enter into a romantic relationship with someone other than the Asian and Asian American man (i.e., the white man) ... the Asian and Asian American man, prominently featured as undesirable ... will be found to be an inferior romantic competitor, and therefore, within the storyline, justifiably forgotten or eliminated” (64). For both male and female Asian characters, there are similar power relationships in terms of gender and racial hierarchy based on stereotypes: Asian men as villains and Asian women as passive. Thus, Asians and Asian Americans are consciously or subconsciously considered inferior in American society and culture.

Hollywood and Japanese Identity

As Sessue Hayakawa and Takuko Takagi set the standard representations of Japanese identity and culture in early Hollywood history, they were constructed through the Western lens of the Japanese. These stereotypical depictions have constantly been shown on Hollywood screen regardless of the era, not only in the examples introduced above (*Gung Ho*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *The Last Samurai*) but also in other films that were successful in the box office: *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), *The Wolverine* (2013), and *Big Hero 6* (2014).

In *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, the notion of Orientalism can be applied in terms of representations of female Japanese. *Memoirs of a Geisha* is the story of one geisha¹⁰, Sayuri’s life. The story takes place in prewar to postwar Japan.

¹⁰ Geisha is a female occupation, similar to that of a receptionist. They learn Japanese traditional music, singing, and dancing to entertain customers while the latter are eating or having a meeting.

Because of the Great Depression, the daughter of a poor villager, Sayuri was sold to a geisha's house in Hanamachi (a fictional place inspired by the town Gion, one of the most famous cities in Japan's Kyoto prefecture). The film depicts her growth and rise to the stardom as a popular geisha in Hanamachi. Since the film mainly portrayed Japanese people and culture, its casting caused a huge controversy in Japan, China and the United States. The heroine Sayuri was played by Zhang Ziyi, the famous but arrogant geisha Hatusmomo was played by Gong Li, and a respectable geisha Mameha was played by Michelle Yeoh. Although there were several Japanese actors in the film, the leading Japanese geisha characters were all played by non-Japanese actresses—they were Chinese and Malaysian. Zhang Ziyi and Gong Li are both well-known Chinese actresses, and Michelle Yeoh is also an extremely popular Malaysian actress in the world (Dargis). The film faced harsh criticism due to its casting of non-Japanese actresses because the figure of a geisha is exclusively reminiscent of Japanese culture. In addition, there were scenes where the geishas were shown to be prostitutes in the film. As Manohla Dargis describes, "Once upon a time in Japan, some women were in the service of procreation, others were employed for recreational sex, while the geisha operated in that gray area in between" (Dargis). It is indeed a historical fact that there was a view of geisha as sex workers. Although geishas working as sex workers disappeared after the Anti-Prostitution Act of 1956, this strong prejudice towards geisha remained as the stereotype.

Despite casting controversies and critical responses, the film earned over \$162 million at the box office and won three Academy Awards: Best Art Direction, Best Cinematography, and Best Costume Design. This indicates that the film was generally accepted by American audiences. Therefore, in the case of this film, national identity of Japanese is obscured under the larger categorization of Asian. This result demonstrates the influence of Orientalism. Explaining

the ways in which Orientalism is disseminated, Edward Said argued: “Orientalism can thus be regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) writing, vision, and study, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient” (202). The term “Orient” implies the Western view of the East which includes various nationalities such as Japanese, Chinese, Philippines, Malaysian, and Indian. Thus, by exploring the casting controversy and depictions of geishas in the film, we can recognize the impact of Orientalism in the sense of generalizing racial identities.

In *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, the representation of the Japanese female body is evidently stereotyped as “the Oriental woman” which Said called “a display of impressive but verbally inexpressive femininity” (187). The trailer of the film well expresses this point of hypersexualization of the female body and voiceless positionality. The opening scene of the trailer shows Japanese women in skimpy dresses dancing alongside racing cars; the camera angle aimed towards their bodies, not even showing their faces. Moreover, the only time Japanese women speak is when they are directed to speak by a man. Although the short length of the trailer, it is obvious that women are portrayed as submissive and voiceless (muted).

Chapter I of this thesis introduced one of the stereotypical representations of Japanese culture in *The Last Samurai*; such ninja representation may be applied to *The Wolverine* as well. However, the treatment of the ninja in *The Wolverine* is different from that in *The Last Samurai*. Although the principal characteristics of the ninja as assassins and cool warriors are the same, there is a connotation to the depiction of the Yakuza¹¹ in *The Wolverine*. One similarity between *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* and *The Wolverine* is the compositional structure—

¹¹ Japanese gangster. Yakuza is usually portrayed as a villain or an anti-social group, as it was done in *The Wolverine*.

Japanese men as villains and Japanese women as passive. In addition, there is no relational development between Asian characters in terms of romantic relationships; instead, there is a representation of romantic relationship between the non-white male and Japanese female. This is exemplified in the relationships shown between Logan (Hugh Jackman) and Mariko Yashida (Tao Okamoto) in *The Wolverine*, as well as Nathan Algren (Tom Cruise) and Taka (Koyuki) in *The Last Samurai*. In both cases, the women do not have any control over themselves or their life choices. In *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, the main character is Caucasian and most of the Japanese characters are villains (gangsters) except one Japanese character that is a teacher figure. These gender representations and power dynamics are reminiscent of the common descriptions of Asian identity in early cinema. Thus, it is significant to note that the stereotypes continue to be applied and accepted by audiences over the 100 years of American film history.

Big Hero 6 is the first Disney animated film where a biracial character (half-Japanese and half-Caucasian) Hiro plays the lead. While the film attempts to integrate two different cultures—Japanese and American culture—in the fictional city of “San Fransokyo (mixture of San Francisco and Tokyo),” the stereotype of an Asian male is employed for the American audience to help them easily recognize Hiro’s racial identity. In the film, Hiro is characterized as a science and technology geek. This image perhaps stems from the history of Japanese technological influence in the United States, such as the Japanese automotive industry in the 1980s. Although it is based on historical facts, the stereotype of Japanese as skillful in technology and efficient has been social and culturally constructed in the United States.

Moreover, this film is based on the Marvel Comics of the same title. While much of the content was changed and adjusted from the original comic to the film, we can clearly see the general Hollywood approach to Japanese identity and culture in the United States. In the original

comic, the story takes place in Tokyo where the main characters clearly showcase their racial identity as Japanese, albeit with different superpowers. However, in the film Tokyo is replaced by the fictional city of San Fransokyo, and the Japanese heroes become multiracial ones. Although the original comic was already Americanized in terms of representations of Japanese¹², the film added more American layers in order to attract as much audience as possible. For example, Hiro becomes biracial and the overall landscape of San Fransokyo is very similar to San Francisco (Japanese-ish visual cues are demonstrated as ornaments). While it is an important strategy to sell and disseminate the film to the world, it is also the proof of Hollywood's approach of westernizing representations of Japanese identity and culture in order to be acceptable to American audiences.

Conclusion

By exploring the historical background of Japanese immigrants and Hollywood's approach to Japanese culture and identity, we are able to acknowledge key notions in order to understand how racial identity is presented in Hollywood: Yellow peril, Orientalism, the model minority, yellowface, and gender stereotypes. Moreover, researching the first Japanese actor to perform onscreen enabled us to discover the roots of the racial concepts of Asian and Asian American media representations. Sessue Hayakawa, the first Asian to act in Hollywood, configured the mindset of model Asian figure to American audiences. His astonishing performance in *The Cheat* established the foundation of Asian/Japanese depictions as villainous and asexual characteristics. These features are exaggerated and stereotyped because they were created through the Western lens of Asian identity—oriental representations. Additionally, it is

¹² One of the heroes, Honey Lemon is illustrated with visually Western-oriented female characteristics such as shapely figure and long blond hair.

important to note that this model image of Hayakawa was strategically constructed by his film studio, Lasky. Takuko Takagi, the first Japanese woman to act in Hollywood, noted that she was expected to perform like an Asian, which resulted in these early Hollywood productions shaping certain expectations of American audiences toward Asian/Japanese identity and how they should look/ behave. Ultimately, biased racial representations of Asians and Asian Americans resulted in a reinforcement of their “otherness” in the United States.

In order to fully satisfy audience expectations, similar Westernized representations of Asian identity and culture have continuously been presented on the big screen. For recent examples, this chapter mainly focused on four successful Hollywood films, and explored general Hollywood approach to the representations of Asian and Asian American identity: *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, *The Wolverine*, and *Big Hero 6*. The most common depiction of all was gender representation. *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, and *The Wolverine* portrayed female characters as passive, voiceless, and subordinate. *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* and *The Wolverine* depicted male characters as villainous and gangsters. These representations have characteristics of Asian and Asian American identity that are similar to those constructed by early American cinema. *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a compelling example of the function of Orientalism in the United States. Despite the casting controversy of using Chinese and Malaysian actresses as leading Japanese female roles, the film was successful at the box office. This fact demonstrates general indifference and acceptance of the audience in terms of racial representation because the actresses look “oriental.” Thus, the distinctive Japanese identity became ambiguous under the larger category of Asian in this film.

This chapter also addressed the importance of considering cultural and social differences between the United States and Japan, by introducing the recent issue of blackface practiced by a Japanese comedian in a TV show. Some people criticized the comedian's act as cultural appropriation, tying it to the history of racism in the United States; however, there were people who defended him by arguing that Japanese people might not use to discussions of race because of their strikingly different historical and cultural background. Articulating this cultural and social gap is necessary in order to understand the spectrum of perceptions with regard to representations of race.

CHAPTER III. CASE STUDY: *GUNG HO*

After World War II, Japan faced an era of significant societal change. This period, known as the Japanese economic miracle¹³ is when the Japanese economy boomed and technological innovation rapidly increased. This economic revolution continued until the early 1990s. As a consequence of strengthening Japan's international competitiveness, many Japanese products flew overseas. The 1980s was the time when Japanese high-tech products such as electric home appliances and cars were exported to America. A significant amount of exports and increase of trade surplus caused severe trade frictions between the United States and Japan, and it led to a fear of Japanese economic invasion upon American society. For example, *The New York Times* published an article titled "Japan's Economic Invasion" in 1977, explaining the huge economic influence of "The Three C's"—Japanese color televisions, coolers (air conditioners), and cars—in the United States (Reston). The article also raised questions about the ideal work ethics of people in the United States in the face of the Japanese economic invasion. Moreover, in the late 80s, the growing numbers of Japanese automobile sales in the United States was described as the Japanese stepping up pressure on the American Big Three—General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler (Risen).

Automobiles and U.S. popular culture are heavily linked to each other. Matt Stone, Arthur Antoine, and Angus MacKenzie argue that automobiles are "far more than transportation: they've become embedded in popular culture" (Stone) because they introduce some of the media examples of the U.S. popular culture, automobiles star in music, movies, television, books, and art form. This chapter mainly focuses on media representation of Japanese culture and identity in 1980s America, in order to examine how Japaneseness was perceived through media in America.

¹³ It is called the age of high economic growth in Japan.

The first gasoline-powered motor vehicle was invented by Karl Benz in 1885 in Germany, and the automotive industry entered the American marketplace in 1890s (Hillstrom et al.). Soon after, Detroit (Michigan) became one of the largest automotive manufacturing cities in the world, because Michigan had geographical and financial advantages; rich environmental resources such as Great Lakes waterways and abundant hardwood forests, and the support from local banks developed the venture business into the leading industry of the nation and the world. Hillstrom noted that the automotive industry “became the backbone of the U.S. economy [... and] changed everything ... from the way people commuted to work, to where they lived, to the way they conducted romance” (Hillstrom 260). He also stated the strong connections between the automobile and popular culture, as well as the cultural impact on people’s fashion (199). Detroit became known as the “Motor City” and Motown Records produced major pop music artists in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, the automotive industry has been closely associated with American culture and identity.

In response to the U.S. economic crisis which started in 2008, then President Barack Obama announced the bailout of the automotive industry in 2009 due to an industry downturn. In the transcript of President Obama's remarks regarding the governmental financial assistance to General Motors and Chrysler, he stressed that “We cannot, and must not, and we will not let our automotive industry simply vanish. This industry is like no other—it's an emblem of the American spirit; a once and future symbol of America's success” (*The New York Times*). A month later, he also referred to Chrysler as “a company that has a particular claim on our American identity” (*Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network*). His speeches and announcements indicated that the automotive industry is embedded in an essential part of American identity,

which affects people in the United States both economically and emotionally. This economic strategy clearly showed the significance of the automotive industry to American ontology.

In a recent case, a *Denver Post* sports writer Terry Frei was fired because of his controversial tweet about the Indianapolis 500 (the Indy 500) on Memorial Day weekend, 2017. The Indy 500 is one of the most famous automobile races in the world, held annually at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in Speedway, Indiana. On May 28, 2017, a Japanese driver, Takuma Sato, became the first Asian driver to win the Indy 500. Frei tweeted that “Nothing specifically personal, but I am very uncomfortable with a Japanese driver winning the Indianapolis 500 during Memorial Day weekend” (*Breitbart*). While many people were opposed to his tweet, this fact that the Indy 500 is an event that relates to his identity as American highlights how closely people attach the automobile with an American identity.

In *Asian Americans and the Media*, Kent Ono, historically and politically analyzed Asian and Asian American representations in the U.S. media. One of the principal contributions of this book is its wide variety of media analyses: lyrics of songs, films, television shows, cartoons, advertisements, t-shirt designs, the Internet, and YouTube. These expansive research materials enabled an examination of both historical and contemporary features with a rhetorical and political aspect of discourse. For example, Ono introduced theorized notions of yellow peril to indicate racial ambivalence and discrimination against Asian and Asian Americans. He used early cinema and war propaganda as critical texts to suggest that the yellow peril discourse made Asian American communities appear as threats, specifically the Chinese, Japanese, Chinese Americans, and Japanese Americans. At the same time, he alerts that “There is, of course, abundant historical work that discusses yellow peril racism and ideology, but rarely does that research understand yellow peril as a phenomenon created by and fanned by the flames of screen

media or the press” (26). Although the media did not generate the concept of yellow peril per se, it reinforced and prompted the yellow peril ideology that had already been existed in people’s mindset. The media depictions of culture and identity are strongly connected to our perceptions of race and ethnicity. Therefore, the study of media representation of Asians and Asian Americans is crucial for both Asian and non-Asian people in the United States to understand racial phenomena.

Moreover, the yellow peril was not a phenomenon that occurred only in early cinema and before or during World War II. Ono also expressed that “episodic and spectacular representation of yellow peril continue to emerge all over the media landscape, often with direct negative consequences” (178). With the fact of these direct negative consequences, he introduced the case of Vincent Chin. As I mentioned earlier this chapter, the 1980s was the time when the American automotive industry gradually declined, and the Japanese automotive industry successfully prospered in America; Detroit is well known as the center of the American automotive industry. Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was killed because he was mistakenly seen and identified as a Japanese man in Detroit (Wu). This example shows the threat toward Asians and Asian Americans in the 1980s and a phenomenon of yellow peril continues to exist regardless of time. Therefore, he advocated the importance of continuously operating critical media analysis of the representation of Asians and Asian Americans.

I will analyze a film that portrays economic and social relationships in 1980s Japan and America, *Gung Ho*. This film was released in 1986 and was directed by one of the famous American film directors, Ron Howard. It stars Michael Keaton and Gedde Watanabe. *Gung Ho* illustrates the takeover of an American car plant by a Japanese automotive company and the conflict and confrontation between Japanese and American automotive workers in 1980s

America. This chapter develops with exploration and cultural comparison of particular scenes and the dialogue as texts with regard to stereotype, gender roles, and American exceptionalism. What are the messages of the film behind those texts? By considering Japanese identity in America, we can acknowledge how this representation of Japanese identity ironically works to affirm American identity. The comparison of two different cultures also allows us to better understand not only Japanese identity but also elucidates American identity.

The story takes place in a fictional town called Hadleyville, Pennsylvania. The local car plant supported a large portion of the local economy as a major employer. However, since the plant closed down for a while, Hunt Stevenson (Michael Keaton) was sent to Japan to convince Assan Motors, a Japanese motor company, to come and reopen the plant. As a result, Assan Motors reopened the plant, with Kazuhiro Takahara (Gedde Watanabe) as plant manager. Hunt was promoted to the position of employee liaison officer to mediate between Kazuhiro and American workers. Although Hunt's job was to encourage American workers to comply with new rules and Japanese style of work, the utterly different environment evoked American employees' resentment and he gradually lost control of his workers. As the plot developed, Hunt and Kazuhiro try to find a way to cooperate with each other regardless of cultural differences.

Stereotypes

There are many scenes that depict a stereotypical image of the Japanese. These depictions indicate the concept of Orientalism and the Model Minority representation of Japanese identity.

Some components of *Gung Ho* contain notions of Orientalism, as evinced in the works of Edward Said, which have been noted earlier in this thesis. The title is originally a Chinese term meaning work together, loyalty, and enthusiasm. However, the film is about the relationship between American and Japanese characters, with no reference to Chinese individuals. For

example, there is a scene at an airport that shows the first Assan Motors workers arriving at Hadleyville. Local residents welcome them by showing cultural appropriation such as kids wearing Judo outfits and kimonos. However, one scene shows people performing a dragon dance, which is one of the Chinese traditional dances. Furthermore, there are scenes that show stereotypical images of Japanese people which are false or exaggerated. In the film, Japanese workers take baths in the river wearing loincloths. Although loincloths were common underwear for Japanese people until World War II, they have gradually disappeared because of the westernization that started during the Meiji period (1868-1912), which included the adoption of Western clothes for Japanese. Moreover, in the scene where Japanese people arrive at the airport, they take off their shoes on the red carpet. Considering that it had been a while since the beginning of the westernization of Japan, I argue that those scenes are false and exaggerated stereotypical representation of the Japanese. What is important about these scenes is they make up an essential part of the comic element in the film. This fact indicates the possibility of the intentional implant of stereotypes in order to criticize the notion of Orientalism. Therefore, the title of this film and particular scenes of false stereotypical representations are perhaps criticizing the Orientalism and stereotypical representations of Asian culture.

While stereotypical images might create a misperception of distinctive identity or culture, there are significant stereotypical representations of Japanese identity, which are applicable to contemporary society shown in this film as well. According to early works in the field of Asian American studies, a common stereotype of Asians and Asian Americans was that of hardworking, dedicated, and efficient people who were described as the “model minority.” Yuka Kawai examined the interconnectedness of the model minority representation and yellow peril. Ono summarized her main argument that “one side of the coin is the model minority stereotype

that sees Asians and Asian Americans as hardworking, dedicated, educationally successful, and the like. On the other side of the coin, Asian Americans are competitive, threatening to take over, and therefore pose a threat to the West as yellow peril” (175). In *Gung Ho*, Kazuhiro often compared Japanese workers to their American counterparts: “I do not understand American workers. They arrive late, they leave early, stay home when they are sick. They put themselves above company.” He added, “In Japan, when production lags, worker stays longer in factory [...] They do not do it for pay. They do it for company.” He also expressed his feelings about the Japanese style of work at the end of the film: “We [Japanese] work too damn hard [...] We are killing ourselves.” The film thus has a Japanese character reproduce stereotypical understandings of both Asian cultures generally, and Japanese culture specifically.

However, this image of hardworking and dedicated Japanese workers is becoming a serious social issue in contemporary Japanese society. In 2015, one of the employees of a major Japanese advertisement company committed suicide because of overworking. Daisuke Kikuchi, a journalist, explained a Japanese term *karoshi*, which is the notion of dying for the company that is “often used to describe the Japanese corporate culture of glorifying those who make the ultimate sacrifice for their company (*The Japan Times*). This idea of sacrificing one’s life for the company is a stereotypical Japanese work identity that commonly exists since the term had been added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2002. This fact shows that while stereotypical representations are exaggerated and reinforce false images of cultures and identities, they can be accurate representations. Additionally, this ideology of “killing themselves for the company” is reminiscent of the patriotic spirit of “serve and die for the country (emperor)” that existed during World War II.

Kazuhiro's dialogue, in referencing both *karoshi* and a stereotype, plays into World War II era representations of the Japanese. However, this usage of both a cultural phenomenon and stereotype recontextualizes the wartime stereotypes for the corporate environment of the 1980s. In the beginning of the film, there is a scene where Kazuhiro and other workers attend a management training program in Assan Motors. They wear ribbons of shame to apologize for their failure to the company. Each ribbon has written on it the particular failure of a worker in Japanese, such as cooperation, strengthening sales, and work performance. They are considered as workers who failed to dedicate their loyalty to the company and are treated harshly until they fully apologize. The way they are "educated" by the company reminds one of the education of patriotism during wartime in Japan. People were punished for not showing enough dedication or patriotic spirit to the country at the time. This portrayal of strong dedication to the company invokes the image of patriotism during wartime.

When Hunt and Kazuhiro get into an argument, Hunt shouts to Kazuhiro, "Oh yeah? If you're so great, how come you lost the big one?" In this dialogue, the object "the big one" refers to the Japanese defeat in World War II. Kazuhiro reacts with anger, and they start fighting each other. The World War II reference is used as a trigger word for them to unleash emotions and physical conflict.

What does it mean to incorporate implications of World War II into the film? Catherine A. Luther suggests that the Japanese representation in U.S. films has changed since World War II: "Although prior to World War II, Japanese people were generally depicted in US films as exotic yet unthreatening, the conflict between the United States and Japan inspired a large number of wartime films featuring the Japanese as the new 'yellow peril'" (134). Therefore, World War II was the time when Japanese became an actual threat in the United States, and the

social condition reflected media representation of Japanese as threatening, particularly in films. The World War II references in *Gung Ho* can be considered crucial in reinforcing particular representations of the Japanese automotive industry as a threat in 1980s America, bringing back wartime yellow peril. Consequently, from considerations of stereotypes of the Japanese, we may interpret that the film offers a complex message to its audience—portraying heterogeneous representations of Japanese culture and identity, but delivering these through homogeneous, Orientalist lens.

Gender Roles

With the depiction of stereotypes of Japanese culture and identity in the film, different perceptions of gender roles in the United States and Japan are delineated. There is a scene where Kazuhiro and his wife, Hunt and Audrey (Hunt's girlfriend), and other Japanese executives and their wives are eating dinner at Kazuhiro's house. After Kazuhiro says, "In a few minutes, right now, we have a little bit business to discuss," all women except Audrey immediately stand up and leave the room without saying anything. Hunt instantly asks Audrey to leave; "Why don't you... you know... leave?" Audrey answers, "Well actually I'm kind of interested in what's going on at the plant. Nobody minds if I stay, right?"

This scene represents the different portrayals of American and Japanese female characters. Japanese women in this scene are portrayed as not be listening to or being involved in a business conversation. In other words, there are gender role stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, and Japanese women are illustrated as submissive. It seems that it is an unspoken rule for women to not participate in men's masculine role—work and earn money for the family. In contrast Audrey, an American woman, is presented as an independent character.

First-wave of feminism appeared in the 19th century. The 1980s is the transitional period from second-wave feminism to third-wave feminism. Although a feminist movement started growing in popularity in Japan especially after World War II, the hegemonic power structure of men as a dominant group over women as minority group remains a cultural practice. For example, there are Japanese terms for “husband” and “wife,” *shujin* and *kanai*. *Shujin* is the term a wife uses to refer to her husband in public. It means “the master/head of the house.” *Kanai* is the term a husband uses to address his wife in public. One of its meanings is “inside of the house.” Both terms emerged and were added to the Japanese dictionary after World War II. Although the feminist movement gradually gained popularity at the time, this emergence of the terms clearly reflects cultural norms of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, Japanese people have consciously or unconsciously practiced this patriarchal system on a daily basis.

From 1990 to 1991, Myra H. Strober and Agnes Milling Kaneko Chan sent surveys to all members of the class of 1981 in Stanford University and Tokyo University (commonly abbreviated as Todai) in order to research gender disparities of the two countries. While Todai may not be the perfect university to compare with Stanford University, which is one of the top universities in the world, they chose Todai for the comparison because of academic prestige and the labor market.

Although both countries have different cultures and social systems, comparing two universities reveals social conditions in terms of gender ideology. The examination of how the married graduates divided household tasks demonstrates the disparity of gender ideology between the two countries.

The survey question was asked to two groups: married graduates with children and full-time-employed married graduates with children. They were asked just one question: “How are

household tasks divided between you and your partner?” They were given five choices: “I do most,” “I do more,” “About equally,” “Partner does more,” and “Partner does all.” The results showed that over 40 percent of Stanford married men and women equally divided their household tasks. In contrast, only 8 percent of men and 13 percent of women at Todai shared tasks. Moreover, 87 percent of Todai women answered that they do all or more tasks, and 90 percent of Todai men responded that their spouses did all or more tasks. It is clear that both Stanford men and women were more likely to share their household tasks than Todai graduates. Furthermore, most men at both universities did not participate in household tasks, which were done by the women.

While there is a common tendency between Stanford and Todai graduates that women were more likely to do all or more household tasks than men in general, this survey leaves us with a better understanding of how people in different cultures have different gender ideology quantitatively. As Strober states, “Japan has not had the kind of vocal feminist movement that exists in the United States”; the feminist movement in Japan was not strong as in the United States (222). Moreover, since Japan was influenced by new ideologies of gender roles from foreign countries such as Britain and the United States, those new waves in terms of gender developed much later than those countries (223).

Contrary to the criticism of human traits such as gender ideology, the film presents Japanese technology as superior to America. For example, a conference room scene at the beginning of the film shows the contrast between Japanese technology and interpersonal discourse. Hunt visits Japan to give his presentation to executives of Assan Motors. He brings a screen for the presentation and asks “Where do I put the screen?”, the wall opens and the screen appears inside it. Again, when he says before the presentation starts, “Where are the lights?” the

lights turn off, and after the presentation, he says, “Can you turn the lights on?” and the lights come on. All these actions ran automatically with a programmed voice announcement of “Opening,” “Turning off,” and “Turning on.” While the scene demonstrates sophisticated Japanese technology, the Japanese executives are portrayed as emotionless characters. They do not smile and respond, even though Hunt makes jokes and puts the picture of his girlfriend in a slide show. This calls to the stereotype of Japanese as hardworking, prioritizing business over family values.

Therefore, the film elucidates Japanese advanced technology such as the superior quality of Japanese cars and automated systems; and criticizes its lack of humanity represented by the inferiority of progress in gender ideology. This lack of humanity also leads to the notion of the Japanese as a threat, that Japanese people sacrifice or kill themselves for work.

American Exceptionalism

By focusing on the aspect of the Japanese automotive industry as a threat in 1980s America, it enables us to refine some significant characteristics of American identity in the process of the comparison. The film depicts American identity from the notion of American exceptionalism. By analyzing the film’s dialogue and comic motifs, we may also consider the concept as a critique of American identity.

According to Donald E. Pease, “American exceptionalism was thus an academic discourse, a political doctrine, and a regulatory ideal assigned responsibility for defining, supporting, and developing the U.S. national identity” (109). American exceptionalism is a crucial backbone of national identity. In his article, Pease stated that historical changes such as World War II and the Cold War had huge impacts on American society. From the political aspect, he introduced the example of George W. Bush, a former president of the United States.

His actions against Islamic terrorism were an attempt to assert U.S. superiority over other nation-states. While Pease also insisted that movements of racial, ethnic and gender minorities are important to consider American exceptionalism, the film being researched particularizes Japanese identity and culture to define American exceptionalism and identity.

In the first labor union meeting scene of the film, Hunt tells everyone, “We just gotta know how to play ’em. Let ’em make some shots. Then we make our move ... I can take ’em.” In this dialogue, “them” indicates the Japanese. He makes a reference to his basketball game back in high school and how he won the game. This story is used as a metaphor to express how Americans will win over the Japanese. Workers respond to his speech with excitement and confidence. This scene shows the principal idea of American exceptionalism.

There are some dialogues that capture one of the characteristics of American nationality. Hunt says to Kazuhiro, “You’re in America now, and Americans really like to feel special.” Later in the film, Kazuhiro expresses his feeling to Hunt that “It’s true. Everybody here [in America] thinks they are special. Nobody works for the team. They’re too busy getting personalized license plates.” These two lines explicitly illuminate American individualism and exceptionalism ideologies which are supported by fundamental characteristics that Americans are unique and better. Hunt also refers to the notion of American exceptionalism as “the great American do-or-die spirit.” This ideology homogenizes the American way of thinking that “America is great,” which reinforces American nationality.

With the construction of American exceptionalism as American identity, the film offers critiques of the concept. When Hunt tries to leave the town, he attempts to open his car door but the doorknob comes off. He spits a curse at his American car: “Defects.” This scene was used as comic, to make fun of the quality of American cars that have many defects unlike Japanese cars.

In the last half of the film, Hunt gives a speech for people in town about the truth, “You don’t want the truth. You want to hear that Americans are better than anybody else. They’re kicking our butts. That ain’t luck [...] we’re strutting around telling ourselves how great we are,” stating that Japanese quality and efficiency of work is much higher than what Americans had expected, and the concept of American exceptionalism may be a myth. Since it is a backbone of national identity, there is a fear of admitting that it is a myth. This leads to a threat of recognizing Japanese automotive industry as a superior object for Americans.

Conclusion

The film advances the theme of Japanese economics and ideology as a threat to American exceptionalism, via representations of stereotypes and gender roles. Many of the representations in different discourses are well portrayed, and are applicable to social issues in contemporary society. For instance, *karoshi*—death from overwork—largely became an issue after the 2010s. *Karoshi* has contributed to high suicide rates of Japan. Subsequently, in 2014, the Japanese government legislated the “Death from overwork prevention countermeasure promotion law.” Moreover, the lack of awareness for gender issues has been controversial. While it is getting more attention today, there has been little discussion of gender issues in Japan. For example, same-sex marriage is still illegal in the Japanese legal system. In a recent case, Osaka city has officially recognized a same-sex couple as foster parents for the first time in history, in April 2017 (Kyodo). Although there has been some progress in efforts to legalize same-sex marriage such as in this case, there is still no legal support and the gay couple is not allowed to getting married. In contrast, same-sex marriage became a legal right in the United States in 2015. Therefore, Japan lags behind in discussing or making progress on certain social issues related to gender; signifying the lack of awareness and attention to understanding gender in general.

Although the film well delivers Japanese identity and culture to some extent, it was censored in the theater and was sold only in the form of DVDs in Japan. The presumable reasons why the film was censored are misrepresentations of the identity in terms of Orientalism and depictions of unnecessary World War II references. Japanese people might misunderstand the content of the film and perhaps take offence. While it might be a fact that the film was censored because of its negative portrayal of the Japanese, one of the most important messages of the film is a criticism of American society. Since this film was released as an American comedy, it criticizes the vulnerability of an American society taken over by Japanese industry, and the myth of American exceptionalism.

There are some other criticisms of the film that can be made: the persona of Kazuhiro and the ending. The personality of Kazuhiro is very Americanized. Toward the end of the film, there are many scenes where Kazuhiro claims that he has an American way of thinking. With his American ideas, Kazuhiro faces resistance from his company, which embodies Japanese ideology. At the end of the film, American and Japanese workers try to work together to achieve the quota of making 15,000 cars a month. However, lacking the requisite time to complete their work, they contrive to meet the numbers by the compromise of allowing defects, such as building a car without an engine, windows, and other small parts. Eventually, although the CEO of Assan Motors finds out that there too many defects in the vehicles, he counts those cars with defects among the target number and recognizes their work as successfully executed. While the film has a happy ending, this is arrived at only because the Japanese learn American ideas of work and compromised on Japanese ideology. Therefore, the film seems more about the Japanese adapting to American ways than about mutual compromise and understanding of different cultures in the intercultural setting.

Ultimately, *Gung Ho* is a crucial resource to analyze media representations of Japaneseness in 1980s America, because the film covers some critical representations of Japan that are relatable and becoming serious social issues in contemporary Japanese society. Moreover, these representations are established in the film from an American perspective.

CHAPTER IV. CASE STUDY: *GHOST IN THE SHELL*

As Chapter III examined the underlying theory and concepts that construct stereotypes and misrepresentations of Japanese identity and culture presented in a 1980s American film, this chapter focuses on the recent controversy on whitewashing of Asian and Asian American identity, and “oriental” media representations in American popular culture. The chapter analyzes Hollywood’s adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* as a text to describe how existing theories and ideology continue to underpin problematic racial and cultural representations in the American film. Specifically, this case study unpacks the casting choice of the lead character and landscape designs of the film. Moreover, this chapter compares audience receptions in the United States and Japan. While *Ghost in the Shell* is a film based on Japanese animation, the whitewashing controversy in Japan appears not as popular as in the United States. With elucidating the controversy and the gap between American and Japanese audiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of cultural traits and media influence on contemporary societies.

Similar to the analysis of *Gung Ho* in Chapter III, the concept of Orientalism plays a significant role in this chapter too, in order to examine racial hierarchy and its relationship with whiteness ideology. Moreover, existing notions such as yellowface (introduced in Chapters I and II) which has appeared since early cinema is also distinguished in *Ghost in the Shell* in relation to the whitewashing controversy.

Description of the Film

Ghost in the Shell is a 2017 American film directed by Rupert Sanders, starring Scarlett Johansson as the main character Major Mira Killian, also known as Motoko Kusanagi; “Beat” Takeshi Kitano as Chief Daisuke Aramaki; Michael Carmen Pitt as Kuze, also known as Hideo; Pilou Asbæk as Batou; and Chin Han as Togusa. The film was nominated for both Outstanding

Color Grading and Outstanding Visual Effects by the Hollywood Professional Association. The film generated much publicity because it is the live-action film of a popular Japanese *manga*¹⁴, *Ghost in the Shell* (攻殻機動隊 *Mobile Armored Riot Police*¹⁵) by Masamune Shirow. As the original film is recognized as classic Japanimation¹⁶, it is known as one of the Japanese animations with an audience, base stretching from Japan to the rest of the world. The film grossed \$169.8 million at the box office, and was made with a budget of \$110 million. Although it was not highly successful at the box office, the film was successful on home video sales¹⁷.

The original *manga* is famous for Shirow's unique approach to the theme of finding meanings of humanity, portraying complexed dynamics between humans and technology. For example, he confronted relationships among humans, cyborgs, and networks. His distinctive worldview of inquiry into humanity, particularly his work in *Ghost in the Shell*, is influenced by the book titled *The Ghost in the Machine* by German philosopher Arthur Koestler. In the book, "Ghost" is not used as the literal English definition of specter or phantom; it is applied as the philosophical ideology coming from the German term "Geist." For instance, Georg Wilhelm

¹⁴ *Manga* (漫画) is a Japanese term for a comic book genre that is similar to American comic books. There are numerous subgenres for *manga* sorted by targeted age and gender of the audience. For instance, *shojo manga* (少女漫画) intended for teenage girls in K-12; *shonen manga* (少年漫画) for teenage boys in K-12; *seinen manga* (青年漫画) for men in their 20s and 30s; and *josei manga* (女性漫画) for adult women. *Shonen* and *seinen manga* are equivalent to American superhero comics.

¹⁵ *Ghost in the Shell* is a science fiction comic book under a subgenre of *seinen manga*. The Japanese animated film, *Ghost in the Shell* / 攻殻機動隊 was released in 1995, directed by Mamoru Oshii. The film ranked number one on the Billboard's top releases in the summer of 1996. The sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (攻殻機動隊 イノセンス *Mobile Armored Riot Police: Innocence*) is also directed by Oshii and became the first Japanese animated film to be in competition at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival.

¹⁶ It is the combined term of "Japanese" and "animation" and refers to Japanese animation.

¹⁷ Recorded the second highest sales on NPD videoscans' national home video (DVD and Blu-ray) sales charts in the United States (Arnold).

Friedrich Hegel published the book *The Phenomenology of Spirit*¹⁸ (*Phänomenologie des Geistes* in German), which is a scholarly research into phenomena based on the workings of the human mind, the humanities. “Geist” is an inclusive term that can be translated into several different meanings such as spirit, ghost, and mind. Therefore, by thinking rationally of the use of the term, we can comprehend that Koestler employs “Ghost” as an inclusive philosophical term in his book. As Shirow was inspired by Koestler’s work (*Young Magazine*, p. 9), Shirow also applies the term “Ghost” as spirit or mind.

The story takes place in a near future technological city (the specific location is not expressed in the film) where people begin to augment their abilities with cybernetic innovations such as networking, vision, intelligence, and strength. With the advent of technology, cyber terrorism and internet crime are serious concerns. Mira Killian (Scarlett Johansson) is the only one who survives a cyber-terrorist attack in which her parents are killed. A leading technology corporation Hanka Robotics operates a secret anti-terrorism project to create a counter-terrorism force. Since Killian’s body is injured beyond repair except for her brain, Hanka Robotics decides to use her as a counter-terrorism force by creating her cyborg body. After a while, she becomes a Major in the anti-terrorist bureau Section 9, working with Batou (Pilou Asbæk) and Togusa (Chin Han) under the command of a Chief Daisuke Aramaki (“Beat” Takeshi Kitano). In discharging her duties, she comes to know Kuze (Carmen Pitt) who is another experiment of Hanka Robotics’ project. In sinteraction with Kuze, she gradually discovers that her memory is controlled and implanted by Hanka Robotics. Eventually, the Section 9 realize that they are deceived by Hanka Robotics. The story demonstrates the question of the “what is humanity?”

¹⁸ It is also known as *The Phenomenology of Mind*.

underlining theme from the original *manga*, but also focuses more on Killian's journey of finding her true identity (*Ghost*) as Motoko Kusanagi, inside of her cyborg body (*Shell*).

Controversy Over the Film

The film caused controversy even before its release, particularly when the casting decision was announced. As the film is based on Japanese *manga* and many characters are supposed to be Japanese, casting non-Japanese (even non-Asian) actors play these roles drew attention from not only fans of the original but also people around the world. The casting of Scarlett Johansson as the heroine, Motoko Kusanagi, received the biggest reaction from the audience. Eliza Berman noted, "Soon after Johansson's casting was confirmed in January 2015, fans launched a petition for the role to be recast: 'The original film is set in Japan, and the major cast members are Japanese. So why would the American remake star a white actress?'" (*Time*). Many people questioned the authenticity of the film in terms of characters' racial identities. Berman also wrote about the reactions of the film's producer Steven Paul and director of the original animation film, Mamoru Oshii. In an interview with *Buzzfeed*, Paul said, "There [are] all sorts of people and nationalities in the world in *Ghost in the Shell* ... I don't think it was just a Japanese story. *Ghost in the Shell* was a very international story, and it wasn't just focused on Japanese; it was supposed to be an entire world" (*Time*).

Although I do not agree entirely with his perspective because the original *manga* takes place specifically in Tokyo and the story is directly connected to Japanese people and culture, I argue that Hollywood's *Ghost in the Shell* portrayed an international story in terms of its plot and settings. For example, Mira Killian is called Major in most of the scenes until she finds out her past identity of Motoko Kusanagi, which happens towards the end of the film. In this case, her body representation has little to do with her "Ghost" identity. Eliza Berman introduced Oshii's

comment, that “The Major is a cyborg and her physical form is an assumed one. The name ‘Motoko Kusanagi’ and her current body are not her original name and body, so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her” (Berman). Thus, her “Shell” is a cyborg, which makes it difficult for the audience to distinguish her racial identity from her physical appearance and concealed true identity. This controversy is based on the notions of yellowface and whitewashing that have been continuously practiced from the early age of American cinema.

Whitewashing

The discussion of whitewashing of Asian identity is fundamentally rooted in the history of yellowface and the ideology of whiteness. As I noted in Chapter II, stereotypes of Asian identity have been strategically constructed by the American film productions from the early cinema such as Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Whiteness ideology overlaps with the notion of Orientalism. The principle ideology of Orientalism is the power relationship between the West as dominant and the East as submissive. Clyde Taylor describes that there are aesthetics and apotheosis of the Caucasian perfection in the field of American cinema which “the aesthetic operates simultaneously and harmoniously with a kindred ideology, that of western racial superiority” (35). Therefore, whitewashing is an expression of whiteness ideology that creates hierarchies of racial identity. In recent times, whitewashing controversy occurred in *Doctor Strange* (2016) and *Death Note* (2017).

Doctor Strange is based on a superhero comic from Marvel. It is the story of Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), a genius neurosurgeon with a vicious personality who becomes a superhero. In the original comics, Strange’s mentor Ancient One is a Tibetan man. However, the role is played by a Caucasian woman, Tilda Swinton in the film. While the opposition to the casting emerged soon after the casting choice was confirmed, director Scott Derrickson defended

his decision of casting Swinton as Ancient One at a London press conference: “The Ancient One and Wong [a monk living in the fictional place Kamar-Taj] in the comics were 1960s Western stereotypes perpetuating the old Fu Manchu¹⁹ mentor to the white hero and Wong was the kung-fu manservant” (Kyriazis). He added, “My first thought was to make the Ancient One a woman and middle-aged ... but then it felt like it was falling into the Dragon Lady stereotype²⁰—the domineering mystical woman with a secret agenda” (Kyriazis).

From his defense, we see that it was a choice to avoid invoking Asian stereotypes such as Fu Manchu and Dragon Lady. Moreover, one of the writers C. Robert Cargill expressed in an interview, “There is no other character in Marvel history that is such a cultural landmine that is absolutely unwinnable ... every single decision that involves Ancient One is a bad one and like Kobayashi Maru, it all comes down onto which way you are willing to lose” (Double Toasted). Later, he explained that casting a Tibetan man as Ancient One risked displeasing one billion people because of the character’s highly stereotypical representation in the original comics for political reasons. He concluded, “You’ve got a lot of problems with any other Asian race, any other ethnicity of the race so what Scott [director] just decided to do is let’s go with an actor who everyone loves and let’s make one of the most powerful characters in the Marvel Universe” (Double Toasted). Although his comments on the director’s casting decision considered American audiences as the main market and his efforts to make a film without offensive elements, the fact that the director chose a popular Caucasian actor demonstrates that he

¹⁹ A fictitious villain character from a series of novels by British author Sax Rohmer. Fu Manchu first appeared on screen in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s adaptation of *The Mask of Fu Manchu* in 1932 as well as in the re-release of *The Mask of Fu Manchu* in 1972. This representation established stereotypes of an Asian character as a villain with certain visual cues.

²⁰ A stereotype of Asian woman as strong and mysterious. These characteristics emerged from the influence of Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American actress to become popular in Hollywood.

privileged economic and social superiority over racial identity. The director's decision shows how whiteness ideology in Hollywood mandates that a Caucasian actor is a "better" choice because of the economic advantage and political convenience.

In addition to the racial superiority in whiteness ideology and Orientalism, Cargill showed his "oriental" perception of race in the interview. He referred to Michelle Yeoh as a Chinese actor, though she is Chinese-Malaysian and is well known as a Malaysian actress. Although she gained popularity in Hong Kong films, recognizing her as a Chinese actress ignores her Malaysian identity. By considering Cargill's understanding of her racial identity, we can conclude that perhaps there is a lack of awareness and that the casting decision was not done after thorough research by the filmmakers.

Netflix released the American adaptation of Japanese *manga* series, *Death Note* in 2017. While it is not a Hollywood film production per se, Netflix is becoming one of the most dominant and influential sources for online media content. Similar to the discussion of *Doctor Strange*'s whitewashing controversy, this film antagonized many audience members with its casting choice. Unlike *Doctor Strange*, the whole cast comprised non-Asian actors despite the Japanese contexts. Since the original story had rich cultural traits such as the concept of "Death God", a large portion of cultural significance is disregarded in the process of adaptation (translation and casting). Hanh Nguyen claimed economic advantages from the casting and cited the otherness of Asian Americans in the United States, "Of course, whitewashing doesn't continue to happen just because of money, although that's a huge part of it. No one wants to be considered racist, but there's an implicit bias to not think of Asian Americans as Americans at

all. Our faces read as foreign” (Ehrlich). In spite of the effort to adapt Japanese *manga* to the American context, the film was not well received by the audience.²¹

Therefore, the recent whitewashing controversy is inspired by the film’s history of yellowface and whiteness aesthetics that have been constructed by film productions. Due to the continuous emergence of whitewashing issues, people are becoming more sensitive and exposed to different racial identities and representations today. It is Hollywood’s duty to perceive racial identity and frame these in their onscreen representations. While C. Robert Cargill rationalized casting choices by stating that they were trying to be less offensive in their racial representations, choosing a Caucasian actor might not be the best solution anymore in contemporary society.

Previous Research on Anime and Representation

Regarding the discussion of live-action adaptation and remakes of Japanese *manga* or animation, it is important to explore visual features of the original text. While whitewashing issues have been controversial in terms of authenticity of the original representation, it is often stated that many Japanese characters from anime and *manga* have Western-oriented (at least non-Japanese) body features. One of the most obvious examples is *Sailor Moon* (美少女戦士セーラームーン *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*). The main character, Tsukino Usagi (known as Sailor Moon) has long blond hair, blue eyes, and “white” skin. Mamoru Oshii, the director of the original *Ghost in the Shell* explained that the reason for non-Japanese depictions in anime is the result of an effort by modern Japanese to “evade the fact that they are Japanese,” (Napier 25) quoting the provocative statement “the Japanese hate their own faces” (Napier 25) of a popular

²¹ An American review aggregation website for film and television, Rotten Tomatoes announced that the film earned 41% rating. Another review aggregation website, Metacritic revealed the film earned 43 out of 100 points.

Japanese film director, Hayao Miyazaki. Moreover, Susan J. Napier argued that Japanese anime is “stateless” (24). While Japanese anime is perhaps an exotic Japanese export to the West, it does not directly embody Japanese culture and anime characters with non-Japanese features is consistent with this. Napier suggested that the most fundamental reason for animation’s popularity in Japan “is not just economic constraints and aesthetic traditions but the very flexibility, creativity, and freedom in the medium itself, a site of resistance to the conformity of Japanese society” (26). Considering Japanese anime’s “statelessness” and its aesthetics, this hypothesis is persuasive. She continued her hypothesis on the global scale, “It is not just Japanese audiences who search for more varied forms of electronic entertainment, who long for an ‘anywhere,’ or who are tired of their own faces” (26). She stated that her hypothesis is applicable to the audience outside of Japan; however, it is debatable whether this argument can be extended to the American audience after the release of the live-action adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell*.²²

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, most of the cast in *Ghost in the Shell* is played by non-Japanese actors including the lead, which is played by a famous Caucasian female, Scarlett Johansson. Hollywood’s *Ghost in the Shell* reinforces the aesthetics of a Western face to its audience. Napier also argued that “the anime medium—precisely because it so often highlights characters and settings that are neither clearly Western nor clearly Japanese—offers a space for identity exploration in which the audience can revel in a safe form of Otherness unmatched by any other contemporary medium” (27). However, as *Ghost in the Shell* was released in Hollywood and played by mostly non-Japanese actors, *Mukokuseki*²³ and

²² The article was written before the release.

²³ A Japanese term for a person who does not hold his/her nationality. It may be translated to stateless or statelessness in English.

“statelessness” aspects of representation will no longer apply to the film since it primarily strengthens the aesthetics of Western cultural representation.

Response from Japanese Audiences

Along with the discussion of non-Japanese depictions in Japanese anime and Western aesthetics, there is a major reaction gap between the American and the Japanese audiences. As I introduced in the YouTube video by Yuta Aoki in Chapter I, many Japanese interviewees had positive comments about the film. This suggests cultural differences and gaps between how Japanese and American audiences think of the controversy on the casting and whitewashing.

First, Yuta asked a general question about the casting of Scarlett Johansson: “What do you think of casting Scarlett Johansson as Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*?” Several interviewees answered: “[Scarlett Johansson is] Beautiful” (That Japanese Man Yuta). Some of the interviewees responded positively to her visual representation, “I think this is better than hiring a Japanese actress [...] it will look more anime-ish if actors aren’t Japanese” (That Japanese Man Yuta) and “She looks like the character, so, it’s not a bad choice” (That Japanese Man Yuta). Second, he introduced the controversy: “The casting is actually criticized a lot in the United States. What do you think is the reason?” None of the interviewees felt racial identity was an issue. Some of them had no idea why there was criticism in the United States. Third, after explaining “Many people criticize it because she is a white actress playing a supposedly Japanese (Asian) role and Hollywood regularly marginalize minority actors,” he asked: “What do you think of this criticism?” Although some answered that the actress does not need to be Japanese or whoever has the skills to act can play the role, there were responses such as, “A Japanese actress should play the role [of Motoko Kusanagi]” (That Japanese Man Yuta) and “A Japanese actress would be more appropriate for the Asian role” (That Japanese Man Yuta).

In addition to the inquiry about *Ghost in the Shell*, he mentioned the casting of white actors in *Death Note*'s Hollywood adaptation. One of the interviewees answered, "Because we've already seen the Japanese live-action adaptation [of the anime], we think the character should be played by a Japanese actor. If we hadn't seen the Japanese one, we wouldn't have thought that the actor should be Japanese" (That Japanese Man Yuta). Another interviewee indicated the economic influence of Hollywood as a reason that "it will be more profitable with a white actor for the lead role. It cannot be helped because it's Hollywood" (That Japanese Man Yuta).

Moreover, he asked their opinions on why some Japanese anime characters have blond hair with blue eyes (Western-oriented features) even though the story takes place in Japan. Many interviewees responded this was because the Japanese artists are "fascinated" by white people and Western features. Also, some people regarded anime as an imaginary world that should be separated from reality. As Reiji Kobayashi argued, "This portrait [of Western-oriented visual feature] is a condensation of the dreams Japanese have held toward Western culture since the end of World War II" (63). Japanese culture and identity have been strongly influenced by Western culture. This fascination toward Western culture perhaps set the model values and expectations for Japanese people. Therefore, by considering the whiteness ideology of Caucasian perfection, we find that the ideology is also subconsciously practiced by Japanese people.

While the video clip shows responses from only seven interviewees, it got 639,772 views with 10,000 likes and 540 dislikes (which is not a horrible review), and 9,335 comments. The interview highlights a cultural gap between Japanese and American people in terms of race. Since Japan is a country that is historically racially homogeneous, it is natural that Japanese

people are not as sensitive as American people to the discussion of the race; the United States, on the other hand, consists of various immigration histories.

In addition, Eliza Berman noted *The Hollywood Reporter's* interview with members of the Japanese movie industry and Japanese fans of the original *manga* and animated adaptation:

Many applauded Johansson as the right choice for the role based on her suitability for the movie's cyberpunk vibe. Others expressed resignation that a white movie star seems to be a prerequisite for getting a Japanese property successfully distributed to an international audience. Some were disappointed, but not as much as with past instances of substituting one ethnic identity for another, as with the casting of Zhang Ziyi, a Chinese actress, as a Japanese character in the 2005 drama *Memoirs of a Geisha*. (Berman)

Since the film did not clarify Major's true (original) identity as a Japanese and she is a cyborg, the controversy of whitewashing was not as intense as the one in *Memoirs of a Geisha* where a Chinese actress plays a core Japanese role. Although some audience members were not happy about the casting decision of *Ghost in the Shell*, we can argue that perhaps the film was less criticized in Japan than in the United States based on these interview responses.

Perception Gaps of Race and Sexuality in the United States and Japan

Japanese responses to *Ghost in the Shell* and *Death Note* indicate some apertures of viewpoints between the United States and Japan in terms of characters' racial identities. Going further on this perception gap, it not only exists in discussions of race but can also be seen in discussions of sexually and gender identity. The degree of recognition of gender and sexuality is another technique for exploring international and intercultural awareness in Japan.

While it is getting more attention today, few discussions are held on gender issues in Japan. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter III, same-sex marriage is still illegal in the Japan. Although Osaka city officially recognized a same-sex couple as foster parents for the first time in April 2017 (Kyodo), there is still no legal support and the gay couple is not allowed to get married. In a contrasting situation, same-sex marriage became a legal right in the United States in 2015.

This difference in cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality may be seen by examining how lesbian characters are portrayed in *Sailor Moon* and *Batwoman*. The two are popular superheroine comics in both countries. In *Sailor Moon*, Haruka Tenou and Michiru Kaiou are lesbian lovers. However, Haruka wears a school-boy uniform with short hair and is illustrated as a boyish girl. While it is not directly stated that they are lesbian, and there are no instances of a physical relationship other than kissing, the audience might misunderstand that they are in a heterosexual relationship by seeing their visual cues. The way of illustrating the relationship obscures their sexual orientations. However, their sexualities are made clear when they undergo sexualized transformations into their Sailor forms. In contrast, *Batwoman* appears in DC comics as a lesbian character. On the last page of *Batwoman #17 (2013)*, Batwoman proposes to her girlfriend, Maggie Sawyer, and the volume concludes with the line, “Marry me, Mags.” Although both comic and *manga* establish the same kind of relationship the ways they represent the relationships are different. Therefore, the fact that Japan lags behind in talking about and making progress on social issues in terms of gender, signifies a lack of awareness and attention to understanding gender in general.

Creating an Exotic and Futuristic Asian Landscape

Although the film does not clearly express where the story is located, there are many Asian-looking landscapes which underline “exotic and futuristic” impressions of Asian culture. They constantly appear onscreen in films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). Wong Kin Yuen explored the representations of space in *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell* (the original animated film in 1995) and concluded that both films are mainly inspired by Hong Kong’s cityscapes. She also argued that there are Chinese and Japanese cultural depictions portrayed in the films. One of the most significant findings of her research is that this “exotic and futuristic” Asian landscape is persistently employed in cyberpunk films: *Akira*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, *Hackers*, *Lawnmower Man 2*, and *Strange Days*, and also in other media forms, viz., cyberpunk novels such as William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* and *Idoru*, and Neal Stephenson’s *Snow Crash*. To build on her arguments about these films and novels, this chapter introduces more recent film examples such as *Big Hero 6* and Hollywood’s *Ghost in the Shell* since Yuen’s article was published in 2000.

With the release of Disney’s *Tron* and Gibson’s *Neuromancer* trilogy established cyberpunk as a subgenre in science fiction. As most of the notable works mentioned above were created in the 1980s and 1990s, cyberpunk ideology and movements emerged and flourished in this period. Cyberpunk is a subgenre that tries to illustrate a futuristic, highly technological world, and challenge humanity. Such futuristic high-tech representation is perhaps inspired by Japanese culture because *Neuromancer* takes place in Chiba where is an actual city in Japan. By observing the time period and setting of *Neuromancer*, we can locate the interrelation between the emergence of the subgenre and social configuration of Japanese technological influence in the United States presented in *Gung Ho* (discussed in Chapter III). While *Gung Ho* is not in the cyberpunk genre, it demonstrates the reality of fear in the United States toward Japanese

industrial innovations, superiority in automotive industry, and technological strength that was prevalent in the 1980s. This correlation helps to explain why cyberpunk emerged in response to the antisocial phenomena against Japanese technological innovations and invasions in the United States.

The story of *Blade Runner* is set in Los Angeles of 2019. As Yuen explained, although cultural references are indirect, the film “creates a futuristic noir atmosphere by heavily borrowing from Asian motifs, albeit vague and general ones, in its design of city icons and social spaces” (4). Distinguishing Asian features, particularly cultural depictions from Japan and Hong Kong appear in the film such as a Japanese food stall²⁴ and a large media screen of the geisha advertisement. At the same time, both Japanese and Chinese characters are utilized for signs in the cityscape. Yuen analyzed the postmodern architectural landscape of cities such as Hong Kong, Times Square and Tokyo by closely examining pictures of actual places. She expressed this postmodern architectural representation as “the sleazy cinematography [that] results in a hybrid and fractal combination of ‘Hong Kong, New York, [and] Tokyo’s Ginza district’” (4). It is not just a hybrid of geographical components, but also an integration of retro and postmodern layers: the large media screen vs. “traditional” geisha representation and modern skyscrapers vs. old and squalid districts.

Mamoru Oshii, director of the original *Ghost in the Shell* commented in an Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) interview about his production team’s intention in making the film: “There was one thing that production staff was saying which was we don’t wanna make it exactly the same as *Blade Runner* [...] But ultimately, it turns out that it’s raining in town and

²⁴ The film does not directly indicate that it is a Japanese food stall. However, a worker speaks Japanese and wears Japanese clothes.

there is a whole bunch of Asian people in town [that are reminiscent of *Blade Runner*]" (TIFF). Although it was unavoidable for *Ghost in the Shell* to be reminiscent of *Blade Runner* because the original *manga* itself is set in Tokyo and has many similar characteristics such as “the busy streets, the futuristic shopping arcades, the neon-lit billboards, the garbage, the drunkards” (6), Asian-oriented landscape is often applied to demonstrate the world of cyberpunk and exotic fantasy in media representation.

Hideo Kojima argued that Hollywood’s adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* was a pleasant surprise in that it was “extremely” successful in faithfully recreating scenes and visuals from the anime (Kojima). As Kojima noted, some scenes evidently demonstrate Hollywood’s efforts in respecting and reproducing the value of original contexts. Moreover, by comparing the picture of a million-dollar view of Hong Kong and shots from the anime and live-action *Ghost in the Shell*, we can easily understand how deeply *Ghost in the Shell* is inspired by Hong Kong and faithfully recreated in Hollywood. As with the case of cyberpunk representation in *Blade Runner* and both *Ghost in the Shell* films, modernistic and retro architectures and cultural components are included simultaneously and intermingle on the big screen.

The hybridity of landscape representation can also be seen in the recent Disney film *Big Hero 6*. As I mentioned in Chapter II, the story takes place in a fictional city called “San Fransokyo.” This name is a combination of two cities, San Francisco and Tokyo. While the film tried to integrate different cultural representations with steep slopes and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and houses with traditional Japanese architectural features, the latter features are difficult to identify because many architectural characteristics overlap with those of Buddhist architecture which resembles the streetscape of a Chinatown. Moreover, the original comic is set in Tokyo; however, San Fransokyo is geographically based on the landscape of San Francisco.

Thus, this suggests that the film is leaning towards the American audience. One of the directors of the film, Don Hall, stated, “San Francisco is the home of Silicon Valley, it’s the hub of technology, and Tokyo is like that, too” (Walker). This statement ties to cyberpunk ideology that strongly draws on the idea of Tokyo as the place of technological innovation. Therefore, along with the case of landscape representations in *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*, these hybrid portrayals obscure distinctive cultural contexts and perhaps lead the audience to “exoticize” these “Asian” features.

Conclusion

This chapter primarily examined Hollywood’s adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) with the ultimate aim of examining representations of Japanese identity and racial controversy in casting choices. It explored ideologies that are present in Hollywood films, such as yellowface and Orientalism, in order to analyze problematic racial and cultural representations of the Japanese in the film. Futuristic and exotic landscapes of the film are one of the perceptible examples of such “oriental” representations. While the casting choices of Tilda Swinton as Ancient One in *Doctor Strange* and Scarlett Johansson as Motoko Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* demonstrate the racial hierarchy and strategic process of eliminating potentially offensive material or stereotypical representations, this chapter begs the question of the necessity of actual representations of cultural traits in films: To what extent should actual representations of cultural traits be included or accurately presented in films, or is this not a necessary feature of representation in visual media? For example, *Ghost in the Shell* is based on Japanese *manga* which is already influenced by Western culture. Therefore, the discussion on media representations of racial identity is becoming more complex than ever before. However, it is important to recognize the current conditions of racial representations.

Moreover, this chapter also compared audience receptions in the United States and Japan. While *Ghost in the Shell* is a film based on Japanese animation, the controversy of whitewashing in casting has garnered far less attention in Japan than in the United States. This gap explains the significance of acknowledging cultural differences at the international level.

Ultimately, acknowledging cultural differences and similarities of media representations presented in *Gung Ho* (Chapter III) and *Ghost in the Shell* helps illustrate the continuous research on media representations of Japanese identity and culture. Although *Gung Ho* and *Ghost in the Shell* are categorized as different genre (one is a comedy, the other is a science fiction) set in disparate time periods, they have similar racial representations that may present stereotypes or problematic portrayals. By examining the nuances of the controversy and gaps between American and Japanese audiences, we may obtain a deeper understanding of cultural contexts and the power of media in the formation of cultural identity.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

In the winter of 2018, the Winter Olympics were held in February in Pyeongchang Country, Gangwon Province, South Korea. The Olympics is a major international sporting event held in four-year cycles, with the Summer and Winter Games alternating by two years. In the Summer Games 200 nations participate while nearly 100 nations compete in the Winter Games, with thousands of athletes participating as representatives of their countries (206 nations in Rio Olympics 2016, and over 92 nations, plus Olympic Athletes from Russia, in Pyeongchang²⁵). Due to its global nature, the Olympics supports the construct of national identities. However, the Asian American identity is still striving for recognition as “American” in the United States even though Asian American athletes represent the nation on the prestigious world stage. *The New York Times* writer Bari Weiss recently retweeted a video clip of figure skater Mirai Nagasu landing a triple axel in the competition with the caption “Immigrants: They get the job done.” For the figure skating events in this Olympics, one half of Team USA’s figure skaters (seven out of 14 athletes²⁶) were Asian Americans, which is the highest number in US Figure Skating history (Park). Although Weiss deleted the tweet and replaced it her defense a few days later, calling Asian American athletes “immigrants” became controversy for making the athletes “others” on Twitter.

Nagasu is a first-generation American who was born and raised in California. With the understanding of Weiss’s intention that “First-generation Americans like Nagasu retain a unique blend of their parents’ culture and American upbringing” by making a pun on the musical

²⁵ A data from the Olympics Nocs List (<https://www.olympic.org/pyeongchang-2018/results/en/general/nocs-list.htm>).

²⁶ Karen Chen, Nathan Chen, Madison Chock, Mirai Nagasu, Maria and Alex Shibutani, and Vincent Zhou. Three of seven (Mirai Nagasu and Maria and Alex Shibutani) are Japanese Americans.

Hamilton's piece "Immigrants (We Get the Job Done)," Janice Lee criticized, "Yet the outrage can be traced to something more formidable than a misunderstanding" (Lee). In fact, Weiss's comment outweighed her intentions. Lee argued:

Despite how Asian-American representation in this year's Olympics was achieved through merit rather than a conscious effort for diversity, it still provides a powerful avenue for changing the landscape of how Americans perceive Asian people. So far, the lack of Asian-American representation in media has perpetuated the harmful mentality that Asian people are inherently foreign and therefore, un-American. (Lee)

In Chapter II, I discussed the otherness of Asian American identity in the United States through early cinema; the construction of stereotypes and lack of Asian and Asian American representation in media prolongs problematic perceptions of identity.

In the case of figure skating, the otherness of Asian American identity has a long history in the United States. In Nagano Olympics 1998, news website *MSNBC* announced Tara Lipinski's gold medal win over Asian American skater Michelle Kwan with the headline: "American Beats Out Kwan." Four years later in Salt Lake City for 2002 Olympics, *The Seattle Times* posted the news about Sarah Hughes's gold medal with the sub-headline: "American outshines Kwan, Slutskaya in skating surprise." These headlines literally demonstrated that they do not consider Michelle Kwan as American, instead reinforce Kwan's otherness in the United States. Despite the fact that the Olympics is an international event which presents the constant opportunity for people to become aware of diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, issues of Asian and Asian American identity continue to exist within American culture. Moreover, the notion of Orientalism plays a role in making Nagasu's racial identity ambiguous under the larger

categorization of Asians and immigrants. Although this is not a discussion of whether the category “Asian” problematic or not, this ideology unconsciously functions as obscuring a specific ethnicity which leads to lack of understanding.

As stated in Chapter I, media representations of culture and identity have the power to establish and change our recognition of ideology. While there are technological benefits and conveniences, this powerful media influence often produces cultural missteps and misrepresentations such as the example of Michelle Kwan. In order to explore the origin of problematic media representations, this thesis used American films as its text.

Chapter II mainly introduced the early cinema construction of media representation of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States, and Hollywood’s general portrayal of the Asian and Asian American identity. This chapter attempted to focus particularly on Japanese identity and its media representation by reviewing the history of Japanese immigrants and Japanese actors in early cinema. It also aimed to familiarize readers with key concepts and notions such as model minority, yellowface, and gender stereotypes that are constantly demonstrated in American films, by exploring specific American films from early and contemporary periods of Hollywood.

In *Asian Americans and the Media*, Kent Ono historically and politically analyzed Asian and Asian American representation in the media of the United States. One of the principal contributions of his book is its wide variety of media analyses. As well, his examination of both historical and contemporary features with a rhetorical and political aspect of discourse elucidates the continuity of misrepresentations of Asian and Asian American identity. With its persistent problematic media exposure, Ono emphasized the necessity of continuation of studies on Asian and Asian American media representation. He also introduced fundamental concepts and

ideologies for exploring Asian and Asian American studies that have sustained my research on media representations of Japanese culture and identity.

One of the key findings is the emergence of Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa in the 1910s. Hayakawa's sensational performance in *The Cheat* as a brutal and atrocious Japanese character created a model image of Japanese identity for American audiences. However, his representation of villainous and asexual features was strategically established by the film's production company to fulfill audience expectations in the United States. Moreover, this strategically constructed portrayal of Hayakawa showed an established model of a successfully assimilated Asian male, which may be perceived by examining his Western-oriented appearance. Japanese actress Takuko Takagi, who became popular in the United States in the same era as Hayakawa, recalled that she was often expected to play Japanese characters that were constructed through the lens of American audiences, that is, an Americanized Japanese representation.

Clarifying the continuity of stereotypes and problematic representations of Japanese culture and identity in American films, Chapter II analyzed six recent Hollywood films that contained Japanese cultural depictions: *The Last Samurai*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, *The Wolverine*, and *Big Hero 6*. Most prominently, these films highlight Japanese female gender stereotypes. Such characters are portrayed as passive, voiceless, and subordinate. For example, female characters are often powerless in terms of decision making. In *The Last Samurai*, Taka's behavior is controlled and oppressed by her brother Katsumoto. While Katsumoto is the head of the Samurai and the family, the film depicts the aesthetics of self-sacrifice and submissiveness of Japanese female figures. Again, Japanese male characters are often not portrayed in romantic relationships, but rather portrayed as

villainous characters such as yakuza, gangsters, and savages. Both in *The Last Samurai* and *The Wolverine*, there is no development of romantic relationships between Asian characters depicted in the films; instead, there are representations of romantic love between a Caucasian male and a Japanese female. Thus, the Japanese male is often portrayed as a villain, and Japanese female is often portrayed as voiceless and sexually attractive.

Chapter III closely analyzed American comedy film *Gung Ho*, directed by Ron Howard in 1986. The film mainly depicts international and intercultural conflicts between Japanese and American automotive workers in the United States. While it is a comedy and perhaps some scenes are intentionally filmed to mock cultural differences, certain scenes are highly stereotypical portrayals of Japanese culture and identity. For example, there is a scene where Japanese workers take a bath. They go to a river together, wearing loincloths. Although the loincloth is a Japanese traditional style of underwear, Western clothes had already become a standard clothing style by 1986, since civilization and enlightenment after the Meiji period. Again, in a dinner scene at Kazuhiro's house there are explicit depictions of the different perceptions of gender between Japan and the United States. As soon as Kazuhiro starts talking about business, all the Japanese women stop eating and leave the dining room—except Hunt's girlfriend Audrey. Eventually, Audrey leaves the room with anger after she is told to leave by Hunt. This scene clearly demonstrates the submissiveness of Japanese women and a strong power hierarchy of gender.

In addition, Orientalism plays a significant role in this film. For instance, although the film is about the relationship between Japan and the United States, the title of the film "*Gung Ho*" is originally a Chinese term, meaning "work together." Further, there are scenes that depict a mixture of Japanese and Chinese cultures. As Hunt describes the design of a Japanese

conference room as “real oriental,” Japanese culture and identity are often portrayed as a part of “the oriental” representation. However, the film also proposes stereotypes that may reflect the reality of cultural representations such as the model minority image. The model minority of a hardworking figure is one that Kent Ono described as matching the portrayals of Japanese characters in the film. While the situation is getting better, the suicide rate in Japan is the sixth-highest in the world, and the second-highest among major industrialized nations for 2017 (Otake). As well, the film reflects the social and political tensions that plagued the American automotive industry in the 1980s. Since the ’80s was the time when Japanese high-tech products, including automobiles, were exported to America, there was a fear of the Japanese taking over American industries. This social condition illustrates that a phenomenon of yellow peril continues to exist regardless of time.

Chapter IV examined the Hollywood adaptation of Japanese animation *Ghost in the Shell* directed by Rupert Sanders in 2017. It mainly emphasized the continuity of problematic media representations of Asians and Asian Americans, particularly Japanese culture and identity. The most notable controversy surrounding the film is the casting choices for its leading characters. For instance, the lead Japanese female character is played by a Caucasian actress, Scarlett Johansson. This controversy of a white actor playing the role of a non-white character is known as whitewashing. More specifically, a non-Asian actor plays a role of Asian character is known as yellowface. People criticized this presentation of whitewashing and yellowface ideologies that underlie the film. The controversy of whitewashing and yellowface has been attracting people’s attention nowadays, especially after the release of Marvel’s *Doctor Strange* in 2016, *Ghost in the Shell*, and the Netflix adaptation of *Death Note* in 2017. In the original comic *Doctor Strange*, there is a key Tibetan male character, Ancient One. However, this was played by Caucasian

actress Tilda Swinton. In the case of *Death Note*, Netflix attempted to create an American adaptation of a Japanese manga series. The film was criticized for not retaining the authenticity of the original cultural contexts. While the criticisms were slightly different in each case, all these controversies revolved around discussions of the appropriateness of casting white actors regardless of original texts in terms of race and ethnicity.

This chapter also clarified the perception gap of the whitewashing controversy in Japan—that Japanese audiences are not as critical as their American counterparts. One of the causes for this, I noted, is perhaps that Japan is historically a racially homogeneous country. Moreover, there may be a fascination with Western culture after the Westernization and modernization during the Meiji period. Mamoru Oshii, director of the first animated film version of *Ghost in the Shell* claimed that there is no basis that an Asian actress must play the main character Motoko Kusanagi, considering the visual cues and the fact that her body is a cyborg. It is interesting that even though Oshii was not opposed to the casting decision, the controversy still occurred in the United States.

As the case study of *Gung Ho* in Chapter III underlies the concept of Orientalism, this notion sustains the analysis of *Ghost in the Shell* in two different ways. One is to demonstrate the racial hierarchy of casting choices that leads to the ideology of whiteness. In the case of Ancient One in *Doctor Strange*, Tilda Swinton is cast for the political risk management in order to avoid stereotypical and offensive representations of Tibetans, according to the film's screenwriter C. Robert Cargill. He opined that the film gained economic and social superiority by casting a popular Caucasian actress since the American audience comprised the film's main market. While Scarlett Johansson looks visually similar to the original character in *Ghost in the Shell*, the production decided to choose her over other famous Japanese or Japanese American actresses.

These decisions indicate that whiteness ideology is consciously or unconsciously practiced in American films. Orientalism also affects the illustration of exotic and futuristic characteristics of “Asian” culture. For example, the landscapes of *Ghost in the Shell* integrate Western and Asian cultural cityscapes that are reminiscent of sceneries in *Blade Runner*. In both films, there are New York City-ish skyscrapers, Japanese cultural traits, and Chinese letters on the streets amalgamating to express a unique world of “futurescape.” Mamoru Oshii explained that although he did not want to create a film that resembles *Blade Runner*, ultimately his film ended up with similar features. As he described, *Blade Runner* is an inspirational piece for other films that aim to sketch futuristic landscapes. Since the 1980s was the time when the ideology of cyberpunk emerged, the film communicates society’s excitement and a threat to the high-tech world, as well as the portrayal of Japanese automotive and technological invasion in *Gung Ho*. Therefore, these “oriental” landscapes deliver exotic and futuristic representations of Asian culture through American lens.

Along with stating the key findings, understanding the history of Asian and Asian American media representations is crucial for exploring how concepts and ideologies continue to exist in contemporary society. This thesis contributes to elucidate problematic treatments of racial and ethnical identity of the Japanese in American films. Although Asian and Asian American studies have established their own discourse in academia, few research have focused particularly on Japanese culture and identity in the past. Moreover, this thesis uses novel Hollywood films as texts to analyze, such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Doctor Strange*, and *Big Hero 6*, which makes it unique.

There are certain limitations of this thesis. First, there are limited academic resources and discussions for newly released films, and some of my analyses are dependent on non-academic

news articles and YouTube videos. These resources may not be fully reliable as evidence to support arguments and analyses. While exploring contemporary topics of popular culture is one of the strengths of this research, it is just the beginning of the process and further research is needed. Second, it is difficult to focus particularly on Japanese culture and identity because there are many overlapping cultural texts and traits to be discussed in the discourse. As Orientalism defines oriental (the Eastern) culture—obscuring distinctive cultures in the process—it is complicated to excerpt certain aspects of Japanese culture from the categorization of oriental or Asian. For instance, stereotypes and problematic media representations of Japanese identity and culture are not only the consequence of monocultural portrayals, but also the interactions and communications within Asian cultures and identities of places such as Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Third, the relationship between Orientalism and Japanese culture creates a contradiction. Orientalism is the way of assessing Eastern culture through Western cultural lens. However, Japanese culture itself often adopts Western ideas to create hybrid or exotic representations, such as the Western-oriented features of Japanese anime characters. For example, the analysis of the landscape of *Ghost in the Shell* (Chapter IV) applies the ideology of cyberpunk and Orientalism to illustrate the ambiguity of Japanese cultural characteristics under the hybridity of multicultural integration. However, *Ghost in the Shell* was originally created by Japanese hands. Therefore, analyzing Japanese culture is often extremely complexing because of its significant Western influences and unique integration of cultures.

Looking ahead to research in the future, employing social scientific methods and combining humanistic methods such as textual and rhetorical analysis may perhaps be effective in examining contemporary topics and actual responses from both Japanese and American cultures. By applying social scientific data analyses such as interviews and inquiries, we may

measure the specific gaps between different cultures. It is crucial to analyze the specific cultural and social gaps that exist in contemporary society because understanding the disparities will help us extend our knowledge and perception to reduce cultural conflicts and schisms.

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