

From Acceptance Through Rejection to Ambivalence: Three Readings of Japanese Society in Film

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受容から拒絶、そして冷淡へ — 三映画作品に読む日本社会の変容

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論文要旨

本稿は、1957年から2003年にかけての46年間に、時を隔てて制作された三篇のハリウッド映画 *Sayonara* (1957)、*Black Rain* (1989)、*Lost in Translation* (2003) を取り上げ、そこに描かれた日本社会の表象について検討する試みである。この三映画作品における中心主題、登場人物、社会規範を詳細に読み解いてみると、各作品が、日本および日本らしさの観念を、それぞれ独特の場と枠組の中に位置付けていることは明らかである。この立場からすれば、日本および日本らしさの観念の描写と解釈が、—それはアメリカのハリウッド映画によるものであって、日本自身によるものでないとはいえ—、時間の流れとともに大きく変化したことが容易に見て取れる。この三作品に見られる変化は、二つの文化（アメリカ文化と日本文化）のあいだの距離、すなわち実感された距離あるいは相互の距離に大幅に影響を受けてきていて、それぞれの映画を、年代順に、受容・拒絶・冷淡をあらわすものとして位置付けることができる。本論では、まず個々のテキストとしての相対的な位置をはっきりさせるため、各作品について注釈をつけ、読み、評言を付した。次に、この三作品を、一つの共通テーマ（日本）をめぐって、長い時間枠の中で構築されたひとまとまりの集会的総体としてとらえて、比較、対照、検討し考察した。最後に、これらの映画の背景にある現代日本社会と日本の文化的アイデンティティーの概念を踏まえつつ、この三作品が表現し構築した世界の核心について検討し、結論を導いた。

キーワード：日本、日本社会、映画理論、文化表象、ポストモダニズム

Abstract

This essay explores representations of Japanese contemporary society in a trilogy of Hollywood films spanning a period of 46 years: *Sayonara* (1957), *Black Rain* (1989), and *Lost in Translation* (2003). By performing a close reading of the central themes, characters, and norms presented in these works, it is clearly observable that each film locates Japan and the ideas of *Japaneseness* within a very particular locus and frame. From such a standpoint it is easy to see that a substantive shift has occurred over time in how Japan and the concept of *Japaneseness* are both depicted and interpreted by America through Hollywood, if not by Japan itself. In this trilogy, this shift has largely been influenced by perceived or relative distances

between the two cultures (American and Japanese), and places the films in the loci of: acceptance, rejection, and ambivalence. Each of the three films are taken individually and in turn, annotated, read, and presented with commentary so as to establish their relative position as a singular text. Following this there follows a brief discussion where the trilogy are compared, contrasted, and examined as a collective body of work on a given theme (Japan) over a longitudinal time-frame. Finally, this essay ends with concluding remarks and comments which examine the core constructs presented in these films against a backdrop of contemporary Japanese society and notions of Japanese cultural identity.

Keywords: Japan, Japanese Society, Film Theory, Cultural Representation, Postmodernism

Style Note

- 1) The author makes extensive use of footnotes as a postmodern stylistic and literary tool to present underlying contextual data and sub-narratives; a secondary conversation which aims to support and enhance the dominant narrative.
- 2) Where the Japanese language is Romanised, hyphens are used to indicate the readings of individual kan-ji characters within a phrase or compound.

Introduction

During a televised interview in the mid '90s, American film director Oliver Stone responded to harsh criticism over his film *Natural Born Killers* (1994) with an interesting retort. Facing criticism not simply due to the film's violent content, but perhaps more so to the lack of traditional resolution for the 'bad guys,' Stone responded, quite simply, that his film - his art, was no more than an inert, non-judgmental mirror held aloft to reflect back the turmoil of American society at that point in time¹. To some critics, this sentiment may appear as if he was negating his responsibility as a filmmaker and 'passing the buck.' Re-framed, however, and viewed as an artist (which Stone clearly is) his response was entirely reasonable, and perfectly logical; after

all, the documentary photographer does not start the war, he² merely captures it on film; he is but a spectator. Amongst its eclectic array of functions, film can be said to be numerous things including: a spectator, a mirror, a barometer, a gauge, or measure of a given topic captured in time and space. And as Stone argues, in its most inert and transparent form, it can be nothing more than a vehicle for reflecting back ideas, perceptions, dreams, and desires of a given culture at a moment in time. Using this hypothesis, if we take a number of films on a common theme, recorded over a period of time; films which are made according to the mores and cultural codes of the time, then it is certainly possible that these can provide data from which we may examine a given topic or theme. In this instance, the point of focus

¹ As footage at the end of the film depicts, at that point in American history, the criminals and 'bad guys' were not being brought to justice and were walking away, unpunished, scot-free.

² The male gender pronoun is used here because historically it has been men who have gone into battle both as combatants and documentarians.

is Japan, Japanese contemporary culture, and representations or manifestations of *Japaneseness*.

The purpose of representing or locating *other* culture or cultures is both myriad and complex, but it is ultimately the *reading* which releases embodied meaning and conveys the film's intent and motivation. As Barthe's *texte lisible* denotes, and despite the eloquence of Stone's argument, the writer and director's intent is subjugated by and subsumed into the reading of the viewer; thus in part, all analysis is of a secondary and subjective nature. That established, however, this does not negate its authenticity of voice, nor subtract from its validity. Leaving that discussion aside for the moment, however, these films in their *texte scriptible* form do provide a platform from which to observe representations of post-War Japanese society and decode meanings embodied in these texts, and finally to compare those relative points in time.

In terms of approach, this essay takes as its starting point, three well-known cinematic depictions of Japan: *Sayonara* (1957), *Black Rain* (1989), and *Lost in Translation* (2003). Beginning with the premise noted prior, that a film has not only the potential to encapsulate a given theme or topic at a specific point in time, but also possesses the ability to convey how the content or central theme(s) were viewed by Hollywood, at that time³, this essay uses a trilogy of films to chart the shift in perceptions and representations of Japan and *Japaneseness* in Hollywood. This arc begins from the post-War period of American occupation where despite the tensions on both sides, Japan

is interestingly depicted from the standpoint of 'acceptance.' Thirty years later, reborn as a global and economic superpower Japan is clearly depicted with distance, skepticism, and a certain disdain in what can be described as a period of 'rejection.' The third, and final wave noted here brings us to the current epoch and the current Japanese incarnation. Reflecting its post-bubble economic meltdown and longitudinal decline, together with both cultural and social fragmentation, a certain 'rudderless Japan,' is depicted with ambivalence and a certain sense of loss.

The Three Films

Acceptance: *Sayonara* (1957)[MGM]

Sayonara (Dir: Joshua Logan) is an inter-racial love story set in the *Kan-sai* region of Japan during the post-War period. The film is based upon James A. Micheners's 1954 novel by the same name. What initially strikes the viewer about this film is the accuracy and sensitivity with which it captures post-defeat Japan in the 1950s. Following America's significant loss of pride at Pearl Harbor, it would not have been a difficult task for post-War Hollywood to continue its function as the publicity wing of Truman's government; to in effect set about reframing the narratives of U.S. loss, genocide, and aggression as victory, necessity, and compassion. What transpires and is presented to the audience, however, is quite different. The initial point of interest in this work lies in the nature of its casting. That the four main performers consist of two established American actors (Marlon Brando and Red Buttons) playing alongside two unknown Japanese actresses (TAKA, Miiko and MIYOSHI,

³ To some extent it is also possible to extrapolate this out to the American populous too.

Umeki) is quite remarkable⁴. This sharing of the limelight, as it were, alludes to the balance which pervades throughout the film; indeed both Buttons and MIYOSHI won Academy Awards® for their performances as supporting actor and actress, MIYOSHI's being the first non-American recipient and the only one awarded to a Japanese actor or actresses to the present day. The egalitarian nature of this paring alludes to and reflects the wider sensibilities and attitudes expressed throughout the film.

The story is set during the Korean War (1950-1953) and takes place in the *Kan-sai* region of post-War Japan. It centres on the themes of class, destiny, autonomy, authority, and change, but at its core, *Sayonara* it is a simple love story. An inter-racial love story about two American Air Force men Major Lloyd 'Ace' Gruver (Marlon Brando) and Airman Joe Kelly (Red Buttons), who each fall in love with a Japanese women, respectively; Hana-ogi (TAKA, Miiko) a star performer in an all-female theatrical revue⁵, and Katsumi Kelly (MIYOSHI, Umeki) an ordinary

working-class woman and housewife⁶. The film deals extensively with the prejudice they face in the acceptance of their love. Interestingly, however, this prejudice is largely centred on U.S. Allied Command, the U.S. Military and U.S. citizens rather than the Japanese. Whilst there are incidents in the film where organised Japanese trouble-makers attempt to cause problems, the local Japanese assist the protagonists and demonstrate a compassionate acceptance of the Americans in their midst. This factor is clearly a significant watershed and a genuine attempt to realign or restructure the 'yellow peril'⁷ narrative. Aside from a few disparaging comments by Major Gruver (Brando) at the start of the film⁸, the work refrains from falling into a hole of distrust and xenophobia, a deep hole from out of which the main protagonist must later climb to reach the film's resolution; the deeper the hole, the greater the arc of transition. Sidestepping such obvious obstacles, the film instead focuses on the micro or human aspects of the post-war situation in which these characters find themselves, and conveys

⁴The fact remains, however, that the nature or limit of acceptance for inter-racial Asian-American relationships at that time, and perhaps even to this day, is that it is more acceptable for an American man to take an Asian bride rather than vice versa. In actuality, in *Sayonara*, Gruver's fiancée Eileen Webster (Patricia Owens) clearly has feelings for NAKAMURA (Ricardo Montalban), but this aspect of American female, Asian male relations is not explored as it was not only outside of the structure of the overarching narrative, but would have undoubtedly not been palatable to American audiences at the time. The idea of Japanese 'taking' white women was a popular trope during WWII and much used in American propaganda.

⁵The *Shochiku Kagekidan* Girls Revue is re-modeled as a *Takarazuka*-esque theatrical revue and chorus line. The *Takarazuka* Revue being a famous all-female theatre in northern Osaka.

⁶What is of further interest here as a sub-text is the symmetry of these couplings, Major Gruver is a General's son and Hana-ogi is the pinnacle of her theatre troupe. These elites are contrasted with Kelly who is merely an Airman and his wife Katsumi, an ordinary working class citizen. Furthermore Kelly has significant respect and admiration for Gruver (asking him to perform the task of best man/witness at his wedding, and his wife too echoes this as she is an ardent fan and admirer of Hana-ogi and her theatrical troupe.

⁷The 'Yellow Peril' pejorative was a narrative used by the U.S. Administration as propaganda during WWII. It ostensibly focused upon derogatory caricatures and grotesque parodies of Japanese in an attempt to dehumanise the wartime enemy.

⁸These out of character remarks by Gruver serve only to used to establish a starting point on the counter arc for resolution. In actuality they seem quite out of place and somewhat unnecessary as Gruver makes a very natural transition towards his appreciation of Japan and things Japanese.

to the viewer a genuinely honest portrayal of Japan resonating from a locus of admiration and acceptance; there is no animosity here.



Fig. 1: *Sayonara* DVD jacket ©MGM

Beyond the preceding point of interest, however, perhaps the genius of this script lies in the fact that three stories unfold simultaneously; that is, in actuality the American actors are playing three parts (three characters) in tandem. The first is the protagonists relationship with a significant other, that is with their lovers; this is a relatively simple narrative with a small arc and in the case of the Kellys it simple serves to show that two people from different cultures can co-exist if both parties share a mutual respect and love for the other and their culture⁹. The second part they

are playing is that of relationship with *country*; as patriot (or otherwise) and this is a much wider arc in the case of Gruver and a somewhat lesser one in the case of Kelly - Gruver starting off as a red-blooded American patriot whilst Kelly starts and ends the film as one who is largely indifferent to country, focused instead on his wife and *self*. The final part they are playing is ostensibly a dialogue with self, that is a personal journey, and again the arcs represented here are similar to those in the preceding point. Here again we witness Gruver embarking upon the most significant of personal transitions from that of a West-point graduate and general's son, with moderate power and much social capital to a state of veritable self-awakening, self-realisation, and rejection of his privilege. This transitional arc mirrors that of the Historical Buddha Shakyamuni's own transition, and marks a return to his true nature or true face¹⁰. Again, in the case of Kelly who was a working-class Airman with no power or social capital, his arc is less dramatic, but through the love and kindness of his wife Katsumi, he finds his home and his centre - something which he is prepared to die to defend¹¹.

Beyond the human angle, however, what both establishes and denotes this work as being of special cultural value and merit, is the sub-narrative which also sees the two male protagonists fall in love with Japanese customs and life (but not necessarily Japanese Culture)¹². The presentation of Japanese life as profound,

⁹ Of course the wider implications of this narrative are that in the post-War world citizens of all nations would do well to look beyond their prejudices and preconceptions and embrace a new era of cooperation and mutual respect.

¹⁰ In Mahayana Buddhist parlance this is called *tathāgatagarbh* (Japanese *ken-shou*; 見性、けんしょう).

¹¹ Interestingly here, Kelly's initial oath of service and allegiance to the U.S. Air Force - to protect and defend, is superseded by one of a personal nature, to protect and serve his wife (and ultimately, himself).

¹² This narrative somewhat echoes reality, that is, U.S. Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson (1867-1950), reputedly vetoed the

elegant, fascinating, and not subjugated to Western values is noteworthy and remarkable for the time. In addition to this, what distinguishes this film is its avoidance of stereotypes, pastiche or exalted reverence for the apparent sublimity of Asian culture¹³. *Sayonara* very deftly navigates a course through both cliché and parody to arrive at a place of quiet understanding and mutual admiration of cultural divergence and heterogeneity. Throughout the film, neither of these men engage in stereotypical activities or propagate fictitious cultural tropes about Japan. And as a whole, the film rejects the way the Japanese like to be seen from ‘outside’ - polite, kind, demure, quiet, and obedient. Instead of these moribund stereotypes, the film instead portrays a startlingly honest account of life in post-defeat Japan. Where its genius lies not in the pageant or richness of organised culture, per se (although *Kabuki* or theatrical revue do appear), but in the almost *Zen*-like quietude and simplicity of everyday life and everyday interactions. The viewer’s lasting impression of this film is a sense of respectful admiration and quite reverence for Japan as a complex and cultured nation of ordinary citizens finding its feet after its

misguided foray into WWII.

Rejection: *Black Rain* (1989)[Paramount Pictures]

Black Rain (Dir: Ridley Scott) is a dystopian crime thriller set in Osaka in the late ‘80s, and like *Sayonara*, stars an ensemble cast of both American and Japanese actors. In *Black Rain*, the actors are essentially coupled in mirror-like pairs representing the dualities of old and new; tradition and modernity. The main protagonist representing that which is considered old or established (to a variety of degrees) is Detective Nick Conklin (Michael Douglas) who plays opposite MATSUMOTO, Masahiro ‘Mas’ (TAKAKURA, Ken). Representing the new world of both internal space and outward physical manifestations are Detective Charlie Vincent (Andy Garcia) who plays opposite *chinpira*¹⁴ SATO (MATSUDA, Yusaku). From the outset the tone of this film is pitched around the theme of conflict (the mainstay of Conklin’s world¹⁵). Conklin is immersed in a world of chaos and misery¹⁶; this state of self-loathing and anger could also be a metaphor for America itself¹⁷. Extending this reading, if we then apply it to one of the most interesting of the

carpet-bombing of Kyoto with incendiary munitions during WWII (as he had agreed for other areas in Japan) because he was apparently enamored with the City as a ancient capital and cultural treasure (Wellerstein, 2014).

¹³ Generally speaking, representations of Asian culture in non-Asian cinema fall into one of two basic traps; one superior, one inferior; that is, they either represent it as being manifestly sublime and incomprehensible to non-Asians, or they belittle the ways as somehow primitive or unsophisticated. The most common narrative seems to be the mysterious and unfathomable nature of the Orient which is cannot be fully comprehended by the Barbarian mind.

¹⁴ A *chinpira* (チンピラ) is a low level gang affiliate within the world of Japanese organised crime. He is not a bone fide gang

associate per se, not a ‘made man’, and the inference of the term is slightly pejorative.

¹⁵ Whether conflict with his ex-wife, the ‘system’ (allegations of impropriety), his colleagues, or to some degree the city of New York.

¹⁶ Any good ‘redemption’ narrative requires the protagonist to travel a particularly long and tumultuous arc as the character overcomes his/her initial predicament to finally achieve a point of inner-peace and ultimate resolution. Such narrative arcs are the mainstay of this genre.

¹⁷ At the time this film was made the American economy was entering a recession (Berry, 1990) and crime in New York City stood at a record level, reportedly with one murder every 22 minutes, making it the murder capital of the world (Celona &

early plot points we can begin to see where the film is headed and what lies in store especially in terms of how this film perceives Japan. This point of interest lies in a simple fact; a choice of motorbike. In the early scenes Conklin rides into frame wearing an open-face helmet astride an American icon; a Harley Davidson - for all intents and purposes he might as well be wearing a stetson and riding a stallion; he is clearly established as an outlaw, a John Wayne or Clint Eastwood for the current epoch. Following his arrival at the darkest, dirtiest part of town¹⁸ he then challenges a young rider to a race¹⁹. This is the second most important plot point, for not only does the younger rider make the quip, "I'll take your social security grandpa" therefore establishing the tension between old and new, but he also wears a full-face helmet (concealing his face²⁰) and rides a Japanese Suzuki motorbike. To summate, Conklin (America) triumphs, but only as a result of some less than gentlemanly conduct; the message here is that America²¹ will prevail even if it means playing by its own rules.

This opening scene and the subtleties encoded within provides the observant viewer with a very clear idea of the tropes and themes which will be explored time and time again in this film as the American protagonists export their ideology and *modus operandi* to Japan.

Returning to the main protagonists, in addition to the four characters noted above which together form two symmetrical counters, one further counterpoint worthy of note is established by the character of *bou-ryoku-dan* leader SUGAI (WAKAYAMA, Tomisaburo). In many ways, SUGAI's character is the keystone or linchpin to all other human relations and worlds described in the film and he disrupts the symmetrical narrative by positioning himself as a veritable shamanic shapeshifter; never constantly one thing nor another; both criminal and noble, old and new, Japanese yet Americanised. SUGAI is the most complex character in the film, and just as Conklin is the embodiment of America, perhaps SUGAI, not MATSUMOTO, is a metaphor for Japan itself²². In the film, he is someone who, on the one

Golding, 2017; McKinley, 1990). America, like Conklin had lost their moral compass and bearings and was adrift in a sea of misery and turmoil.

¹⁸ Conklin arrives near the Port, under an overpass, in the most industrial part of the City, clearly a place he feels at home and clearly a reflection of his character. It is worth noting that this is an extreme counterpoint to Charlie Vincent (Andy Garcia) who, despite also being a police detective is much more comfortable uptown.

¹⁹ This introduces the tension and conflict of generations, a factor which is revisited many times, in many forms throughout the film.

²⁰ This indicates the values of subterfuge, concealment, and dishonesty - perhaps a nod towards how America viewed Japan. Note also that in contrast Conklin's open face helmet stands as a metaphor for American ideals of openness and transparency (real or imagined).

²¹ Read: American ways, American values.

²² What is noteworthy here is the dichotomous relationship between the Japanese protagonists MATSUMOTO (the Police officer) and SUGAI (the gang boss). These two characters essentially mirror each other in their belief in protocol, reverence for the nation's lost past (real or imagined), and their sense of duty towards their sponsoring institution. The fundamental difference is, however, that according to the rules of Western society or Western cinema, one represents goodness or righteousness (Police), the other evil or deviance (gangster). That established, however, such clear-cut demarcation is not always present in Japanese society, where, for example, until a recent clampdown and change in Japan's law, the *bou-ryoku-dan* (crime syndicates) held offices in most communities, and were not demonised in the same way as organised crime was in the U.S.

hand tries to represent and embody the traditional morals, codes, and mainstream values of 'lost' Japan, yet someone who is simultaneously an outlier, an outcast, and a criminal. Someone who was raised on a diet of post-War Americana and yet someone who is constantly sifting through the ashes of his own culture to salvage the leftovers he can try to hand down to his underlings, so that they may know the Way.

As a cultural relic, *Black Rain* proves to be an extremely interesting companion to *Sayonara*, because like *Sayonara*, which was shot at a pivotal moment in Japanese history (post-War), *Black Rain* too was shot at such a juncture. Shot at the height of the 'Bubble Era'²³, the pinnacle of post-War Japan-US economic tensions, the portrayal of Japan is not one of high culture, quietude, or historicity, rather it is an altogether more caustic and brash Japan, awash with money and a renewed sense of self and pride. This pride, however, is not based upon the feudal systems of Confucian etiquette, but modeled on their post-war occupiers instead - the Americans. It is, in effect, a new, monied Japan raised on a diet of American cartoons and post-war American liberalism which is depicted in this film; poacher turned gamekeeper. Whilst there are tensions in the film between 'old' and 'new' Japan these tensions are as much about the relations between

'old' Japan and 'new' America as they are about domestic tensions. Much of the conflict in the film is derived from how America perceived (or desired) an old Japan (subservient, obedient, weak, dependent, and poor) and the realities of Bubble Era Japan²⁴. The film, therefore, shows Japan as a darkened almost dystopian nation cut adrift from its heritage and roots, and the Japanese are no longer depicted as polite, respectful, or demure. Rather, they are now manifested as a nation of organised criminals and gang members grown fat on a diet of American popular culture and greed, in conflict with the old and forging the new in a pastiche of their post-War occupiers.

What is of particular interest here is the multifaceted nature of this conflict and fracture. On the one hand there is the rivalry between America (American culture and protocols) and Japan, which is ostensibly portrayed as a clash between old and new worlds. In addition to this there is the conflict and friction between old and new Japan, essentially a pre-war largely mythical notion of Bu-shi-dou derived etiquette and strict social codes which stands in stark contrast to the narcissistic and solipsistic Japan of the 1980s. What is further interesting to observe here, is the underlying sense that the Japanese protagonists MASTUMOTO, Masahiro (the Police officer played by TAKAKURA, Ken) and the gang boss,

²³ The Japanese 'Bubble Era' was a period of exceptional economic growth, roughly between 1985 - 1992. During this time Japan's economy grew to become the second largest in the world (second only to America), and brought with it not only a huge upsurge in consumer spending, but perhaps more importantly, a change in how the Japanese viewed themselves. A new, more positive, aggressive, and adventurous mindset was de rigueur at the time. Japan's economy is now placed at number three in global rankings, superseded by China.

²⁴ It is arguable that the Japanese Bubble Era was a veritable re-enactment of Pearl Harbor insofar as during this time, Japanese companies ventured Westward and aggressively began buying up chunks of American land, industry, and business - it was a de facto second attack on American soil, not physical, but financial, and America was not entirely sure how to process this.

SUGAI played by WAKAYAMA, Tomisaburo) to a large extent adopt *mu-seki-nin*²⁵ positions on the cause of Japan's (moral) decline deflecting blame away from their nation's own greed and responsibility, and instead presenting the root cause of all social malaise as being non-Japanese in origin.

As a final note, it is worth conveying that since its original release date, the DVD jacket for the film has changed as is clearly demonstrable in the two figures below.



Fig.2: Black Rain original DVD jacket
©Paramount Pictures



Fig.3: Black Rain current DVD jacket
©Paramount Pictures

In Figure 2, the original cover depicts a gaudy Bladerunner-esque²⁶ dystopian night-scene from downtown Osaka, with Conklin (Michael Douglas) posed defiant in the foreground astride a motorbike²⁷. By inference, this depicts Japan as simultaneously: brash, shady, advanced, and dark and Douglas' character as the Lone Ranger riding into town to re-calibrate the moral compass and restore law and order. In Figure 3, the newer artwork, however, Japan is depicted as more subdued, less contemporary, less offensive, and more subservient. Clearly these two sets

²⁵ *Mu-seki-nin* (無責任、むせきにん), whilst often mistranslated as 'a lack of responsibility' is better translated as a 'negation of one's responsibility,' the character 'mu' (無、む) better translated as the absence of something rather than the removal of something. Thus the implication in such a phrase is that the Japanese protagonists in the film are in effect, passing the buck and negating their own shortcomings in raising a new generation of Japanese who do not adhere to or respect the 'old ways.'

²⁶ The director Ridley Scott also directed *Bladerunner* (1982) which uses a mélange of SE Asian nighttime imagery derived from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan as its backdrop to create a mythical dystopian vision of the future.

²⁷ Note that in this image, Conklin sits astride not an American Harley Davidson, but a Japanese motorbike. This symbolic depiction conveys to the observant viewer that America has triumphed over the 'enemy' (Japan) and Conklin is astride the spoils of war, that he is sitting on, suppressing, and in possession of that which was the enemies.

of artwork are holding a mirror to American society at two relative points in time; then and now - reflecting back America's perception of and distance to Japan. As such, and despite the contents of the film remaining constant (only the artwork has changed), this imagery clearly encapsulate the perception of Japan at two points in time. It is further interesting to note here that the latter artwork with its simple black and white portraits, is much closer in feeling to the Japan depicted in Coppola's *Lost in Translation* which we shall turn to next.

Ambivalence: *Lost in Translations* (2005)[Focus features]

Lost in Translation (hereafter LIT) (Dir: Sophia Coppola) is a short story set in Tokyo and revolves around two main protagonists (neither of whom really wants to be there), Bob Harris (Bill Murray) and Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson). Bob Harris is a washed-up, middle-aged American film star who lands a lucrative endorsement campaign for Japanese whisky, while Charlotte is a young newly-wed and recent graduate who has tagged along with her husband (Giovanni Ribisi) who is working in the City on a photography shoot; as she puts it, "he was

working here, and I had nothing to do so I came along²⁸". As a cultural artefact and reference-point LIT is exceptionally meritorious for a number of reasons which will be discussed later, however, the primary reason of importance is indicated by Charlotte's statement above. That is, because unlike other, more mainstream portrayals of Japan in film and media²⁹, LIT wipes clean the misty lens or romanticised orientalism and replaces it instead with a crystalline Zeiss-like lens locked at f22. This lens has the capacity to capture in impeccable detail both the foreground, and (most importantly) the background - that which is usually out of focus. This infinite depth of field captures the entire spectrum of Japanese contemporary culture from the surface *tate-mae*, *omote*, or *shou-men* to the deeper *hon-ne* and *ura*³⁰. The result of which is that Tokyo (Japan) is both presented and received (by the protagonists) with a perceptive irony and understanding that is shockingly transparent and revelatory, it is no longer presented as futuristic, exciting, dynamic, or possessing any significant (high)culture value. Instead it is stripped bear and presented as it is, a sprawling, over-populated urban area of drab, spiritless buildings (not architecture) inhabited by a citizenry who are in constant motion to and

²⁸ Such simple words form a very prophetic statement indeed, for they counter previous narratives about people *longing* to visit Japan, and lay bare her reasons and passion (or lack thereof) for being in Japan at that point in time. It is noteworthy enough to mention here, that in times gone by her statement may have been much more upbeat and positive, à la "He was working here and I've always dreamed about visiting Japan so I took this chance of a lifetime to come."

²⁹ These representations are often home grown, highly contrived, and nationally generated for international consumption, bearing little or no reality to the daily life of most people who live in Japan, a point which will be expanded later.

³⁰ *Tate-mae* (建前、たてまえ), is described as 'one's outward or surface appearance' and stands antithetical to, and forms a pair with *hon-ne* (本音、ほんね) which is translated as 'one's inner self, real face or intention.' Likewise, *omote* (表、おもて) - front, forms a diametric couplet with *ura* (裏、うら), which is the back, or unseen aspect of something or someone. The word *shou-men* (正面、しょうめん) refers to a front-facing aspect of either a person or building, the second character in the compound, *men* (面、めん) has amongst its translations, the word 'mask.'

from their place of residence, seemingly unaware or disengaged from their immediate locale; the Metropolis. Charlotte makes another telling statement on this theme, when she telephones a friend in the U.S. and confides in them, “I went to a shrine³¹ today, and all these monks were chanting, and I didn’t feel a thing!” This sentiment echoes throughout her interaction with Japan, notably as she wafts wisp-like and vacant through her interactions with historical Japan. Nothing seems to satisfy, inspire, or pique her interest - perhaps the Japan she has found does not match that which is portrayed and exported in advertising and media? Or perhaps there is a simpler explanation, perhaps it is just not that inspiring? Intriguingly both of the main protagonists share this fractured and disconnected relationship with Japan which becomes the central tenet of this film. The main difference between the two is, however, their age and thus their standpoint - their relative position along a spectrum from like to dislike. In the case of Bob Harris, whilst he is clearly not enamored with Tokyo, someone of his age, will have a spread of memories from the legacy of WWII and Pearl Harbour (passed down by parents) to the corporate raids by Japanese firms on American businesses during the ‘80s and ‘90s. As a result, Bob has what could be described as a ‘polite indifference’ towards Japan. Conversely, in Charlotte’s case, her frame of reference as a less

easily impressed, post-millennial may likely be situated in popular culture such as *manga*, *anime*, and a less mainstream, more *hentai*³² Japan. The result of Charlotte’s viewpoint being, more so than Bob, she displays and almost ‘impolite ambivalence’ towards Japan. As a result, it appears that she expects the country to do more to wow or capture her heart than simply present passé artefacts and quirk. That established, however, as the film progresses, Bob’s position changes somewhat and he eventually moves to join Charlotte at the location of confoundment, frustration, and indifference.

Developing these points further, the two protagonists almost become metaphors for past and present Japan (and Japanese), that is Bob has a career, a history, and a legacy; he has achievements and triumphs (albeit in the past). He has the ability to ‘grin and bear it’³³, and a sense of duty³⁴. Charlotte, on the other hand, possesses none of these qualities and is much more solipsistic, narcissistic, and devoid of any real talent or skill of her own³⁵, she is jaded, sarcastic, choosy, and largely vapid, only being in Tokyo because of her celebrity photographer husband; because of someone else’s effort and career success.

What is striking about this work, is that when compared to the two other films, throughout LIT, the two main protagonists refrain from making emotional or spiritual contact with their

³¹ In actuality she visited a temple, not a shrine.

³² *Hen-tai*, abbreviated from the Japanese *hen-tai sei-yoku* (変態性欲、へんたいせいよく) is often associated with a perverse or pornographic genre of *anime* or *manga*, but in actuality can refer to that Japanese culture which is less mainstream, darker, more edgy, not necessarily pornographic.

³³ Japanese, *ga-man* (我慢、がまん)

³⁴ Japanese: *gi-ri* (義理、ぎり) or *nin-jyou* (人情、にんじょう).

³⁵ Remember she is only in Japan because her photographer husband is working there.

surroundings; remaining largely indifferent to Japan throughout the film. As a result, it often appears as if the flatness, uniformity, and drabness with which Tokyo (Japan) is presented serves merely as a backdrop or stage set against which the protagonists perform their interactions. This subjugation of Japan as being less than the third-character³⁶ and the general indifference is, perhaps, indicative of Japan's standing in the world in the current epoch i.e. that in its contemporary form, Japan lacks a clear and definite image, national identity, national ethos, and a clear place in the world. The fact that LIT is mostly set in Tokyo³⁷, perhaps also alludes to the West (or at least America's) growing disinterest with the tired and overused cultural tropes of fictionalised or regional Japan. Instantly recognisable by such cultural props as: *Fuji-san*, *Maiko*, *Kin-kaku-ji*, *Itsuku-shima-jin-ya*, *sakura*, *kimono*, *momiji* ad infinitum. These 'culture-by-numbers' stereotypes of Japan largely perpetuated by the State through the Japanese National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) seem as old and dated as the culture they depict and no longer inspire awe. Amalgamated into a singular and contrived mythical identity, these over-used images have become something which the author refers to in their fine art practice as, 'JapanLand' - JapanLand being a Baudrillardian Japanese

Disneyland³⁸. In addition to this re-evaluation of Japan, another important message here is that contemporary Japan can be understood by a week's stay in and around Tokyo - that is, essentially, Japan has little more to offer and anything else is simply a repetition or pastiche of that which can be seen and found in or around the Metropolis. This unveiling also goes some way to neutering the fiction that Japan and Japanese culture are somehow too sublime, ethereal, or complex for non-Japanese (read; Westerners) to comprehend. The final message LIT conveys to the viewer, is that Tokyo might as well be anywhere - any other faceless, globalised, over-populated city in the modern world, and that the reality is perhaps not as interesting as the fantasy. Unlike the two films discussed prior, which offer us two distinct counter-points, this work shifts back along the spectrum to a more neutral central position situated around the loci of indifference and ambivalence. From its dis-invested position, it presents the viewer with a fresh reading and comprehension of contemporary Japanese culture, one which appears based upon direct, first-hand experience. Amongst LIT's greatest contributions is its ability to lift the veil on Japan to, e.g., to reveal the humanity behind the metaphorical curtain, the service-workers behind the fable of '*omote-nashi*'³⁹. This more

³⁶ The 'third' or 'silent' character refers to the use of place or location as a character in a film.

³⁷ Other than a very brief trip by Charlotte to Kyoto which offers no major plot-points, and one scene where Bob plays golf in the shadow of Mt. Fuji, the entire film takes place in Tokyo.

³⁸ Baudrillard argued that the simulacrum of America and Americana was Disneyland, that it was, in effect, a microcosm of America and contained, in essence, all things American; for Baudrillard Disneyland was the pinnacle of simulacra.

The author argues, however, that contemporary Japan has superseded this. That through its fictionalised self-promotion, its self-referentiality, and constant homage to a myriad of historical markers, Japan has become a pastiche of itself; a kind of national theme park extending far beyond the confines of a relatively small area of Anaheim, California.

³⁹ The concept of *omote-nashi* (お持て成し, おもてなし), lit: no reverse side - treating the customer as king, was popularised during the Tokyo Olympic bid, when a speech made by

honest and authentic portrayal of ‘real’ life and ‘real’ Japanese characters not only allows Japan to find its feet, but also allows it to finally recognise itself, its *hon-ne*, and its true reflection on celluloid. Although in the current epoch, with the aid of social media platforms and Youtube®, such rational comprehension is perhaps becoming the understanding du jour⁴⁰, what is interesting to note is that this film was released in 2005, in what might be called the pre-manga era⁴¹ when such crystalline readings were still quite rare in Western media and Orientalism still pervaded.

Despite its often less than flattering portrayal of contemporary Japanese life and Japanese people, the strength of this film lies in the fact that unlike *Black Rain*, it refrains from judgment about the fractured remains of post-War Japan; in effect, it is what it is. In actuality, any negativity is really no more than Stone’s ‘mirror’ (paragraph 1) and is perhaps only noticeable because it presents such a jarring alternative to previous representations of Japan or Japaneseness commonality propagated in the media⁴². The Japanese depicted in LIT

represent a authentic and realistic array of characters one could easily find in contemporary Japan (Metropolitan Tokyo), and yet these characters (vapid comedians, confused sex-workers, rude professionals, surly waitresses, and incompetent personnel) are invariably never depicted in media for non-Japanese consumption⁴³. Perhaps being considered (by the Japanese) as too real, dirty, or too close to reality. The fact is that the Japanese characters and the Japan depicted in this film *do* exist and are likely more prevalent than, for example, a *kimono*-clad person clattering their *geta* down a pristine, moonlit cobbled street glistening after light rain towards their wooden house⁴⁴.

Finally, as per the DVD covers for *Black Rain*, it is worth noting the visual shift which has taken place over time. As can be seen below in Figure 4, the initial cover simply showed Bob sitting on a bed facing camera, the curtains open revealing a generic nighttime cityscape. The bed, in that room could be anywhere in the world, the only cultural ‘flag’ being the *yukata* he is wearing.

TAKIGAWA, Christel described the ‘unique’ experience of Japanese hospitality - *the spirit of selfless hospitality*. Of course, the nature of the ‘service’ industry worldwide is by its inerrant design and purpose about subjugating oneself and serving others, something which is by no means unique to Japan.

⁴⁰ Factors such as the 2011 nuclear explosion/leak at *Fuku-shima dai-ich* which had a global impact, and the numerous scandals and faux pas connected to the ill-fated 2020 Tokyo Olympics have served to re-position Japan’s image overseas.

⁴¹ Whilst for a number of years, many non-Japanese have been aficionados of *manga* and *anime*, such representations were never included in the mythical ‘identikit’ image of Japan i.e. Japanese posters and advertising, which invariably focused on ‘high’ culture. ‘Post-manga’ refers to the current epoch in which popular culture has finally begun to be included in the plethora of images and identities included in ‘Japan’ and exported overseas. Following 千と千尋の神隠し’s Academy

Award® for Best Animated Feature (2003), the guardians of Japan’s national image have, reluctantly relented to include darker or ‘lower/popular’ elements of contemporary Japanese culture in their advertising and to some small degree have reconfigured the mythical tropes associated with the highly stylised national identity.

⁴² As simple Google ‘image’ search with the keyword ‘Japan’ or ‘images of Japan’ will clearly demonstrate this point.

⁴³ Interestingly such characters are well-known to the Japanese viewing public and often appear in media, advertising, and light entertainment. The Japanese are certainly not deluded about the breadth of their own citizenry, but this is not exported or usually discussed with non-Japanese, being somewhat of a ‘national secret,’ or a veritable ‘internal memo,’ as it were.

⁴⁴ Such as scene as this is indicative of a quintessentially ‘Japanese’ view of itself in film or media.

Figure 5, an interim cover shows Charlotte against the background of the famed *Shibuya Crossing*, and as per Figure 4, except for the Japanese signs, this scene could have been shot in any large city, anywhere in the increasingly homogenised world. Finally, the current cover (Figure 6) simply depicts Charlotte laying on an unmade bed in a cluttered hotel room⁴⁵. What is interesting to observe from these three images is the common thread of anonymity presented to the viewer; that is Japan's/Tokyo's anonymity. As has been noted earlier, that the film takes place in Tokyo is almost immaterial; the clear focus of this work is located in the internal spaces of the characters and the personal spaces between those characters. The City is relegated to the vehicle by which they met.



Fig.5: LIT alternative DVD jacket ©Focus Features



Fig.4: LIT original DVD jacket ©Focus Features



Fig.6: LIT current DVD jacket ©Focus Features

⁴⁵ This very washed-out, almost monotone photograph of Charlotte on an unmade bed in an anonymous room of mild chaos and clutter is perhaps both referential of the character in Japan (the room being a metaphor for Japan), and also

the lack of importance of Japan. Compare this to *Sayonara*, and the initial cover for *Black Rain*, where Japan is clearly acknowledged as the 'third character, a character of some importance.

Discussion

When read as individual texts, the three films presented here are significant for a number of reasons. When compared and contrasted to one another, however, they transcend the singular, and are imbued with even greater cultural and historical importance. Viewed in this way, they offer us three clear reference points along a continuum of time from which to evaluate and compare representations of *Japaneseness* in film. Separated by 32 years, and 14 years, respectively (a 46 year spread in total), these three reference points chart the journey of modern Japan. Beginning in the tumultuous and uncertain ashes of WWII, they then shift dramatically to the rising phoenix and self-confidence in the Bubble, and finally, they make a marked swing backwards to the post-millennial cultural void and economic flat-line which are dominant markers in today's *Rei-wa*⁴⁶ society. The three films read and presented here have been interpreted as representing three distinct flavours or three cultural attitudes towards Japan; acceptance, rejection, and ambivalence.

Interestingly, acceptance is represented in *Sayonara* (1957), a film shot at a time when America, like Japan was still licking its post-War wounds. As a result one might understandably assume that this work would depict unsavoury Oriental stereotypes of post-War Japan by its American occupiers, thankfully the opposite is true. Instead of crude caricatures of Japan and

the Japanese, *Sayonara* deftly renders the nation with sympathy, dignity, equality, and reverence; indeed one could be forgiven for feeling that there is almost an air of apology abound in this film. That the liberal Hollywood filmmaker's rightful disgust at U.S. committed atrocities has seeped into the fabric of the film and that they are, in part, attempting to rehumanise the Japanese who were so degradingly depicted in U.S. wartime propaganda. Even the closing credit which reads, "We wish to gratefully acknowledge the courtesy and cooperation of the officials and the people of Japan for their help in making this motion picture" attests to this desire to perhaps set the record straight. Whilst there are a few moments of xenophobia depicted in the film directed to specific Japanese (not the nation), they clearly demonstrate that it is the U.S. Occupiers who are being unreasonable and are at fault, not the Japanese. These infringements of U.S. Military codes or protocols primarily serve as key plot points on Gruver's transitional arc from gentle skeptic to respectful admirer; from initially adhering to military protocol on matters concerning fraternisation, to rejecting such doctrines. In the final scene his transition is completed when he chooses to disobey his Command and marry a Japanese national (preferencing self over nation). Indeed, the pinnacle of tragedy occurs as a result of America's draconian and inhumane protocols towards its staff, when Airman Kelly and his wife *Katsumi*

⁴⁶ Japanese history and time is divided according to specific markers. In its recent history this time has been marked by the inauguration and reign of its emperors. Post-War Japan is recorded as follows: *Shou-wa* (昭和、しょうわ) 1926-1989, *Hei-sei* (平成、へいせい) 1989-2019, and *Rei-wa* (令和、れいわ)

2019-present.

⁴⁷ Kelly is one of a number of men who have been singled out for immediate overseas transfer. The commonality between these men is that have all taken Japanese women as their wives.

commit suicide rather than be separated⁴⁷; again, it seems that there is a certain quiet judgment being offered here about American policies and protocols, not Japanese.

In stark contrast to the tacit acceptance depicted in *Sayonara*, in *Black Rain* (1989), Hollywood moves the cultural standpoint to a diametrically opposite position located not in acceptance, but rejection. *Black Rain* is best viewed not purely a piece of entertainment, per se, rather, a throwback to U.S. wartime propaganda. It is a veritable Trojan Horse of cultural clichés and stereotypes designed to leave the viewer in no doubt who are the good guys and who are the bad. The origins of this position of rejection were, in part, located in Japan's renewed economic prowess and financial muscle - something clearly a threat to not only the U.S. economy at that time, but more importantly U.S. prestige and pride. As the only industrialised nation left standing after the War, America had become used to being the only four-legged horse in the race and its now faltering post-War economy, which has enjoyed an early and unfettered start was not ready to be challenged by another nation. Especially not an Asian⁴⁸ one and certainly not one which had previously attacked American soil and forced its hand to commit the ultimate war crime; America likes a fair fight, but only if its opponent is tethered. Made at the

height of the Bubble, this film demonstrates a definite shift and fracture in U.S.- Japan relations and any hint at reverence, respect, or quietude for Japan is hidden deep below a tumultuous and acerbic surface.

Despite the differences noted above, however, both *Black Rain* and *Sayonara* share two similarities. Firstly these are period-specific human dramas, with well-written characters, set in Japan, focused on perceptions and representations of culture by other. Secondly the repercussions of macro policies (mostly institutional) are dealt with at the micro level by the protagonists, who attempt to use their moral compass to reach a state of grace and understanding. The major divergence here being that in *Sayonara* one gets the impression that the American protagonists are much more autonomous and much keener on self-determination than are the characters in *Black Rain*. For despite all their chest-beating and posturing, and behind all the surface tensions and scowls, both Conklin and Vincent are no more than corporate G-men, embodiments of their nation and its national self-interest, scratch their surface and they bleed red, white, and blue; not the case in *Sayonara*. So, despite Conklin's attempt to mimic a brash, frontier sheriff he is, in actuality, no different to MATSUMOTO whom he derides as being a 'suit' or a corporate bureaucrat; the key distinction being that MATSUMOTO has no illusions about what he is.

The final offering in this trilogy, the film forming the last panel of the triptych is *LIT* (2003). As noted prior, following the pendulum swing from plus to minus, here we witness it swing back to the middle-ground, coming to rest just over the minus area. The minus portrayed

⁴⁸ Rather similar to Adolf Hitler's belief in the supremacy of the Aryan Race which was shattered by Jesse Jackson at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, America too had such a moment. After telling itself and its populous about the apparent inadequacies and inferiorities of Asians (a notion which to some degree still pervades), to then have a former enemy which one has belittled and subjugated suddenly bite the hand that feeds and rise above its allotted station was not only unacceptable, but demoralising.

here, however, is distinctly different from the obvious minus of *Black Rain* which, because of its excess, can easily be rationalised and understood. In *LIT*, the minus is actually situated around a state of indifference or ambivalence - emotions which are worse because they reflect and intimate a disengagement from the subject; like it or loathe it, but don't be indifferent to it!

It can be argued that at least the ashes of post-war Japan were made up of something; a belief in nation, culture, or heritage - that they had some constitution - that they weren't just ash. The ashes of post-Bubble or millennial Japan, however, appear to be almost entirely self-referential and empty; there is nothing but grey ash. *LIT* captures a centrist Japan of uniformity, conformity, and homogeneity - a very 'beige' or monotone Japan. Gone is the awe, wonder, and sparkle, replaced instead by a cultural and social void which is lacking in substance and texture as if it were one large *Muji* shop⁴⁹.

The ambivalence portrayed in *LIT* is complex, however, and is situated not only within the protagonists, but perhaps more strongly within their surroundings - within Japan (Tokyo). In effect, therefore, we may not be dealing with two Americans and their ambivalence towards Japan, rather, with Japan's ambivalence towards itself expressed through the two protagonists. As noted much earlier, they are simply inert mirrors reflecting back Japan's self-image to the audience, after all, they did not invent a fantasy of Japan on a Los Angeles sound stage; it is not an imaginary Japan we are presented with here, for

it actually existed at that point in time. Of course the director chose what to film and what not to, what to edit out, and what to leave in; but given a bowl of various shaped strawberries, she cannot be blamed for making something which tastes of strawberry!

Whilst the lasting impression from this film may be that Japan is mostly dark, confused, and lost in modernity, it is not all doom-and-gloom, for at Japan's core lies a hidden light or charm and *LIT* goes some way to capturing this. However, rather than the bold and brash statements depicted in *Sayonara* and *Black Rain*, *LIT* offers the observant viewer small vignettes, small windows through which to glimpse a myriad of *Japans*, which ultimately lead to a resolution that these parts may go some way towards expressing the whole. That these *Japans* are not the ideals propped up and sanctioned by the JNTO or the agents of soft-diplomacy, they are more authentic and have more right to be represented and included in the greater Japanese identity for the current epoch, regardless of whether the self-imposed cultural elite deem them acceptable or not. Ultimately, what *LIT* offers us therefore, is a Japan for the Age and it is up to the viewer to reexamine their own prejudices and preconceptions in order to accept that.

Conclusion

The three films presented here: *Sayonara* (1957), *Black Rain* (1989), and *Lost in Translation* (2003) form three reference points along the continuum of film history. That they were made when they were, not being period pieces, reenactments, nor pastiches of time and space outside their own loci renders them of exceptional cinematic and

⁴⁹ *Mu-jirushi-ryou-hin, 'Muji'* (無印良品、むじるしりょうひん).

cultural value. Amongst their myriad of merits, perhaps their greatest asset is as a triptych forming a singular unit, and their ability to capture, depict, and express change and changing perceptions of Japan. This apparently simple task is, it appears, a feat Japan itself seems unable (or unwilling) to do, and Hollywood's constant re-evaluation, and re-invention of Japan through film, stands in stark contrast to that of Japan itself. Left to Japanese NPOs and NGOs like the Daiwa Foundation, The Nippon Foundation, The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, the various regional embassies and consulates, and the JNTO, non-Japanese could hardly be blamed for assuming that Japan had time-traveled backwards to a pre-*Edo*⁵⁰ era. A time where all citizens walked around in *ki-mono* and lived in exquisite wooden houses eating only *kai-seki-ryou-ri*⁵¹ off ornate lacquerware, where everyday is simultaneously the height of spring (blossoming *sakura*) and autumn (*momiji*). The point being reiterated here is that Japan is not fixed, finite, or unyielding over time as its self promotion would have us believe, and that furthermore, there is not one Japan, but many Japans (plural). The three films read and cited herein provide a reflection or glimpse of the shifting realities of

Japan over time, and provide interest as quasi cultural barometers and beacons able to guide the reader/viewer towards understanding and perhaps indirectly afford them opportunities to evaluate and re-evaluate Japanese cultural identities, fashions, trends, and ideas in space and time.

As a longitudinal observer of Japan and Japanese cultural identity, the author maintains that the greatest disservice Japan constantly does to itself, is the denial of change, multiplicity, and heterogeneity. The constant perpetuation of its cultural myths à la *tan-i min-zoku*⁵² (単一民族、たんいみんぞく), that the Japanese are all one and the same, all round pegs fitting snugly in round holes, with everyone having a place and knowing where it is, unyielding over time is not only delusional but stunting. The myth that Japan is a uniform nation of high Zen-based culture, uniformity, cleanliness, safety, and *wa* (和、わ) renders it not only devoid from reality, but also and ultimately less interesting. This static representation - *ko-tei-kan-nen*⁵⁴ (固定観念、こていかんねん), which fails to capture the diversity of the Japanese archipelago and its inhabitants, could be one of the contributing factors why interest in Japan or things Japanese is currently waning in the West - (LIT encapsulates this), and

⁵⁰ The *Edo* period (1603-1867), perhaps the zeitgeist of that which can be considered quintessentially Japanese.

⁵¹ *Kai-seki-ryou-ri* (会席料理、かいせきりょうり) is a form of *wa-shoku* (和食、わしょく) - Japanese traditional cuisine. It is notable for its exquisite presentation and variety of ingredients most often with a seasonal reference. Because of the beauty and intricacy of its presentation, it is the kind of Japanese food which is invariably depicted in Japanese advertising, yet the food which almost no ordinary citizen eats - certainly not on any regular basis.

⁵² The myth of a singular race or singular ethnic history.

⁵³ *Wa* translates as 'harmony' or balance, and is euphemistically used to refer to things Japanese, the inference being that 'real' Japanese artefacts and ideas have at their core an innate sense of appropriateness, balance, and a sublime adherence to nature and the environment (both micro and macro).

⁵⁴ Fixed, finite, or 'boxing' of ideas/data/information/concepts to strip out diversity and arrive at something akin to a stereotype.

why fewer films are being made here by non-Japanese directors⁵⁵.

It is arguable that if any image is fixed or finite, it need only be read once to be comprehended; if it is constantly in change, however, then that is not the case. If one believes Japan is, in fact, the ‘culture-by-numbers’ nation depicted by the JNTO in its posters, and one visits the country, sees all the cultural props on the poster, all the temples and shrines &c, then it is arguable to some degree, that in effect, if those props are regarded as representing the essence of Japan, then one has indeed seen Japan. Conversely, if the nation accepts that it is constantly in flux, if its advertising and media (including film), reflect this belief, then this is not the case. If Japanese media (and self-perception) reflected the diversity of both ‘popular’ and ‘high’ cultures which are spread across the archipelago, if it is recognised and acknowledge these cultures as being multiplicitous and constantly in change, that to understand Japan would require constant re-visitation. Perhaps then, interest would not be on the wane and perhaps more interesting cinematic representations would be abound.

⁵⁵ In actuality this is not the only problem for non-Japanese film directors working in Japan, as both Coppola and Scott testified during interviews presented on their respective DVDs. That both films were not entirely shot in Japan and, like Shrader’s ‘Mishima: A life in Four Chapters’ (1985), OSHIMA’s masterpiece, ‘*L’Empire des sens*’ (1976) which were finished and edited overseas, and Zwick’s ‘The Last Samurai’ (2003) which was predominantly filmed in New Zealand not Japan, numerous Western producers and directors have attested to the difficulties in filming in Japan. Not only the cost, bureaucracy, inflexibility, but also the drudge of swimming against the current of creativity are reasons various directors and producers have given as to why they would avoid Japan.

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