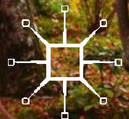
ANDREW DORMAN

Paradoxical Japaneseness

Cultural Representation in 21st Century Japanese Cinema



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Notes for Readers

Notes on the Romanization of Japanese Names, Japanese Film Titles and the Use of Italics

Throughout this book Japanese names are placed into the order common to English-speaking countries (given name first, family name second). All film titles are given in Japanese first and thereafter in English, except in cases where the film is more commonly known by its Japanese title (e.g. *Rashomon*). This also applies to films from other non-English-speaking countries.

Japanese words are italicized, for example, *bunraku* theatre, except in the case of quotations in which the author has eschewed the use of italics for Japanese words. More internationally recognized terms, such as anime and samurai, are not italicized. The use of italics does not apply to Japanese names, place names or landmarks (e.g. Himeji castle).

Note on Box Office Grosses

Box office grosses featured in this book are given as US dollars, British pound sterling or Japanese yen depending on which currency is used by the source from which the figures are taken.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I wish to begin this book with a simple assertion; that any film, in one way or another, is specific to the country that produces it. Whether it displays specific cultural images, articulates 'national issues' or is simply made in a particular location, a film carries with it an inherent nationality according to which it may be situated contextually. However, situating a given film in regards to its nationality is not always a simple task. Studying cinema on the basis of cultural and national specificity is fraught with complications, and may be complicated even further by numerous 'transnational' elements relevant to the study of film: international coproduction, multinational casts and crew, the appropriation of subject matter from one culture to another, films made specifically for audiences in other countries, and the globally interconnected nature of film industry practices. Cinema often appears as a multinational, transnational medium, a medium that can pass through different national and cultural contexts on its way towards public exhibition. Although most films are inherently national in some respect, and are thus identified with or attributed to a specific nation, they cannot always be analysed adequately on the simple pretexts of nation, nationality and cultural/regional specificity. Nor are national cinemas and film industries unique or self-contained institutions; they are, according to the dynamics of a global film industry, far more ambiguous than the term national cinema suggests.

With this book I would like readers to consider the cultural ambiguities of national cinemas and the flexibility shown by national film indus-

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tries in representing a specific culture. Nationality, whether expressed as a collective identity or used as a cultural signifier, may be distinct, but it is by no means unchangeable. An individual, for instance, may lay claim to different nationalities and hold different passports due to a culturally diverse heritage. A nation may be defined as a physical space on a map by its borders and as a cultural entity by a flag, a national anthem, a shared language and a shared history, yet within its borders live people who may identify themselves according to other nationalities or regional and communal identities. By the same token, a film may have a nationality, but at the same time it may also represent other nationalities through its content and its production, for example, a film that has subject matter which pertains to a completely different national context from the one in which it was produced, or a film that is shared through international coproduction. What I am speaking of here is the ambiguity of nationality, in short, its paradoxical nature. Nationality in this regard can be simultaneously distinct (and therefore meaningful) and culturally ambiguous (and thus flexible in its meaning and how one might approach it intellectually).

Throughout this book I discuss films as culturally paradoxical texts in terms of their content and the industrial contexts that produced them. I have chosen to do this in relation to Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century because, as will be apparent, Japan is a fascinating case of a nation that has often adopted culturally paradoxical modes of representation in response to an expanding and increasingly diverse global film industry and film market. This does not mean that Japanese cinema has simply cast aside its culturally specific features. As I will argue, its distinctiveness in the global market is maintained through modes of representation and industrial practices that seemingly undermine this distinctiveness. This is my central contention and one that will be illustrated by an analysis of film content and industrial practices of production and distribution involving Japan. Much of Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century is culturally paradoxical, with film exports often emphasizing or de-emphasizing their inherent 'Japaneseness' according to the changing dynamics and expectations of a global industry as well as a more culturally diverse global audience. Maintaining a strong and distinctive cultural presence within this context requires a certain degree of flexibility in how one chooses to represent cultural specificity. In order to maintain a strong market presence in an increasingly competitive, diverse and interconnected industry, Japanese filmmakers, producers and studios have adopted and developed various ways of representing Japan to the world. At a time when creative and

cultural industries have become vital to Japanese gross domestic product (GDP) in response to prolonged recession (1990s–), flexible and ambiguous modes of representation have emerged in Japanese cinema.

In order to understand the paradoxical nature of cultural representation in film, I have identified two contradictory modes of representation: cultural concealment and cultural performance. Cultural concealment refers to a de-emphasis or, as in some cases, a removal of distinctive cultural features as part of a more culturally ambiguous and hybrid representation of Japan. For example, in Chap. 3, I discuss *Sukiyaki uesutan jango/Sukiyaki Western Django* (Takashi Miike, 2007), a film in which the convention of Japanese language dialogue is eschewed in favour of English language dialogue. In addition, *Sukiyaki Western Django* is geographically ambiguous—the film takes place in an American 'Wild West' town situated in rural Japan—and this draws attention to the malleability of Japanese national identity. Cultural concealment is also addressed as a strategy of cultural representation in the context of Japanese cultural production since the late twentieth century. Modes of representation, such as *kokusaika* policy and *mukokuseki* animation (both of which I will address in Chap. 2) de-emphasize culturally specific features in order to make cultural exports accessible to non-Japanese consumers. As a major characteristic of Japanese cultural production, concealment is also evident in contemporary cinema, particularly in the case of popular films such as the work of director Takashi Miike (Chap. 3) and Japanese horror (Chap. 4).

In contrast, cultural performance refers to a film's emphasis on distinctive Japanese features, an emphasis on cultural specificity that becomes central to the film's appeal. Cultural iconography, historical and geographical specificity and national stereotypes may be presented overtly in order to distinguish a film as a Japanese product. *Jidaigeki*, a genre of Japanese period film focusing on the Tokugawa/Edo era (1603–1868), is a prime example of cultural performance because it represents Japan in terms of historical and cultural specificity, i.e. a representation of a more 'authentic' Japan that predates modernization and the influx of foreign influences during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The idea of cultural performance has its origins in theatre studies and the attempts of scholars since the 1980s to combine theatre and drama studies with anthropology. In this book I do not discuss cultural performance in terms of performance studies as certain scholars have done, namely J. Lowell Lewis (2013), who points out that the term performance is often too open,

since almost anything can be seen as a performance (Lewis, 2013, p. 4). Instead I focus specifically on the use of film as a method of showcasing nationality in a way that can be understood as a form of performance. Performance, whether through the representation of iconography, cultural traditions or history, is not discussed in terms of anthropology so much as it is understood as a means of emphasizing one's nationality 'The noun *performance*', writes F. G. Bailey, 'carries with it a notion of publicity, something exhibited, something that is staged' (Bailey, 1996, p. 2). As will become apparent in Chaps. 5 and 6, cultural performance fulfils the need to publicize and exhibit cultural specificity in a highly staged manner, thus distinguishing Japanese culture and, more specifically, Japanese cinema in a global market.

When viewed in parallel, concealment and performance disorientate stable images and ideas of Japan. The former presents Japaneseness as a highly malleable form interrelated with the 'foreign', the 'global' and the 'non-specific', while the latter serves to distinguish Japanese cultural iconography and subject matter. When viewed in relation to transnational industrial practices such as film distribution, international coproduction and the use of foreign financial and production resources, these modes of representation appear highly contradictory. When considering such contrasting modes of representation, one is faced with an intriguing paradox: Japan is often difficult to situate firmly in its film exports, yet, at the same time, it becomes highly visible through film exports. I would argue that such a paradox is key to understanding the changing nature of nationality and cultural specificity in the context of early twenty-first century cultural and economic globalization. As Mika Ko and Koichi Iwabuchi have both illustrated, Japanese national identity itself has often been presented paradoxically. Focusing on various discourses used to define national identity since the emergence of a Japanese nation state, Ko describes types of *nihonjinron* (discourses of Japaneseness) that are varied and not always coherent: 'Some of them are even conflicting or contradictory to each other' (Ko, 2010, p. 11). Yet, Ko points out that such discourses advocate the uniqueness of Japan, despite not always being coherent with one another; in order to legitimize Japan's uniqueness, *nihonjinron* 'have kept changing their content' (Ko, 2010, p. 11). Similar to this, Iwabuchi discusses the presentation of a contradictory national self-image vis-à-vis the rest of the world:

> In the course of Japan's modern history, in which West-centric transnational and cross-cultural encounters, conflicts and connections have been accelerated at various levels, a particular self-image of the Japanese national essence has been developed so as to construct a modern national identity in the face of Western domination. (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 53)

Iwabuchi goes on to suggest that the appropriation and assimilation of foreign influences, which would appear to undermine a unique national self-image, actually help to reinforce Japan's distinctive presence in the world, an 'exclusivist notion of Japanese national and cultural identity': 'It is in this sense that I would argue that the Japanese capacity for cultural borrowing and appropriation does not simply articulate a process of hybridization in practice, but it is strategically represented as a key feature of Japanese national identity itself' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 53). Both *nihonjinron* and cultural appropriation serve as strategies through which Japan's alleged uniqueness is presented, both to the rest of the world and in reaction to it. In the case of twenty-first-century Japanese cinema, cultural concealment and cultural performance function in much the same way; nationality is made indefinable, yet distinct, a source that can be concealed or evoked according to the audience or market that is being catered to. One could even suggest that such paradoxical forms of representation become characteristic of Japanese cultural production and export in the twenty-first century, a time in which film production and distribution appear less reliant on singular national industries.

There are, however, certain issues worth considering that arise from the discussion of Japanese films as culturally paradoxical texts. Part of what makes many of the films discussed in this book paradoxical is the fact that they are produced and distributed through industrial processes that are separate from a Japanese context. This includes the recontextualization of certain directors as international/global filmmakers when their work is promoted overseas (Chap. 3), the distribution of films through DVD (Chap. 4) and international film festivals (Chap. 5), and the use of coproduction strategy and foreign finance (Chap. 6). Because of the different national and transnational, contexts of contemporary film production, the influence of overseas consortia on Japanese films is considerable, so much so that it raises questions concerning the actual nationality of certain film productions, particularly those which are coproduced. However, though the influence of foreign consortia and a global audience has had a significant impact on cultural representation in many Japanese film exports,

such factors also facilitate the global dissemination of Japanese films and Japanese popular culture in general. Just as foreign influences on, foreign appropriations of and foreign involvement in Japanese film productions contradict the uniqueness, as it were, and autonomy of those productions, they also contribute to it. In some cases Japanese filmmakers are able to access non-Japanese resources of finance, production and promotion, while the increased visibility of Japanese cinema across the globe enhances national film production, encouraging filmmakers to adopt new modes of representation.

Cultural concealment and cultural performance are symptomatic of an increasingly globalized film industry and how individual nations respond to its various challenges. As this book demonstrates, representations of Japan are often strikingly paradoxical in ways that are related to the wider market for Japanese cinema and popular culture in the early twenty-first century. An essentialist analysis of national cinema as an expression of a single cultural context is therefore unhelpful towards understanding the complexities of national film production. In the process of maintaining national/cultural distinctiveness, films continually engage in intercultural relations between texts and industrial processes which appear contradictory to that distinctiveness.

Scholarly Background

One of the primary motivations for this book has been the controversy, if such a word is apt, surrounding English language studies of Japanese cinema. I am referring here to a certain tendency in English language scholarship to essentialize the subject of Japanese cinema, to approach it as something unique, as something quintessentially Japanese. I am not suggesting that it is incorrect to take such an approach and focus specifically on the nationality of Japanese films; it is, after all, logical to study films in relation to specific national, cultural and historical contexts. Certainly, this book focuses specifically on Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century, albeit in relation to the external cultural and industrial factors that influence cultural representation. In this respect, it is worth taking note of Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer's argument that it is important to perceive Japanese cinema in terms of its 'external' and 'relational' dimensions: 'Japan is not so much a bounded entity as an "idea" dependent upon its imagined links to other outside communities for its very definition and meaning' (Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p. 19). In the context of

economic and cultural globalization, and the interconnections between nations, cultures and communities that characterize it, it becomes crucial to understand national cinema as a paradoxical entity, an entity that is distinct as a national product, yet also related to a much wider context of film production, distribution and cultural appropriation. To essentialize films according to their national context, in other words to study cultural representation simply in relation to Japan itself, limits an understanding of the paradoxical nature of cultural representation.

In reassessing his approaches to Japanese cinema, Donald Richie claims that the 'assumption is that film exists in the context of the world around it. It stems from reality [...] Japanese reality was the source, and the virtue of the Japanese film lay in its fidelity' (Richie, 2001, pp. xiii–xiv). In contrast to the scholarly convention identified by Richie, I discuss Japanese films as both culturally ambiguous and culturally distinctive texts related to their internal and external contexts. There is no single source to which the films under discussion are faithful (whether on a textual or industrial level), i.e. a cultural essence we might broadly refer to as Japaneseness. The controversy among English language scholars has centred on the study of Japanese cultural specificity and the perception of Japan as a unique and self-contained culture, a 'bounded entity' (Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p. 19). Prominent in this discourse has been Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's study of the director Akira Kurosawa and specifically Yoshimoto's critique of essentialist studies of Japanese cinema.

Challenging many of the prevailing axioms of Japanese film study, Yoshimoto identifies the work of major writers Joseph L. Anderson, Donald Richie, Paul Schrader and Noel Burch, and their tendency to essentialize Japanese cinema and culture as unique entities that stand in direct contrast to Western cinemas. Yoshimoto writes:

> Very schematically, the history of American scholarship on Japanese cinema can be divided into three phases: (1) humanistic celebration of great auteurs and Japanese culture in the 1960s, (2) formalistic and Marxist celebration of Japanese cinema as an alternative to the classical Hollywood cinema in the 1970s, and (3) critical reexamination of the preceding approaches through the introduction of discourse of Otherness and cross-cultural analysis in the 1980s. (Yoshimoto, 2000, p. 8)

Although integral to a more 'Western' understanding of Japanese filmmaking practices, scholarship throughout the 1960s and 1970s emphasized the differences between Japanese and non-Japanese cinemas, even in cases

where Japanese cinema was applied to Western film theory: as Yuriko Furuhata writes, Japanese cinema played a significant role in the development of Western film theory in the 1960s and 1970s (Furuhata, 2013, p. 6), while also providing the impetus for Anderson and Richie's humanistic scholarship in the 1960s. In the process, Japan was treated as Other, a fundamentally national subject incompatible and thus irreconcilable with cultural contexts outside East Asia. Paul Schrader's work on Yasujiro Ozu, a director so often essentialized as *the* most Japanese of filmmakers, is discussed by Yoshimoto in terms of essentialization. By relating Ozu's film style directly to the practice of Zen Buddhism, Schrader understands the director according to his essential Japaneseness and thus proposes an Oriental film style in the director's work: 'Schrader eagerly tries to mold Ozu into a Zen artist of the East whose personality and culture are so steeped in Zen that his films express the Transcendent' (Yoshimoto, 2000, p. 13). Ozu is thus firmly situated in a Japanese/Eastern context, or as Yoshimoto refers to it, a 'holistic space' created by Schrader (Yoshimoto, 2000, p. 13). Given the fact that Ozu's films often reference Japan's relationship with the outside world with filmmaking techniques influenced by Hollywood and the appropriation of American pop culture iconography, an essentialist approach can only go so far in understanding Ozu's mode of representation.

A tendency to essentialize Japanese cinema is evident in many important studies of Japan, the Japanese and Japanese culture published in the English language. This includes Lafcadio Hearn's work on Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1967) and *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (1982) by Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie. The Japanese themselves have essentialized Japanese subjects, for example, Yuji Aida's *The Structure of the Japanese Consciousness* (1972), and various *nihonjinron* discourses produced since World War II designed to highlight the supposedly unique characteristics of Japanese culture and society. The tendency has often been to interpret Japan as a unique and monolithic entity vastly different from the West, a subject that must be decoded and demystified through specialist academic study. In this book there is an understanding of Japanese cinema as a distinct and culturally specific subject, but distinct in relation to different cultural and industrial contexts (not necessarily in contrast to them) and the external as well as national influences that inform paradoxical cultural representation.

Highlighting film as an important element in promoting Japanese culture around the world, Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunka cho*) consider Japanese cinema as something deeply rooted in its national context, something 'firmly fixed in the everyday lives of the people of Japan' (Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka cho), 2012, p. 22). 'Film is also an expression of the cultural situation in a country or region at a particular time, and shows the special characteristics of a culture' (Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka cho), 2012, p. 22). Although I would not refute this statement—as was stated earlier, any film, in one way or another, is specific to the country that produces it—film is not rooted in a single national context and therefore cannot be defined simply on the basis of its 'fidelity' to a single source. What this book aims to do is reveal cultural representation to be a 'multicontextual' process by offering an analysis of film that relates to the various cultural and industrial contexts that inform it.

Analytical Rationale

The decision to focus on paradoxical representations of Japan is partly a response to essentialist studies of national cinema. Paradoxical modes of representation are as much a product of transnational industrial processes and the widespread popularity of Japanese popular culture outside Japan as they are the product of 'national cinema' or 'national culture'. This does not mean that the importance of culturally specific features is overlooked. On the contrary, my analysis of paradoxical cultural representation focuses on several key areas specific to Japan: the treatment of language and ethnicity (Chap. 3), the presentation of cultural iconography (Chaps. 3 and 5) and popular genres associated with Japan (Chaps. 4 and 6). As some of these chapters illustrate, the specific features that make Japanese culture recognizable around the world are integral to the commercial success of many films. Hence, cultural performance is a commercially viable form of representation, just as modes of cultural concealment are used to de-emphasize certain features and make films more culturally inconspicuous and thus accessible to the widest possible audience. In terms of how filmmakers present Japan, there is a degree of flexibility involved.

For films to become commercially successful (while remaining culturally distinctive) often requires a contradictory approach that emphasizes unique qualities, but does so according to the parameters set by a global film market. A film may present a distinctive portrayal of a national subject,

but will do so in a way that is accessible to non-nationals; for example, a Japanese period film distributed overseas via international film festivals performs cultural specificity while still conforming to the international context of film festival exhibition.

Despite Japanese cinema having received much scholarly attention over the years, there remains a dearth of research exploring the industrial and commercial dimensions of the subject. In recent years there have been significant movements towards a better understanding of Japanese film in terms of its global and industrial contexts. This has provided starting points for a more engaged discussion of how cultural representation is constructed. English language scholarship on the subject of Japanese cinema has often favoured issues of national allegory, authorship and film genre, though more recently attention has turned towards histories of film production and the global circulation of Japanese and Asian films (see Phillips and Stringer, eds, 2007; Davis and Yeh, 2008; Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, eds, 2009; and Woojeong Joo, Rayna Denison and Hiroko Furukawa, 2013). Yoshiharu Tezuka's *Japanese Cinema Goes Global* (2012), for instance, assesses how Japanese filmmakers, producers and financiers have engaged with national identity and strategies of self-exoticism through transnational arrangements of film finance and coproduction. The process of globalization, Tezuka argues, has changed the material and discursive conditions that have underlined an essentialist discourse of Japanese cultural uniqueness (Tezuka, 2012, pp. 4–5). Tezuka's work is one of the most important studies of recent years because it considers the industrial as well as cultural influences that have shaped Japanese cinema. He reassesses Japan's supposed cultural uniqueness by looking at the geopolitical interaction between Japanese film workers and those in other countries, including China and the USA. Similarly, I relate Japan to external contexts, though I have done so with an awareness of how specific cultural characteristics can be concealed or channelled through cultural performance.

The decision to focus on Japanese cinema in the early twenty-first century was prompted by the unprecedented surge of interest that has been shown in Japanese popular culture during this period, both scholarly and otherwise. The dissemination of Japanese cultural products is now more widespread than at any previous stage. Since the 1980s, Japanese animation (referred to as anime) has become a highly lucrative cultural export alongside manga comic books and novels. Horror films and extreme cinema (cinema of an explicitly violent and trans-

gressive nature) are branded with terms such as J Horror and Asia Extreme, becoming widely available in Asia, Europe and North America via home entertainment formats. Disparate aspects of Japanese popular culture including animation, manga, film, pop music, fashion and even food are showcased and celebrated at fan conventions around the world. Concurrently, mainstream publications dedicated to Japanese film, anime and manga are stocked regularly by mainstream retailers, most notably *NEO Magazine* in the UK and *Otaku USA Magazine*, and Japanese filmmakers such as Takeshi Kitano, Hirokazu Koreeda and Takashi Miike maintain a strong presence at both major international and small-scale film festivals. As Japan has become more prominent internationally through its cultural products, it has also been incorporated into the much wider consumption of East Asian popular culture. This has duly led to a growing body of scholarship dedicated to the regional and global dimensions of East Asian media in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, in some instances Japanese films have been promoted globally as 'Asian cinema', most notably in the UK via the VHS and DVD packaging of Japanese horror films by the likes of Tartan Films, Premier Asia, Optimum Asia and 4Digital Asia.

It is worth asking at this point why Japanese popular culture has become so prominent internationally in the early twenty-first century. This requires some contextualization. By the 1980s Japan had become one of the world's leading economic powers, particularly in the areas of automobile and electronics production. However, Japan's economic prosperity, which peaked in the mid-1980s, was curtailed by the financial deflation of its so-called 'bubble economy' in the early 1990s and the resultant Heisei recession, a recession which has extended into the twenty-first century. A key development during this recession has been a re-emphasis on cultural products as a way of counterbalancing losses incurred in other production sectors.

As a result of economic recession, Japanese cultural production has grown in value with GDP no longer concentrated solely on economic and industrial growth. This has resulted in the so-called Cool Japan culture industry, the source of Japan's 'gross national cool', as Douglas McGray describes it (McGray, 2002). Cool Japan has been pursued by the Japanese government, cultural policy-makers and creative industries to promote cultural products that make Japan distinctive and 'cool' on the world stage, in particular, computer games, animation, comics and film. The Japanese status of these products has been emphasized to foreign consumers as a

selling point, helping to promote the nation's creative industries globally while counteracting Japan's diminishing economic status:

> Under the very serious conditions of the Japanese economy such as intensifying competition with emerging countries, diminishing domestic demand, deteriorating growth potential, and battered local economies, we can no longer rely on conventional models of Japanese industry and economy, consisting of mass production, mass consumption and cost competition. Japan will never survive without creating new sources of revenue. (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2012)

The rise of new creative and culture industries under the Cool Japan policy has resulted in an influx of computer games, music software, animation, film, television shows and publishing. As Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) reported in 2005, METI estimates that if these sectors are included, the broader content industry is worth 11 trillion yen, 'making it double the size of the iron and steel industry, and approximately half the size of the auto industry' (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005, p. 10). In accordance, Japanese filmmakers, producers and cultural policy initiatives have engaged with non-Japanese consortia in an attempt to increase the global visibility of cultural products. For example, the Japan Association for the International Promotion of Moving Images (UNIJAPAN) was launched in 2005 to achieve numerous objectives related to the promotion of Japanese films overseas. Among UNIJAPAN's aims was the 'creation, display and distribution of materials and data necessary for international diffusion and publicity of Japanese films' and support programmes for the international promotion of Japanese films (particularly at film festivals) (UNIJAPAN, 2005, pp. 1–2).

Clearly there has been a pressing economic motivation for the increase in cultural exportation since the 1990s. It is because of this that I focus on the early twenty-first century, a period in which Japanese filmmakers and producers have responded both to the Cool Japan policy and the economic imperative to promote Japanese cinema globally. As a result, Japanese films have often been produced, promoted and exported as culturally specific products in the wider branding of Japanese 'national cool', while simultaneously film workers have engaged with transnational industrial arrangements which seemingly undermine the autonomy of the Japanese film industry.

In addition to the wider economic motivations for increased film production in Japan, the domestic marketplace for Japanese cinema has seen an increase in film production and exportation. Between 1997 and 2010, the number of Japanese films released in the domestic market rose to almost double, from 278 in 1997 to 408 in 2010, reaching a high of 448 in 2009 (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan Inc., 2012). During this period the domestic market share for Japanese films also rose, from a low of 30.2 % in 1998 to a high of 59.5 % in 2008 (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan Inc., 2012). Just as the film production sector has responded to collective efforts to promote 'pop culture' in order to support Japan's economy, so too has it responded to a commercial lull for the industry in the late 1990s and early 2000s. According to an official 2008 report by JETRO, the vast majority of film income is earned domestically (up to 90 %), however, overseas sales are becoming 'indispensable' income sources. Overseas sales revenue was thus incorporated into the business plans of production companies (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2008, p. 12). This has not only informed the promotion of films worldwide, it has also helped counteract financial losses incurred by the poor performance of films within the domestic market at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The year 2002, in particular, proved to be a relative low point, with domestic releases managing only a 27.1 % market share (Davis and Yeh, 2008, p. 69).

The shift from imported films to domestic films dominating the Japanese box office in the mid to late 2000s helped to renew confidence in the global commercial potential of domestic productions, attracting investment from leading television broadcasters (Asahi Broadcasting Corporation, Fuji Television, Nippon Television Network, Tokyo Broadcasting System Television Inc.) and multimedia companies (Dentsu Music and Entertainment, Hakuhodo DY Media Partners): 'As other industries also entered the film industry around the same time, the production of Japanese films multiplied at a magnificent rate, thus called the "bubble of the Japanese film"' (UNIJAPAN, 2009, p. 17). In the process, there have been more sustained attempts to maintain Japan as a global film brand via the dissemination of culturally specific genres—anime, J Horror, *jidaigeki*—alongside theatrical and home entertainment distribution, regular film festival participation by Japanese filmmakers, international coproduction, and the utilization of Japanese locations by foreign film productions.

Much of this book looks at the relationship between Japanese cultural representation and external contexts. This presents the chance to discuss numerous national/industrial contexts related to Japan's film industry: East Asia, Europe, North America, etc. In order to make this study as concise as possible, I have decided to focus on the English language markets of the UK and the USA, as well as British and American industrial contexts connected to Japanese film production, though there is also consideration of major European film festivals in Chap. 5. The UK and the USA serve as focal points in understanding the success of Japanese film exports, certainly in terms of box office figures, trends of popularity and collaborations between Japanese and non-Japanese film consortia. There are numerous reasons for singling out these particular territories. The American market remains one of the largest and most profitable for Japanese cultural products, while the extent to which Japanese cinema and popular culture have been appropriated by Hollywood in recent years—remakes of Japanese horror titles, anime-styled films such as *Speed Racer* (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 2008) and *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (Edgar Wright, 2010), films directly influenced by Japanese cinema (*The Last Samurai* (Edward Zwick, 2003), *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003), *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013), *The Wolverine* (James Mangold, 2013), *47 Ronin* (Carl Erik Rinsch, 2013), and *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards, 2014))—makes it a key area in analysing the popularity and influence of Japanese films in the English-speaking world. The UK, in comparison, represents a smaller market for Japanese cinema, yet it is notable for its consumption of it: the availability of horror and extreme cinema via British companies Tartan Films (now US-based Palisades Tartan), Premier Asia and 4Digital Asia; *NEO Magazine*'s dedicated coverage of Japanese pop culture; the Japan Foundation's promotion of Japanese cinema through its regular touring film program; and the involvement of UK-based companies, such as HanWay Films and Recorded Picture Company, in recent *jidaigeki* production. Moreover, my own geographical position within the UK has been advantageous. As a consumer of Japanese films since the late 1990s, I have observed for a number of years the increasing popularity and commercial success of Japanese cinema in the British context. This has been particularly useful towards understanding the ongoing popularity of certain genres—anime, J Horror and *jidaigeki*—and how perceptions of them have been shaped by DVD promotion, theatrical distribution and mainstream media coverage.

Lastly, I should point out that this book does not offer a comprehensive overview of twenty-first-century Japanese cinema, hence the decision to focus on specific films, genres and contexts of film production. Certain aspects of Japanese cinema are not included for in-depth discussion, anime being the most notable omission. More than any other area of contemporary Japanese cinema, anime has spearheaded the global dissemination of Japanese pop culture, with the output of Studio Ghibli and major works such as *Akira* (Katsuhiro Otomo, 1988), *Kokaku kidotai/Ghost in the Shell* (Mamoru Oshii, 1995) and *Pafekuto Buruu/Perfect Blue* (Satoshi Kon, 1997) becoming considerable critical and commercial successes overseas. The fact that anime has been so widely successful while often appearing to be 'un-Japanese' aesthetically (an issue I will return to in Chap. 2) surely makes it an ideal case study for an investigation of cultural concealment in Japanese cinema. However, anime is not singled out for in-depth analysis primarily because of the multitude of publications already dedicated to the subject. Contemporary documentary is also omitted, as Japanese feature documentaries have not had the same cultural or commercial impact as other film categories, while domestically successful films unavailable or unpopular in English-speaking countries are not featured, given that this book is concerned with exported cinema.

Methodology

Drawing upon extensive industry-based research, including research conducted in Japan, the case studies featured in this book utilize both textual and empirical approaches in order to investigate cultural representation in the selected films, as well as the industrial and commercial contexts that impact on these representations. A focused textual analysis is central to the book, with cultural representation understood in terms of the films' aesthetic representation, cultural iconography and thematic elements. This forms the main analysis of the films, while their industrial and commercial contexts of production, promotion and distribution are addressed through a methodology based on film industry and cultural policy sources. These contexts are as follows: utilization of foreign commercial resources (Chap. 3); DVD distribution and Hollywood remakes of J Horror (Chap. 4); international film festivals (Chap. 5); and international coproduction and film financing (Chap. 6).

Despite Japanese films having received considerable attention in English language studies, there is, as already stated, a dearth of empirical

research. This book provides readers with new industry-based analysis related to DVD marketing and distribution, international film festivals and coproduction and film financing. In the process, I have used film industry and cultural policy sources rarely consulted in Japanese film studies. These include the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), the Japan Association for the International Promotion of Moving Images (UNIJAPAN), the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan Inc. (Eiren). Industry sources have proved particularly valuable in understanding the economic motivations for Japan's increased engagement with foreign film companies, studios and distributors. By combining close textual analysis with new empirical research, the featured chapters focus on both onscreen representations of Japan and the external contexts of production and distribution that have informed representation.

Structure

To understand paradoxical modes of cultural representation and how they relate to both Japanese and non-Japanese contexts, I have divided this book into three sections: Part I, 'Cultural Specificity and Globalization'; Part II, 'Cultural Concealment'; and Part III, 'Cultural Performance'. Part I provides an introductory chapter that situates the subjects of cultural specificity and Japanese cinema in the context of late twentieth-/early twenty-first-century globalization and the impact this phenomenon has had on cultural representation. I also consider the study of Japanese cinema as a distinctive national cinema, a subject that has been essentialized in English language studies. As will become apparent, an essentialist approach poses certain limitations, particularly when discussing national/cultural representation in the contexts of globalization.

Part II consists of two chapters, both of which focus on cultural concealment as a mode of representation. Chapter 3 discusses the films *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo 3/Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* (Shinya Tsukamoto, 2009), films which subvert the conventions of Japanese ethnicity and language, and, in the case of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, cultural iconography. Both demonstrate a culturally hybrid strategy of representation whereby features of national identity are concealed or mixed with external cultural features. Culturally hybrid representation is related to the English language market in which the films' directors—Takashi Miike and Shinya Tsukamoto—have gained cult popularity. In the case of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, the mode of representation is linked to the recontextualization of

Miike as a global cult filmmaker able to utilize the English language and foreign resources of production and distribution. Similarly, Tsukamoto's use of English language dialogue and treatment of ethnicity are informed by external film consortia and the commercial opportunities presented by the English language market.

Continuing the analysis of cultural concealment, Chap. 4 focuses on the popularity of Japanese horror in the twenty-first century and the representation of cultural specificity. Initially, I investigate cultural representation in so-called J Horror films, and the supernatural horror *Kairo/Pulse* (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2001) in particular. The thematic signatures of J Horror, which we might consider to be specific to a Japanese context, are often combined with the depiction of Tokyo as a culturally indistinct space, thus presenting a paradoxical treatment of the subject. In addition, Japanese horror has been appropriated outside Japan in the form of Hollywood remakes. Although remakes represent an American 'takeover' of Japanese film content and thus demonstrate Hollywood's dominance within the global film market, the appropriation of J Horror is also demonstrative of Japanese cultural influence. Therefore, despite the cultural ambiguity of many horror films and the recontextualization of them through Hollywood remakes, J Horror not only maintains its distinctiveness as a Japanese brand, it also bolsters the international profile of Japanese popular culture.

Chapters 5 and 6 shift the focus to cultural performance in films that are distinctively Japanese in terms of their content, yet are ambiguous on a commercial/industrial level. Taking into consideration the success of Japanese cinema at major European film festivals and cultural performance in *Doruzu/Dolls* (Takeshi Kitano, 2002) and *Okuribito/Departures* (Yojiro Takita, 2008), I show how film festivals engender a paradoxical mode of representation. Both *Dolls* and *Departures* provide an overtly Japanese cultural performance, using national iconography as part of their appeal to a foreign audience. Yet, this is achieved paradoxically; cultural performance is counterbalanced with a more non-specific mode of representation, one that conforms to some degree to the institutional conventions of art cinema and the international context of the film festival. In doing this, Takeshi Kitano and Yojiro Takita use both self-reflexive performance and the commercial opportunities provided by the major festivals to produce films that are simultaneously distinctive as Japanese products and accessible to a wide audience.

Finally, Chap. 6 investigates the revival of one of the most iconic Japanese film genres—*jidaigeki*—and considers its role in the global commodification of Japanese cultural authenticity in the twenty-first century.

When viewed as a genre film, the samurai epic *Jusan-nin no shikaku/13 Assassins* (Takashi Miike, 2010) constitutes an 'authentic' representation of feudal Japan. However, as an international coproduction supported by foreign capital, *13 Assassins*, much like other *jidaigeki* films, is culturally ambiguous on a commercial/industrial level. This indicates that the production of *jidaigeki* as a culturally specific film genre is not simply a national phenomenon. Furthermore, the cultural iconography of *jidaigeki* has been appropriated extensively in Hollywood films, many of which have become commercially successful in Japan. Although this raises questions concerning the commercial ownership of authentic Japanese iconography, the involvement of non-Japanese production companies and Hollywood appropriations of *jidaigeki* help to maintain the genre's status as a distinctive cultural brand. Moreover, Japanese filmmakers and producers benefit from transnational production practices which enable them to export a culturally specific genre. In this regard, Japan adapts to the globally diverse nature of contemporary film production without undermining the authenticity of a signature genre.

As well as highlighting certain genres that have been integral to the popularization of Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century, such as J Horror and *jidaigeki*, and discussing the work of some of Japan's most prominent contemporary filmmakers, the chapters in this book aim to provide a coherent investigation of culturally paradoxical representation and its relationship to both Japan itself and the development of a culturally diverse and globally interconnected film industry. It is hoped that readers will not only engage with the textual features that make Japanese cinema distinctive, but will also consider its cultural ambiguity and how such ambiguity is engendered by multiple cultural and industrial factors. As a major cultural export in the twenty-first century, Japanese cinema should not be understood simply as a *national* cinema, but as a cinema able to adapt to the changing practices of a globalized industry while, in the process, articulating the ambiguities of national identity in a global context.

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PART I

Cultural Specificity and Globalization

CHAPTER 2

Cultural Specificity and Globalization

The films discussed in this book, along with their industrial/commercial contexts, raise major questions concerning the representation of cultural specificity on the global stage. How is the specificity of national cinema affected by a globalized industry and a diverse global audience? In the context of a global film industry, do films lose their distinctiveness as national products, or do external contexts of production actually contribute to their distinctiveness? In order to help clarify some of these issues I have chosen to focus on Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century and discuss the representation of Japanese cultural specificity in relation to non-Japanese involvement in production and distribution practices. In regards to the issues raised, Japanese cinema is by no means an isolated case and it is hoped that this book will encourage readers to make their own connections between film industry practices and cultural representation in other national contexts. However, developments in Japanese cinema warrant close attention, given the rise of Japanese popular culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and the impact this has had on cultural representation. To understand this impact, one should consider the theoretical issues relevant to the subject, specifically national cinema, the impact of globalization on cultural specificity, and how we might approach Japanese cinema accordingly. This chapter therefore suggests a more flexible analytical approach, as opposed to an essentialist analysis, with which to investigate the paradoxes of cultural representation.

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First, I will address national cinema as a concept related to globalization. Due to the impact of cultural and economic globalization on cultural specificity and film industry practices in the twenty-first century it is tempting to think that the concept of national cinema is no longer relevant. However, rather than suggest that distinctive national cinemas have lost their meaning, I will discuss how Japan has been able to adapt cultural representation to the changing industrial conditions brought about by globalization. Second, there will be a reconsideration of the essentialist study of Japanese films. An essentialist approach poses limitations for the discussion of paradoxical cultural representation, a mode of representation that is informed as much by external cultural and industrial factors as it is by a Japanese cultural essence.

Situating National Cinema

As this book illustrates, cinematic representations of Japan are constructed according to different cultural, industrial and commercial factors, not all of which can be firmly situated within a Japanese context. Filmmakers, producers and studios have gradually adapted to the global expansion of film production practices and in the process have adopted various methods of production and distribution. This has ranged from international coproduction to gaining financial support from overseas, both of which appear to undermine the idea of a self-sufficient national film industry.

Accordingly, production practices are not simply adapted to an expanding film industry; filmmakers and producers also take into consideration a much more diverse audience. Viewers can now access films from virtually every corner of the world through a wide range of mediums: theatrical screenings, specialist film seasons, film festivals, DVD, Blu-ray, film-streaming websites, online downloads, pay-per-view channels, and film piracy. Discussing changing practices within the Japanese film industry, Yoshiharu Tezuka underlines the commercial impact of a much larger market on national identity:

> I believe it is not an exaggeration to say that now the degree of success for Asian filmmakers is measured by the prizes they have won in international festivals, and performances at box offices globally; and in this environment the national identity of cinema and filmmakers, and their relationship to the other and cultural otherness are going through important changes. (Tezuka, 2012, p. vii)

Within the globally dispersed contexts of film production, film marketing and film distribution, national film industries, both in Asia and elsewhere, appear increasingly amorphous in how they respond to a global market. Ideologies of nationhood appear to be irrelevant to the actual production of national films, and so one should start to question the nationality of films based on the transnational production arrangements through which they are created. In many cases, strategies of international coproduction, foreign financing and location production create ambiguity, with multiple nations often represented within the production of a single film.

The historical epic *Mongol* (Sergei Bodrov, 2007) is a clear example of nationally ambiguous cinema, a film that cannot be firmly situated within a single national context due to the cultural diversity of its production. The film was directed by Russian Sergei Bodrov, who was supported by Russian producers as well as Russian and German studios. Although classified as a Russian film, *Mongol* was not filmed in Russia, nor is its subject matter identifiable as Russian. Instead, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China provided the locations for a Russian film about a Mongolian historical figure (Genghis Khan) portrayed by a Japanese actor (Tadanobu Asano). The coproduced anthology *Tokyo!* (Michel Gondry, Leos Carax and Bong Joon ho, 2008) is similarly ambiguous: French and South Korean directors, Japanese producers (Masa Sawada and Michiko Yoshitake), a French studio (Comme des Cinémas), a Japanese and French cast, and Japanese locations. Is *Tokyo!* a Japanese film? Its setting would suggest that it is, however, the film itself and the multiple strands of nationality evident in its production suggest otherwise. Both *Mongol* and *Tokyo!* avoid the easy categorization of national cinema because their transnational production histories tell us more about the culturally decentred nature of contemporary film production rather than anything substantially *national*.

The national identities of film industries might be questioned in similar ways. Take Hollywood's development in recent decades as an example. American film production utilizes an extensive infrastructure of locations and studio facilities that stretches far beyond the confines of a North American industry. Although by no means a new phenomenon, external Hollywood production—the use of foreign locations, production facilities and filmmaking personnel—has gained new momentum in the early twenty-first century via an expanding production infrastructure. Hollywood thus becomes increasingly decentred as it responds to the 'circumstances and logic of a global industry' (Goldsmith and O'Regan, 2005, p. 1). However, despite its global production networks, Hollywood

maintains its monopoly over film financing, production and distribution, and remains dominant at the global box office, leading some scholars, most notably Toby Miller et al. (2001) and Ben Goldsmith and Tom O'Regan (2005), to address the concept of a global Hollywood industry, an industry that is culturally diverse, yet maintains American dominance in the film market.

With films so often produced through extensive networks of collaboration that transcend national borders, and with the market for film now more widespread and diverse than at any previous time, the concept of a national cinema seems somewhat outdated. Writing about national cinemas used to be an easy task, suggests Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, but this has changed; 'on the one hand, we are no longer sure about the coherence of the nation-state and, on the other hand, the idea of history has also become far from self-evident' (Yoshimoto, 2006, p. 27). Since the emergence of transnational cinema as an influential framework for film analysis, national cinema has been reassessed, with scholars questioning the relevance of such a seemingly restrictive concept in relation to the more 'fluid' movements of globalization. Susan Hayward raises a series of questions about the value of national cinema, the needs it fulfils, how it may be conceptualized, what functions it serves, and why it is still important to talk about it (Hayward, 2000, p. 88).

It appears that national films and film industries cannot be defined simply as culturally distinct institutions, particularly when situated within the contexts of transnational film production and a global film market. By avoiding an essentialist understanding of national cinemas, Hayward concludes that just as cinema is an inherently hybrid product, so is national cinema, much like the nation itself, 'multicultural in its meaning' (Hayward, 2000, p. 101). Not only is national cinema inherently hybrid, or multicultural in its meaning, as Hayward suggests, but film practices are also increasingly multicultural as interdependence among industries becomes more common: from the large scale—Hollywood's use of locations and studio facilities across the world—to the small scale—transnational collaborative projects such as the Scottish/Danish Advance Party initiative, the Federation Panafricaine des Cinéastes in West Africa, and the Madrid-based Ibermedia programme, which offers support for Latin American coproductions across Spain, Portugal and 17 countries throughout South and Central America.

Through collaborations such as the Advance Party and Ibermedia initiatives, different cultural and industrial contexts converge in film production, not all of which can be associated (whether on a textual or industrial level) with a specific nation:

> The degree of cultural cross-breeding and interpenetration, not only across borders but also within them, suggests that modern cultural formations are invariably hybrid and impure. They constantly mix together different 'indigeneities' and are thus always re-fashioning themselves, as opposed to exhibiting an already fully formed identity. (Higson, 2000, p. 67)

Both on a textual level (film content) and an industrial level (film production), this mixing of 'indigeneities' inevitably raises the question of whether national cinemas and film industries are really national in ways that are highly distinctive. Certainly, the increasingly collaborative nature of global film production has complicated the issue, suggesting that just as creative industries like film become more interconnected in their production, financing and distribution practices, they invariably undermine their own distinct cultural/national identities.

Tezuka points out that it used to be taken for granted that cultural industries were 'nationally organized' and cultural productions locally embedded, that 'Culture was understood as being something rooted within the national framework' (Tezuka, 2012, p. ix). As Tezuka goes on to say, economic globalization came to undermine the national basis of such an understanding (Tezuka, 2012, pp. ix–x). Yet, to suggest that the distinctiveness of creative industries is disappearing as a result of economic globalization is to overlook the fact that cultural industries such as film are redefining their methods of cultural representation and, as a result, are rearticulating cultural specificity in response to the globalization of film production. This does not mean that national cinema no longer functions as a valid concept in film analysis or that representations of distinctive cultural features have been homogenized; it simply means that one should approach national cinema as a more malleable category: a category constructed both internally and externally through creative and industrial practices involving various 'indegeneities'. Consider David Martin-Jones' reassessment of Scottish cinema as an example of national cinema constructed across different national contexts. Rather than deconstruct the Scottish identity of films made in or about Scotland, Martin-Jones

proposes a 'global' Scottish cinema consisting of 'fantasy Scotlands' created by filmmakers of different nationalities (Martin-Jones, 2010, p. 1). What results, in my view, are valid representations of Scotland that are constructed externally by non-Scottish filmmakers and film industries, albeit representations that stretch the boundaries of an authentic and distinctive 'Scottishness'.

Within the contexts of transnational film production and a global film market, national cinema continually refashions itself; national film industries produce cultural representations that are highly ambiguous, yet these representations also contribute to cultural distinctiveness. In order to better understand this paradox, it is worth considering the impact globalization has had on the concept of nationhood and, more specifically, how Japan has adapted modes of representation in response to economic and cultural globalization.

Disappearing Nations

In conjunction with national cinema debates, it has become commonplace for writers to conclude that nations are becoming things of the past. Accordingly, one could argue that the cultural uniqueness and political and economic power of individual nations have been compromised by the expansion of a more interconnected global economy and political culture, in other words, globalization. Arjun Appadurai is inclined to see globalization as a marker of a new crisis for the sovereignty of nation states (Appadurai, 2001, p. 4), while Leslie Sklair argues that contemporary problems related to globalization cannot be studied adequately at the level of nation states and must instead be understood in terms of global processes: 'This is not a necessary consequence of most theories of globalization, though many argue that the significance of the nation-state is declining (even if the ideology of nationalism is still strong in some places)' (Sklair, 2007, p. 233). The movement of capital, information and people is increasingly accelerated (Yoshimoto, 2003, p. 53), to the point that the global context in which we now apparently live is a cliché, as Mike Featherstone suggests, of a world becoming smaller and more interconnected (Featherstone, 1996, p. 46), a paradigm of political decision-making, economic exchange and social development that restricts the influence that individual nations have over 'global events'.

When broadly understood according to the rhetoric of globalization, collaboration in politics, economics and mass media has signalled a growing state of interconnectedness and intensified relationships of interdependence (Omoniyi and Saxena, 2010, p. 1). Global interdependency has manifested itself in numerous ways: multinational, political organizations formed in the wake of World War II (the United Nations, NATO); institutions that oversee the financial fortunes of multiple nations (the World Bank, the European Union); business conglomerates operating as global corporations rather than national ones (Sony); the global film industry of Hollywood; the production and distribution of cultural products through international film and television coproduction, and so on.

Considering these collaborations, it is not surprising that concerns have been raised about the relevance of nation states, in particular what Manfred B. Steger defines as a pessimistic hyperglobalization argument (Steger, 2009, p. 72), according to which the distinctive identities of nations gradually disappear. From a hyperglobalization viewpoint, the world does not become a more culturally diverse community, in which nations, cultures and communities maintain their distinctive characteristics; instead it is increasingly homogenized through shared political governance and the spread of popular culture. Steger makes it clear that pessimistic commentators—he identifies George Ritzer and political theorist Benjamin Barber as key proponents—understand the phenomenon primarily as a Western-centric process of cultural hegemony, through which the visual synergy of American popular and consumer culture spreads across the globe: 'As evidence for their interpretation, these commentators point to Amazonian Indians wearing Nike training shoes, denizens of the Southern Sahara purchasing Yankees baseball caps, and Palestinian youths proudly displaying their Chicago Bulls sweatshirts in downtown Ramallah' (Steger, 2009, pp. 72–73). The pessimistic discourse equates globalization with homogenizing economic and cultural strategies directed through a predominantly American model of consumerism. Globalization is therefore not understood as a multinational phenomenon so much as a process of Americanization. On this subject, Paul Willeman takes a somewhat polemic stance, arguing that 'international community' is simply a 'code word for a call to submit to the policies pursued by the American state', while, much like Steger, he equates the 'national popular' with the consumption of American cultural products (Willeman, 2006, p. 29).

Whether conceptualized as an extension of American political and cultural hegemony or something more multinational, the increased state of

interdependence defined as globalization raises significant doubts over the contemporary relevance of nation states. The political and economic autonomy of individual nations certainly appears to have been undermined by more decentred forms of governance, economic exchange and cultural production. In this regard, Janet Staiger relates Marxist and neo-Marxist understandings of capitalist exchange to a decrease in nation state power:

> As capitalism now has less need of the nation state as an agent for its goals […] and perhaps is even being hindered by the older ideology of nationalism in its process of extracting surplus value, global capitalism is discarding the nation state as a significant conceptual entity and replacing it with other imaginary communities. (Staiger, 2002, p. 233)

One such imaginary community is the global/international community in whose interests multinational organizations and institutions appear to act, and for whom consumerism and expansive social media act as the primary means of global connection. The continual flow of economic exchange and information demonstrates the ease with which economic, social and, to some extent, political developments transcend national boundaries. Nation states are not entirely powerless to so-called global processes, as government restrictions over social media have shown. Nor has nationalism lost its power to unify—one need only look at independence referendums in Scotland and Catalonia in 2014 to find evidence of this. Nevertheless, as Staiger indicates, the nation state ideology may be discarded in the flow of global capitalism because such an ideology is considered a hindrance to the extraction of surplus value.

The diminishing symbolic power of nationhood within the global economy is nowhere more evident than in the expansion of business conglomerates. Although a conglomerate originates in a specific county, its identity and business practices are shaped first and foremost by the global economic/financial environment rather than national identity. Conglomerates adopt non-specific corporate identities, while the nationalities of the companies that comprise them are largely irrelevant to their activities. The Sony Group is a prime example, a global corporation originating in Japan which has de-emphasized its Japanese characteristics. Sony founders, Masaru Ibuka and Akio Morita very quickly discarded the original company name, Tokyo Tshushin Kogyo, in favour of a Romanized moniker that alluded to the Latin *sonus* and 'sonny', an American slang expression. The fusion of these elements was designed to create a name that would be

easily pronounceable in the growing US electronics market in the 1950s and 1960s. Such a desire to be accessible to a wider English-speaking market also led to Sony's name being displayed in Romanized lettering, even in Japan itself, rather than the traditional form of *kanji* (Chinese characters used to represent words of Chinese and Japanese origin).

Over the years other foreign elements have contributed to Sony's growth, from the Sony Corporation of America founded in 1960 to the acquisition of Columbia Pictures and CBS Records in the late 1980s and the appointment of Welsh-born American Howard Stringer as CEO in 2005, the first time a Japanese electronics company had selected a non-Japanese for such a position. Since the late 1950s, Sony's transformation from a small Tokyo electronics company to a multinational, multimedia conglomerate has involved a strategic concealment of the company's Japanese origins. Today, Sony is not solely identifiable as a Japanese corporation; instead it operates as a nationally decentred, global conglomerate with major offices and employees situated not only in Japan, but also in Berlin, New York, Philadelphia and New Jersey, and certain sections, namely Sony Pictures Entertainment and Sony Music Entertainment, based in the USA.

Globalization's Impact on Cultural Specificity

Forms of globalization, such as multinational corporations and political organizations, redefine national power within a wider global context through processes that transform the social condition of 'weakening nationality' into one of 'globality' (Steger, 2009, p. 9). Yet, how does globalization impact on national/cultural specificity? Global conglomerates demonstrate strategies of cultural concealment whereby local/cultural specificity (in Sony's case, the specificity of language and location) are de-emphasized in order to create a corporate brand identity that is universally accessible. Although Japanese in its origins, Sony is recognized as a global brand and thus its presence within national spaces (via its products, corporate offices, advertising and sponsorship) connects these spaces in the same way that nations are connected by other forms of globalization, such as the spread of cultural and consumer brands.

As a highly contested concept, globalization remains difficult to define and difficult to articulate into a single tangible form: it is equal parts a social process, a state of political and economic interdependency, and a form of political, cultural and economic hegemony. Defining globalization

in such terms, however, does not fully account for its impact on cultural specificity. It is worth considering how globalization becomes visually apparent in the world around us. As suggested previously, flows of capitalist exchange and social media across geopolitical boundaries demonstrate the ease with which economic, social and political developments transcend those boundaries. This not only impacts upon national sovereignty, it also alters physical spaces within nations. Globalization, whether it is seen in the diffusion of global corporations or the flow of popular culture, underlines the porousness of national spaces and national identities by making their inherent 'hybridity' much more pronounced.

The continual growth of corporations, businesses and brand iconography has a homogenizing impact. Established names like Sony, Samsung, Nokia, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Emirates imprint their brand iconography (in the form of advertisements, office complexes and sponsorship). A visual synergy of brand iconography is inserted into national spaces across the globe: one is just as likely to encounter American consumer brands such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola throughout Africa and former Eastern Bloc countries as find them in North America. Not only does the diffusion of global corporations generate a visual sameness that is symptomatic of economic globalization, it also supersedes local specificity in many cases. A movement in recent decades towards corporate sponsorship in sport has led to brand iconography overshadowing local features: in English football, for example, Arsenal and Manchester City embrace sponsorship in the form of new stadiums—the Emirates Stadium in London and the Etihad Stadium in Manchester—both of which display the names of their corporate backers, but retain little reference to the clubs themselves and the areas in which the stadiums are located.

As global corporations exert their aesthetic identities across numerous national spaces, cultural specificity is subsumed into the visual synergy of brand iconography. The iconography associated with global consumerism and capitalist exchange clearly has a disorientating impact on actual environments, particularly urban ones, just as multinational political and economic organizations destabilize the traditional power structures of individual nations. When viewed in parallel, these manifestations of globalization not only create paradoxical environments (both local and global), they also fuel concerns about the homogenizing effects of globalization itself. Such concerns often allude to the spread of Western popular culture and America's position as a political, economic and cultural centre

of power (see Willeman, 2006). However, as Sony's transformation from a local Japanese company to a genuinely global corporation suggests, and as the proliferation of Asian cultural products and commercial brands (Sony, Samsung, LG, etc.) demonstrates, globalization is a much more decentred phenomenon.

In developing the idea of a decentred model of globalization, Koichi Iwabuchi suggests a shift in balance between American cultural hegemony and major East Asian economies, a shift that results in a balancing or, as Iwabuchi terms it, a decentring of globalization:

> American cultural imaginaries are undoubtedly still by far the most influential in the world, but the process of globalization has made the conception of rigidly demarcated national and cultural boundaries implausible and tenuous in a way in which it has come to be untenable to single out the absolute symbolic center that belongs to a particular country or region. (Iwabuchi, 2004, p. 5)

Rather than view globalization simply as an extension of American or Western influence, Iwabuchi understands its recent development as an ongoing series of shifts in power and influence, shifts that are evident in East Asia, where new challenges to American/Western cultural hegemony have emerged: the influx of Japanese industrial and cultural exports into Western markets and the gradual shift from Hollywood films dominating the box office in East Asian countries to domestically produced films. Since 2009, domestic releases in Japan, South Korea and China have enjoyed a 50 % overall market share, thus demonstrating that in East Asia, Hollywood is 'not as global as is often assumed' (Yeh, 2014, p. 60). Cultural power becomes more globally dispersed with established and emerging economies in Asia becoming increasingly influential through economic and cultural production. Thus, when discussing globalization's impact on Japanese cultural production, it is unwise to adopt what Featherstone refers to as a totalizing logic that assumes a master process of homogeneous integration (Featherstone, 1996, p. 46). Although the USA remains a focal point in discussions of globalization, the phenomenon is by its very nature a decentred process, a process of interdependence that has no absolute centre of power.

Despite tangible signs of cultural homogenization, most notably in generic urbanization, any suggestion that cultural specificity is completely homogenized as the result of globalization is debatable. As Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake argue, attention to local conjunctures needs to be

linked to global processes without falling into the modernist binary of the universal (global) and the particular (local) (Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996, p. 6). Cultural specificity has been profoundly affected by the widespread changes engendered by globalization. This raises questions about the relevance of distinctive nation states. For instance, the idea of self-sufficient film industries has been uprooted to some degree by the 'transnationalization' of cultural production practices. Yet, filmmakers, producers, studios, and film and cultural policy-makers adapt to the challenges posed by an amorphous global economy. Although globalization's impact on national film industries has been acutely felt through international coproduction strategies, location production and financing from overseas sources, this does not necessarily result in the homogenization of distinctive film cultures. If anything, globalization's impact on film industries has created new conditions, according to which cultural specificity is recontextualized. Certain forms of representation result from this, representations of the nation and its defining cultural features that are paradoxical; both specific to the nation that produces them and yet culturally ambiguous.

Adapting to Globalization

Although cultural specificity appears to be undermined by economic and cultural globalization, distinctive representations of nationality have not disappeared, nor has the global currency of 'local culture' been reduced. Globalization only devalues the local culture if one views the global and the local as opposing forces (homogenization versus the particular). What if the cultural ambiguities generated by globalization were actually incorporated into local cultural representation, and what if this in itself became specific to a particular national context? The global and the local would be interrelated rather than oppositional; the two would overlap, become mutually reliant and more indistinguishable from one another. As Takashi Inoguchi suggests, the respective dynamism of globalization and cultural nationalism mean that they cannot remain antagonistic: 'They impact upon, react to and influence each other' (Inoguchi, 2009, p. 336). Accordingly, the local can be seen as a 'part of' globalization, something that not only reflects this phenomenon, but also utilizes economic and cultural resources offered by a more expansive global market.

Since the 1980s an increasing number of arguments have arisen that locate the local within a global context. Of particular relevance is Roland Robertson's reinterpretation of globalization and the popularization of

the concept of 'glocalization'. Rather than seeing local/global interactions as a contrast or conflict, Robertson de-mythologizes the notion that globalization is simply an all-encompassing phenomenon that subsumes the world's various cultures, thus bringing into question the 'triumph of culturally homogenizing forces over all others' (Robertson, 1995, p. 25). Eschewing the use of terms such as contrast and conflict, Robertson views the local/global dichotomy as a state of coexistence in which the two are 'complementary and interpenetrative' (Robertson, 1995, p. 40). Accordingly, cultural representation derives much of its meaning from a global context. In contrast to a hyperglobalization argument, I argue that cultural specificity is oftentimes presented according to a global context (for example, films are exported in order to reach a diverse range of audiences around the world) in ways that help to maintain the distinctiveness of the local producer. Thus, the global context informs cultural representation as opposed to diminishing its distinctiveness.

There are many examples of glocalization that demonstrate the coexistence of global cultural homogenization and local cultural specificity, prompting a discussion of culturally paradoxical modes of representation. More specifically, it has prompted an analysis of modes of representation that simultaneously derive meaning from the seemingly oppositional contexts of local and global. One result of globalization, as I will demonstrate throughout this book, is that local representation can be disorientated, even recontextualized, yet this does not mean that Japan becomes indistinct in its cultural products. Japaneseness, whether presented in the form of national identity, ethnicity, cultural iconography or history, is still evident, even in the most innocuous of products. This is because cultural specificity is never static or monolithic; it is malleable and can be adapted to whatever context, market or audience it is presented to.

Japan has developed ways of being distinctly indistinct, employing strategies of economic and cultural production that appear simultaneously local and global. Consider, for example, Japanese computer games produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the aesthetic and thematic choices made by Japanese game designers. Consider some highly popular games designed for Nintendo: *Donkey Kong* (Shigeru Miyamoto, 1981), *Super Mario Bros.* (Shigeru Miyamoto, 1985), *The Legend of Zelda* (Shigeru Miyamoto, 1986), *Final Fantasy* (Hironobu Sakaguchi, 1987) and *Pokemon* (Satoshi Tajiri, 1996). All are the products of Japanese creators and companies, but none display an aesthetic or thematic identity which one would describe as Japanese; the titular Donkey Kong was

inspired by King Kong, a Hollywood icon, as was his constant kidnapping of a blonde, Caucasian woman as part of the game's premise. Super Mario and his brother Luigi are Italian plumbers living in a fantasy world, while both *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* transport game players to lands more reminiscent of European fairy tales and the work of J. R. R. Tolkien than anything discernibly Japanese. Yet, despite their culturally innocuous appearance, Nintendo games helped establish Japan as *the* leading world producer and manufacturer of computer games, their distinctly non-Japanese aesthetics having been designed to appeal to an international market. As a result, Japanese games are inherently Japanese, yet are visually universal:

> Animation, Japanese computer games and characters may be recognized as originating in Japan and their consumption may well be associated with high technology or miniaturization; however, the appeal of such products is relatively autonomous from cultural images of the country of production. (Iwabuchi, 2007, p. 63)

In the case of Japanese computer games made for a global market, cultural specificity is eschewed in favour of a more accessible, more universal aesthetic, while the presence of Japan is still established in the process, becoming ubiquitous through the popularity of computer games. Moreover, the concealment of distinctive cultural features becomes a distinguishing characteristic of Japanese game design to such an extent that Japan becomes synonymous with strategies of glocalization.

Japanese game designers, along with filmmakers and other creative personnel, are of course under no obligation to represent Japan explicitly in their work. Just because a person is from a particular place does not mean their work must reflect this. The assumption, suggest Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto, is that there must be something Japanese about a product produced in Japan (Allen and Sakamoto, 2006, p. 3). However, the lack of distinctive cultural features remains an unusual and distinguishing feature of Japanese economic and cultural production. Since Japan's economic resurgence in the late twentieth century, various strategies of representation and product design have been adopted to help Japan adapt to and compete in an ever-expanding global market. According to many of these strategies local ingredients and universal principles of representation are interrelated, allowing certain products to appeal to the widest possible market. Strategies such as *kokusaika* and *mukokuseki*, which I will dis-

cuss shortly, adapt Japan's cultural specificities to the amorphousness of a global market context, concealing and recontextualizing Japanese identity based on the needs, tastes and expectations of consumers worldwide. The mode of representation therefore cannot be static nor monolithic; it must be able to adapt to whatever is required by external markets, whether it be highly distinctive or culturally neutral.

Japanese economic and cultural production has followed strategies that are culturally paradoxical, so much so that many commentators have identified Japan as a specialist in glocalization. Both Robertson (1995) and Iwabuchi (2002) point out that glocalization as a concept has its roots in the Japanese word *dochakuka*, a method of adapting farming techniques to local conditions that evolved into the marketing practices of Japanese businesses:

> [T]he terms 'glocal' and 'globalization' became aspects of business jargon during the 1980s, but their major locus of origin was in fact Japan, a country which has for a very long time strongly cultivated the spatio-cultural significance of Japan itself and where the general issue of the relationship between the particular and the universal has historically received almost obsessive attention. (Robertson, 1995, p. 28)

From business strategies to cultural production, Japan has demonstrated an ability to adapt to a global market, adopting strategies of representation that are not dependent on nationality or cultural specificity for their meaning. Cultural products are adapted according to a constellation of markets and audiences. Thus, products appear ambiguous in order to appeal (potentially) to anybody in the world. As both Iwabuchi (2002) and Ko (2010) have shown, Japanese national identity itself has been constructed in ways that appear contradictory, yet always with the purpose of maintaining and promoting Japan's unique position in the world. The ability to appear 'distinctly indistinct', which I would suggest is informed by the concept of glocalization, is evident in various representation strategies used in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to maintain Japan's global market presence.

Japanese Responses to Globalization

Whether in Japanese 'signature' film genres (anime, J Horror, extreme cinema) or the consumer technologies for which the nation is renowned, Japan often appears to be absent, even irrelevant in the appreciation of

these products. In the UK, for example, 'Hyper Japan' events feature cosplayers dressed as anime and manga characters, yet as Susan J. Napier points out, cosplayers are more interested in the characters they are mimicking rather than the Japanese origins of those characters (Napier, 2007, p. 166). This form of consumption recalls Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus' argument that Japanese cultural export is limited to culturally neutral consumer technologies whose place of origin is largely irrelevant to how they are enjoyed (Hoskins and Mirus, 1988, p. 503), and also relates to Iwabuchi's influential work on Japanese strategies of cultural 'erasure' in producing consumer goods:

> Although the question of whether Japanese animations and characters invoke the image of Japanese culture and lifestyle is still moot, what is indisputable is that Japan has come to be regarded by a large number of young people in the United States, Europe and Asia as an artistic country that produces cool animations [...]. (Iwabuchi, 2008, p. 128)

Discussing anime, Japanese pop music and lifestyle magazines, JETRO points out that these phenomena retain their 'original, authentic essence' while others do not: 'the point is not if they are authentic, but if they are "cool." Being cool turns people's heads and attracts them, becoming more a form of power than a simple set of values' (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005b, p. 2). One might regularly consume Japanese products therefore, but this does not necessarily constitute an awareness or appreciation of the nation itself.

In many cases, economic and cultural exports appear culturally neutral, with connotative features having been diluted to meet the demands of a wider global market. Specific economic and cultural policies have been pursued to meet this objective, just as Japan's economic and cultural prosperity peaked in the late twentieth century. *Kokusaika*, a term meaning internationalization, was one such policy developed by the Japanese government and its industries in the 1980s as a method of adapting to the growing world economy by de-emphasizing Japan's 'unique' world position:

> *Kokusaika* [...] was about the end of Japanese cultural exceptionalism. It signalled the beginning of attempts to integrate the sense of Japanese particularity within the global political economy, as the new, post-Cold War, constellation of power was emerging along with the global spread of neoliberalism. (Tezuka, 2012, p. 77)

Prompted by the need to be competitive in an increasingly globalized economy, government policy dictated a concealment of Japanese cultural distinctiveness, an approach that also relates to Japanese marketing strategies for children's television programmes in South-East Asia during the 1990s which gave new substance to the idea of pan-Asianism, an imaginary space representing Japan's encounter with Asia (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 6). The political and economic impact of globalization informed the degree to which Japanese cultural features were considered important in export products. Crucially, economic and cultural policy-makers responded by encouraging the production of culturally ambiguous consumer goods, a method of cultural exportation that has continued into the twenty-first century to inform cinematic representations of Japan.

The national project of *kokusaika* in the 1980s and Japanese attempts at affinitive, pan-Asian cultural marketing strategies in the 1990s demonstrate policies of cultural concealment designed to help Japan conform to and remain competitive within an expanding global market. In both cases, cultural specificity is not paramount to the successful production, promotion and distribution of Japanese goods. Yet, more recently, concealment has been counterbalanced with cultural performance: the Cool Japan strategy, for example, emphasizes cultural distinctiveness as the central selling point of export products. Furthermore, cultural specificity is rarely, if ever, concealed completely. Inevitably, traces of nationality can be found even in the most 'mundane' and innocuous of products. Japanese electronic items, such as those produced by Sony, Toshiba, Hitachi, et al., might not display any outward signs of Japaneseness—they are, after all, designed to be unobtrusive household items—yet they remain Japanese because they demonstrate Japan's status as a major electronics producer, so much so that Japan became synonymous with the electronics industry. Even if products such as televisions, radios and microwave ovens are culturally neutral in appearance, in reality, they are still representative of Japan, albeit indirectly. In this case, Japaneseness is paradoxical: visually it is absent, but in regards to brand recognition, it is highly visible.

If the policy of *kokusaika* offers any indication, cultural representation is adaptable to its external economic and cultural contexts. Culturally specific features can be concealed or performed according to the market demands generated by an expanding global economy. Rather than undermine the significance of cultural distinctiveness, globalization informs the terms of cultural representation in exported products: in Japan's case, it informs the degrees to which Japaneseness is displayed by directly influencing

economic and cultural policy-making. In this instance, 'local' and 'global' are not opposing terms, they are interrelated in the production of cultural exports; as Featherstone argues, it is not helpful to regard them as dichotomies: 'it would seem that the processes of globalization and localization are inextricably bound together in the current phase' (Featherstone, 1996, p. 47). National cinema and cultural representation are very much a part of globalization, both on textual and industrial levels, with films displaying varying degrees of cultural specificity in ways directly linked to transnational filmmaking practices and overseas markets.

The *Mukokuseki* Style

The *kokusaika* policy is a prime example of how an individual nation chooses to respond to the growth of the global political economy through a policy of cultural concealment. However, as I have suggested, concealment does not necessarily constitute an erasure of cultural features so much as a de-emphasizing strategy designed to make products appear more 'global'. *Kokusaika* was part of a much wider trend of concealment that also extended to cultural production. Iwabuchi employs the term 'odorless' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 24) to denote Japanese strategies of cultural concealment. The most intriguing example of this is the *mukokuseki* style of Japanese animation, one of the 'three C's'—consumer technologies, comics and cartoons, and computer games—identified by Iwabuchi in his discussion of Japanese cultural 'odorlessness':

> The three C's I mentioned earlier are cultural artifacts in which a country's bodily, racial, and ethnic characteristics are erased or softened. The characters of Japanese animation and computer games for the most part do not look 'Japanese.' Such non-Japanese-ness is called *mukokuseki*, literally meaning 'something or someone lacking any nationality,' but also implying the erasure of racial or ethnic characteristics or a context, which does not imprint a particular culture or country with these features. (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 28)

Mukokuseki animation is designed to be without any obvious cultural origins, presenting culture in terms of decontextualization. According to the *mukokuseki* style, characters do not always possess Japanese ethnic features, while settings and narratives may incorporate non-Japanese elements to create a culturally hybrid *mise-en-scène*.

In *mukokuseki* animation, setting and subject matter adopt a distinctly European ambience: *Taiyo no ko daiboken/Little Norse Prince* (Isao Takahata, 1968) appropriates the imagery of Norse mythology; *Arupusu no shoujo/Heidi, a Girl of the Alps* (Isao Takahata, 1974) is, as its English title indicates, a Japanese version of Johanna Spyri's Swiss novel; *Rupan Sansei: Kariosutoro no shiro/Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1979) takes as its geographical settings Monaco and the fictional European nation of Cagliostro; *Kyuketsuki hanta D/Vampire Hunter D* (Toyoo Ashida, 1985) presents a world in which Swiss and German architecture is combined with the inherent Europeanness of vampire legends; like *Little Norse Prince*, *Amon Saga* (Yoshikazu Oga, 1986) appropriates visual elements of Norse mythology; while *Kari gurashi no Arrieti/Arrietty* (Hiromasa Yonebayashi, 2011) adapts Mary Norton's 1952 English novel, *The Borrowers*. In such cases, images and source material associated with Europe are incorporated into an aesthetic strategy that recontextualizes Japanese animation as global pop culture. Even in the case of animated films set in Japan, the national space may be altered or exaggerated beyond instant recognition: for example, the post-apocalyptic Neo-Tokyo of the highly popular *Akira* franchise or the fantastical worlds inhabited by the characters of Studio Ghibli titles *Kaze no tani no Nausicaa/Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1984), *Mononoke hime/Princess Mononoke* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1997) and *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi/Spirited Away* (Hayao Miyazaki, 2001).

The *mukokuseki* style reflects first of all the homogenizing and culturally jarring effects of globalization and, second, shifts in global cultural hegemony, to the extent that Cobus van Staden considers anime not only to be an expression of 'Japaneseness', but also a 'globalized cultural phenomenon' (van Staden, 2011, p. 180). In relation to van Staden's second point, *mukokuseki* anime conforms to a Western-centric aesthetic and cultural paradigm by adopting Western features, such as Caucasian ethnicity, European geographical settings and non-Japanese literary sources. At the same time, anime demonstrates Japanese hegemony over image and content: in other words, the commercially profitable manipulation of Western imagery and iconography by Japanese animators. As Iwabuchi's analysis of the *mukokuseki* aesthetic makes clear, Japanese animation embodies a state of cultural and ethnic indeterminacy. Yet, despite this paradox, the global popularity of anime continues to represent a strong Japanese cultural presence in the West; as Iwabuchi explains, the international spread of *mukokuseki* simultaneously articulates the universal appeal of Japanese

cultural products and the disappearance of any perceptible Japaneseness (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 33). Cultural concealment in anime is not simply a symptom of Western-centric globalization therefore. Non-Japanese cultural features are incorporated into a Japanese 'way of doing things'. In turn, strategies of cultural concealment in anime might be considered to be an expression of Japanese Occidentalism, as van Staden suggests in his analysis of *Heidi, a Girl of the Alps*:

> *Heidi* does not represent the power of Europe in Japan—it represents the power of Japan in Europe. 'European' *Heidi* has been remade into *anime*. There is no need for an explicitly Japanese presence in *Heidi* because it is intrinsically infused with 'Japaneseness' […] Japan is the real and Europe is the dream, and it is clear that the person dreaming is not European. (van Staden, 2011, p. 183)

It is interesting that van Staden describes *Heidi, a Girl of the Alps* as intrinsically infused with Japaneseness, despite its obvious lack of culturally specific imagery. On the one hand, anime conceals recognizable Japanese features, such as ethnicity and geographical setting, and replaces them with European, American and Asian cultural features. The *mukokuseki* style is in this regard a global aesthetic, an aesthetic that appears nationless. On the other hand, *mukokuseki* animation is inherently and distinctly Japanese, a cultural product neither produced by nor associated with any other country on Earth.

The history of anime exportation is one characterized by a lack of a distinguishable Japanese identity, whether this has been the result of Japanese animators making aesthetic choices or foreign distributors making practical decisions. Due to anime's history of being redubbed and edited for non-Japanese audiences, the meaning of films has often been obscured; 'the early television history of anime was a product of the work of American distributors […] who cut together and redubbed anime with little regard to a sense of their "original" meanings and purposes. […]' (Joo et al., 2013). Obscured in its original cultural meanings, Japanese animation entered the wider global market in the 1980s as a culturally ambiguous entity. As JETRO points out, animated films and television shows were consumed without 'any conscious recognition that these works were made in Japan' (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005a). As *mukokuseki*'s defining aesthetic characteristic, the concealment of cultural features is linked directly to anime's status as an internationally successful cultural

export. Even when certain features of ethnicity and setting are concealed or blurred, anime maintains its inherent Japaneseness, becoming one of the nation's most globally recognized exports. Like electronic products and computer games, *mukokuseki* anime is a paradoxical product: it is not overtly Japanese in appearance, yet it represents Japan in a global market.

The *Mukokuseki* Style in *Ghost in the Shell*

A clear example of animation that is simultaneously Japanese and culturally ambiguous, Mamoru Oshii's 1995 science fiction film, *Ghost in the Shell* articulates a disorientating experience of globalization through a culturally ambiguous aesthetic strategy. The film's Japanese elements intertwine with external cultural features, adapting the *mukokuseki* aesthetic to a highly technologized city of the near future. Within this city, recognizable Japanese urban characteristics are difficult to distinguish among an intricate sprawl of multiple languages and ethnicities, a Chinese street market, the Taiwanese Daija Mazu Festival, and allusions to Jakob Grimm's tale of the Golem. Inuhiko Yomota highlights the undetermined cultural identity of this setting, a city that 'is not clearly Tokyo, Hong Kong, Venice, or Amsterdam' (Yomota, 2003, p. 80), while Steven T. Brown links the indeterminacy of the city to director Oshii's interest in the 'liminality of borderlines' (Brown, 2010, p. 20):

> The polymorphous geographical marking of Oshii's animated spaces, which include elements that could be described as Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, European and American, resists the viewer's attempts to pinpoint their precise locations because they are borderline places—"somewhere that is not here, sometime that is not now." (Brown, 2010, p. 21)

Ghost in the Shell's disorientating network of national and cultural signifiers parallels the global cyberspace that is so central to the film's themes of international political and financial networking, cyber terrorism and the omnipresence of technology. It is within such a world that Japan cannot be firmly situated as a distinctive nation state.

Japan, however, does maintain an inherent presence in Oshii's film that is difficult to ignore. First, the film deals with the disruptive impact of advanced technology on the human self (or in the case of the cyborg agent Matoko Kusanagi, perceptions of a human self). This theme is not unique to Japanese cinema, though it has preoccupied Japanese

filmmakers for many years, including Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*), Shinya Tsukamoto (*Denchu kozo no boken/The Adventure of Denchu Kozen* (1987), *Tetsuo/Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), *Tetsuo 2/Tetsuo 2: Body Hammer* (1992)), Shozin Fukui (*Pinokio 964/Pinocchio 964* (1991)), Satoshi Kon (*Pafekuto Buruu/Perfect Blue* (1997), *Papurika/Paprika* (2006)), Hideo Nakata (*Ringu/Ring* (1998)), Kiyoshi Kurosawa (*Pulse* (2001)), and Takashi Miike (*Chakushin ari/One Missed Call* (2004)).

Second, though setting and ethnicity remain undetermined in *Ghost in the Shell*, Japaneseness is still clearly identifiable in character names such as Makoto Kusanagi, Batou, Togusa, Aramaki, Saito and Ishikawa, as well as in Kenji Kawai's score, described by Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy as a 'haunting ceremony of arcane Japanese' (Clements and McCarthy, 2001, p. 141). Third, on a production level, *Ghost in the Shell* is undeniably Japanese, given the nationality of its director, screenwriter, producers, animators and other creative personnel, as well as its source material—a manga series written by Shirow Masamune. Although Japanese urban and ethnic features are concealed, *Ghost in the Shell*'s cultural ambiguity is counterbalanced by an inherent Japaneseness that is identifiable both in the film itself and in its production. What results is a paradoxical representation of Japan, one that is accessible to different audiences and which, I would argue, is a major characteristic of Japanese film exportation in the twenty-first century. Not surprisingly, *Ghost in the Shell* was partly funded by the US-based company Manga Entertainment, the leading distributor of anime titles to the USA and the UK throughout the 1990s and 2000s, with the intention of keeping the company's commercial reputation afloat (Clements and McCarthy, 2001, p. 141). Furthermore, the film proved accessible to and highly popular with a widespread global audience, becoming one of the most commercially successful anime releases outside Japan, reaching number one on the US Billboard video sales chart in 1998 (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005a).

As a method of successfully adapting films for a wider, more diverse audience, cultural concealment softens the impact of Japan's cultural presence in the global marketplace. Yet, this does not constitute an erasure of Japaneseness, as indicated by Iwabuchi's concept of cultural 'odorlessness'. In anime's case, Japaneseness is inherent rather than explicit. In producing a range of economic and cultural products, Japan becomes a

brand in itself, although, as Iwabuchi, Napier and Hoskins and Mirus all suggest, the consumer's appreciation of Japanese products does not necessarily take into account their national origin.

The international success of Japanese exports throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries appears to have taken place in spite of Japan itself, with specific cultural features becoming less and less prominent: 'like stones being rolled along in the torrent, the sharp edges and bulges that make these exports peculiarly Japanese are worn away and what was once Japanese becomes part of the global currency' (Mouer and Norris, 2009, p. 367) Indeed, Japanese cultural specificity has become a part of the global currency in the sense that cultural features are concealed or emphasized in response to the burgeoning overseas market for Japanese products. But, while Mouer and Norris view Japanese features as having been 'worn away' in the process of becoming global currency, I would argue that the issue is not so straightforward. Rather than disappearing, Japan asserts its presence in ways that are paradoxical, contradictory, and, as anime demonstrates, disorientating. 'Japaneseness' is very much fluid in this sense and this is evident in much of the nation's cultural exports, from electronic goods to anime. As specific strategies of representation show, such as *kokusaika* and *mukokuseki*, there can be a distinctly Japanese method of appearing culturally ambiguous which, in turn, becomes something synonymous with Japanese exports. Paradoxically, Japaneseness is reinforced through cultural concealment; although cultural specificity may not be evident in a particular product, the mode of representation may be something specific to Japan.

Economic and cultural strategies such as *kokusaika* and *mukokuseki* are direct responses to the expansion of a global market and the increasing profitability of Japanese economic and cultural produce overseas. Through these strategies, Japanese national identity is recontextualized and Japaneseness reimagined in the face of the 'unimaginable totality' of globalization (Jameson, 2009, p. 315). In *Ghost in the Shell*, Japan is represented as a decontextualized space in which nationality and cultural specificity are difficult to situate. At the same time, anime *is* Japanese, a distinctly Japanese aesthetic representation made in the context of globalization. By appearing simultaneously *local* and *global*, *mukokuseki* anime demonstrates a Japanese adaptation to a more globalized world, a world in which paradoxical modes of representation seem to be the most appropriate means of cultural expression.

Essentializing National Cinema

The complex interrelationship between local culture and a global market cannot be simplified in terms of a local/global dichotomy. Cultural representation in film becomes more ambiguous the more it comes into contact with transnational processes of production and distribution. Paradoxical modes of representation rearticulate cultural specificity according to the different contexts of globalization, and, in doing so, allow national industries to adapt to changing economic and cultural conditions. Such conditions have led filmmakers and other film personnel to produce representations that may at times be questionable as national products, yet remain integral to maintaining the global cultural presence of individual nations.

Inevitably, globalization's impact on nation states, cultural production and cultural representation has made it increasingly difficult to discuss film content and film industry practices solely in terms of national cinema. This is not to say that nation states have become irrelevant as globalization simply redefines what national cinema represents. Just as national industries embrace transnational practices associated with economic and cultural globalization, so filmmakers adapt their modes of representation. Although such industrial and creative developments undermine the concept of national cinema, one could argue that through transnational processes of film production and culturally paradoxical modes of representation, cultural distinctiveness is maintained. *Mukokuseki* anime demonstrates a shift in Japanese cinema towards a more paradoxical mode of representation by incorporating different national, cultural and ethnic elements into a Japanese context. As a Japanese response to cultural homogenization (whether it is commercially or artistically motivated), *mukokuseki* exemplifies paradoxical cinema, simultaneously concealing and exerting its national identity.

To better understand the paradoxical nature of cultural representation in Japanese cinema one should reconsider the essentialization of national cinema and, more specifically, how cultural essentialism has characterized the study of Japanese film. An essentialist mode of analysis is highly problematic given that there can be no absolute symbolic centre of meaning or identity attributed to the discussion of a national cinema. As this book demonstrates, Japanese cinema is informed by a variety of cultural and industrial factors with representation ranging from the culturally ambiguous (see Chaps. 3 and 4) to the culturally specific (Chaps. 5 and 6).

In his essay, 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema', Andrew Higson highlights the restrictiveness of national cinema as a concept, a concept that adversely affects a nuanced reading of national films. If nations are conceptualized as self-contained and distinctive spaces, then it should follow that national cinema is also finite, representing only the nation itself and therefore resisting reinterpretation:

> The problem is that, when describing a national cinema, there is a tendency to focus only on those films that narrate the nation as just this finite, limited space, inhabited by a tightly coherent and unified community, closed off to other identities besides national identity. (Higson, 2000, p. 66)

As a centre of meaning, the nation acts as the focal point in how one interprets national films. Yet, this presupposes a finite national space and a homogenous national identity that can be faithfully represented onscreen. The ways in which the nation is imagined tends to preclude identities and interpretations that are contrary to a conventional understanding of national cinema. Nation states and national identities are neither stable nor can they be conveniently defined through cultural representation: national identity, Higson contends, is always shifting, always 'becoming' (Higson, 1995, p. 4). Cinema plays a role in continually redefining the contours of national identity through paradoxical forms of representation. In this sense, national cinema is by no means a reliable term of reference. National identities and cultural iconography are malleable as opposed to fixed, and concurrently films remain paradoxical as opposed to monolithic.

Discussing national films in terms of representation, Higson raises several questions about the concept of national cinema:

> [D]o they share a common style or world-view? Do they share common themes, motifs, or preoccupations? How do they project the national character? How do they dramatize the fantasies of national identity? Are they concerned with questions of nationhood? What role do they play in constructing the sense or the image of a nation? (Higson, 1995, p. 5)

To these questions there are no definitive answers, mainly because there can be no definitive mode of representing national themes, national character or identity across changing political and cultural contexts. Far too often 'styles', 'worldviews', 'themes' and 'preoccupations' have an overriding influence on how films from a specific place are interpreted as national cinema, so much so that other factors key to the production of national

cinema are overlooked: international coproduction, external sources of finance, the reception of films by foreign audiences, and so on. Taking such factors into account is, I would argue, highly revealing in terms of how cultural representation is constructed. As a means of reassessing cultural representation in film, an acknowledgement of the films' external features is compatible with an analysis of distinctive cultural features.

Even if films present distinctive representations of national identity (one thinks of British period films and American westerns as obvious examples), the inherently collaborative and culturally hybrid nature of film production and distribution, renders the mode of representation paradoxical. *Sukiyaki Western Django* is one of the most paradoxical films discussed in this book. Takashi Miike's film is a transnational genre hybrid that incorporates English language dialogue along with the iconography of *jidaigeki*, American westerns and Italian 'spaghetti' westerns into a geographical setting that is simultaneously Japanese and not Japanese. In contrast, another Miike film—*13 Assassins*—presents a far more 'stable' aesthetic representation of Japaneseness, one that is rooted in the actual past of the film's Tokugawa/Edo period setting and the generic conventions of *jidaigeki*. However, the national authenticity of *13 Assassins*' content belies a transnational industrial identity, with British production and finance invested in the representation of Japanese cultural authenticity. In both cases, the term national cinema fails to convey adequately the cultural paradoxes evident in the representation of Japan. With this in mind, the nationality of film exports is questionable, as are attempts to assert defining national characteristics onto the study of Japanese films. Whether it is evident in film content (aesthetics, film technique, subject matter) or in terms of production, national cinema is the product of an ongoing relationship between the nation and the external world and not simply an expression of an essentialized national identity.

Essentializing Japan, Essentializing Yasujiro Ozu

Few other nations have been objectified to the same extent as Japan, both in film studies and other disciplines. Part of the problem of studying Japan according to an essentialist view of its culture is that it maintains the idea that Japan is fundamentally different from other cultures. This is not to say that the specificities of Japan are not relevant to this book. The study of national films alone demands some engagement with the specific features that identify those films as national products. Moreover, the decision to

discuss Japanese cinema is an essentialist action in itself, regardless of how one chooses to approach it, for to single Japan out as a case study automatically suggests specific reasons for selection. This is made clear in Aaron Gerow's review of Japanese film studies, with the author arguing that even those studies that strive to deconstruct an essentialist view of Japanese cinema nevertheless reduce Japan to a 'singular nation':

> Japanese film studies have focused increased attention on the issue of "national cinema," but even those that recognize that motion pictures are not the manifestation of some age-old national essence, and that they in fact participate in the modern construction of national identity, seem to be compelled to reduce films to the singular nation, even if that nation is constructed or inherently engaged in transnational systems of difference. (Gerow, 2010, p. 13)

In response to Gerow, this book does single out Japan in a sense, though not with the purpose of essentializing the subject, but rather as a means of understanding how cultural specificity is represented and how it is affected by both Japanese and foreign influences.

In the context of globalization, and specifically its impact on national cinema, the essentialization of Japan limits an understanding of how Japanese culture interacts with and is influenced by the external world. The interaction between the two has often been problematic in the study of Japanese subjects, with scholars, Tessa Morris-Suzuki suggests, keen to maintain the idea of Japan as a self-contained, highly unique culture: 'the one term which seldom appears to need discussion is the word "Japan". Japan seems real and self-explanatory' (Morris-Suzuki, 1996, p. 41). This 'real and self-explanatory' Japan is partly the result of cultural essentialism, both Japanese and external. The seemingly inscrutable nature of Japanese culture and society has been reinforced at various stages by Western interpretation, first, in the Meiji period (1868–1912), an era of political, economic and cultural openness (following the Tokugawa/Edo period of isolationism) which required the cross-cultural interpretations offered by writers, most notably Lafcadio Hearn. The US Occupation of Japan (1945–1952) brought with it further attempts to interpret social and cultural characteristics which in many respects informed American studies of Japanese cinema by the likes of Donald Richie, Joseph L. Anderson and Noel Burch in the 1960s and 1970s. As Freda Freiberg points out, 'Washington Researchers' studied film and documentary in order to understand the Japanese national character towards the end of World

War II, with Richie coming to Japan with the Occupation and writing *Film Style and National Character* for the Japan Travel Bureau in 1961 (Freiberg, 2000, pp. 179–180).

The enigma of the Japanese 'character' has also resulted from Japanese attempts to maintain a discourse of cultural uniqueness. *Nihonjinron*, *nihon shakairon* and *nihonron* discourses, essentially interchangeable terms referring to 'presuppositions', 'presumptions', 'propositions' and 'assertions' about the Japanese and Japanese culture (Befu, 2001, p. 2), have served to reinforce Japanese exceptionality in different areas, including ethnicity, language, history, culture and social convention. For example, Yuji Aida provides an explanation of competitiveness in Japanese society based on the 'mental structure of the Japanese'. As Aida suggests, national characteristics (*minzokuteki tokushitsu*) are the product of racial, climatic, and historical conditions (Aida, 1972, p. 30). *Nihonjinron* ideology is by no means subscribed to by most Japanese, and has been criticized, Harumi Befu notes, for not admitting to Japan's ethnic and cultural heterogeneity (Befu 2009, p. 26). Indeed, the espousal of unique characteristics belies the more culturally hybrid aspects of Japan's development as a nation state, something that many Western film scholars have overlooked in discussions of Japanese cinema.

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto addresses some of the most influential American studies of Japanese film in order to challenge prevailing discourses of Japanese exceptionality. Refusing to be drawn into speculations about the 'Japanese mind', Yoshimoto draws attention instead to the role that American scholars—namely Richie, Anderson and Paul Schrader—have played in constructing various paradigms of Japanese cinema, according to which its uniqueness is emphasized. First published in 1960, Anderson and Richie's *Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (1982) is singled out as identifying a specific national character in the humanist values of Yasujiro Ozu's films of the 1950s. Despite acknowledging the significance of Anderson and Richie's work, Yoshimoto remains critical of their use of an essentialized national character as a means of illuminating humanistic ideals:

> This focus on national character as a determinate factor in analysis and interpretation has led to an unfortunate situation, in which stereotypes of

> the Japanese national character and cultural essence are routinely used to explain thematic motifs, formal features, and contextual backgrounds of Japanese films. (Yoshimoto, 2000, p. 10)

Not only does Anderson and Richie's analysis of national character attribute uniform characteristics, even stereotypes, to film content, it also overlooks the numerous transnational/global dimensions of Ozu's work by relying so heavily on a national cinema paradigm. Many film scholars, Richie in particular, have preserved Ozu's status as a 'representative' Japanese filmmaker whose work stems directly from the specificities of Japanese society and Japanese culture. In contrast to Akira Kurosawa, whose generic variety, adaptations of Western literary sources (Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Gorky) and influence on Hollywood and Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns are addressed in terms of a more 'universal' filmmaking sensibility, Ozu is said to represent something more authentically Japanese, with the aesthetics and subject matter of his films demonstrating a distinctly 'Japanese style':

> The Japanese continue, ten years after his death, to think of Yasujiro Ozu as the most Japanese of all their directors. [...] Ozu, one is told, "had the real Japanese flavour." This "Japanese flavour" has a more definite meaning than, say, "the American way" or the "French touch" if only because Japan remains so intensely conscious of its own Japaneseness. (Richie, 1977, p. xi)

Certainly Ozu's numerous domestic dramas of the 1950s present many of the subtle intricacies and everyday realities of Japanese family life in the *ofuna-cho* (*ofuna* style) of 'everyday life films' made at Shochiku Studios in the 1940s and 1950s. Moreover, Richie argues that the director's formal aesthetics and allusions to Buddhism were informed by national ideals. Although aware that restraint, simplicity and 'near-Buddhist serenity' are not everyday features of Japanese life, Richie nevertheless views these qualities as national ideals put into focus by Ozu's work: 'Ozu's insistence upon them and the public feeling for or against them make these ideals more than empty hypotheses' (Richie, 1977, p. xii).

There are many ways in which Ozu's films can be attributed a distinct Japanese aesthetic style, according to which the director is essentialized in terms of national characteristics. The director's positioning of characters on traditional *tatami* mats, for instance, lures the camera to ground level, giving films such as *Bakushu/Early Summer* (1951), *Ochazuke no aiji/The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice* (1952), *Tokyo monogatari/Tokyo Story* (1953), and *Kohayagawa-ko no aki/The End of Summer* (1961) a

distinctive visual characteristic linked to the domestic convention of sitting on *tatami* mats. Household objects are often used to punctuate drama in the form of transitional 'pillow' shots, while Ozu became renowned for the use of tight framing devices, such as doorways, windows and sliding panels (*fusuma*), in his most intimate domestic dramas, a motif also employed by Ozu's contemporary Kenji Mizoguchi to frame the constrictive domestic lives of characters in *Josei no shori/Victory of Women* (1946) and *Akasenchitai/Street of Shame* (1956). Ozu's films have also been noted for their Zen-like tranquillity, evident in the director's avoidance of conventional cinematic time frames. Story is presented gradually and since there is little conventional 'action' taking place, Ozu narratives are distinguished by a tranquil, otherworldly pacing which Richie, as noted, links to Buddhist serenity.

Similarly, Paul Schrader links the work of Ozu to Buddhism and Zen practices in his book *Transcendental Style in Film* (1972). Although Schrader discusses a transcendental film style in the work of Ozu, Robert Bresson and Carl Theodor Dreyer, it is only in the case of Ozu that the connection between the transcendental style and the filmmaker's nationality is made explicit:

> In his films this style is natural, indigenous and commercially successful, largely because of the Japanese culture itself. The concept of transcendental experience is so intrinsic to Japanese (and Oriental) culture, that Ozu was able both to develop the transcendental style and to stay within the popular conventions of Japanese art. (Schrader, 1972, p. 33)

Central to Schrader's interpretation of Ozu's film style are the rituals he associates with Zen Buddhism and its Oriental 'essence': 'In Ozu's films, as in all traditional Oriental art, the form itself is the ritual which creates the eternal present (*ekaksana*), gives weight to the emptiness (*mu*), and makes it possible to evoke the *furyu*, the four basic untranslatable moods of Zen' (Schrader, 1972, p. 33). By analysing Ozu's style through Zen, Schrader interprets Ozu's work as something that is fundamentally and spiritually Japanese.

How much of Ozu's aesthetic choices and stylistic techniques are the work of an individual artist with an idiosyncratic approach and how much of it is the expression of Ozu as a Japanese 'representative' is more difficult to discern than Richie and Schrader suggest. Analyses of Ozu's oeuvre have traditionally focused on cultural specificity, either in aesthetics,

technique or subject matter, reaffirming Ozu as the 'most Japanese' of directors. Although it would be incorrect to deny Ozu's ability to evoke certain characteristics of Japanese domestic life and social convention, an essentialist understanding of his films restricts the possibility of other interpretations. In fact, Ozu's work is in many instances more culturally hybrid than it initially appears to be. To understand Ozu's 'Japaneseness' is not simply a matter of evaluating the specific elements that evoke a Japanese context; it also requires an engagement with the cultural paradoxes evident in many of his films and specifically the relationship between local and global images.

In response to Richie and Schrader's work on Ozu, I return to Higson's assertion that there is a tendency in film studies to focus on films that 'narrate' the nation as a finite, limited space (Higson, 2000, p. 66). One of the major challenges of Japanese film studies, and studies of Ozu in particular, is the tendency to assign a distinctly Japanese character to film content, thereby essentializing a film's inherent Japaneseness as the sole source of its meaning. In focusing so heavily on the features that make Ozu distinctly Japanese, scholars have tended to overlook the significance of globalization and how this informs the director's representation of Japan. Kathe Geist challenges the prevailing consensus surrounding the national character of Ozu's work, suggesting that the 'most Japanese' director had a very 'Western sense of narrative' (Geist, 2006, p. 116), an outcome perhaps of his close observations of popular Hollywood cinema in the 1920s and 1930s and an admiration of Japanese authors of the Taisho period (1912–1926), who had been influenced by Western literature (Geist, 2006, p. 126). Crucially, Geist's observation of Ozu's 'Western sense of narrative' and his break from the conventions of continuity editing in Japanese silent films reveals a paradoxical representation of Japan:

> Ironically, Ozu's independence is itself more American than Japanese, hence the ambivalence one finds in so many of his films between a love of things Japanese and a pull towards the West—an ambivalence that seems to have resonated with his audience. (Geist, 2006, p. 116)

In order to understand Ozu's formal style and his connection to Japanese audiences, Geist considers an American influence on the director's representation of Japan, thus avoiding a conventional understanding of Ozu's work as national cinema. In responding to the essentialism that has to large extent defined the study of Ozu in the West, Geist demonstrates a

more flexible analytical approach with which to understand the cultural paradoxes of the director's work. The paradox of an American/Japanese approach to style and form provides not only an alternative interpretation of film content, it is also revealing of the cultural hybridity of the Japanese state and cinema's ability to articulate that cultural hybridity.

The local/global duality of film is always borne out in the tensions between national film content and the 'foreignness' of the medium itself: 'it can be argued that non-Hollywood cinematic traditions often reflect a tension between what was in many instances an imported form (cinematic technology and techniques) and content (the "most ancient and local artistic traditions")' (Standish, 2005, p. 14). As Japan imported certain commodities from the West, it was inevitable that the 'foreign' medium of film would be used to articulate the disorientating impact of globalization during the first half of the twentieth century. External cultural influences, such as American and European imports, certainly made their presence felt in film content, particularly in Ozu's films of the 1930s.

Alastair Phillips suggests that the Japanese film industry prior to World War II needs to be observed within the historical context of its 'contested and evolving' relationship with Japan's modernity (Phillips, 2007, p. 26). Accordingly, certain of the pre-war period focus on social and industrial transformation and the presence of modernity as a 'foreign object'. This appears to be the point Miriam Hansen makes in relation to material objects featured in Japanese films of the 1930s. Although the representation of material objects is 'part of the vocabulary of international silent film', critics have linked this 'stylistic gesture' to traditional Japanese aesthetics:

> This tradition may have constituted a significant cultural reference (albeit a refracted, mediated and perhaps ironic one), but the cinematically intensified presence of the object in Japanese pre-war films seems to have at least as much to do with modern commodity culture and its social and epistemic consequences. (Hansen, 2009, p. 290)

To simplify Hansen's argument, aesthetic features may adopt a quintessentially Japanese appearance, yet they are also connected to the production of material objects and consumer imports. Inevitably films adopted the 'foreign' into their *mise-en-scène*, often in the form of material objects. The infiltration of foreign objects into the Japanese national space became a recurring feature of Ozu's work. In *Hijosen no onna/Dragnet Girl* (1933)

an outlaw couple—Jyoji (Joji Oka) and Tokiko (Kinuyo Tanaka)—adopt the customary fashions of 1930s Hollywood gangsters and their 'molls', such as those commonly found in Warner Brothers productions of the time. Ozu also incorporates other signifiers of 1930s American popular culture, including a jazz club and an RCA Victor record store, a consumerist space filled with imported objects which are symbolic of what Hansen refers to as modern commodity culture. Moreover, in terms of generic categorization, *Dragnet Girl* is culturally paradoxical; an *ankokugai eiga* (underworld film), a genre in which, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano explains, the 'domestic space' and the 'foreign space' directly interact (Wada-Marciano, 2008, p. 32). Within the domestic space of the film's Tokyo setting, the foreign (the Hollywood gangster film) is evoked: Jyoji is gunned down in the film's final scene, a scene that parallels the deaths of Jyoji's American counterparts in gangster films released by Warner Brothers, particularly *Scarface: The Shame of a Nation* (Howard Hawks, 1932).

As well as incorporating American consumerist and cinematic imagery, Ozu is critical of the social ramifications of external cultural influence, hence Jyoji's crimes are equated with an Americanized lifestyle, while the film's more moral characters wear traditional clothing in an overt aesthetic juxtaposition of local and foreign. Referring to Ozu's films of the 1930s, Standish views Tokyo as a city becoming the '*mise-en-scène* of modernity in all its negative aspects' (Standish, 2005, p. 42). In order to understand what Ozu films are actually communicating in terms of 'national experience', one should be aware of how the nation is constantly interacting with the wider world and, as in these cases, how it interacts aesthetically. As Standish makes clear, cinematic techniques and indeed the importation of cinema itself were adapted to pre-modern Japanese storytelling paradigms, a process that was interactive rather than externally imposed (Standish, 2011, p. 4).

In *Dragnet Girl*, global modernity enters the national space of Tokyo via the consumption of American imports, a process of globalization that disorientates the national identity of the *mise-en-scène*. As a result, the coherency of national character, so essential one would think in Ozu's oeuvre, is disrupted by a paradoxical mode of representation. An essentialist analysis is unlikely to reveal this paradoxical identity. By accentuating the otherness of Japanese culture, conventional understandings of Japanese cinema overlook the significance of the external world within the national space and its impact on cultural representation: in *Dragnet Girl*, the representation of 1930s Japanese modernity; in *mukokuseki* anime,

the disorientating imagery of late twentieth-century globalization. To understand what films are communicating in terms of 'national identity', 'national character' and 'national experience', it is worth considering how nationality is adapted and redefined through the continual interplay of local and global elements.

Conclusion

In the postwar context of Japanese film studies, cultural essentialism became necessary in understanding Japanese filmmaking in national terms. However, in the contexts of cultural globalization and more interdependent film industries in the twenty-first century, a more flexible approach is required. In the chapters that follow, films are not understood simply as representations of the nation that has produced them; they also articulate culturally paradoxical identities, both on textual and commercial/industrial levels. Representation designed to conceal or de-emphasize distinctive cultural features, *mukokuseki* anime being one of the most striking examples, have been part of a Japanese response to an expanding market, a means of making Japanese cultural products both accessible and distinctive in a global context. In this respect, cultural representation is informed by globalization's impact on the film industry, especially when one considers the fact that Japanese film production and related policy-making have been influenced by the overseas market for Japanese cultural products.

In much of twenty-first-century Japanese cinema, adaptation often involves paradoxical modes of representation. Films cannot be adequately studied within the restrictive parameters of national cinema. This is especially true of film exports. As cultural products, film exports are intended to circulate beyond their national context, often emerging through arrangements of production, financing and distribution that are not confined to a Japanese industrial context. With a much more widespread and diverse audience becoming receptive to Japanese films, modes of representation have become increasingly adaptable to different audience expectations, whether the expectation is for something culturally neutral (and therefore accessible) or something culturally specific. In Chap. 3, I discuss two films—*Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*—both of which are paradoxically Japanese in ways linked to the English language market and which, in the process, articulate culturally hybrid representations of ethnicity and language.

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PART II

Cultural Concealment

CHAPTER 3

(Cult)ural Hybridity

One of the most notable aspects of Japanese cinema in the early twenty-first century has been the widespread popularity of 'cult' film categories, particularly in the UK and the USA. Since the 1990s, there has been an influx of Japanese horror films (usually marketed under the term J Horror), extreme cinema (films of an explicitly violent or transgressive nature), gangster films (*yakuza eiga*), and fantasy and science fiction anime into English language markets. Some of the most internationally renowned Japanese filmmakers of recent years—one thinks of Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Miike, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Shinya Tsukamoto, Takashi Shimizu and Sion Sono—have become cult figures because of their association with the marketing of cult films overseas. Major distributors of Japanese titles, such as Tartan Films (UK and USA), Manga Entertainment (UK and USA), Premier Asia (UK), Optimum Asia (UK), 4Digital Asia (UK) and Media Blasters (USA), have played a major role in maintaining the cult status of certain directors and, alongside widely available publications like *NEO Magazine* in the UK and *Otaku USA Magazine*, have helped maintain Japan's international reputation as a producer of cult-oriented cinema. While the cult marketing of Japanese films in the 1990s and 2000s helped establish Japan as a distinctive producer of horror, extreme and *yakuza* cinema, the actual representation of Japan in many films remains ambiguous in regards to nationality. The great paradox of the cult success of Japanese cinema is that while distribution and promotion have tended to emphasize the Japanese status of film exports (and thus help maintain

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the global visibility of the Japanese film industry), many films promoted as cult cinema offer highly ambiguous and at times culturally hybrid representations of Japan.

Culturally paradoxical modes of representation, I would contend, are related to the global popularity of Japanese cult cinema in the twenty-first century, so it is worth investigating how non-Japanese commercial and industrial contexts inform culturally hybrid modes of representation. In this chapter I discuss two films—*Sukiyaki Western Django* (2007) and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* (2009)—which subvert conventions of Japanese ethnicity and language, and, in the case of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, Japanese cultural iconography. Both films demonstrate a culturally hybrid strategy of representation whereby essential features of national identity are concealed or mixed with external cultural features. Culturally hybrid representation is related to the English language market in which the films' directors—Takashi Miike and Shinya Tsukamoto—have gained cult popularity. In the case of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, the mode of representation is linked to the recontextualization of Miike as a global cult filmmaker able to use the English language and foreign resources of production and distribution. Similarly, Tsukamoto's use of English language dialogue and treatment of ethnicity are informed by external film consortia and the commercial opportunities presented by the English language market. Whether on a textual level (the representation of ethnicity and language) or a commercial/industrial level, the two films cannot be contextualized simply as Japanese cinema given their culturally paradoxical strategies of representation and the influence the English language film market has on these strategies. Core elements of nationality are re-fashioned with both Miike and Tsukamoto utilizing non-Japanese commercial and industrial resources of financing, production and distribution to create self-reflexive cult cinema made specifically for an English-speaking audience.

Japanese Cultural Hybridity

Ross Mouer and Craig Norris question how safe Japaneseness is when it is processed through cultural exports. The debate concerning the authenticity of Japanese products, they argue, is likely to continue: 'In the meantime, Japanese concerned about the future of their culture as a distinct culture will be challenged to come up with yet new forms of hybridity' (Mouer and Norris, 2009, p. 367). In Chap. 2, I suggested that the expansion of the global film market and globally dispersed film

production practices have a disorientating impact on representation, leading filmmakers and other film personnel to refashion their modes of representation. In many respects this is the challenge discussed by Mouer and Norris, the challenge to adapt to an interconnected global market. Miike and Tsukamoto respond to the challenge by producing culturally hybrid films that not only stretch the boundaries of national cinema and national identity, but also suggest new commercial possibilities for Japanese film production. On a textual level, Miike and Tsukamoto present a culturally disorientating portrait of Japaneseness, while on a commercial level the viewer is faced with the cultural paradox of English language Japanese cinema. By using external commercial and industrial resources, Miike and Tsukamoto recontextualize Japanese identity as a highly malleable category. This is done partly in response to the essentialization of Japanese national identity, yet it is adapts cultural representation to the decentred contexts of global film production.

The issue of hybridity is central to the discussion of Japanese cultural distinctiveness, as Mouer and Norris indicate. Cultural production requires new forms of hybridity in order to repackage and recontextualize cultural specificity for a global (as opposed to local) audience. However, simply because hybridity is adopted as a mode of representation does not mean that the product in question is no longer distinctive in its Japaneseness. Although cultural products may conceal traces of nationality, this in itself may be considered to be a distinctive (perhaps even defining) feature of twenty-first-century cultural production in Japan. As a recurring feature of Japanese cultural production and cinema more specifically, hybridity is not simply a mode of concealment; it is also a demonstration of how ubiquitous Japanese popular culture has become, how recognizable it is globally, and how it is interrelated with other national contexts. Hybridity therefore contributes to the distinctiveness of Japanese cinema, whether in the form of anime's cultural ambiguity or the hybrid modes of representation adopted in *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*. Rather than deny Japan's cultural distinctiveness, these films show that national cinema can be multidimensional, a category that represents not only the particularities of a specific place, but also the wider cultural and industrial contexts that inform it.

As Koichi Iwabuchi and Mika Ko both indicate, Japan's unique cultural identity may be legitimized in ways that appear contradictory to its uniqueness. Iwabuchi argues that the appropriation and assimilation of foreign influences can be used to reinforce a distinctive Japanese cultural

presence. Thus, the Japanese capacity for cultural borrowing is strategically represented as a 'key feature of Japanese national identity itself' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 53). Paradoxically, strategies of hybridity and concealment are recognized as distinctly Japanese modes of representation in the context of globalization and this is certainly evident in Japanese cinema, from *mukokuseki* to J Horror and the work of Miike and Tsukamoto. If we refer back to the examples of pan-Asianism, *kokusaika* and *mukokuseki* anime (see Chap. 2), it is clear that cultural concealment and hybridity are strategies of adaptation, according to which culturally specific features are de-emphasized or spliced with external cultural features (the 'foreign'). This approach to economic and cultural production creates exports that appear more *global* in their identities, while, at the same time, retaining an inherent Japanese status. Accordingly, cultural production adapts to an expanding global market by refashioning cultural distinctiveness and authenticity into accessible products. Iwabuchi refers to Japanese cultural 'hybridism' as a strategy of adaptation through which foreign elements may be incorporated into Japanese products, though not in such a way as to completely erase their inherent Japaneseness. According to Iwabuchi, Japanese hybridism aims to discursively construct an image of an 'organic cultural entity', a Japan that absorbs foreign cultures without changing its 'national-cultural core' (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 53). *Mukokuseki* animation exemplifies this paradox, an aesthetic that may not always look Japanese, but is associated exclusively with Japan both as a cultural product and as a global brand. Japan adapts to the wider contexts of economic and cultural globalization by producing items like anime that are at once global (and therefore compatible with a wider, more diverse audience) and distinctively local. By adapting in such a way, Japan re-fashions its core identity in direct relation to Western-centric processes of globalization:

> a particular self-image of the Japanese national essence has been developed so as to construct a modern national identity in the face of Western domination […] The Japanese modern experience is described in terms of appropriation, domestication, and indigenization of the foreign (predominantly associated with the West) in a way that reinforces an exclusivist notion of Japanese national/cultural identity. (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 53)

Central to the process of hybridism, as discussed by Iwabuchi, is an appropriation of foreign cultural features that operates under the assumption that anything foreign can be 'domesticated' into the familiar (Iwabuchi,

2002, p. 54). Cultural hybridism is conceptualized as a Japanese strategy of adaptation, so much so that a term—*iitoko dori*—has been used to describe a process of adopting foreign cultural influences, or, as Roger J. Davies and Osamu Ikeno describe it, a way of adopting the best parts of foreign culture (Davies and Ikeno, 2002, p. 131).

Cultural Hybridity in the Work of Takashi Miike

Takashi Miike has embraced cultural hybridity on many levels—thematically, aesthetically and in his treatment of geographical setting, ethnicity and language. Many Miike films question the conventions of national and ethnic identity in the Japanese context while at the same time playing a key role in maintaining the global visibility of Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century. Miike's culturally hybrid, paradoxical representations of Japan weave together local and global signifiers to articulate a hybrid identity. This approach to cultural representation is, as I will later discuss, related to Miike's status as a cult filmmaker in English-speaking countries and the commercial recontextualization of his work outside Japan. Incorporating foreign cultural elements of ethnicity and language into the Japanese environments inhabited by his characters, Miike highlights the precariousness of an essentialized national identity and the conventions upon which national identity is based. Moreover, a culturally hybrid mode of representation coupled with the widespread availability of his films overseas, particularly in the UK and the USA, [Table 3.1] makes it difficult to conceptualize Miike's work as national cinema. English language is central to the recontextualization of Japanese identity in *Sukiyaki Western Django*, with Miike using English dialogue to deconstruct language and subvert its role as a national signifier. The eschewing of Japanese dialogue in favour of English is, alongside mixed race ethnicity, a culturally paradoxical feature of the film that has an underlying commercial motivation linked to Miike's cult status in the UK and the USA. Through a hybrid mode of representation, Miike unravels the essentialist conventions underpinning national and ethnic identity, and in ways directly linked to a non-Japanese commercial/industrial context.

Viewing the cult film as both 'wildly global' and 'firmly local', Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik address cultural belonging as a 'peculiar concept' in the context of cult cinema: 'because cult films are already standing "apart" in their own environments, they are not representative of their culture—at least not its mainstream' (Mathijs and Mendik, 2008, p. 275).

Table 3.1 DVD availability of selected Takashi Miike films in the UK and the USA (2001–2009)

Film	*Year of first DVD release*	*DVD distributor on first release*
Shinjuku kuroshakai: China mafia senso/Shinjuku Triad Society (1995)	2003 (UK)/2004 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Arts Magic (USA)
Gokudo kuroshakai/Rainy Dog (1997)	2003 (UK)/2004 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Arts Magic (USA)
Nihon kuroshakai/Ley Lines(1999)	2003 (UK)/2004 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Arts Magic (USA)
Odishon/Audition (1999)	2001 (UK/USA)	Tartan (UK)/Chimera Entertainment (USA)
DOA Deddo oa araibu/Dead or Alive (1999)	2002 (UK)/2004 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Kino Video (USA)
Hyoryu-gai/City of Lost Children (2000)	2002 (UK/USA)	Tartan (UK)/Chimera Entertainment (USA)
DOA Deddo oa araibu 2/Dead or Alive 2 (2000)	2003 (UK)/2004 (USA)	Tartan (USA)/Kino International
Koroshiya Ichi/Ichi the Killer (2001)	2003 (UK/USA)	Premier Asia (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)
Bijita Q/Visitor Q (2001)	2004 (UK)/2002 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)
Katakurike no kofuko/The Happiness of the Katakuris (2002)	2004 (UK)/2008 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Eastern Star (USA)
Araburu tamashii-tachi/Agitator (2002)	2004 (UK)/n/a (USA)	Tartan (UK)/n/a (USA)
Shin jingi no hakaba/Graveyard of Honour (2002)	n/a (UK)/2007 (USA)	Dynit (UK)/ANIMEIGO (USA)
Gokudo kyofu dai-gekijo/Gozu (2003)	2004 (UK)/2009 (USA)	Tartan (UK)/Cinema Epoch (USA)
One Missed Call (2004)	2008 (UK)/2005 (USA)	Contender Entertainment Group(UK)/Media Blasters(USA)
Sukiyaki Western Django (2007)	2009 (UK)/2008 (USA)	Contender Home Entertainment (UK)/Millennium (USA)

Sources: Amazon (2015a) and (2015b)

Miike's work does not belong solely to a Japanese context, given the cultural ambiguities of settings and characters, and the marketing of Miike as a cult director outside Japan. Now synonymous with terms used to promote Japanese and East Asian cinema overseas, such as Tartan Films'

Asia Extreme label and Media Blasters' Tokyo Shock, Miike was at the forefront of Japanese horror and extreme cinema's international success in the 2000s. With a liberal approach to violence, sex, genre convention and narrative, Miike has emerged as a director with considerable cult appeal. Befitting of the unconventional and at times transgressive nature of violent cult cinema, the films *Dead or Alive*, *Audition*, *Ichi the Killer* and *Visitor Q* attracted controversy when released outside Japan. Screenings of *Audition* prompted walkouts and verbal abuse directed at Miike during the 2000 Rotterdam International Film Festival, while *Ichi the Killer* was subject to censorship by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC).

Alongside an unconventional approach to violence and sex, many Miike films of the late 1990s and early 2000s abandon narrative cause-and-effect logic (see, e.g., the apocalyptic climax of *Dead or Alive*, *The Happiness of the Katakuris* and the surreal *Gozu*). Miike has also demonstrated a hybrid approach to genres, ranging from yakuza films, horror, musicals, and *jidaigeki*, making it impossible, Ko suggests, to pigeonhole his films into a single genre (Ko, 2010, p. 38). Miike has often applied his characteristic indeterminacy to nationality. National and ethnic identities are ambiguous in films such as *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog*, *Burusu Harpu/Blues Harp* (1998), *Ley Lines*, *City of Lost Souls*, *Ichi the Killer* and *Sukiyaki Western Django*. Many observers have characterized the director's work as conveying a deep sense of cultural rootlessness. Aaron Gerow employs the terms in-betweenness (Gerow, 2009, p. 29) and homelessness (Gerow, 2009, p. 26) to describe Miike's aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities, while Tom Mes identifies the 'rootless individual' as the most fundamental characteristic of Miike's characters, whether it stems from cultural or ethnic disconnections, geographical displacement, a lack of genealogical roots, physiological rootlessness, or psychological illness (Mes, 2004, pp. 23–24).

Miike's work is littered with characters occupying various in-between states of nationality and ethnicity. Their apparent rootlessness reveals an image of Japanese society that is far from homogenous. In Miike's first theatrical release, *Shinjuku Triad Society*, Tatsuhito (Kippei Shiina) is the multilingual son of a Japanese father and a Chinese mother, yet feels, as Mark Player notes, neither Japanese nor Chinese (Player, 2015, p. 109), which leads him to conceal his Chinese roots in order to become a successful policeman. His state of national and ethnic hybridity is one shared by the Japanese/African/American drug dealer Chuji (Hiroyuki Ikeuchi) in *Blues Harp* and the Japanese/Brazilian criminal Mario (Teah) in *City of Lost Souls*, as well as the main protagonists of *Dead or Alive*, who are

identified as *zanryu koji*, the children of Japanese parents born overseas. Immigrants, children of immigrants and diaspora communities feature prominently in other films too. In *Ley Lines*, Ryuichi (Kazuki Kitamura) is met with contempt and suspicion from civil servants and law enforcement on account of his Chinese parentage. Elsewhere, Japanese characters are exiled to Taipei (*Rainy Dog*) and the Philippines (*Family*, *The Guys from Paradise*), while in *City of Lost Souls* Brazilian, Russian and Chinese diasporas become embroiled in a cosmopolitan criminal underworld lying beneath Tokyo's ethnically homogenous surface. As Ko points out, Miike remains unusual among contemporary Japanese filmmakers for his use of non-Japanese characters, including mixed race groups (Ko, 2010, p. 39). By frequently incorporating characters of non-Japanese or 'questionable' Japanese identity into Japanese environments (or alternatively, Japanese characters into foreign environments), Miike employs a strategy of cultural hybridism that subverts essentialist images of the nation state.

In *Sukiyaki Western Django*, Miike's most overtly hybrid film, conventions of ethnicity and language are subverted within a decontextualized, culturally ambiguous setting that combines rural Japan and the iconography of *jidaigeki* with American and Italian westerns. In its blurring of ethnic boundaries and adoption of English dialogue, the film not only articulates the disorientating impact of a more global, more collective identity, but also references the transnational production and distribution arrangements that give the film a culturally paradoxical commercial identity. Significantly, cultural representation is interrelated with the English language market for Miike's films (and the markets for Japanese and East Asian cult cinemas more generally), as well as the recontextualization of the director as a global cult figure within that market.

Cultural Recontextualization in *Sukiyaki Western Django*

Miike films are rarely suited to standard plot synopses, and *Sukiyaki Western Django* is no exception to this. In essence, the film is a western that alludes not only to Hollywood's imagining of the American West, but also to the Italian appropriation of the western in the 1960s. Taking its narrative structure from Akira Kurosawa's period action film *Yojimbo* (1961) and the Italian westerns that borrowed so heavily from it (*Per un pugno di dollari/A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964) and *Django* (Sergio Corbucci, 1966)), *Sukiyaki Western Django* follows a lone, enig-

matic gunman, played by Hideaki Ito, as he wanders into a remote mining town split between two warring clans—the Heike (the Reds) and the Genji (the Whites). The names of the rival clans are notable for being one of the few culturally specific references in the film, an allusion to the conflict between the Heike (Taira) and Genji (Minamoto) clans during the Genpei War (1180–1185). Yet, even this Japanese cultural reference is paradoxical as the placement of the lone gunman between the warring factions also alludes to a much-travelled narrative that began with *Yojimbo* and led to *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Django*. With both clans keen to recruit his services, the gunman chooses instead to fight for an innkeeper, Ruriko (Kaori Momoi), and her grandson Heihachi (Ruka Uchida), whose father has been murdered by the Heike and whose mother is forced into prostitution by the Genji. With Ruriko's help, the gunman manipulates the clans against one another, before finally confronting the Genji leader, Yoshitsune (Yusuke Iseya), in a final battle between revolver and sword.

Sukiyaki Western Django makes no secret of its cultural hybridity, with little reverence shown towards authenticity. In this respect, Elest Ali notes that the film's merging of transnational themes is a statement on the 'reciprocal borrowing between Japanese and Western culture in general' (Ali, 2010, p. 127). The film's intentionally artificial and at times kitsch East-meets-West aesthetic presents an array of connotative Japanese images—a blazing red sun, Mount Fuji, tofu, sukiyaki beef, chopsticks, a *katana* sword—and combines them with cultural signifiers derived from elsewhere. Taking place within an overtly artificial setting that resembles an old Hollywood soundstage, the opening sequence asserts a highly paradoxical cultural identity. Pirringo, a white cowboy played by Quentin Tarantino, sets up camp with a Japanese female companion, Ruriko, who is inextricably dressed as a Native American. Several details identify the scene as that of a western: Pirringo's poncho, clearly modelled on those worn by Clint Eastwood in Sergio Leone's westerns, the campsite, a discarded wagon wheel, a cactus, a snake, and a sunburnt desert floor. Yet, these signifiers are offset by a painted backdrop styled specifically as an *ukiyo-e* woodblock print, specifically Katsushika Hokusai's *Gaifu kaisei/Fine Wind, Clear Morning* (1830). The inclusion of such an overtly Japanese image disorientates the genre context established in the foreground. Cinematic illusion is deconstructed by such an artificial aesthetic. With western iconography juxtaposed so heavily against the 'East' in the background a lack of cultural authenticity is established. With American, Italian and Japanese cultural signifiers all occupying the same space, there is clearly no attempt

at an authentic or distinctive mode of representation. Hence, an American played by Tarantino mimics a Japanese accent in English while cooking sukiyaki at a desert campsite, over which looms Mount Fuji. The cinematic space is decontextualized; it is neither the American West nor the Japanese East, instead it is a hybrid space, both Japanese and American in its character. Later in the film, Ito's lone gunman rides into a more recognizable Japanese locale, a small town of pagodas and a *torii* gateway surrounded by forests and mountains. However, any clear sense of national or geographical placement is contradicted by the town's name—Nevada—while its most popular saloon is named Eastwood. Again, the sense of place is offset by the juxtaposition of different national signifiers, resulting in a culturally hybrid identity.

Any discussion of cultural hybridity in *Sukiyaki Western Django* should consider its allusions to the Italian spaghetti western. Leon Hunt asserts that *Sukiyaki Western Django*, like the Thai western *Fat alai jone/Tears of the Black Tiger* (Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000) and the South Korean action adventure *Joheunnom nabbeun nom isanghan nom/The Good, the Bad and the Weird* (Kim Ji woon, 2008), is concerned with 'cultural roots' at the same time as it stresses its inauthenticity as a western (Hunt, 2011, p. 103). Key to the film's 'inauthenticity' is its continual referencing of the spaghetti westerns of the 1960s and 1970s, a subgenre shunned by many American critics in the 1960s for its 'bastardization' of the classic American western, a 'debased' (Wagstaff, 1992, p. 246) and ultimately unsuccessful imitation of a quintessentially American art form. Although *Sukiyaki Western Django* may be seen as a pastiche of Hollywood westerns, a film that is clearly 'putting on the west' as a mode of pastiche (Dyer, 2006, p. 100), the genre most central to Miike's mode of representation is the spaghetti western, and specifically Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* and Corbucci's *Django*. In appropriating the geographical and temporal settings of Hollywood westerns, *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Django* recontextualized the genre, subverting its inherent American identity by reproducing its iconography on Italian studio sets and in Spain's Almeria desert. Nationality appears irrelevant within the world of the spaghetti western; characters rarely exhibit discernible national or cultural identities, while an actual Italian cultural context is obscured by the American aesthetic of the Wild West.

The decision to associate *Sukiyaki Western Django* so closely with the de-contextualized cultural identity of Italian westerns is highly significant in regards to Miike's representation of Japanese ethnicity and language.

As established in its opening scene, *Sukiyaki Western Django* disregards clear-cut national and cultural origins. The material the film references, Steve Rawle argues, has always been transnational in origin with the cultural borrowing that informs it reflecting 'transnational exchange rather than appropriation of American material by Miike' (Rawle, 2011, p. 91). By not aligning itself to any specific location or genre, Miike's film participates in a history of cultural appropriation that has seen the same narrative pass through the hands of Japanese, Italian and American filmmakers. Partly influenced thematically by American western novels and cinema, as well as the style of John Ford, Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* focuses on a cynical and morally ambiguous *ronin* (masterless samurai) played by Toshiro Mifune, who arrives in a remote town and manipulates two local gangs against one another. This character was recontextualized three years later as an equally cynical lone gunman played by Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars*, with *Yojimbo*'s narrative transplanted from feudal Japan to the US/Mexico border of the late nineteenth century. The success of Leone's film would in turn inspire similar narratives and characters, the most notable being *Django* in 1966. The transnational process of appropriation that began with *Yojimbo* in 1961 eventually returns to a Japanese context with *Sukiyaki Western Django*. The film appropriates *Yojimbo*'s narrative via *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Django*, while also incorporating visual signifiers from spaghetti westerns and *jidaigeki* cinema: Yoshitsune's *katana* (long sword); the lone gunman's set of rifles (a nod to the rifle collection of Colonel Mortimer (Lee van Cleef) in *Per qualche dollar in piu/For a Few Dollars More* (Sergio Leone, 1965)); and a Gatling gun and coffin featured prominently in *Django*.

In *Yojimbo* and the Italian westerns it inspired, the central character becomes key to understanding *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s cultural hybridity. Like Mifune's character in *Yojimbo*, a masterless samurai without any fixed place of residence, the lone antiheroes of spaghetti westerns often appear as characters without context who assume no obvious national or communal identity. Thus the typical spaghetti western protagonist is, to borrow Robert Warshow's description of the American gangster, a man 'without culture' (Warshow, 2004, p. 703), unfettered from any sense of place or belonging. The Stranger (Thomas Milian) in *Se sei vivo spara/Django Kill…If You Live, Shoot!* (Giulio Questi, 1967) is half-Mexican, half-American, as is Ringo (Mark Damon) in *Johnny Oro/Ringo and His Golden Pistol* (Sergio Corbucci, 1965). The titular hero of *Keoma* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1976), played by Franco Nero, is shunned by his

brothers for having a Native American mother. Even Django, a Union soldier in the American Civil War, is culturally ambiguous: when asked whether he is a 'Yankee', Django simply replies, "I fought for the North.' Inevitably these characters come into conflict with settled communities and so too does Miike's lone gunman, a man of mixed ethnicity with no clear origins, a man who is juxtaposed with the homogenous ethnic identities of the Heike and Genji clans.

On viewing spaghetti westerns such as *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Django*, at least in their dubbed versions, alongside Miike's English language Japanese film, it becomes apparent that geo-cultural placement is largely unimportant to their protagonists. Spaghetti westerns do not have to be understood according to an Italian context. Neither does *Sukiyaki Western Django* have a clear contextual relationship with Japan. In contrast to Hollywood westerns made prior to the 1960s, spaghetti westerns are not firmly rooted in the heroic mythology associated with the American West, often disregarding the moral certainties of the traditional American western while at the same time appropriating its iconography and geographical setting. Dimitris Eleftheriotis views the genre as a 'hybrid *par excellence*' (Eleftheriotis, 2001, p. 92). Accordingly, the cultural identity of the Italian western is 'promiscuous' rather than stable. Spaghetti westerns are Italian in most respects (usually written, directed and produced by Italians for Italian studios), yet they appropriate a quintessentially American genre. Although most Italian westerns are located in the American West (usually Texas or the US/Mexico border), most were filmed in Italy and Spain. In addition, casts tended to be highly cosmopolitan, consisting of Italian, Spanish, French, German and American actors. Though spaghetti westerns may be related to a 1960s/1970s Italian film industry context and popular genres of the time (*peplum* historical films, the *giallo* horror genre), they, like *Sukiyaki Western Django*, are difficult to contextualize as national cinema. Eleftheriotis writes:

> The weakening or erasure of the national in the spaghetti entails a rethinking of the "national" of the national cinema. This must involve an understanding of national cinema that does not seek to discover ways in which national film cultures are defined in unique national terms, but explores the ways in which such cultures engage with and transform other cultures. (Eleftheriotis, 2001, p. 127)

It is significant that such a culturally rootless genre is appropriated by Miike and incorporated into a film which subverts national identity.

Sukiyaki Western Django exists within a recontextualized, culturally paradoxical world, a world in which different cultural elements engage with and transform each other. Like the artificial American West created by Italian studios and re-enacted in the Almeria desert or the nationally ambiguous antiheroes of *A Fistful of Dollars* and *Django*, there is no clear-cut national identity to be discerned from the culturally hybrid town of Nevada. Instead, the town functions as a recontextualized space in which fundamental elements of national identity are subverted. The national signifiers of ethnicity and language, for example, may be conventions of a racially and culturally homogenous Japan, however, in *Sukiyaki Western Django*, ethnicity is malleable, while the convention of Japanese language is eschewed altogether. The fact that Miike foregrounds these particular aspects of Japanese identity, which have in many cases been used to legitimize national identity, is therefore worth exploring.

Ethnicity

Writing in 1998, Dolores P. Martinez argues that the rhetoric of the Japanese state remains one of homogenous national identity (Martinez, 1998, p. 10). Japan has, relatively speaking, been characterized as an ethnically homogenous nation, although, as Yoshio Sugimoto indicates, this has been changing: 'The upsurge of ethnic consciousness around the world has also sharpened the focus on ethnic diversity in Japan. The confluence of these factors has given rise to what one might call the ethnic turn of the definition of Japanese culture' (Sugimoto, 2009, pp. 1–2). This summation of Japanese identity is typical of a growing body of work that has critiqued dominant cultural narratives on which Japanese identity is based (see Morris-Suzuki (1996); Howell (2004); Befu (2001 and 2009); and Ko (2010). As Harumi Befu suggests, numerous scholars have criticized *nihonjinron* for 'not admitting to the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of Japan' (Befu, 2009, p. 26). Although all countries lay claim to being unique, writes Ko, it is Japan which perceives its culture as 'uniquely' unique (Ko, 2010, p. 11): 'Since its emergence as a modern nation state, Japan has been obsessed with its alleged uniqueness, and its uniqueness has continually been narrated in a set of discourses called *nihonjinron* (discourses of Japaneseness)' (Ko, 2010, p. 11). Of course, the uniqueness Ko speaks of is paradoxical; to some extent it is based on reality, but it is also an imagined political, social and cultural construct that exaggerates cultural distinctiveness and belies the culturally hybrid elements of national

identity—in Japan's case, cultural and ethnic links to China, Korea, South-East Asia and the Pacific.

The central drawback of *nihonjinron* has been a reluctance to fully acknowledge Japan's culturally hybrid historical roots and the processes of assimilation and exclusion through which homogenous national and ethnic identity has been constructed:

> The policies of assimilation which were used to turn the people of the frontier into Japanese citizens involved a sharpening of the official definition of what it meant to be Japanese. But that definition itself was not constant or stable. Instead […] it was contextual and changing, shaped both by circumstances within Japan and by the nature of relations between the Japanese state and the societies of the periphery. (Morris-Suzuki, 1996, p. 42)

The essentialization of ethnic identity does not account for certain realities, such as Chinese and Korean cultural influences, Japanese minorities (Ainu, Okinawans, Ogasawarans, *burakumin*) and diaspora communities. Discussing the conventions of Japanese identity, Befu pinpoints highly selective criteria according to which nationals have been traditionally defined: a native speaker born in Japan of Japanese parents who embodies Japanese culture is considered 'pure' or 'typical', whereas those who lack one or more of these features to the full extent is considered 'suspect' to varying degrees (Befu, 2009, p. 29). Historically this has meant the children of Japanese expatriates, people who are legally Japanese through approved citizenship, but who remain 'suspect' on account of their parents' residency elsewhere, while it has also been applied to citizens of bi-national parentage (Befu, 2009, p. 32). In addition, people born of inter-national marriages, especially those involving non-Asians, still suffer discrimination through epithets such as *ain-oko* (mixed blood), *gaijin* (foreigner) and *Amerikajin* (American) (Befu, 2009, p. 33). The use of discriminatory terms in distinguishing Japanese from non-Japanese places ethnicity at the forefront of national identity and, as Kosaku Yoshino suggests, places Japanese identity in direct opposition to its Western other:

> The endless discussions of Japanese uniqueness are, if put more precisely, discussions of difference, but difference of a specific kind. Japanese identity is the anti-image of foreignness and, as such, can only be affirmed by formulating the images of the Other; namely, the West […] In general terms, ethnicity may be understood, to a certain extent, as the symbolic boundary process of organising significant differences between 'us' and 'them' […]. (Yoshino, 1992, p. 8)

With the ethnic body so central to conventional definitions of Japanese identity, Miike's portrayal of mixed race Japanese and diaspora communities is not only unconventional, but actively subverts the expectation of seeing homogenous images of Japaneseness and what Masakazu Iino refers to as the ideology of blood purism in Japan (Iino, 2010, p. 73). Although David L. Howell suggests that homogenous images resist subversion, with the myth of Japanese homogeneity remaining impervious to subversion from within (Howell, 2004, p. 103), Miike de-mythologizes much of what is considered typical Japanese, presenting ethnicity in particular as a variable rather than as a constant.

Within the decontextualized Japan of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, ethnicity is not a reliable marker of identity. Instead, the cultural paradoxes evident in the film's *mise-en-scène* are mirrored in the ambiguous ethnic identities of Nevada's inhabitants. In keeping with the film's extravagant visual palette, the Heike and Genji are distinguished by colours that are integral to their clan identities: Heike in red and black and Genji in white. While the Genji are predominantly dark-haired in a way natural to the Japanese, many of the Heike have uncharacteristically red hair or a mix of red and black, and are distinguished in terms of their 'mongrelness', their lack of allegiance to any single cause, and adoption of foreign firearms. In contrast, the Genji are firm traditionalists, as symbolized by their leader's favouring of the *katana* sword over firearms. Although portrayed by Japanese actors, the clans are attributed imagined ethnic identities distinct from one another, a distinction that becomes a key element of the film's narrative. A Genji woman, Shizuka (Yoshino Kimura), is prostituted by her clan as punishment for falling in love with Akira (Shun Oguri), a young Heike. The two lovers have a son named Heihachi. As the town's sheriff Hoanka (Teruyuki Kagawa) explains: 'So, Red and White got hitched, and they figured crossing roses blooming in both colours was romantic […] And they raised Heihachi, their red and white treasure.' However, just as Shizuka is punished by her own people, so Akira is murdered by the Heike, and Heihachi is ostracized from the community. The young boy does, however, find companionship with his Heike grandmother, Ruriko, and Ito's lone gunman, who, it transpires, is of the "same stock" as the young boy. In a direct reference to the ethnically ambiguous anti-heroes common in spaghetti westerns (in particular, the titular characters portrayed by Franco Nero in *Django* and *Keoma*), both Heihachi and the lone gunman are referred to as 'half-breeds', while Akira is himself a child of ethnically ambiguous origins, the son of Ruriko, a Heike who in her youth adopted a Native American identity, and Pirringo, a Caucasian who in his old age,

and for reasons unexplained, morphs into an elderly Japanese man. With such disregard shown for fixed ethnic identities, ethnicity is treated as a variable rather than as an essential component of nationality. Miike's mixing of ethnicities constitutes a culturally hybrid strategy of representation, one that alludes to the restrictive conventions of national identity, and which also extends to another key national signifier—language.

Language

Whereas Japanese ethnicity in *Sukiyaki Western Django* is obscured by multiple ethnic identities, Japanese language is concealed. Even more so than ethnicity, language provides a clear demarcation of Japanese identity. Unlike more globally disseminated languages (English, French, Spanish), Japanese is confined to Japan itself and the Japanese diaspora around the world. The fact that this language tends to be a 'standard' or 'mainland' form of Japanese—*kyotsugo* (common language)—suggests that it has been engendered as the core language in ways that undermine regional variations. For Befu, a Japan that emphasizes homogeneity fails to recognize people's 'varied patterns of living' (Befu, 2009, p. 26), language being one such pattern. The standardization of the Japanese language inevitably filters into cultural products. Even in the most culturally ambiguous Japanese films the dialogue language remains indigenous with few exceptions. Anime film exports can be an exception to this, appearing in dubbed form according to the territories to which they are sold. However, this particular mode of concealing language follows the production process, with non-Japanese actors providing translated dialogue once foreign rights are secured. In contrast, *Sukiyaki Western Django* is a live action film produced *with* a foreign language; unlike anime, the use of English is very much a part of the diegesis, as opposed to having been added in post-production. The convention of Japanese dialogue is removed from the film in favour of the more 'global', more 'universal' language of English, partly for commercial reasons and partly as a strategy of subverting the fundamentality of 'standard' Japanese.

In addition to the portrayal of mixed race Japanese, immigrants and diaspora, Miike has often used language to disorientate a sense of national and geographical placement. In *Shinjuku Triad Society*, language becomes irrelevant between Tatsuhito and his Chinese mother. Tatsuhito communicates in Japanese despite the fact that his mother barely speaks it and regardless of the fact that he is fluent in her native Mandarin. Similarly,

language serves no meaningful purpose for the character Karen in *Ichi the Killer*, as she speaks freely in a mix of Japanese, Cantonese and English to Japanese counterparts with little or no understanding of her sudden linguistic shifts. In *City of Lost Souls*, Japanese is not spoken for an entire 17 minutes. In fact, there is more Chinese and Portuguese dialogue in the film than Japanese (Lo, 2014, p. 219). Elsewhere, the use of English is employed to humorous effect: Tokyo policemen count in English in *Dead or Alive*, while in the farcical *Happiness of the Katakuris*, Richard Sagawa (Kiyoshiro Imawano) masquerades as the gentlemanly nephew of Queen Elizabeth II. In such instances, the use of language is not faithful to any single context. Within the diegesis, the continuity of language is disrupted: as Tatsuhito and Karen's conversations demonstrate, language has no functional role to play. Whether characters understand what is being said matters little, just as their nationalities appear transient.

How should one view Miike's recurrent use of English? First, the use of English underlines the fact that, for all its alleged cultural uniqueness, Japan is not an isolated or self-contained nation, but is always tied to the world around it. Central to the transnational and culturally hybrid nature of Miike's representation of Japan, English acts as a global signifier, a signifier of Japan's position *within* the world, rather than outside of it. However, the fact that the signifier is English (as opposed to Japanese) arguably places Japan in a subaltern position, given English's status as the global lingua franca and the language of colonization (Tam, 2004, p. xi). Established first through British colonization and second through the global spread of American popular culture and political influence since World War II, the English language would appear symbolic of Western culture's dominance of the world's indigenous cultures. But, Miike does not evoke English because Japan assumes a subaltern status vis-à-vis the English-speaking world. Instead, the director understands English as the language of globalization, rather than as a language of colonization and Westernization, a language that has served a variety of purposes throughout East Asia.

English is associated with the global economy and its traditional centres of power in the West. However, with the economic ascendency of East Asia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the use of English in Asia could be said to reflect Asia's entry into the global economy along with its increasing economic and cultural power. By utilizing the global currency of English, the likes of Japan, South Korea and China participate in a global dialogue (as opposed to a regional or national dialogue), thus

avoiding a peripheral cultural and political status: 'if the only language you use is not written and not comprehended outside your immediate community, then it is easy to comprehend your status as subaltern' (Sonntag, 2003, p. 9).

English becomes the language of globalization, thus representing not simply Westernization, but the local use of English as the global lingua franca. The adoption of English language in *Sukiyaki Western Django* could be read along the lines of post-colonial theory, which posits that the incorporation of English is symbolic of the West's dominance over indigenous cultures and those cultures' assumption of a subaltern position. Yet, Miike does not employ English simply as the language of the West, but rather as a truly international language, with its usage in *Sukiyaki Western Django* referring to the usage of English in a Japanese context. The appearance of English words in Japanese culture is not uncommon; as James Stanlow points out, the use of English is not restricted to signage and popular culture, but is 'imbricated into the fabric of Japanese life in a myriad of ways, from the media to academic life, from advertising to personal conversation' (Stanlow, 2004, p. 23). Outside of its use in education and communication with English speakers, the use of English in Japan is more limited to the use of loanwords littered throughout popular culture, from t shirts featuring English phrases (often mistranslated) to words used for advertising consumer brands. The adoption of English as an actual dialogue language for a Japanese film is, however, uncommon and represents a far more substantial incorporation of the language.

Alongside the representation of ethnicity, the use of language recontextualizes an essentialized national identity, placing Japan into a culturally hybrid, global context. In addition, one might also consider the adoption of English in *Sukiyaki Western Django* as a commercial strategy. By eschewing Japanese in favour of English, *Sukiyaki Western Django* pushes linguistic indeterminacy further than any previous Miike film. Clearly uneasy with the change in language, the films' Japanese cast deliver a broken (and somewhat comical) mix of British slang and clichéd phrases derived from American westerns and action films, phrases that most Japanese viewers would not be expected to recognize: 'nook and cranny'; 'Not too shabby'; 'That's tits-on-a-bull thinking'; 'Are you gonna come at me or whistle dixie?'; 'Shit or get off the pot!'; 'Hold your horses'; 'Payback's a bitch'; 'Shit just happens'. At the same time, English-speaking audiences might be left nonplussed when Japanese titles appear onscreen early in the film without accompanying subtitles, or when Sheriff Hoanka, upon dying,

utters the film's only line of Japanese minus an English translation. The resulting disorientation is consistent with the film's cultural hybridity.

As I have indicated, there are certain motivations for a culturally hybrid mode of representation in *Sukiyaki Western Django*. The ethnic ambiguity of the lone gunman, the Heike and Genji clans, Ruriko, Heihachi and Pirringo is certainly consistent with Miike's preoccupation with mixed race characters, immigrants and diaspora communities. The director's treatment of Japanese identity as a malleable category is further emphasized by the use of foreign languages, most notably in *Sukiyaki Western Django*. However, though this might account for cultural representation within the contexts of Miike's oeuvre and conventional definitions of Japanese identity, the commercial and industrial incentives for the use of English are equally significant. The recontextualization of a distinct Japanese identity into a more plural and ambiguous global identity should therefore be understood in the context of Miike's cult status in the English language market and specifically the influence of external commercial and industrial factors. By using a more globally accessible language along with commercial resources acquired through collaboration with external consortia, *Sukiyaki Western Django* is presented as global cult cinema produced for the English language market.

Commercial Recontextualization

The weaving together of different national signifiers in *Sukiyaki Western Django* can be read within the contexts of Japanese cultural essentialism and Miike's response to it in many of his films. In this respect, cultural hybridity, the film's mode of representation, is informed by its national context, i.e. the restrictive conventions of Japanese ethnic identity and the role of language as a national signifier. However, cultural hybridity brings together various cultural strands and therefore other contexts are represented by the film. If one thinks of *Sukiyaki Western Django* as an expression of global identity rather than national identity, then it is worth considering its wider commercial context and specifically the commercial reasons why Miike represents ethnicity and language in such a paradoxical fashion. The mode of representation is a product of its external commercial context (as much as a reflection of its national context) as well as Miike's recontextualization as a *global* cult filmmaker able to utilize foreign resources of production, marketing and distribution. In keeping with its cultural hybridity, *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s commercial identity

is culturally paradoxical with the film's mode of representation informed by Miike's popularity in the English language market and collaboration with external consortia.

On a textual level, numerous Miike films present Japanese characters and Japanese environments that do not conform to an immediately recognizable image of Japan or conventional notions of national identity. Furthermore, Miike has, in the wake of international commercial success, worked within different industrial contexts in order to reach a wider audience, and this, as *Sukiyaki Western Django* demonstrates, has an effect on film content.

Sukiyaki Western Django was not the first time Miike had made an English language film for a non-Japanese audience. Capitalizing on the burgeoning popularity of East Asian horror and extreme cinema in Europe and North America, *Saam gang yi/Three…Extremes* (Fruit Chan, Park Chan wook, and Takashi Miike, 2004) was a Chinese, South Korean and Japanese coproduction that combined the talents of Miike and two other directors associated with the boom in East Asian horror and extreme cinema, Fruit Chan and Park Chan wook. Comprising the films *Dumplings* (Chan), *Cut* (Park) and *Box* (Miike), *Three…Extremes*, as the name indicates, carried a close association with the 'Asia Extreme' label used to great effect by Tartan Films to promote East Asian films on VHS and DVD. With its self-consciously Asia Extreme content and marketing campaign, the project was tailor-made for the 'Asiaphile' cult demographics cultivated by the likes of Tartan, Premier Asia and Optimum Asia in the UK and Media Blasters in the USA, and confirmed Miike's ability to work within an English language context.

The commercial recontextualization of Miike from Japanese to Asian to global cult filmmaker corresponded with the wider endorsement of his work by other cult directors at the time, including Quentin Tarantino, Guillermo del Toro and Eli Roth. Due to his growing international status as a specialist in violent cult cinema, Miike was invited to make a second English language film, *Imprint* (2006), as part of the *Masters of Horror* television anthology (Mike Garris, 2005–2007), a cult/genre project made for the Showtime cable network in the USA. By being placed within the production context of *Masters of Horror* and, in the process, being endorsed as an internationally renowned cult figure alongside other directors in the series (such as Dario Argento, John Carpenter and Tobe Hooper), Miike was again recontextualized. The director's representation of Japan in *Imprint* was also recontextualized: an American journalist (Billy

Drago) travels through nineteenth-century Japan in an episode that, like *Sukiyaki Western Django*, recontextualizes a Japanese setting as an English language audio-visual space. *Imprint* was Miike's first attempt at utilizing non-Japanese financial and industrial resources to represent Japan, with a North American audience at the forefront of his decision-making. Miike even attempted to conform to the demands of the North American market and specifically the restrictions imposed by US television censorship. Although some of its violent content was removed, *Imprint* was cancelled by the Showtime network, only reaching its intended audience via DVD later in 2006. However, despite this setback, *Masters of Horror* confirmed Miike's status as a filmmaker endorsed by other cult directors, a practitioner of 'Asian' horror and extreme cinema, and a visiting Japanese director willing to work within US linguistic and censorship restrictions.

Crucially, *Masters of Horror* and *Three…Extremes* gave Miike the commercial incentive to present Japan directly to a non-Japanese audience. Through the English language production of these projects, Miike was repositioned commercially—from Japan to Asia to North America and finally to a global audience. Taking this into consideration, it is unsurprising that Miike devised the culturally hybrid *Sukiyaki Western Django* as a self-reflexive English language Japanese cult film produced specifically for an overseas market. In the context of Miike's collaboration with non-Japanese consortia, the decontextualized cinematic space of Nevada, the ethnic ambiguity of *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s characters and the paradox of English dialogue in a Japanese film begin to make commercial sense. In this regard, the use of English as a global signifier (as opposed to Japanese as a national signifier) has underlying commercial incentives linked to the commercial opportunities offered through transnational collaboration.

On a commercial level, *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s dialogue has a practical function, though clearly not one designed for a Japanese audience: to make the film more widely accessible to a responsive English language market. When understood in the context of Miike's collaboration with non-Japanese consortia, the adoption of English appears symptomatic of the increased influence that the external market and America's central position within it have on cultural representation. Factoring into the recontextualization of Miike as a globally recognized Japanese/Asian cult director has of course been the widespread availability of his work via VHS and DVD (see Table 3.1), along with the increased brand recognition of East Asian horror and extreme cinema in the UK and the USA. The initial cult popularity of J Horror and extreme cinema was based to a large extent on

their rarity, their 'foreignness' and the relative difficulty consumers faced in accessing films. However, by the early 2000s, the branding of Japanese titles by the likes of Tartan Films in the UK and Media Blasters in the USA had resulted in a wider dissemination of films by emerging directors. This, in turn, resulted in greater external involvement in the production and distribution of cult films, and greater financial incentives for Japanese companies to collaborate on cofinanced and coproduced projects.

Discussing his decision to use English dialogue, Miike provides a clear indication that the adoption of English language was directly motivated by the opportunities offered by overseas markets:

> [T]heir English is not an imitation of native speakers. Their accent is unique to the Japanese people. It would be interesting if English-language speakers think their Japanese English is cool and start imitating them, then I think we might change something! Japanese actors would be able to expand the scope of their careers. And for Japanese movies, surprising possibilities might result. (SciFi Japan, 2007)

There are two points made by Miike that are worth highlighting. First, the hope that English speakers might consider *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s Japanese English to be 'cool' clearly resonates with Japanese cultural exportation in the early twenty-first century, specifically the desire to produce, package and promote Japanese culture and identity under Cool Japan rhetoric. A mark of coolness is imitation, in this case the idea that English speakers might imitate Japanese actors imitating English.

Second, Miike suggests that *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s Japanese English might 'change something' for Japanese actors expanding the scope of their careers (by utilizing the widely spoken language of English), possibly with the American film industry as a potential career option. The use of English therefore is clearly informed by the commercial possibilities offered elsewhere—production collaboration, greater financing, widespread distribution, larger audiences—with Miike appealing to an external market while also forging new working relationships overseas, both for himself and his cast. The need to be accessible to an English-speaking audience potentially secures new opportunities for a national film industry constantly seeking to maintain global visibility, while Japanese film workers begin to utilize new global networks and new resources of production and distribution.

In terms of production and distribution, *Sukiyaki Western Django* was the result of cultural hybridity, in other words the cultural hybridity of

transnational collaboration. Japan was represented by several companies: A-Team, Dentsu, Geneon Entertainment, Nagoya Broadcasting Network (NBN), Sedic International, Shogakukan, Toei Company, Tokyu Recreation, and TV Asahi. The involvement of Sedic International is particularly noteworthy: Sedic International are a Japanese development, financing and production company with a strong focus on the wider global market. The head of Sedic International and a regular Miike collaborator, Toshiaki Nakazawa, produced several Japanese cross-over hits, including Yojiro Takita's *Departures*, the winner of the 2009 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and Miike's recent foray into the genre of *jidaigeki*, *13 Assassins* and *Hara-Kiri/Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai* (Takashi Miike, 2011), both of which were produced in partnership with British company Han Way Films. In addition, the presence of Sony Pictures Releasing recontextualizes the film's commercial identity as well as contributing the global brand name of Sony to the project. As a global/ Japanese corporation, Sony is itself culturally paradoxical, recognized as much for its American identity (Sony Pictures Entertainment, the production of major Hollywood franchises) as for its Japanese origins. In the case of *Sukiyaki Western Django*, the centre of power is difficult to attribute to any single national production context.

Among the new commercial resources made available to Miike was an extensive network of distribution channels through which *Sukiyaki Western Django* could be marketed to a larger audience, in contrast to the narrow cult demographics targeted by DVD companies specializing in Japanese and East Asian horror/extreme cinema. Whereas most Miike films had been distributed via VHS and DVD formats and limited theatrical releases, the director's first English language production was distributed on a scale unprecedented in his career. Distributed throughout Europe and North America, *Sukiyaki Western Django* did not simply represent 'Japanese cinema'; the film was also indicative of a more diverse network of production, distribution and promotion spanning both Japanese and English language contexts. Contributing to *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s mainstream visibility was Celluloid Dreams, a French production and distribution company serving as an international sales agent for films produced around the world. On the one hand, Celluloid Dreams distributed *Sukiyaki Western Django* as a self-conscious cult film release by securing its North American premier at Toronto's Midnight Madness showcase. Celluloid Dreams have since developed their global roster of films in the category of violent, cult/genre cinema, launching 'Celluloid Nightmares'

in 2010 as a label featuring such titles as *Funny Games* (Michael Haneke, 1997), *Kommandor Treholt and ninjatropen/Norwegian Ninja* (Thomas Cappelen Malling, 2010), *Atrocious* (Fernando Barreda Luna, 2010), *A Horrible Way to Die* (Adam Wingard, 2010) and *Serbuan maut/The Raid* (Gareth Evans, 2012).

Confirming that *Sukiyaki Western Django* was intended for a global market, the film premiered at the Venice International Film Festival in September 2007, followed later that month by a North American premier in Toronto. Significantly, these showcases occurred only weeks after the film's Japanese premier, with the temporal margins that usually separate a film's Japanese release and its international debut being narrowed considerably. *Sukiyaki Western Django* opened on nine screens in the USA, including Los Angeles and New York, having been reviewed in mainstream American publications the previous year, including *Variety*, *The New York Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter* and *The Village Voice*. Elsewhere, cult film aficionado Kim Newman wrote about the film in *Empire Magazine* in the UK (Newman, 2009) and Mark Schilling provided an English language review in *The Japan Times* (Schilling, 2007).

Another key factor in securing mainstream attention for *Sukiyaki Western Django* was the casting of Tarantino. This enabled Miike to attract a larger production budget and a more high profile international marketing campaign. Tarantino's role as a foreign character not only contributes to the film's cultural hybridity, it is also a key factor in the film's commercial recontextualization. No longer simply a Japanese or even an Asian cult film, *Sukiyaki Western Django* was commercially positioned as mainstream cult cinema endorsed by Tarantino and was, in accordance, marketed to a more diverse audience. Tarantino, who would himself go on to pay homage to Corbucci's *Django* in *Django Unchained* (2012), automatically provides *Sukiyaki Western Django* with a certain degree of cult credibility in the global market, his recognizability as a filmmaker endorsing the film to those familiar with such works as *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1992), *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and *Kill Bill* volumes one and two (Quentin Tarantino, 2003–2004). The casting of Tarantino is also a self-reflexive decision on Miike's part, one that underlines the 'cultishness' of the film in the same way that Tarantino's casting of blackploitation actress Pam Grier in *Jackie Brown* (1998) and martial arts stars Sony Chiba, Gordon Lau and David Carradine in the *Kill Bill* series had done. Furthermore, Tarantino's presence references not only the director's endorsement of East Asian cult cinema, but his own appropriation of

Japanese and Hong Kong genre films. Tarantino's hybrid style of filmmaking has continually woven together elements of disparate genres—spaghetti westerns, blackploitation, Hong Kong action cinema and Japanese extreme cinema—and this has raised awareness of those genres among mainstream Western audiences. In the process, Tarantino endorses the work of Japanese, South Korean, Hong Kong and Chinese filmmakers, acting as a 'connoisseur' of East Asian cinema. Leon Hunt suggests that through an association with Tarantino, East Asian films have gained more attention in the West:

> Tarantino's public persona embraces his Asiaphile fanboy credentials, which have been evident throughout his career, culminating in *Kill Bill*'s full-scale pillaging of Hong Kong and Japanese genre cinema. He has acted as a 'patron' to Asian cinema, whether distributing Asian films, lending his name to the Western promotion of *Hero* (HK/China, 2002), or through his more recent association with Park Chan-wook. (Hunt, 2008, p. 220)

In association with Tarantino, *Sukiyaki Western Django* gained more legitimacy in British and American markets, thereby attracting a mainstream audience, with the director having helped promote a greater awareness of Miike. In addition, Tarantino's patronage also carried weight with so-called Asiaphile and fanboy audiences, audiences already familiar with Tarantino's own self-reflexive, culturally hybrid films.

Tarantino's involvement in *Sukiyaki Western Django*, both as actor and as a marketing tool, proved crucial to its cross-over potential, as did the appropriation of film genres familiar to European and North American audiences. The choice of language, not just as a culturally hybrid strategy of representation, but also as a strategy of accessibility, was key to attracting the attention of mainstream reviewers, and, previous to that, securing foreign financing, production and distribution. All of these factors contribute to the film's culturally paradoxical commercial identity; all are signifiers of external cultural and commercial contexts, from Tarantino's visibility in the West and the iconography of American and Italian westerns, to Sony's culturally ambiguous identity, Sedic International's collaboration with foreign consortia and the use of American and British vernaculars throughout the film. With different nations represented in *Sukiyaki Western Django*'s production and distribution, it becomes difficult, perhaps even unnecessary to situate the film, both in terms of content and production, within a specific national context. As a result, the film

occupies a range of categories, all of which appear contradictory: Japanese cinema/global cinema; cult cinema/mainstream cinema; Japanese cinema/English language cinema. Whether one approaches *Sukiyaki Western Django* as a representation of Japanese identity or as a commercial product, the film cannot be firmly contextualized in terms of national cinema. Instead, its nationality is recontextualized on textual and commercial levels. As well as demonstrating Miike's utilization of non-Japanese resources of financing, production and distribution, the film's commercial recontextualization is also symptomatic of the increased involvement of foreign consortia in the production of Japanese films.

The Ethnic Body in *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*

Like Miike, Shinya Tsukamoto has attracted a cult following in the UK and the USA, particularly among fanboy demographics targeted by distributors of Japanese horror and extreme cinema. Since the international success of the director's debut feature *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* in 1989 and its sequel *Tetsuo 2: Body Hammer* (1992), Tsukamoto has maintained a strong following primarily through VHS and DVD distribution and screenings at horror and fantasy film festivals in Europe and North America. Widespread exposure outside Japan has inevitably attracted the attention of foreign producers and studios keen to adapt the *Tetsuo* series to an English language context. The external market for Tsukamoto's work would have a significant impact on the filmmaker's decision-making and specifically the representation of ethnicity and language in the third film in the *Tetsuo* series, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*. The film's subversion of ethnicity and language is directly related to commercial expectations from non-Japanese consortia for Tsukamoto to direct a third *Tetsuo* film accessible to English-speaking audiences. Thus, in regards to cultural representation, Tsukamoto, like Miike, demonstrates adaptability; prompted by external commercial factors, the director represents Japan in culturally hybrid terms, subverting Japanese ethnicity and language in an attempt to recontextualize the *Tetsuo* series as global/Japanese.

The *Tetsuo* films have gained considerable popularity outside Japan, their low budget, DIY experimentalism, bleak industrial imagery, gruesome body horror and erotic violence making them notable additions to the J Horror/Asia Extreme canon. All three films in the series tell a similar story, functioning Ian Conrich suggests, as transformation and incorporation narratives (Conrich, 2005, p. 99). In *Tetsuo*, the domestic life of a

Tokyo salaryman (played by Tomoroh Taguchi) is turned upside down by a stranger named Yatsu (Shinya Tsukamoto), a man with a penchant for self-mutilation and body modification using metal objects and industrial scrap. After being injured by the salaryman in a hit-and-run accident, Yatsu takes revenge, gradually manipulating the salaryman's metamorphosis into a hideous hybrid of flesh and metal. Each part of the salaryman's body is progressively transformed through a nightmarish sequence of events—a confrontation with a mutated salarywoman (Nobu Kanaoka), a sexual assault at the hands of his girlfriend (Kei Fujiwara), and an eventual battle with Yatsu that becomes so physically intimate that it creates a new metal being intent on destroying the world. *Tetsuo* offers a disturbing yet blackly humorous satire on Japan's post-World War II modernization and the role of technology in Japanese society, proffering what might happen if a man could indeed turn into metal.

In *Tetsuo 2* a salaryman named Tomoh (again played by Taguchi) becomes the target for a gang of metal fetishists led by Yatsu. Attempting to achieve a perfect symbiosis of man and machine, the gang kidnap Tomoh's young son, using the father's anger to trigger another gruesome metamorphosis. Like *Tetsuo*, *Tetsuo 2* ends with an amalgamation of Yatsu and the mutated salaryman, the result of which is potential mass destruction. Seventeen years later Tsukamoto developed a similar narrative for *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, albeit with significant alterations. Anthony (Eric Bossick), a Japanese/American corporate worker lives with his wife and young son in Tokyo. His domestic life is shattered when his son is killed in a hit-and-run incident similar to the one featured in the first *Tetsuo* film. Anthony's desire for revenge on the man responsible—an ageing Yatsu—manifests itself physically as his body transforms into a mechanical, gun-like weapon. Once again, the transformation is manipulated by Yatsu, although in this case the metal fetishist is connected to a Japanese/American scientific project—the Tetsuo project—designed to help mankind evolve. In a departure from previous *Tetsuo* films, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* does not end with the threat of apocalypse (though it does feature apocalyptic imagery including a dream sequence in which Tokyo is obliterated by a nuclear explosion). Instead, Anthony absorbs Yatsu into his new body, returns to his normal physical self and begins rebuilding his life.

As a horror film, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* equates physical transformation with the disruption of coherent social institutions—the body, the family and the nation—in an attempt to represent Japan as a culturally hybrid and cosmopolitan reality. As Jay McRoy argues, tales of horror

and monstrosity have concerned themselves with the notion of hybridity to explore 'those regions where categories fail to maintain their integrity' (McRoy, 2005, p. 176). The connection between ethnicity and bodily integrity, for example, is a major feature of Miike's work. Ko relates a lack of bodily integrity in Miike's films with a sense of loss related to a mythically homogenous Japan. The disintegration of the 'national body' and the 'loss of control of bodily boundaries' communicate this sense of loss; as a metaphor for losing control, the lack of bodily integrity, Ko argues, is discernible in Miike's inclusion of non-Japanese bodies in his films, with foreigners and mixed race groups most forcefully dramatizing the break-up of the national body (Ko, 2010, p. 60). Throughout *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, ethnicity is equated with monstrousness, a monstrousness that threatens to disrupt certain boundaries, both social and physical. In *Tetsuo* and *Testuo 2* this means the integrity of the human body and the self. But, in *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* the transformation from man into machine concerns the integrity of national and ethnic identity, with the film's cultural hybridity underlining how vulnerable such identities are in a globalized world.

In terms of ethnicity and specifically the conventions of ethnicity that underpin an essentialized Japanese identity, Anthony is the product of a decentralized family unit, the son of a Japanese mother and an American father. As an adult, Anthony tries to reconcile his mixed cultural heritage by marrying a Japanese woman and starting a family in Tokyo. In effect he seeks to homogenize his family unit by giving it the 'integrity' of appearing Japanese. Yet, Anthony remains 'suspect' both in his ethnicity and nationality, and this ambiguity is re-emphasized later in the film by his physical ambiguity as a man/machine hybrid. With the family integral to Anthony's self-conception as a Japanese, the family (as a metaphor for Japan) becomes central to Tsukamoto's cultural representation. The family unit has been used metaphorically to achieve a collective sense of ethnic identity, an identity oftentimes linked to Japan's most centralized family unit—the imperial family—and the notion of 'pure blood' ethnicity, which Yoshino refers to as the fictive notion of Japanese blood (Yoshino, 1997, p. 201). The imperial family as a metaphor of national identity and homogenous ethnicity has been evoked at certain points in history to validate both the uniqueness of being Japanese and the fundamental difference of those who are not, often in times of perceived social instability. In a dramatically changing geopolitical and economic environment through-

out the twentieth century, fictive notions of ethnic purity and cultural essentialism served to reinforce a sense of national identity:

> With its ubiquitous mirrors and myths of self-identity, Japan often seems to savor the symbol and personification of its cultural self-portrait. In its history Japan did not even exist as a modern "nation" until the founding of new images: in particular, the "family-state" (*kazoku kokka*) and its variation, the "household" (*ie*), metaphors which were propagandized to consolidate the Japanese people under the banners of militarism. (Morimoto, 1994, p. 11)

Disconnected from the collective family and pure blood metaphors of national identity evoked by Tsukamoto, Anthony fits uneasily into a conventional model of Japaneseness, despite his attempts to assimilate through marriage, parenthood and employment with a Japanese company. Anthony's lack of 'pure' Japaneseness leads to an internal conflict between a 'normal' (human) and 'abnormal' (machine) body, a theme central to the representation of national identity.

In all three *Tetsuo* films the corruption of the human body by technological forces signals a break-up of subjectivity and, as Eric Cazdyn points out, a break-up of national subjectivity (Cazdyn, 2002, p. 243). But, unlike previous *Tetsuo* films, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* makes an explicit link between ethnicity and a loss of bodily integrity. Anthony's 'mixed race' identity is in stark contrast with Tsukamoto's other salarymen, both of whom represent something far more conventional in terms of the nation state. In a Japanese sociocultural context, Steven T. Brown explains, the salaryman represents the 'typical' white-collar employee of a large corporation or government bureaucracy, who is middle class, heterosexual and married (Brown, 2010, p. 105). Representative of the model citizen, the salaryman became a masculine stereotype during Japan's era of economic growth (1950s–1980s), a dominant self-image, model and representation of men and masculinity in Japan (Roberson and Suzuki, 2003, p. 1) Unlike Anthony, the salarymen played by Tomoroh Taguchi in *Tetsuo* and *Tetsuo 2* are stereotypically masculine figures within the Japanese context. Furthermore, Tsukamoto's salarymen are continually placed into conflict with their social others: women, homosexual men, transsexuals and the working class, represented, Brown argues, by the 'lower class, blue collar, and homosexual' Yatsu (Brown, 2010, p. 106). *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* places the culturally and ethnically hybrid Anthony alongside these social outsiders, a man whose foreignness is incorporated into the figure of the

Japanese male corporate worker, yet is maintained as something essentially different from Japanese national identity. In contrast to his Japanese counterparts in previous *Tetsuo* films, Anthony is a twenty-first-century salaryman, no longer a figurehead for Japanese economic prosperity, but rather a cosmopolitan model of masculinity, an embodiment of 'global Japan'. Within Anthony's body both Japanese salaryman stereotypes and non-Japanese ethnicity correlate to form a culturally hybrid identity that is Japanese and yet also foreign.

An American(ized) Tetsuo

Although Anthony's mixed ethnicity invites an analysis of *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* as a film that, much like *Sukiyaki Western Django*, subverts conventional models of Japanese identity, there are other ways of understanding Tsukamoto's decision to cast a Japanese/American actor in the lead role as well as the adoption of English language dialogue throughout the film. It is therefore worth considering how an external commercial context informs Tsukamoto's representation of Japan and specifically the external commercial expectations placed upon the director to make a more internationally accessible *Tetsuo* film.

Due to the popularity of *Tetsuo* and *Tetsuo 2* outside Japan, and years of speculation about a third film in the series, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* had much to live up to on its international release. A considerable fanbase had developed overseas throughout the 1990s and 2000s in response to the initial international success of previous films and, subsequently, the availability of the films on VHS and DVD. Integral to the series' cross-over success has been its recontextualization as 'cult cinema' marketed to 'cult audiences' through foreign endorsement dating back to 1989 and *Tetsuo*'s first international screening at the Fanta Festival in Rome. In front of an audience that included Chilean director Alejandro Jodorowsky, a cult cinema figure who had himself benefitted from the American patronage of the Midnight Movie showcases of the 1970s, *Tetsuo* was awarded the festival's Grand Prix prize for best film. At a time of few international success stories for Japanese filmmakers, the recognition of Tsukamoto proved to be crucial in securing a non-Japanese fanbase and, in the process, the film's entry into the global cult film canon. As Tom Mes suggests, *Tetsuo* created a following different from the cinephile audiences that had for many years been the main demographic for Japanese film exports:

> This was a new generation of fans, who regarded *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* not as a rupture with an established image of Japanese cinema, but as a film that fitted snugly into a pantheon of genre works that included Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, James Cameron's *The Terminator*, David Lynch's *Eraserhead* and the work of David Cronenberg, Sam Raimi and Clive Barker. (Mes, 2005, p. 59)

As well as evoking the international success of classical Japanese cinema in the 1950s (Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi) in relation to *Tetsuo*, Mes also associates the film's reception overseas with a canon of western genre cinema (Mes, 2005, p. 59). With his film effectively endorsed as something that 'fitted' into the 'pantheon' of genre cinema alongside the likes of Lynch, Cronenberg, Raimi, et al., Tsukamoto was legitimized, both in terms of cult credibility and commercial potential, by being recontextualized. Marketed as accessible cult cinema for a non-Japanese audience, *Tetsuo* was widely distributed, with theatrical rights sold to twelve territories worldwide, including the UK and the USA. *Tetsuo* became even more visible in the English language market when released on DVD as an early addition to Tartan's Asia Extreme label in the UK (2002) and in the USA (2005). After the closure of Tartan Films in 2008, the popularity of the series prompted its re-release on DVD and Blu-ray, courtesy of Third Window Films in 2012.

Bearing in mind the international cult following that the *Tetsuo* films have acquired, how significant is it that certain non-Japanese elements (Caucasian ethnicity and English language) were incorporated into *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*? Although there are ways of reading its cultural hybridity in the context of Japanese ethnic essentialism, the ethnic and linguistic ambiguities of Tsukamoto's film are better understood as a commercially motivated strategy of representation. The casting of Japanese/American actor Bossick and the adoption of English dialogue point towards the influence of the external market and specifically the influence American producers have had on Tsukamoto's mode of representation.

In a series of interviews with Tom Mes, Tsukamoto discussed the role of American producers in developing a third *Tetsuo* film, while also expressing some reservations about the potential impact that American commercial involvement would have on production:

> When I made Tetsuo II in 1992 and had an international promotion tour the year after, an American producer came to me with the idea of making Tetsuo America. I liked the concept of Tetsuo rumbling in the United States

> […] What I was trying to do was not to make another Japanese Tetsuo movie, but to make Tetsuo America happen in the ideal way. Many American producers including Quentin Tarantino approached me and I very much appreciate their offers, but I am a very cautious person, maybe too cautious (laughs). (Mes, 2011)

Rumours persisted of an American *Tetsuo* production, despite Tsukamoto's reservations, with Tarantino suggested as a possible producer, Tim Roth as lead actor and Roger Avery as scriptwriter, along with a $3 million budget (Mes, 2005, p. 92). Furthermore, former Nine Inch Nails frontman Trent Reznor was suggested as the film's musical composer in place of *Tetsuo* and *Tetsuo 2*'s Chu Ishikawa.

With American consortia taking a keen interest in producing a *Tetsuo* film specifically for the American market, certain indigenous elements of the previous films now appeared surplus to requirements: the Tokyo setting, the use of a Japanese lead actor, Ishikawa's film score, and Japanese funding from Toshiba EMI. During Tsukamoto's discussions with American producers there had been a clear appreciation of the director's previous work, but also apprehension about the more surreal and incomprehensible aspects of the *Tetsuo* films, and the impact this might have on marketing a new film in the USA: '[M]any of them told me the previous two films are interesting, but they also told me they could not understand what makes the protagonist turn into metal. So I needed a rational form of storytelling' (Mes, 2011). With American producers having a direct influence on the development of *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, the alterations made by Tsukamoto, specifically a more rational narrative structured around Anthony's revenge-driven metamorphosis, the use of English dialogue, the casting of Bossick and the inclusion of Reznor's soundtrack.

Tetsuo: The Bullet Man is clearly a film made *for* a Western/English language market and this informs much of the film's content. As Tsukamoto himself has indicated, the film was conceptualized as an Americanized version of previous *Tetsuo* films, hence incorporating a Japanese/American protagonist, English dialogue and a more 'rational' form of storytelling. In the process, the film's representation of Tokyo becomes culturally hybrid as the Japanese male stereotype of the salaryman (as played by Tomoroh Taguchi in previous films) is replaced by a more 'cosmopolitan' corporate worker. Given the convention of casting an actor of indigenous ethnicity in a lead role (whether in Japan, Hollywood or elsewhere), it is intriguing that Tsukamoto uses an actor of both Japanese and American heritage in

the role of the salaryman. Casting a white face appears to be economically motivated, an aesthetic choice perhaps aimed at making the film more palpable to audiences in the USA and other English language territories. If the casting of Bossick and the adoption of English dialogue were economically motivated, then this would suggest US commercial/industrial influence on the mode of representation. It also indicates that Tsukamoto was not simply concerned with appeasing pre-existing and somewhat narrow cult demographics, but instead sought wider recognition.

Although a Tarantino-produced *Tetsuo* project never materialized, Tsukamoto avoided the linguistic barriers that had contributed to the delay in production in the 1990s by using globally accessible English for the final film. In turn, Tsukamoto's concealment of the indigenous language made the film not only more accessible for its intended audience, but also more marketable. International sales were handled by Paris-based Coproduction Office before the film became the 'property' of Japanese production company Asmik Ace Entertainment. The film was introduced to sales agents and potential buyers at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival prior to Asmik Ace Entertainment's involvement in the project. In terms of actual commercial ownership therefore, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* was separated from its Japanese context, just as Tsukamoto's decision to use English and the casting of Bossick separated it from the national signifiers of language and ethnicity.

Following Cannes, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, like *Sukiyaki Western Django* two years previously, received its international premier at Venice, and a North American premier at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. Coproduction Office orchestrated an extensive international sales campaign, securing deals in Brazil (Paris Filmes), Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Koch Media), Greece (Videorama), Russia (Leopolis), Hong Kong (Edko Films) and Taiwan (Catchplay), while the film was distributed theatrically in the USA by the Independent Film Channel (IFC), opening in ten cities following its appearance at Tribeca (Kay, 2010). In addition, a major showcase was provided by the 2010 San Diego Comic-Con International, with Japanese/US toy manufacturer Kotobukiya unveiling the official 'Bullet Man Real Figure'. A firmly established marketing event for cult, science fiction, superhero and fantasy-oriented films and television shows, Comic-Con represented further commercial recontextualization for *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, this time as a film that could potentially appeal to range of fan demographics. Having reached a wider audience by adopting English language, Tsukamoto has been able to maintain a strong

international presence in the wake of *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*'s release. The director has become more prominent on the international film festival circuit: *Kotoko* (Shinya Tsukamoto, 2011), the director's next release, premiered at the Venice International Film Festival, becoming the first Japanese film to win in the event's Orrizonti section. Three years later, Tsukamoto's *Nobi/Fire's on the Plain* (2014), a remake of Kon Ichikawa's 1959 film of the same name, was screened in competition at Venice.

Taking into account *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*'s internationally widespread sales and marketing campaign, the film's representation of ethnicity and use of language appears to be motivated primarily by commercial incentives. On a textual level the film subverts the expectations of seeing a Japanese actor leading a Japanese film and of listening to that film in the Japanese language. The conventional practice of casting an actor of Japanese ethnicity is overturned, both as an aesthetic representation of a more culturally hybrid Japanese environment and as a commercial concession informed by the demand for an 'American Tetsuo'. The casting of Japanese/American actor Bossick thus becomes symbolic of both the cultural hybridity of the film itself and the American influence imposed on its Japanese production. As Tsukamoto has indicated, the involvement of American producers and the presence of the American market had a significant impact, hence the casting of Bossick, the adoption of English dialogue and an extensive marketing campaign throughout Europe and the USA. As a Japanese production lacking the fundamental component of Japanese language, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* is paradoxical both textually and commercially, and certainly too complex in its cultural identity to be analysed simply as national cinema. Moreover, like *Sukiyaki Western Django*, it is symptomatic of the changes Japanese directors, producers and studios have had to contend with in recent years, often requiring new and paradoxical strategies of representation and more extensive distribution networks in order to remain commercially viable.

Conclusion

In a more globally interconnected industry, films are often ambiguous in their national identity. In some cases, film content may be informed by external factors. Both *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* adopt hybrid strategies of cultural representation, partly as a response to restrictive conventions of national identity and partly for commercial reasons linked to the English language market. National identity in both

films is recontextualized: Japanese ethnicity becomes mixed race ethnicity while Japanese language is replaced with English. Rather than reinforce conventions of national identity, Miike and Tsukamoto represent Japan in terms of a more hybrid and malleable identity, an identity that is, paradoxically, both Japanese and global in nature. In the process, these filmmakers are themselves recontextualized. Both demonstrate a willingness to work within an English language context in order to use the commercial opportunities afforded by international collaboration. To some extent, Miike and Tsukamoto's involvement with foreign consortia raises questions about the national identity of films as commercial products, making it difficult to situate the production of either film firmly within a Japanese context. Nevertheless, by adopting culturally hybrid modes of representation and embracing the wider market for Japanese cult cinema, Miike and Tsukamoto stretch the boundaries of Japanese film production, presenting new ways of articulating national identity in the contexts of cultural and economic globalization. In this sense, neither film erases cultural specificity. Instead, fundamental features of national identity are recontextualized in order to present a more culturally ambiguous Japanese identity, one that is both distinctive and accessible to audiences beyond Japan.

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CHAPTER 4

Concealing Japan in J Horror

Whether concealing connotative cultural features or adopting culturally hybrid strategies of representation, many popular film genres from Japan are culturally paradoxical. Conversely, popular film genres represent Japanese cultural power on the global stage, with animation and horror in particular becoming commercially successful. Marketing has certainly helped maintain a Japanese culture presence: J Horror has, for instance, become the preferred term of reference in English language territories for Japanese horror exports in the 2000s, with the emphasis on the letter 'J' denoting the place of origin and its importance as a global brand. Similarly, anime, for all the cultural ambiguity of the *mukokuseki* aesthetic, has not only become one of Japan's most profitable cultural exports, but also a quintessentially Japanese art form. If one looks to the economic and industrial contexts of Japanese cultural production in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the paradoxical representation of Japan in films such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* is perhaps not as inexplicable as it first appears. Cultural ambiguity and hybridity are often central to Japan's most successful economic and cultural exports, from automobiles and electronics to animation and horror. In order for certain products to translate to a diverse and ever expanding market, the nationality of those products has been adapted in conjunction with policies and initiatives designed to promote Japan's culture industries worldwide.

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In this chapter I will discuss cultural representation in relation to the J Horror boom of the 2000s, focusing specifically on Kiyoshi Kurosawa's supernatural horror *Pulse* (2001), a film in which the thematic signatures of modern Japanese horror correlate with the representation of Tokyo as a culturally indistinct space. J Horror has played a major role in reinvigorating the international profile of Japanese popular culture. This has led to major horror films being remade by Hollywood studios. The appropriation of Japanese horror films for the English language market might be viewed as an American 'takeover' of Japanese film content. Certainly remakes demonstrate Hollywood's dominant position within the global film market, as major studios appropriate Japanese source material to produce films that are more commercially successful than the originals.

Although there is clearly an inversion of cultural and commercial ownership evident in the success of J Horror remakes, Hollywood appropriation of Japanese horror is also symptomatic of a more interconnected global industry. J Horror is a culturally paradoxical phenomenon because it reflects both Japanese and American cultural power in the global film market, with a distinctive Japanese cultural presence maintained through film content that often appears to undermine this presence. With Japanese consortia directly involved in transplanting Japanese film content to an American context, there have been significant commercial gains to be had: lucrative remake rights, Japanese filmmakers gaining work in Hollywood, and a burgeoning international profile for Japanese horror (and by association Japanese popular culture). Thus, despite its cultural ambiguity and the fact that it is recontextualized by Hollywood remakes, J Horror maintains its status as a Japanese brand.

The Global Spread of Japanese Horror

Central to Japanese cinema's commercial resurgence in the UK and the USA has been the exportation of cult film genres—anime, horror, science fiction and gangster films—most of which have been widely marketed through home entertainment formats, Japan-specific labels (Media Blasters' 'Tokyo Shock' label) and pan-Asian labels (Tartan Asia Extreme, Optimum Asia, Premier Asia, 4Digital Asia). J Horror emerged as a new signature genre for the Japanese industry in the late 1990s, one that would go on to have a significant impact on horror cinema in Hollywood, and in the process raise the international profile of Japanese cinema. Writing in 2005, Jay McRoy notes that in the last two decades Japanese horror

had reached new levels of popularity, 'appearing everywhere from the programmes of prestigious international film festivals to the shelves of even the most overtly commercial video stores' (McRoy, 2005, p. 1). Japanese horror has not only reached foreign audiences through home entertainment formats—satellite, cable, VHS, DVD, online downloads—it has also attracted interest from academic journals, periodicals (*Film Comment*, *Asian Cult Cinema*), mainstream magazines (*NEO Magazine*, *Otaku USA Magazine*) and websites (Midnight Eye), as well as numerous online fansites.

Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano emphasizes J Horror's role in transforming the fortunes of the Japanese industry, with horror films pushing the nation's cinema into the global market:

> Until the advent of J-Horror, Japanese cinema has never been a "global cinema" [...] J-horror's border traffic represents a significant departure from the cinema's long-standing failure in foreign markets. The history of Japanese exported film (*yushutsu eiga*) has largely been a series of misfires which, despite an often-favorable critical reception, failed to reach wide theatrical release and box office profits. (Wada-Marciano, 2009, p. 28)

As Wada-Marciano indicates, J Horror marked a major commercial turnaround in the history of Japanese film export. The key factor in the horror boom was the extensive utilization of home entertainment formats, particularly VHS and DVD, as opposed to the traditional routes of distribution for Japanese cinema (theatrical exhibition, international film festivals). Indeed, horror has not enjoyed the same success as other genres when it comes to theatrical distribution: 'compared to anime, the market for live action Japanese films in the US is significantly smaller. Between 2000 and 2008, 91 per cent of the Japanese titles released in the US were anime [...] Most Japanese films [...] are distributed on a much smaller scale, in less than 50 theatres' (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2009). Only two horror films are listed by JETRO in the top 23 highest grossing Japanese live action films theatrically released in the USA during the period 1980 to 2008. Distributed by UK-based Tartan Films, *Marebito* (Takashi Shimizu, 2004) ranks twentieth with a total US box office gross of $13,983, while *Ju on/The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2002) is ranked fifth with a total gross of $325, 680 (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2009). In terms of theatrical box office success in the USA, horror ranks relatively low compared to other signature genres; there are for

instance six *jidaigeki* films in the top 23, while the success of anime warrants a list of its own.

In contrast to theatrical performance, horror features prominently in sales of live action films released in the American home entertainment market, with four films listed in the top 20 highest-grossing Japanese DVD releases during the period 2000 to 2008: *Ichi the Killer* (Uncut version) ranks sixteenth; *Ju on* eleventh; *Ring* eight; and *Audition* (Uncut special edition) fifth (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2009). The DVD availability of Japanese horror and extreme cinema has been widespread, particularly in the UK and the USA, Table 4.1 indicating the ease with which foreign consumers have been able to access such material, whether online (Amazon, Play.com) or through conventional retail (HMV, Tower Records).

Table 4.1 DVD availability of major J Horror/extreme films in the UK and the USA (1999–2009)

Film (in alphabetical order)	*Distributors (on first release)*	*Year*
Akumu tantei/Nightmare Detective (Shinya Tsukamoto, 2006)	n/a (UK)/Dimension Extreme (USA)	2008 (USA)
Audition	Tartan (UK)/Chimera Entertainment (USA)	2001 (UK/USA)
Batoru rowaiaru/Battle Royale (Kinji Fukaksaku, 2000)	Tartan (UK)/Anchor Bay Entertainment (USA)	2001 (UK)/2012 (USA)
Jisatsu sakuru/Suicide Circle (Sion Sono, 2001)	Cine du Monde (UK)/TLA Releasing (USA)	2003 (UK/USA)
Kaosu/Chaos (Hideo Nakata, 2000)	Tartan (UK)/Kino International (USA)	2005 (UK)/2003 (USA)
Karisuma/Charisma (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 1999)	n/a (UK)/Home Vision Entertainment (USA)	2003 (USA)
Kyua/Cure (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 1997)	n/a (UK)/Home Vision Entertainment (USA)	2004 (USA)
Honogurai mizu no soko kara/Dark Water (Hideo Nakata, 2002)	Tartan (UK)/Section 23 (USA)	2003 (UK/USA)
Desu noto/Death Note (Shunsuke Kaneko, 2006)	4Digital Asia (UK)/Viz Pictures, Inc. (USA)	2009 (UK)/2008 (USA)
Furrizu mii/Freeze Me (Takashi Ishii, 2000)	Tartan (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)	2002 (UK/USA)
Ichi the Killer	Premier Asia (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)	2003 (UK/USA)
Ju on	Premier Asia (UK)/Lionsgate (USA)	2004 (UK/USA)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Film (in alphabetical order)	*Distributors (on first release)*	*Year*
Ju on 2/The Grudge 2 (Takashi Shimizu, 2003)	Premier Asia (UK)/Lionsgate (USA)	2006 (UK/USA)
Marebito	Tartan (UK/USA)	2006 (UK/USA)
Mitoboru mashin/Meatball Machine (Yudai Yamaguchi and Junichi Yamamoto, 2005)	4Digital Asia (UK)/TLA Releasing (USA)	2009 (UK)/2007 (USA)
One Missed Call	Contender Entertainment Group (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)	2008 (UK)/2005 (USA)
Pulse	Optimum Home Entertainment (UK)/ Magnolia (USA)	2006 (UK/USA)
Ring	Tartan (UK)/Universal Studios (USA)	2001 (UK/USA)
Ringu 2/Ring 2 (Hideo Nakata, 1999)	Tartan (UK)/Dreamworks (USA)	2001 (UK)/2005 (USA)
Ringu 0/Ring 0 (Norio Tsurata, 2000)	Tartan (UK/USA)	2002 (UK/USA)
Rokugatsu no hebi/A Snake of June (Shinya Tsukamoto, 2002)	Tartan (UK)/Media Corporation (USA)	2004 (UK/USA)
Tokyo zankoku keisatsu/Tokyo Gore Police (Yoshihiro Nishimura, 2008)	4Digital Asia (UK)/Media Blasters (USA)	2009 (UK/USA)
Tetsuo: The Iron Man	Tartan (UK)/Kino Lorber (USA)	2002 (UK)/2005 (USA)
Tetsuo 2: Body Hammer	Manga Video (UK/USA)	1999 (UK/USA)
Uzumaki/Spiral (Higuchinsky, 2000)	Arts Magic Ltd. (UK)/Elite Entertainment (USA)	2003 (UK)/2004 (USA)
Varasu/Versus (Ryuhei Kitamura, 2000)	Tartan (UK)/Media Blasters	2003 (UK/USA)

Sources: Evans and McRoy (2005, pp. 185–206), Amazon (2015a, b)

Just as DVD distribution has been critical in turning J Horror into a global phenomenon, so too have the promotional tactics of DVD companies specializing in Japanese and East Asian cinemas. The chief provider of Japanese horror titles in the UK between 1999 and 2008, Tartan Films attracted criticism for its tendency to accentuate the otherness of East Asian films by promoting disturbing and violent cinema. 'Aiding the popularity of this new Japanese cinema', writes Gary Needham, 'are discourses of excess, difference and transgression, connected as they are to notions of otherness, promoted through marketing practices which recontextu-

alize the films as extreme entertainment' (Needham, 2006, p. 9). The oftentimes outlandish promotions of Japanese horror by Tartan Films and its competitors may have proved controversial enough to irk those concerned about its xenophobic, orientalist implications. However, the DVD packaging and promotion of Japanese horror, whether as 'Asia Extreme' or 'Tokyo Shock', proved decisive. Would video and DVD distributors in the UK and the USA have made such an impact had they not emphasized Japan and East Asia as new and exciting territories in the production of horror films and extreme cinema? To a large degree it has been the cultural otherness of films and the Western audiences' perception of the 'East' as 'weird and wonderful, sublime and grotesque' (Shin, 2009, p. 87) that has established Japanese horror overseas.

The role of home entertainment formats and new media in the proliferation of Japanese horror represented a break from established channels of distribution and reception for Japanese films. With the diffusion of the DVD format worldwide, films could now reach a more diverse audience without having to rely on securing long and expensive theatrical runs or prestigious film festival screenings (which in the case of low budget, cult-oriented genres such as horror, has been severely limited). The popularity of cult films, particularly those produced outside English-speaking territories, has often been dependent on home entertainment formats, for example, the 'Video Nasties' phenomenon whereby horror and exploitation films, including many titles from Italy, gained a considerable audience in the UK thanks to the widespread sale of Betamax and VHS formats. Since the late 1990s, DVD has proved equally effective in J Horror's global spread. In this regard, the J Horror boom, much like anime before it, has largely sidestepped theatrical distribution in favour of the more economically viable DVD market, and the empirical evidence supports this.

Tracing Cultural Specificity in J Horror

In addition to its commercial breakthrough in the early 2000s, J Horror has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention, particularly in regards to the relationships between horror, traditional Japanese aesthetics and contemporary Japanese society (see Balmain, 2008), gender (Blake, 2008), globalized film production and consumption (Kinoshita, 2009), the impact of new media (Wada-Marciano, 2009), fan reception (Hills, 2005), and Hollywood's appropriation of the genre (Wee, 2011, 2013). However, though J Horror has been analysed from a variety of critical and

theoretical standpoints, it remains unclear as to what the term actually means, both in the context of Japanese cinema and the wider context of Asian horror. The international currency of Asian horror, Nikki J. Y. Lee points out, has grown so sharply as a popular subgenre that critics have not had enough opportunity to debate and agree on its generic conventions (Lee, 2011, p. 103). I would suggest that there are essentially two ways of defining J Horror. First, it has served as an effective marketing term, effective because it not only highlights the nationality of films as a key selling point, but also because it has been applied liberally as a 'catch-all' term to almost any Japanese horror film released since the late 1990s, as well explicitly violent films more accurately described as extreme cinema. This includes psychological horror (*Cure*, *Audition*, *Nightmare Detective*), technological horror (the *Tetsuo* series) and violent *yakuza* cinema (*Dead or Alive*, *Ichi the Killer*). Moreover, alongside Tartan Films' Asia Extreme brand, the term has, through association, helped establish some of Japan's most acclaimed contemporary filmmakers, namely, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Shinya Tsukamoto, Takashi Miike, Hideo Nakata and Takashi Shimizu, as well as producers such as Takashige Ichise, whose credits include the major horror franchises *Ring* (1998–2000) and *Ju-on* (2002–2003), and the J Horror Theatre (2004–2010) series produced by Toho studios.

Second, J Horror can refer more specifically to a genre or type of horror film—supernatural horror/media horror—infused with culturally specific elements, such as vengeful ghost narratives derived from Japanese folklore and explicit references to the saturation of media and technology in Japan. What distinguishes many horror films is their appropriation of *onyrou* and *yurei* narratives. *Onyrou* and *yurei* refer to vengeful ghosts, usually those of murdered women, who return from beyond the grave to punish the living and disrupt societal bonds; as Linnie Blake explains, the vengeful ghost's target is not merely the living, but the 'repressive and totalising ideologies that they have internalised as a means of denying the dislocations to national self-image wrought by traumatic events such as war' (Blake, 2008, p. 45). The vengeful ghost narrative has often been adapted as a means of articulating a collective or historical trauma relevant to the Japanese context. Many of J Horror's precursors, such as the films *Kwaidan* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1964) and *Yabu no naka no Kuroneko/Kuroneko* (Kaneto Shindo, 1968), feature vengeful female ghosts. These ghosts often attack men and in doing so target the patriarchal and militaristic ideologies said to underpin the nation state. In Kaneto Shindo's *Kuroneko*, for example, two women are raped and murdered by samurai, only to return as murderous

spirits who then devour samurai: 'Shindo turns attention towards oppressive and often violent social institutions that not only led the nation into global conflict, but had also served to undermine certain members of society, particularly women' (Dorman, 2015, p. 153). Similarly, *Ring* and *Ju-on* feature female ghosts borne out of male violence against women; a daughter murdered by her father and a wife by her husband. Not only are the vengeful female ghosts of Japanese literature, art and film recalled for a modern audience, they are understood as culturally specific figures used to highlight particular social concerns.

In more recent years, J Horror films have related *onyrou* and *yurei* archetypes to contemporary concerns about media saturation, technological overreliance, internet culture and social isolation in Japan. Many horror films of the late 1990s and 2000s identify certain media technologies as causative factors in the emergence of ghosts, including telephones and video (*Ring*), mobile phones (*One Missed Call*) and the internet (*Pulse*). Arguably the most influential and commercially successful Japanese horror film of the period, *Ring* features Sadako, the vengeful ghost of a young girl murdered by her own father, who comes into contact with her victims via a cursed videotape. The victim of both maternal neglect and paternal violence (Balmain, 2008, p. 174), Sadako enters the world of the living through mundane household technologies to murder those who have watched the videotape. Similarly, *One Missed Call* bridges contemporary society and the spiritual world via the pervasiveness of mobile phone use; in this case, each character's death is prefigured by a screaming voice message sent from their future self. As discussed in the following section of this chapter, Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse* emphasizes the corrosive effects of social isolation linked to internet use and in this sense is typical of Japanese 'media horror'.

The generic cycle of Japanese media horror draws on several culturally specific elements, yet, at the same time, horror's response to Japan's media-saturated environment has proved universal enough to appeal to audiences beyond Japan's domestic market. This might suggest that non-specific textual features have helped make films more accessible to foreign audiences. Although *Ring*, *Ju-on*, *One Missed Call* and *Pulse* evoke indigenous superstitions and centuries-old ghost narratives, such cultural references are never so ingrained as to be alienating or confusing to non-Japanese viewers.

The accessibility of modern Japanese horror has prompted academic debate concerning cultural specificity, or a lack thereof, leading some

to argue that J Horror's cultural indistinctiveness has been the key factor in its international success. Steffen Hantke addresses specific reasons for Japanese horror's popularity. Focusing on the generic and aesthetic 'blandness' of *Audition*, Hantke views Miike's film as a global rather than a national text which, much like *mukokuseki* aesthetics, de-emphasizes its inherent Japaneseness. By being flexible in regards to its nationality, *Audition* was able to appeal towards a more diverse audience and transcend traditional boundaries of popular entertainment and serious art house cinema:

> [O]ne wonders whether this flexibility or adaptability is the result of generic blandness [...] a lack of distinguishing features [...] Does *Audition* lack cultural specificity, or is there something specifically 'global' about the film that has allowed it to work so well transnationally? (Hantke, 2005, p. 55)

What Hantke clearly suggests is a global identity, in other words a lack of distinctive cultural features that has made Japanese horror widely accessible in accordance with the rise of the DVD industry. In the example highlighted by Hantke—the psychological horror *Audition*—the extreme violence typical of Japanese films distributed by Tartan, Premier Asia, Media Blasters, et al., is tempered by specific factors: its aesthetic and generic indistinctiveness, as well as its adaptability as a text suitable for a range of audiences (mainstream, cult, art house) across different national contexts.

Oliver Dew approaches *Audition* along similar lines, arguing that its cross-over success can be traced to its generic duality; the combination of a cult fanboy audience and the 'art-house/world cinema audience' being the 'most common aggregation for a successful Asian genre film' (Dew, 2007, p. 59). Rather than existing solely within a Japanese cultural context, J Horror inhabits an intermediary context between Japan and Hollywood, or as Valerie Wee views it, an increasingly fluid media territory that has allowed contemporary cinematic horror to cross both medium-specific and national boundaries (Wee, 2013, p. 12). Just as Hantke views *Audition* as a culturally and generically flexible text, Wee underlines J Horror's commercial and cultural positioning between different national and film industry contexts, its aesthetic and thematic elements reflecting the 'influences and impact of global exchange' (Wee, 2013, p. 12).

Rather than categorize it as either culturally specific or indistinctly global, I would argue that J Horror is a culturally specific genre in many

respects, albeit one that is not bound to the quintessence of Japan. The ability to appear culturally indistinct, whether through narrative or aesthetics, while at the same time evoking Japanese cultural signifiers, has been one of J Horror's defining characteristics. In many cases, J Horror films present nationality more 'softly' than other signature genres (one thinks of the historical spectacles of *jidaigeki* as the most overt form of cultural representation). The mode of representation in films such as *Ring*, *Ju-on*, *Pulse* and *One Missed Call* is often ambiguous. As Hantke indicates, Japanese horror has adapted to different cultural and demographical contexts, even when marketed and consumed as a distinctly Japanese product.

Cultural Specificity in Kurosawa's *Pulse*

With Japan ever present, yet strangely anonymous in many horror films, it is worth considering paradoxical representation in the supernatural horror *Pulse*, a film which combines the thematic signatures of Japanese media horror with a representation of Tokyo as a culturally indistinct urban space. Evoking certain characteristics of media horror while de-emphasizing its Japanese setting, *Pulse* demonstrates a 'softer', more subtle mode of representation. The film focuses on the burgeoning internet culture of the early twenty-first century and equates it with supernatural phenomena. The internet becomes a conduit through which destructive spirits enter the world of the living: economics student Kawashima (Haruhiko Kato) connects to the internet for the first time, only to encounter an anonymous message ('Would you like to meet a ghost?') following a series of webcam conferences. Seeking an explanation, Kawashima befriends Harue (Koyuki), a computer lab assistant at his university, and together they discover that ghosts are not only contacting the living, but also infecting them with an online virus that induces depression and suicide. *Pulse* also features the character Michi (Kumiko Aso), a plant shop assistant who is alerted to the presence of ghosts when her co-worker Taguchi (Kenji Mizuhashi) fails to attend work. Having isolated himself from colleagues and friends, Taguchi hangs himself in his apartment, followed by Michi's friend Junko (Kurume Arisaka) and later Harue. With more and more Tokyo citizens committing suicide and the city descending into chaos, Kawashima and Michi escape the city on a ship destined for South America, although by now the virus has spread far beyond Japan.

One can be flexible in how they interpret *Pulse* in regards to its nationality. On the one hand, the film shares many of J Horror's thematic and

aesthetic characteristics, particularly an emphasis on media technology and the supernatural. On the other hand, Kurosawa de-emphasizes the film's Japanese setting at certain points. Although one is aware of a Tokyo setting, Kurosawa's representation of the city conceals and distorts recognizable cultural features as part of the film's low key, atmospheric horror. Though not to suggest that *Pulse* is derivative of J Horror, the emphasis on slowly building a sense of pervasive dread without resorting to extreme violence or staged shocks distinguishes the film as Japanese media horror.

In addition, *Pulse* shares many of the same thematic concerns of media horror films such as *Ring* and *Suicide Circle*. As noted previously, *Ring* features the ghost Sadako who signals her presence in a variety of ways (a cursed videotape, telephone calls, distorted photographs) before entering her victim's homes. Pre-empting the Japanese media horror cycle of vengeful spirits (*Ju-on*), online ghosts (*Pulse*) and haunted mobile phones (*One Missed Call*), *Ring* established a potent theme by associating Japan's media-saturated environment with social isolation and death. Moreover, Sadako not only targets those who are heavily reliant on technology, but also certain social 'ills' related to technological use. Similarly, the film *Suicide Circle* combines elements of horror and media technology to underline certain trends within Japanese society, in this case, teenage conformity and the use of social media in encouraging suicide among young people. Steven T. Brown writes:

> Since 2000, Japan has seen an increasing number of suicide pacts facilitated by Internet message boards and Web sites. Although cyber-based suicides still only account for roughly 0.01 percent of the more than thirty thousand suicides committed in Japan each year over the past decade, they are definitely on the rise, especially among adolescents [...]. (Brown, 2010, p. 127)

In *Suicide Circle*, a series of mass suicides is orchestrated through websites, online message boards and mobile texting, thus the film, much like *Pulse*, equates suicide in modern Japan with internet use and its role in isolating individuals from one another. In both cases, media technologies are singled out as causative factors in the disruption of the traditional social structures of family and community, a recurrent theme that relates J Horror directly to a national context.

Christopher Sharrett considers the dominant tone of Japanese horror to one of hysteria, a hysteria propelled by Japan's 'mastery' of industrial and post-industrial capitalism (Sharrett, 2005, p. xii). The Japanese

economic 'miracle' of industrial recovery and technological innovation in the latter half of the twentieth century appears to have come at a great cost; the industrial and post-industrial conditions created by Japan's economic transformations have engendered unhealthy social tendencies towards technological overreliance, workaholicism and breakdowns in human interaction. Accordingly, Japanese horror and science fiction have continually evoked anxieties about technology, constructing, Colette Balmain suggests, a dystopian view of society in which death is the eventual outcome of technological progress (Balmain, 2008, p. 187). The Japanese, Morris Low suggests, have taken their 'embrace of technology to extremes not countenanced elsewhere' (Low, 2009, p. 136). Perhaps unsurprisingly, many films present death and destruction as the logical outcomes of scientific and technological change: from the atomic tests in the Pacific Ocean that awaken the eponymous monster in *Gojira/Godzilla* (Ishiro Honda, 1954) and the scientific experiments that create destructive physical powers in *Akira*, to the technological horror of the *Tetsuo* series and the media horror films such as *Ring*, *Suicide Circle*, *Pulse* and *One Missed Call*. Japanese media horror operates as a culturally specific genre thematically related to a long line of films in which technology has a corrosive effect on the social milieu. The hysteria Sharrett speaks of thus becomes a culturally specific response to the universal issue of technological saturation, one that can be traced throughout Japanese media horror. *Pulse* invokes a sense of hysteria that not only reflects the apocalyptic nature of Japanese horror and science fiction, but also relates internet use to a distinct lack of genuine human interaction within Tokyo's sprawling metropolis. In doing so, the film alludes to its sociocultural context in ways that are typical of media horror.

Several writers have related Kurosawa's film directly to the Japanese social milieu of the early twenty-first century, as well as to Japanese history. Brown, for example, discusses the representation of death in *Pulse* and the way in which the victims' bodies transform into black stains reminiscent of the black human shadows etched by the atomic bombings of 1945 (Brown, 2010, p. 131). Not only is *Pulse* related to Japanese historical events, it is also linked to the recurrence of atom bomb imagery in Japanese horror and science fiction. By the film's end, as Tokyo descends into a state of apocalypse, the city is erased of Japanese life as a direct result of technological innovation; in this case, the internet replaces the atom bomb as the latest technology to reap devastation upon Japan. Similar to Brown, Balmain makes the logical connection between internet use in *Pulse* and

its Japanese context, arguing that the film comments on an isolated generation of internet users, or *otaku*, who prefer virtual relationships to real connections (Balmain, 2008, p. 183). Balmain touches upon the isolation of young Japanese consumed by online and virtual lifestyles, a tendency towards social withdrawal that is evident in *Pulse*. Struggling to establish substantial connections with other people, the character Kawashima resorts to online social networking, his feelings of isolation both eased through new connections and, at the same time, compounded by the solitary nature of staying indoors with only the virtual world for company.

Spending most of his time in a cramped apartment where the computer occupies the same space as his bed, Kawashima acts as *Pulse*'s reference point to the phenomenon of *hikikomori*, a state of social withdrawal common among young Japanese, and young males in particular. *Hikikomori* has been linked to the rise of prolonged internet use, *otaku* culture and increasing youth unemployment, and, as Sachiko Horiguchi notes, is generally believed to be unique to contemporary Japanese society (Horiguchi, 2014, p. 230). A self-imposed state of isolation that has generated considerable attention in Japan as a social epidemic, *hikikomori* parallels media horror's preoccupation with isolation, suicide and technology. To underline its cultural specificity, Horiguchi relates *hikikomori* behaviour to Takeo Doi's theory of *amae* dependency (Doi, 2002), which gives positive value to familial interdependency and explains why Japanese parents often allow their children to live at home, even as adults: 'This does not mean that *hikikomori* as a phenomenon is unique to Japan, but rather the uniqueness lies in the existence of the cultural category of *hikikomori* itself' (Horiguchi, 2014, p. 230). Brown notes that Japanese psychiatrists view *hikikomori* as a social disorder specific to Japan, albeit with cases also reported in South Korea, China and Taiwan (Brown, 2010, p. 118). Like technological overreliance and media saturation, the issue is at once culturally specific and universal, a phenomenon that finds a succinct expression in Japanese media horror. The same applies to the issue of suicide, a topic which resonates throughout recent Japanese horror films. Relating a sense of isolation with suicide and the emergence of online and mobile phone culture, films such as *Pulse*, *Suicide Circle* and *One Missed Call* develop the thematic concerns established in *Ring*, J Horror's first international hit, to express a sense of horror informed by specific social disorders. Urban isolation and suicide in particular have become recurring themes that signify an intimate link between horror and the social environment it depicts.

Representing Tokyo

It is interesting to note that for all their technophobic anxieties and despite an appropriation of traditional Japanese ghost iconography, *Pulse*, *Ring*, *Ring 2*, *Ju-On* and *One Missed Call* all take place within culturally bland locations. As a visual motif, the empty urban space has become characteristic of J Horror, with attention rarely drawn to details of Japanese architecture and urban design. Both Valerie Wee and Kathe Geist highlight a positive use of empty space in Japanese film and art: in *Ring*, the compositional use of empty space, Wee suggests, is linked to the concept of *mu* (Wee, 2011, p. 49), which, as Geist points out, 'implies that empty space contributes actively to a composition […] the empty space is used to suggest a world lying beyond what the painter shows us' (Geist, 1994, p. 287). Japanese media horror might be contextualized in terms of spatial aesthetics linked to Zen, as Wee demonstrates. However, in the case of *Pulse*, it is worth considering the representation of Tokyo in terms of cultural concealment. At the end of Kurosawa's film Tokyo shows little sign of life, aside from the dead bodies that litter its streets. The film as a whole establishes Tokyo as inherently lifeless, a deserted metropolis where the swarming crowds that characterize districts such as East and West Shinjuku, Shibuya and Ginza are strangely absent.

Although the sociocultural subtexts of *Pulse* are closely related to Japan's urban milieu in the early twenty-first century, the actual urban space depicted in the film is mostly devoid of cultural signifiers. In terms of the aesthetics of setting, the film conveys cultural blandness as opposed to a clearly defined sense of place. While many films can be read in terms of national and sociocultural contexts, the *mise-en-scène* of J Horror often obscures geographical placement, presenting environments that are Japanese and nowhere in particular. *Pulse* is a striking example of this paradox, its setting drawing attention to and diverting attention away from Tokyo as a recognizable Japanese cultural space.

The transient nature of Tokyo in media horror has carried over into American J Horror remakes, most notably *The Grudge*. Whereas the Hollywood versions of *Ring*, *Dark Water*, *One Missed Call* and *Pulse* take place in American locations, *The Grudge* stays in Tokyo. Although this might have afforded the film's Japanese director Takashi Shimizu the opportunity to showcase the city's iconography in much the same way as other Japan-based Hollywood productions (*Lost in Translation* (Sophia Coppola, 2003), *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (Justin Lin,

2006), *The Ramen Girl* (Robert Allan Ackerman, 2008), *The Wolverine*), the film instead retains an anonymous urban identity typical of Japanese media horror: 'Tokyo's famous sights and five-star facades are absent. *The Grudge* lurks in quieter, everyday Japan, a place of ordinary confusions and problems. [...] In *The Grudge*, Japan is bland, pedestrian, routine, a rejection of postcard views, insidiously alienating and depleting' (Davis and Yeh, 2008, pp. 124–125).

No attempt at cultural performance is made by Shimizu. Instead Tokyo is devoid of cultural signifiers in a way that conveys a pervasive sense of both isolation and cultural disorientation.

With its subtle representation of Tokyo, *Pulse* is a culturally paradoxical text, the Japanese status of which is inherent rather than explicit. The film does not provide an overt cultural performance; instead it de-emphasizes Tokyo's distinctiveness as a Japanese city. This does not mean of course that *Pulse* is completely unrecognizable as a Japanese film. As already stated, its Japanese status is inherent, thus the viewer is aware of the Japanese audio-visual space as signified by the film's Japanese cast, their character names and the fact that they speak Japanese throughout. To refer back to Chap. 3, if the absence of the Japanese language in *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* is significant in terms of cultural representation, then so too is its presence in Kurosawa's film. Linguistically, therefore, one is firmly situated within a Japanese context. On an aesthetic level, however, *Pulse* presents a disorientating cultural experience with Tokyo reimagined as an indeterminate space, a space that defies immediate recognition.

Kurosawa emphasizes the isolated states in which characters find themselves through an aesthetic strategy similar to that of *The Grudge*, an aesthetic strategy which Eric Cazdyn discusses in terms of its 'clinicalness' (Cazdyn, 2014, p. 28). The director's representation of Tokyo provides a suitably anonymous backdrop. The character Michi works at Sunny Plant Sales, a rooftop nursery that towers above the city. This placement presents an opportunity to fully showcase Tokyo's iconography—its skyline, its sprawling, chaotic mass of skyscrapers, offices and glowing advertisements. However, the scenes on the rooftop place limitations upon these surroundings. Buildings are either obscured by the film's restrictive cinematography or contained within tight framing devices, such as the nursery's numerous panes of glass. What becomes apparent is the use of framing techniques and a subdued visual palette of greys, blues and greens that obstruct any immediate identification of Japanese locality, creating a

cinematic space which Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp view as detached from the real world (Mes and Sharp, 2005, p. 110).

Any instant recognition of Tokyo is negated by the tight aesthetic parameters placed upon the *mise-en-scène*. Characters walk through empty side streets, avoiding the bustle of life in more crowded areas. They pass through deserted subway stations, travel on empty buses and trains, and, in Kawashima's case, wander through the night when recognizable traces of Tokyo are enveloped in darkness. The film as a whole treats Tokyo as an inherently lifeless environment lacking the usual iconography one sees in cinematic representations of the city: the swarm of pedestrians in Shinjuku, Shibuya, Harajuku, Ginza and Nihonbashi; traditional shrines and temples; the neon glow of endless signs and advertisements. As a visual motif, the emptiness of the city and the concealment of connotative images offer a softer mode of representation, one that continually downplays *Pulse*'s Japanese status. Within a culturally bland Tokyo, the film is not only drained of Japanese life, but is drained of Japaneseness itself.

A Globalized, Decentred City

It was suggested in Chap. 2 that the hybridity of national spaces and national identities has become more pronounced as a result of globalization. The continual flow of people, capitalist exchange, consumer imagery, social media and cultural identities transforms nations and cities into new global environments. These environments appear culturally paradoxical, becoming spaces in which national and global signifiers interrelate. The generic global city has become a popular term of reference, a concept influenced by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas' model of the generic city, a homogenized urban space liberated from its historical and cultural specificity (Koolhaas, 1998). A city displays an identity that is at once both specifically national and non-specifically global (and therefore is nowhere in particular): '[C]ities are in the world, but worlds also open inside cities, forcing them (cities) to exceed their geographical and historical specificity (physics) and assume the properties of a world, and even a universe (metaphysics). They are centers and ends of the world' (Mizuta Lippit, 2010, p. 171).

Within the generic global city, local and global images interrelate, creating a profound disorientation. This is not to say that cities around the

world have become indistinguishable from one another; a Japanese city, for instance, may share similarities with cities in other countries, yet it retains cultural specificity in its architecture, historical landmarks, places of worship, festivals, etc. Nevertheless, certain generic styles of urban planning, architecture and corporate iconography generate a pervasive 'sameness' throughout many cities. Although local features are retained, a generic urban identity begins to emerge:

> In territorial terms […] the age of information is not just the age of spatial dispersal, it is the age of generalized urbanization. In the next decade it is likely that most people of the world will be, for the first time, living in the cities. Yet cities are, and will be, of very different kinds, depending on cultures, institutions, histories, and economies, but they share, and they will share in the foreseeable future, a spatial logic that is specific to the Information Age. (Castells, 2005, p. 628)

A city may be situated in a specific nation and display some semblance of national identity, yet it also demonstrates a tendency towards a culturally neutral form of cosmopolitanism. Such an environment can be seen in *Pulse*, an environment in which globalization engenders a thematic and aesthetic concealment of iconic cultural features.

Given Japan's economic prominence in the late twentieth century and its geopolitical position at the nexus between Asia and the West, it is not surprising that Tokyo has often been singled out as a prime example of a generic global city. Akira Mizuta Lippit notes the 'acute focus on the specificity of places' in Japanese cinema and the relation between 'particular places and the larger world that surrounds it' (Mizuta Lippit, 2010, p. 174), a relationship through which the host city is subsumed into the wider global context:

> Evident in this specificity is a tension unique to specificity at such: specificity defines a fragile condition and such places are at risk of losing their specificity into the abyss of universality or atopicality. Recognizable places risk disappearing into the world, unrecognizable. (Mizuta Lippit, 2010, p. 174)

If we look at some of the defining features of a global city—generic architecture, the saturation of businesses, corporations and consumer images—it becomes apparent that cultural specificity merges with elements of other

places, effectively homogenizing what were once (or at least what appeared to be) distinctive cultural spaces. Roland Barthes speaks of the 'precious paradox' of Tokyo, a city that 'does possess a center' (the Imperial Palace), albeit a center that is empty:

> Quadrangular, reticulated cities (Los Angeles for instance) are said to produce a profound uneasiness: they offend our synesthetic sentiment of the city, which requires that any urban space have a center to go to, to return from, a complete site to dream of and in relation to which advance or retreat; in a word to invent oneself. (Barthes, 1982, p. 30)

A quadrangular city like Tokyo, a city that comprises multiple urban centers does not conform to centralized urban design, which Barthes considers to be integral to situating one's self within the urban space. Scott Nygren takes this view of Tokyo even further, pointing out that, unlike Western cities, Tokyo is a decentred, heterogenous environment 'dispersed among multiple district centers, no one of which predominates' (Nygren, 2007, p. 208). The fact that Tokyo appears as a quadrangular, decentred city at once distinguishes it from other cities while also demonstrating a lack of an identifiable centre according to which one can be situated.

In *Pulse*, one struggles to identify Tokyo according to Kurosawa's representation of it. The city's cultural identity and thus its source of signification, are obscured. This generates a 'profound uneasiness' which Kurosawa relates to the isolation of it inhabitants and, furthermore, suggests a paradox. In one sense, the representation of Tokyo in *Pulse* appears specific to how the city is perceived as a distinctly indistinct environment, one that possesses multiple centres. Yet, because of this Tokyo appears as an empty space, the cultural signifiers of which are concealed. On an aesthetic level, the mode of representation is culturally paradoxical; the viewer sees Tokyo, but in a way that constantly de-emphasizes that fact. I would argue that this mode of representation is characteristic of many modern Japanese horror films, particularly those categorized as media horror. Any reading of *Pulse*'s cultural specificity is therefore limited to its sociocultural references to media saturation, suicide and social withdrawal. The fact that such references are evoked by a film that conceals the cultural signifiers of place not only softens cultural distinctiveness, but also suggests a mode of representation that is strikingly paradoxical.

Appropriating J Horror

J Horror is a constellation of national and global signifiers, a culturally paradoxical cinema that combines Japanese horror traditions, sociocultural subtext and universal anxieties. Hantke and Wee have both suggested that J Horror has been successful in crossing national and cultural boundaries primarily because of its generic flexibility, allowing it to appeal to different demographics across different national and cultural contexts. To this I would add that J Horror is also flexible in regards to its nationality and the representation of Japanese cultural specificity. The ease with which Japanese horror films have been translated into an English language context via Hollywood remakes is testament to its accessibility and cultural flexibility, and, moreover, demonstrates the genre's paradoxical commercial status: as both a Japanese film brand and a *global* commodity.

I will now address Hollywood's appropriation of J Horror and the impact this has had on its commercial identity as a Japanese film export. Hollywood remakes might be considered an American takeover of Japanese film content, with studios exercising their dominant position in the global film market as they appropriate from smaller film industries. The fact that J Horror remakes have grossed more money than the originals they are based on suggests an inversion of commercial ownership of film content that favours the larger Hollywood studios. However, Japanese consortia have been heavily involved in 'selling' J Horror to Hollywood, making considerable commercial gains in the process. This has helped maintain the international profile of J Horror as a Japanese brand and demonstrates the flexibility, or adaptability of films that, as I have argued, are culturally paradoxical on a textual level. Thus, in addition to a paradoxical mode of representation, the J Horror phenomenon is also paradoxical in its commercial identity; a signature Japanese genre that is adapted to an English language context; a genre which has been adsorbed into Hollywood/ American popular culture, while retaining its distinctiveness as a Japanese film product.

Throughout its history, Hollywood has turned to other countries in order to expand itself, create new film projects and maintain a dominant role in the global film industry. This has ranged from collaborations with other industries and the use of locations and studio facilities around the world to the acquisition of foreign filmmaking and acting talent. Hollywood has also appropriated film content from foreign sources in the form of remakes, a practice that, although not exclusive to Japanese cinema, has

Table 4.2 Major J Horror films and their American remakes

Original film	*Remake*	*Studio*
Ring	*The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002)	Dreamworks
Ring 2	*The Ring 2* (Hideo Nakata, 2005)	Sony
Ju on	*The Grudge* (Takashi Shimizu, 2004)	Sony
Ju on 2	*The Grudge 2* (Takashi Shimizu, 2006)	Sony
Pulse	*Pulse* (Jim Sorenzo, 2006)	Dimension
Dark Water	*Dark Water* (Walter Salles, 2005)	Buena Vista
One Missed Call	*One Missed Call* (Eric Valette, 2008)	Warner Bros

been extensive, particularly when it comes to horror films. Media horror has been a popular source of material, with *Ring*, *Ring 2*, *Ju-on*, *Pulse*, *Dark Water* and *One Missed Call* all being remade by major Hollywood studios (Table 4.2). This is not surprising given that Japanese horror had attained a cult status in the USA, as well as in the UK. Expressing universal fears of isolation, revenge and technological saturation through accessible ghost stories, films such as *Ring* and *Ju-on*, the first two J Horror titles to be remade in Hollywood, were not so culturally specific as to be untranslatable to an English language audience, hence a slew of American remakes with bigger budgets and big name stars (Naomi Watts (*The Ring*, *The Ring 2*), Sarah Michelle Geller (*The Grudge*, *The Grudge 2*), Jennifer Connolly (*Dark Water*) and Brian Cox (*The Ring*)).

It should be noted that J Horror remains a distinctive Japanese contribution to the horror canon in the minds of many of its fans, despite being appropriated by Hollywood. The essentialization of J Horror in online fan forums and blog posts, for example, is mirrored by its critical reception, particularly in the UK. Daniel Martin shows that the reception of *Ring* in various press reviews—*The Sunday Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, and *The Evening Standard*—is consistent in praising the film's restraint in relation to its nationality: 'Most reviews celebrate the national origin of the film, using their praise of the Japanese horror style to express their distaste for the American tradition' (Martin, 2009, p. 45). J Horror's popularity in the West may be partly attributable to its generic flexibility, as Hantke and Dew have suggested, and the universal themes it deals with, however, it is also apparent that Japanese horror films are of interest specifically because they are perceived to be uniquely Japanese. Just as the cultural flexibility of J Horror has helped it to cross over to Western audience, there remains a great appreciation

among that audience of its cultural specificity. As Matt Hills has argued (Hills, 2005), US fans of *Ring* (the original Japanese version) revere the film as a culturally specific text. Its lack of clear motives and narrative resolution, appropriation of Japanese ghost iconography, and connections to 'Eastern superstition' have attracted interest from non-Japanese viewers. Hills observes how fans have highlighted Japanese horror's dissimilarities with other horror traditions and, in the process, its perceived superiority. For example, the plot-driven and overly-explanatory 'Western horror film' in which phenomena must be simplified for the audience and subdued in the narrative is compared to the Japanese horror film's lack of motive and narrative resolution, which reflects a 'broader acceptance of the supernatural in Japanese culture' as opposed to 'Western rationalism' (Hills, 2005, p. 168).

In spite of criticism from diehard fans both before and after their releases, most Hollywood remakes have been commercial hits, not only in their domestic market, but also in Japan itself (see Table 4.3). By the late 2000s, studios were seeking out new and exciting material in East Asian cinema, resulting in remakes of numerous titles from Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand. In negotiation with intermediary agents and producers, the most notable being Roy Lee (*The Ring*, *The Ring 2*, *The Grudge*, *The Grudge 2*, *The Grudge 3*, *Dark Water*, *Shutter*), studios and distributors were quick to sell the remake rights of domestically successful films to major Hollywood studios, often because the originals themselves were deemed unlikely to receive wide theatrical releases outside Japan.

Hollywood remakes of Japanese horror represent an inversion of cultural and commercial ownership, with films not only reimagined in the form of Hollywood entertainment (and thus incorporated into it), but also recontextualized as mainstream cinema destined to become more

Table 4.3 Japanese box office grosses for J Horror remakes (2002–2008)

Film	*Year of Japanese release*	*Total Japanese box office gross (in US dollars)*
The Ring	2002	14,150,184
The Ring 2	2005	2,389,632
The Grudge	2005	2,755,496
Dark Water	2005	265,902
One Missed Call	2008	785,315

Source: Box Office Mojo (2013)

successful than the original source material. This is not only evident in the box office profits of J Horror remakes in the USA, but also in their performance in the Japanese market (Table 4.3). J Horror's biggest domestic hit *Ring* grossed $6.6 million in Japan, while its American remake, *The Ring*, grossed $8.3 million in its first two weeks alone (Xu, 2008, p. 192). In addition to its Japanese commercial success, the American version of *Ju-on*, *The Grudge*, was sold to more markets worldwide than the original, 27 in total, including France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore (Kawamoto, 2004). The fact that Hollywood remakes of Japanese horror films have been so successful at the Japanese box office shows how inverted creative and commercial ownership of film content has become in the global market, and how this inversion invariably favours Hollywood. As Tezuka states, the 'imbalance' between Hollywood and Asian film industries is huge to say the least (Tezuka, 2012, p. 141), and nowhere is this more apparent than in the economic disparities that exist between small budget Japanese horror and big budget (and higher-grossing) Hollywood remakes.

J Horror is of course part of a much wider appropriation of Japanese cinema by Hollywood. Remakes, films directly influenced by Japanese cinema (or containing substantial Japanese subject matter) and those set or filmed in Japan have increased significantly since J Horror's emergence. Many of these 'Hollywood Japanese' productions have proved to be popular with both US and Japanese audiences, including *The Last Samurai*, *Lost in Translation*, the *Kill Bill* series, *Shall We Dance?* (Masayuki Suo, 2004), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Rob Marshall, 2005), *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift*, *The Ramen Girl*, *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Clint Eastwood, 2006), *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013), *The Wolverine*, *47 Ronin*, and *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards, 2014). In a clear demonstration of inverted creative and commercial ownership, Hollywood acquires the rights to Japanese film content and refashions it for the English language market, before selling the remake to Japanese companies for distribution to Japanese audiences. As a result, large profits are gained by US (not necessarily Japanese) studios and this has helped counteract the shift from Hollywood films dominating the Japanese box office to domestic productions in the mid-2000s. In this respect, Hollywood remakes not only appropriate Japanese cinema, but also compete directly against it in its domestic market.

The saturation of Hollywood cinema demonstrates Hollywood's wide-reaching power and influence over other film industries and its ability to

acquire new material from foreign sources. Yet, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the process of remaking J Horror only reinforces the global hegemony of Hollywood or that the sale of remake rights from Japanese to US consortia is only commercially beneficial to the latter. Remakes of Japanese films and US films containing Japanese subject matter are not simply 'Hollywood', given that Hollywood/Japanese productions still represent Japan on the global stage, however distorted the representation may be. Remake rights are usually acquired through cross-cultural exchanges that are, to some degree, mutually beneficial, while the appropriation of Japanese film content is as much a symptom of Japanese cultural power and influence on US popular culture as it is a demonstration of Hollywood's global dominance. The attention drawn by J Horror remakes and the commercial benefits of optioning and selling remake rights have not gone unnoticed by Japanese producers, film companies and cultural policy-makers. In fact, the sale of remake rights to Hollywood has been actively encouraged in recent years, both as a financial boost for Japan's film and culture industries and a means of generating further interest in Japan as the originator of J Horror.

The Sale of Japanese Film Content

Exporting Japanese film content in the form of Hollywood remakes makes commercial sense as Japan still faces difficulties in generating large box office profits in the English language market, despite the growing popularity of Japanese culture in the West. The majority of Japanese film exports still rely to some extent on favourable screenings at international film festivals to secure distribution, as well as specialist film programmes (such as the Zippangu Film Festival and the Japan Foundation Touring Programme in the UK). Japanese films receive relatively short theatrical releases, particularly in the USA. The prospect of subtitles continues to be problematic for most audiences beyond film festival and cinephile demographics. For many people subtitles remain a barrier between their language context and films made outside of that context: 'Too many people are so preoccupied with the unhappy anticipation of having to deal with annoying subtitles that they find it impossible to get excited about seeing films in other languages from other countries' (Nochimson, 2010, p. 4). In terms of English language film reception there are exceptions: non-English language films do sometimes become commercially successful across the world regardless of linguistic barriers—for example, *Wo hu*

cang long/Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) and *Amelie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001). But these success stories are usually few and far between, with the majority of non-English language films throughout the twentieth century only becoming widely successful in dubbed form, including Italian spaghetti westerns in the 1960s, Hong Kong action films in the 1970s and 1980s, and anime in the 1980s and 1990s. The main problem for Japanese cinema in the English language market is that it is not an English language cinema (this would explain some of the rationale for using English dialogue in Miike's *Sukiyaki Western Django* and Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*). Language therefore has been identified by Japanese and US producers and sales agents as a major reason to sell the remake rights of films, thus enabling Japanese film content to be more widely seen (albeit in a recontextualized form).

In order to bolster Japanese content overseas, films are developed as remake-worthy projects by organizations such as All Nippon Entertainment Works (ANEW), a 'global entertainment studio' (All Nippon Entertainment Works Co., Ltd. 2012), launched with a $78.3 million investment from the Japanese government and the METI-affiliated Innovation Network Corporation of Japan (INCJ). ANEW was set up in 2011 to boost the profits of 'Japanese content' in the global market by adapting stories and characters for foreign film releases. With ANEW focused on selling 'local stories' to foreign studios and production companies, there is a clear intent to sell Japanese narratives to other territories via remake optioning and coproduction. In its news release launch of ANEW, INCJ states:

> There are many intriguing Japanese stories and characters that have been well-received internationally. However, most of them are only either in the Japanese language or central to Japanese themes and customs, having not yet been intended for the global market. There are blatant needs for introducing such stories and characters to this larger audience, as adaptation allows us to expand the reach and scope of such Japanese creators like never before, opening up a new market. (Innovation Network Corporation of Japan (INCJ), 2011, p. 1)

ANEW was established to make Japanese content more accessible worldwide. As INCJ indicates, there are certain factors that limit the widespread appeal of Japanese content, namely, its cultural specificity. Specificities of 'language', 'themes' and 'customs' are identified by INCJ as potential obstacles in distributing Japanese content overseas. Despite the fact

that Japanese stories and characters have been 'well received internationally', there remains a significant distance between Japanese content and non-Japanese audiences which, INCJ suggests, arises from the inherent difference of Japanese language, themes, customs, etc. The commercial potential of Japanese content is seemingly hampered by its Japaneseness, thus prompting INCJ to launch ANEW as a means of adapting film content to other national/cultural contexts.

In order to 'boost' Japanese content in the global market, content is often recontextualized by adapting themes, subject matter and narratives from Japan. With the adaptation of film content having proved so successful in the form of J Horror remakes—successful both for Hollywood and for Japan in raising J Horror's international profile—companies and initiatives have used adaptation as an effective strategy for bolstering the presence of Japanese content overseas. In launching ANEW, INCJ employs a strategy of cultural concealment that expands the scope of Japan's creative and culture industries by opening up new markets for Japanese content. Content is sold to foreign buyers, who then recontextualize that content according to a different language for a foreign audience. Paradoxically, cultural specificities are concealed, including language, themes and customs, yet this potentially boosts the influence of creative and culture industries outside Japan, thus making them more ubiquitous. In the case of J Horror remakes, it is not only Hollywood that benefits from appropriating and adapting content. The infiltration of Japanese content into foreign markets, whether through remakes or optioning, is a more indirect method of cultural representation, according to which Japan itself appears to be absent and at the same time omnipresent.

The fact that Hollywood has adapted Japanese horror stories has had an inevitable 'knock-on' effect for Japan's creative and cultural industries. Attention from moviegoers, critics and scholars is drawn to the J Horror phenomenon and its influence on US horror, in turn helping to 'explode' Japanese popular culture on a global scale. The Japanese response to this has been considerable, with organizations and initiatives exploiting the commercial potential of Japanese 'content' and horror films in particular, in collaboration with external consortia. In outlining the strategic aims of the so-called 'Cool Japan Initiative' in 2013, METI emphasizes the need to explode Japanese 'attractive goods and services on a widespread scale' (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2013b, p. 2). This included the promotion of various cultural products: anime, comics, films, television programmes, music, toys, fashion, and food (Ministry of Economy,

Trade and Industry, 2013b, p. 2). Since the mid-2000s, the international promotion of Japanese 'cool' via cultural and consumer products has been the primary focus for organizations such as METI and JETRO. Prompted by the international success of anime and other signature products, the Cool Japan policy has increased awareness of Japanese popular culture on an unprecedented scale. Although this has usually meant the export of 'original' and 'authentic' products, it has become more common in recent years to develop Japanese projects specifically for the sale of content rights to interested parties overseas, thereby generating interest in Japan as an originator of new film projects. The supply of contents to other countries is a far more indirect method of proliferation; projects are developed in order to be sold overseas (as opposed to being produced in Japan), where they are then turned into a film or television show by external consortia. The aim is, as METI states, to increase 'the supply of contents to overseas countries by supporting localization and promoting management of intellectual property and other rights' (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), 2013a). Accordingly, organizations have introduced initiatives to supply content to foreign buyers, mainly in Asia and the USA, and in doing so have expanded Japanese cultural influence indirectly.

In an attempt to establish content as one of Japan's main export industries and triple its global sales, JETRO organized a seminar in November 2010, focusing on 'bridging the gap' between Japanese and US content industries (Shackleton, 2010). The intention was not to promote already existing cultural products, but rather to establish stronger and more mutually beneficial networks between content industries and sell in-development properties to US buyers. As reported in *Screen Daily*, Hollywood producers Don Murphy, Jason Hoffs and Roy Lee were on hand to provide advice on bridging perceived cultural and industrial gaps between Japan and the USA (Shackleton, 2010). Focusing specifically on anime and J Horror, Hollywood producers encouraged the future sale of remake/properties rights from Japan, providing new financial incentives for Japanese consortia based on prior deals, such as those of J Horror remakes.

The sale of in-development film projects has increased significantly since the mid-2000s. Studios can acquire rights to remake films or, as in some cases, property rights that allow them to develop a Japanese film project with limited commercial potential into a Hollywood blockbuster. Thus, what begins as national film content is very quickly sold overseas, leading to the development and production of content in a different

cultural and industrial context. Writing in 2006, Darrell William Davis queries whether arrangements of selling remake and property rights will result in further integration of global markets and audiences, or whether Western conglomerates are simply pre-empting Japanese production plans in an insidious fashion (Davis, 2006, p. 204). The procurement of content rights at reasonable costs appears to favour the buyer (Hollywood) in most cases. Yet, with renewed focus on generating global interest in cultural products and consumer goods, both directly and indirectly, Japanese film companies and producers have established ways of not only making profits, but also attracting American interest in potential film projects. 'Many Asian producers', Davis writes, 'are now packaging projects expressly for remake option rights in the US. They are indifferent to whether their films ever get made, so long as their idea is optioned by a lucrative foreign acquisition' (Davis, 2006, p. 204). This is evident in ANEW's attempts to sell 'local stories' overseas and in METI and JETRO's encouragement of new initiatives through which to disseminate Japanese content globally.

JETRO highlights two types of contract for acquiring remake rights: buyout and option (JETRO USA, 2008, p. 19). The buyout option has been the preferred choice for selling the rights of J Horror films because the rights to a project can be returned if it is not produced within a set time period. In most cases, however, the remake is put into production, leading to the 'resale' of remakes into the Japanese market: the remake rights to *Ring* were sold by Asmik Ace Entertainment to Dreamworks, who would in turn sell the theatrical rights of *The Ring* to the Japanese distributor Kadokawa. Hollywood makes greater box office profits from Japanese content than its Japanese counterpart. Yet, this does not mean that Japanese film companies and producers are not benefitting in terms of generating interest in a 'Japan boom'.

The commercial gains for Japanese consortia may be indirect, but in selling remake rights, studios, producers and film companies help maintain a strong Japanese presence (and influence) in the global market, secure brand recognition (J Horror) and potentially widen the market for Japanese cultural exports. One of the outcomes of this is the production of Japanese horror specifically for a larger audience (as opposed to a domestic one or narrow cult demographics) with a heightened awareness of the J Horror brand. In 2004, the J Horror Theatre project was launched by producer Takashige Ichise and his development and financing company, Entertainment Farm. With international distribution

provided by Lionsgate, the leading DVD distributor of Japanese horror in the USA, the J Horror Theatre series yielded six titles released over six years: *Kansen/Infection* (Masayuki Ochiai, 2004); *Yogen/Premonition* (Norio Tsuruta, 2004); *Rinne/Reincarnation* (Takashi Shimizu, 2005); *Sakebi/Retribution* (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2006); *Kaidan* (Hideo Nakata, 2007); and *Kyofu* (Hiroshi Takahashi, 2010). With such a long-term investment, the series represented J Horror's development from a culturally specific film product to a global brand, and, by virtue of this, its culturally paradoxical identity as a Japanese/global commercial product.

Helping to maintain Japan's reputation for cutting-edge horror alongside the sale of remake rights and initiatives such as J Horror Theatre, filmmakers have sought out new opportunities based on their association with the J Horror phenomenon. Nakata, director of *Ring* and *Ring 2*, went on to direct the higher grossing *The Ring 2* in the USA, followed by his first English language production, *Chatroom* (2010), a film which falls back upon familiar themes of media horror, albeit with Nakata's 'consistency of vision' being lost, Balmain argues, in the drive to produce a product that US teens would consume (Balmain, 2015, p. 132).

Having contributed the first J Horror Theatre film, *Infection*, in 2004, Masayuki Ochiai would also make an English language film. In recognition of J Horror's influence on US horror, the 2008 film *Shutter* places its American protagonists in a Japanese setting while also referencing Japanese media horror in its central premise of a vengeful female ghost who appears through photographs. Previous to this, Shimizu was given the opportunity to work in Japanese locations with *The Grudge*, a film that, like the majority of J Horror remakes, was aimed at an American teenage audience. Like Miike, whose cult status in the West led to collaboration with US and British film companies and bigger budgets, Nakata, Ochiai and Shimizu are recontextualized as filmmakers, working with a greater set of resources and finances to produce English language cinema marketed to a wider audience. Although this would suggest that Japanese content and filmmaking talent have been incorporated into Hollywood's global 'machine', it is also worth remembering that the proliferation of Japanese content and the presence of filmmakers in Hollywood contribute to the idea of a Japan 'boom', a heightened international profile not only for Japanese horror, but for other culture products as well.

Conclusion

There are issues of cultural and creative ownership to consider whenever Japanese film content (originals) is used to create commercially profitable mainstream cinema (remakes). To some extent, the success of J Horror remakes represents an inversion of ownership, with Japanese film content appropriated and recontextualized as Hollywood cinema. However, Japanese consortia have become more directly involved in transplanting content to US film studios, motivated primarily by lucrative remake deals and initiatives designed to make Japanese content accessible overseas. In this regard, Hollywood's appropriation of Japanese horror demonstrates the wide-ranging influence the J Horror brand has. It remains to be seen whether the sale of remake rights will have substantial, long-term benefits for Japan's creative and culture industries. However, it is clear that J Horror's influence reflects and bolsters Japanese *and* US cultural power in the global market, thus the J Horror phenomenon is paradoxical on a commercial level.

In terms of content, many popular horror films are also paradoxical. Cultural specificity is both inherent and ambiguous; Kurosawa's *Pulse*, for example, conforms to certain thematic tropes in Japanese media horror. At the same time, the film de-emphasizes its Japaneseness, particularly the specificity of place. Similarly, the sale of remake rights to US studios recontextualizes Japanese content as Hollywood entertainment (and in that sense is a concealment of Japaneseness). Yet, it also bolsters the international profile of Japan's creative and culture industries. In order to create and maintain a strong market presence, film industries have had to become increasingly adaptable to different industrial and cultural contexts, as well as flexible in regards to their cultural specificity. As I have shown in this and Chap. 3, Japan is represented according to strategies of cultural concealment, which ironically have proved instrumental in maintaining the distinctiveness of Japanese popular culture on a global scale.

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PART III

Cultural Performance

CHAPTER 5

Utilizing International Film Festivals

From the adoption of culturally hybrid aesthetics and English language in *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* to the cultural ambiguity of J Horror, it is clear that cultural concealment has, ironically, become a distinctive feature in recent Japanese cinema. Although such an approach to representation helps make certain films more accessible to foreign audiences, this does not mean that cultural specificity has lost its commercial value. Audiences still seek 'authentic' cultural experiences in Japanese cinema. Thus, filmmakers appear to be increasingly flexible in terms of how they present Japan to a global audience, producing films that are at once culturally distinctive and accessible to non-Japanese viewers. Just as cultural concealment has become a major feature of Japanese cinema's international success since the 1990s, from *mukokuseki* animation to J Horror, so too has the overt representation of Japanese subjects—what I refer to as cultural performance—become a vital element in Japanese cinema's global appeal. Films that embrace these contradictory modes of representation are therefore suited to an increasingly diverse and interconnected global film industry and film market; filmmakers use various national and global cultural signifiers, whether those of language, place, aesthetics or industry, to maintain a strong Japanese market presence in the twenty-first century.

Over two chapters, I will discuss cultural performance as a mode of representation in relation to the external commercial and industrial contexts of international film festivals (Chap. 5) and international coproduction

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and financing (Chap. 6), highlighting in the process the use of Japanese cultural specificity in 'festival films' and *jidaigeki* period productions. While the content of certain films may be influenced by foreign commercial and financial factors in ways that raise questions about the ownership of 'national cinema', the international profile of Japanese cinema has been bolstered considerably by foreign involvement.

In the case of films marketed via international film festivals, particularly major festivals in Europe, the festival circuit offers a major showcase for Japanese filmmakers, many of whom have become internationally established as a result of it. It is therefore worth discussing the impact of international film festivals on cultural representation. Taking into consideration director Takeshi Kitano's association with European festivals as well as cultural performance in his 2002 film *Dolls* and Yojiro Takita's *Departures* (2008), this chapter examines how film festivals engender a paradoxical mode of representation. Both films present an overt cultural performance, yet do so in a way that is accessible to non-Japanese audiences. The films are culturally paradoxical in that they combine Japanese cultural spectacle with a more non-specific art cinema aesthetic suitable to the international context of the film festival.

Japanese Cinema on the European Film Festival Circuit

Despite the emergence in recent decades of major film festivals outside Europe, such as the Busan International Film Festival in South Korea, the Toronto International Film Festival in Canada, and specialist showcases at Sundance and Tribeca in the USA, Europe maintains a prominent position on the international film festival circuit. Given the cultural and industrial centrality of the Venice, Cannes and Berlin film festivals, the influence their selection and awarding committees have in establishing new film releases in Europe and North America, and the saturation of media that accompanies these events, Europe continues to offer some of the most high profile showcases for so-called 'world cinemas'. Recognition of artistic value by 'Europe's "cinema elite"', writes Peter C. Pugsley, provides Asian filmmakers with the 'first step' in reaching international audiences (Pugsley, 2013, p. 114). Many national film industries have identified the major European festivals as starting points for widespread promotion and distribution, as well as an opportunity to raise awareness of emerging filmmaking talents. Accordingly, the festival circuit provides a global network

of events through which to showcase national cinema to the world's media and thereby generate a high level of interest.

Discussing the new wave of foreign interest in Japanese cinema during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Chuck Stephens underlines the importance of festivals in making films credible and available outside of the country in which they are produced:

> With more and more new Japanese filmmakers parlaying international film festival play dates into distribution deals across Europe and North America [...] gone at last are the dark ages when a filmmaker like Seijun Suzuki had to wait 30 years for audiences to get a whiff of his delirious confections. Today's Japanese filmmakers are well aware that they're no longer making films strictly for Japanese audiences. (Stephens, 2002, p. 36)

With festivals providing the credibility of award recognition and theatrical screenings, as well as media attention and the possibility of overseas distribution deals, the global success of national cinemas is invariably intertwined with the commercial opportunities presented by major European festivals. In this regard, the film festival, both as a site of exhibition and a meeting place for film consortia, has played a major role not only in establishing filmmakers from around the world, but also in supporting the growth of national film industries, attracting new audiences and establishing effective industrial relationships.

East Asian cinemas—Japan, South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand—have benefitted from European festival exposure throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with the rise of the film festival in Europe corresponding to the emergence of Asian cinema on the global stage and Japanese cinema in particular. With theatrical distribution for East Asian films in Europe and North America still somewhat limited to specialist screenings, film seasons and the so-called art house market, a major film festival can provide the mainstream coverage necessary to establish filmmakers internationally. The list of East Asian filmmakers who have benefitted from festival exposure in Europe is considerable: Kitano, Takashi Miike and Hirokazu Koreeda from Japan, Kim ki duk and Park Chan wook from South Korea, Chinese filmmakers Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, Hong Kong's Wong Kar Wai, and Hou Hsiao hsien of Taiwan. Although, as Dina Iordanova argues, the festival product (the film) is 'essentially perishable' with a limited shelf life, and also that the global film festival phenomenon is not 'inherently networked', but

rather composed of singular ventures (Iordanova, 2009, pp. 25–26), the European film festival has at the very least provided a showcase, a launching pad if you will, for directors working outside Hollywood and Europe. Moreover, by virtue of festival endorsement, whether through awards, in competition screenings or retrospectives, mainstream audiences and media are made more aware of what other film-producing nations have to offer.

Japan has enjoyed a strong relationship with the European festival circuit since the 1950s, with the majority of its internationally known directors having 'arrived' in the West via the likes of Venice, Cannes and Berlin. Kudos, argues Abe Mark Nornes, must go to festival programmers, with festivals acting as the 'main interface' between Japanese cinema and its world audience (Nornes, 2014, p. 245). In many respects, the history of Japanese cinema vis-à-vis the West has been characterized at various stages by how successful films have been at major festivals. Before the advent of home entertainment formats, film festivals played an integral part in introducing Japanese cinema to non-Japanese markets, in the process influencing how much Japanese cinema was perceived as 'important' on the international scene.

The emergence of Japanese cinema as a major national cinema has often been attributed to (or at least associated with) the European film festival in the 1950s, and specifically the recognition of Akira Kurosawa's film *Rashomon*, which was awarded Venice's Golden Lion award for the best film of 1951. As a starting point for foreign interest in Japanese filmmaking, *Rashomon*'s success at Venice heralded a cross-over to a larger global audience and the West's 'discovery' of world cinemas beyond Hollywood and Europe:

> The international recognition of Japanese national cinema—following the success of *Rashomon*—effectively re-established the Japanese film industry's leading role in Asia and its privileged position as the only producer of the "alternative to Western aesthetic" with the Western technologies in the world dominated by the logic of "the West and the rest." (Tezuka, 2012, p. 4)

A major element of *Rashomon*'s international success was its apparent difference, its exoticism. The film's popularity would, in turn, encourage the Japanese industry to emphasize cultural specificity, often in the form of historical dramas. Yoshiharu Tezuka notes that Japanese cinema's export potential was enhanced dramatically by *Rashomon*'s success, as filmmakers and producers became more self-conscious of the 'Western gaze' (Tezuka,

Table 5.1 Sample of major film festival awards received by Japanese films (1951–2015)

Award	*Festival*	*Total number of recipients*
Golden Lion (for best film)	Venice	3
Silver Lion (for best director)	Venice	5
Palme d'Or (for best film)	Cannes	4
Prix de la mise-en-scène (for best director)	Cannes	1
Prix du Jury/Grand Prix Du Jury (Grand jury prize)	Cannes	7
Golden Bear (for best film)	Berlin	2
Silver Bear (for best director)	Berlin	2

Sources: La Biennale di Venezia (2016a, b), Festival de Cannes (2015) and Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (2015)

2012, p. 26). The 1950s and 1960s were a particularly fruitful period for Japanese filmmakers in terms of securing prestigious festival screenings and awards, as well as increased interest from film journals and magazines such as *Sight and Sound* and *Film and Filming* in the UK and *Cineaste* in the USA. From 1951 to 1964, Japanese films and filmmakers were regular award recipients at European festivals, a trend that has continued into the twenty-first century (Table 5.1).

Although it is difficult to identify specific reasons why Japanese cinema was celebrated to such an extent, its immediate post-World War II context suggests that festival exposure served to 'welcome' Japan back into the international community following its wartime actions and seven years of US Occupation (1945–1952). What was radically different for Japan as a result of the Occupation, Tezuka argues, was that the country was 'inserted into the new symbolic order that was emerging in the context of the cold war: now Japan was part of the free and democratic "West"' (Tezuka, 2012, p. 27). As a means of 'insertion', film festivals, awarding committees, film journalism, and film and cultural studies (Ruth Benedict, Joseph L. Anderson, Donald Richie, et al.) had a role to play in reconnecting Japan with the former Allied nations. Although post-war US policy had imposed limitations on Japanese film production, including censorship, the Occupation period had at least allowed for an industry to remain in place. The post-war period saw a rapid expansion of the industry, as well as an increase in domestic audiences (Thompson and Bordwell, 2003, p. 393), thus laying a foundation for greater festival success than other East Asian territories (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Number of awards by Asian nations received at Venice, Cannes and Berlin (1951–2015)

Nation	*Venice*	*Cannes*	*Berlin*	*Total*
Japan	9	12	4	25
China	3	6	4	13
South Korea	2	3	1	6
Taiwan	2	2	2	6
Hong Kong	–	2	1	3
Thailand	–	2	–	2

Sources: La Biennale di Venezia (2016a, b), Festival de Cannes (2015) and Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (2015)

Crucial to Japanese festival success was the pursuit of self-consciously 'Japanese' film projects that were deemed suitable for festival selection, a trend of cultural performance that emphasized the exoticism of Japanese history and culture. As a commercial strategy, the presentation of Japaneseness adhered to perceived cultural differences between Japan and the new emerging audiences for its cinema. Japan was duly designated 'authentic' and 'of the past', identified as something distant and exotic that could be packaged via the emerging European festival of the 1950s. *Rashomon*'s success in Europe had encouraged an increase in period film production as studios, producers and filmmakers began to use the commercial potential of Japanese exoticism on a much wider scale.

Historical/period films were ideally suited to launch the internationalization of Japanese cinema, given that their mode of representation was overtly Japanese and thus highly distinctive in the eyes of foreign audiences. President of Daiei Studios, Masaichi Nagata, became a central figure in encouraging period film production specifically for non-Japanese markets. *Jidaigeki* and other period film genres were prioritized because of their apparent uniqueness and for their ability to sell a more benign representation of Japanese identity; an identity designed to make Japan appear more palpable to foreign audiences following World War II:

> The national priority at the time was to produce goods for export so that the nation could re-build its economy and recover from the devastation of the war. In this politico-economic context, Nagata saw the internationalization of Japanese cinema as a duty, which should be carried out as a national project. In his own work which pursued these goals he deployed conspicuous self-Orientalist strategies. (Tezuka, 2012, p. 40)

Considering the export of Japanese films as a ‘patriotic act’ (Yau Shuk-ting, 2009, p. 64), Nagata was a driving force in the internationalization of Japanese cinema and, more specifically, the promotion of Japanese cultural spectacles via European and North American film festivals. In 1953, Nagata secured agreements with Italy, France, the UK and the USA whereby three Daiei studio films would be sold to each country annually (Yau Shuk-ting, 2009, p. 64), thus enabling a greater influx of Japanese films into overseas markets. In order for Japanese cinema to be recognized globally, cultural performance was emphasized in the form of period films, especially those produced by Daiei such as *Ugetsu monogatari* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1953), *Chikamatsu monogatari/The Crucified Lovers* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1954) and *Jigokumin/Gate of Hell* (Teinosuke Kinogasa, 1954), with the specificity of Japanese history proving to be a particularly popular subject.

Given both the industrial emphasis on self-orientalizing strategies of representation, it is not surprising that *jidaigeki* and other historical genre films have predominated in terms of screenings and award nominations for Japanese films at the major European festivals: *Rashomon* (Venice, 1951); *Ugetsu monogatari* (Venice, 1953); *Shichinin no samurai/Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954) (Venice, 1954); *Sansho dayu/Sansho the Bailiff* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1954) (Venice, 1954); *Gate of Hell* (Cannes, 1954); *Kakushi-toride no san-akunin/The Hidden Fortress* (Akira Kurosawa, 1958) (Berlin, 1959); *Seppuku/Harakiri* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1962) (Cannes, 1963); *Bushido zankoku monogatari/Bushido Samurai Saga* (Tadashi Imai, 1963) (Berlin, 1963); *Kagemusha* (Akira Kurosawa, 1980) (Cannes, 1980); *Narayama bushiko/The Ballad of Narayama* (Shohei Imamura, 1983) (Cannes, 1983); *Zatoichi* (Venice, 2003); and *13 Assassins* (Venice, 2010). *Jidaigeki* has featured heavily at Cannes and Venice: ten of the thirty-one Japanese films screened in competition at Venice since 1951 are *jidaigeki*. Of the forty-eight Japanese films screened at Cannes since its inception in 1946, twelve are *jidaigeki* (fourteen if one includes period film/horror cross-overs *Kwaidan* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1964) and *Yabu no naka no kuroneko/Kuroneko* (Kaneto Shindo, 1968), 25 % of the total number of Japanese releases screened in competition (Festival de Cannes, 2015; Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin, 2015). With so many Japanese ‘festival films’ being historical in nature, foreign audiences have been regularly presented with the exoticism of feudal Japan, a Japan that predated the influx of foreign economic and cultural influence during the Meiji period (1868–1912). This not only demonstrates the extent to which self-

reflexive strategies of representation have been pursued, but also suggests that cultural performance remains a vital mode of representation and one directly informed by European film festivals. As I will discuss later, Kitano, a director who, like Kurosawa before him, has benefitted commercially from a long-term association with the festivals of Venice, Cannes and Berlin, conforms to a self-reflexive strategy of cultural performance.

In contrast to the 'golden age' of Japanese film festival success in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s and 1980s proved to be less favourable. Despite some notable successes, such as the Palme d'Or won by *The Ballad of Narayama* in 1983, the dearth of Japanese films at major festivals reflected the steady decline in film production following the collapse of the studio system, from an average of 500 films per year in the 1950s to around 250 per year by the 1990s (Joo, Denison and Furukawa, 2013, p. 33). Describing both the decline of Japanese festival success after the 1960s and its resurgence in the late 1990s, Donato Totaro writes:

> Japan, the first Asian country to make Western inroads with the international success of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* […] had largely taken a back seat on the international scene since the rise in the mid-1980s of such national cinemas as Iran, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea. But Japan has rebounded strongly thanks in great part to Kitano's multi prize-winning *Fireworks*. (Totaro, 2004, p. 130)

1997 marked a resurgence in Japanese film production and export, with European festivals once again playing an important role in introducing new Japanese cinema to a global audience. *Unagi/The Eel* (Shohei Imamura, 1997) was awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes, followed shortly after by *Hana bi/Fireworks* (Takeshi Kitano, 1997) winning Venice's Golden Lion award. Much like *Rashomon* 46 years earlier, these successes paved the way for other filmmakers to court festival events and thus raise the international profile of Japanese cinema. This would eventually lead to an increase in annual film production (from 282 in 2000 to 408 in 2010) (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan, Inc., 2012) and with it a resurgence in film exports. Since 1997, numerous filmmakers have become regular participants at international festivals, including Miike, Koreeda, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Shinji Aoyama and Naomi Kawase, while Kitano has remained a fixture at Venice. In order to capitalize on these achievements, a network of festival ventures (both large- and small-scale) have been established in English language territories. These include

Vancouver's *Dragons and Tigers* programme, the Toronto Japanese Film Festival, the Los Angeles Japanese Film Festival, the New York Festival of Contemporary Japanese Cinema, *Japan Cuts* also in New York, the Japan Foundation film tours in the UK, the Zippangu Japanese Film Festival in London, and the *Scotland Loves Anime* showcases held in Edinburgh and Glasgow. With a strong Japanese presence at foreign festivals and a widespread network of Japan-specific film events, Japanese film consortia and cultural promotion organizations have used festivals as reliable sources for the funding and promotion of films, many of which adhere to cultural performance strategies of representation.

Using International Film Festivals

With the resurgence of foreign interest in Japanese cinema following festival success in the late 1990s, economic and cultural promotion organizations have focused specifically on the international film festival as a key overseas market. Given the widespread influence festivals have in showcasing new film releases, it has become imperative for film industries, particularly those outside Europe and North America, to invest in the production of films for the international festival market. The cultural centrality of Europe and North America (at least in regards to the global film industry) has brought East Asian cinemas into closer proximity with new audiences, partly because East Asian film festivals remain peripheral due to their 'sheer distance' (Iordanova, 2011, p. 3). Filmmakers and producers are, in the process, brought into closer proximity with the commercial and industrial resources used by other film industries. In the case of Japanese film production and economic policy, international festivals are used for their potential to attract widespread interest and for the commercially beneficial associations that have existed between top tier festivals and Japanese filmmakers. Moreover, the cosmopolitan nature of film festivals, the fact that they bring together consortia from across the world, means that they can also offer invaluable networking opportunities, becoming, in the words of Cindy Hing-yuk Wong, 'crucial centers for the development of film knowledge and film practices' (Wong, 2011, p. 1).

The value of screenings, awards and networking opportunities at major film festivals has been identified as a key factor in promoting Japanese cinema to a global audience. With regular screenings and awards serving to establish national directors as international figures, Japanese film consortia have invested heavily in participation at foreign festivals:

> Another pay-off is that foreign festival success facilitated directors' journeys home with heads held high. These international awards changed the mind-set of industry insiders and government bureaucrats; they began courting these filmmakers for their cultural and political significance, not just their commercial worth. Festivals therefore helped bestow cultural capital that could be converted and used at home. (Davis and Yeh, 2008, p. 163)

The eventual acceptance of Takeshi Kitano in Japan as a serious filmmaker (in contrast to his status as a comedian and television personality) is testament to the influence festival success can have in convincing industry insiders to invest in Japanese films made by festival-endorsed auteurs and their potential to be internationally popular and marketable.

Discussing the cultivation of overseas markets, JETRO identifies festivals and associated film product trade shows as sites in which Japanese consortia need to participate in the 'global movie industry' and 'grasp the business trends of distributors and movie software product makers from different countries in a familiar network' (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2008, p. 17). The Venice International Film Festival offers the Venice Film Market, an event designed to facilitate new business between producers, buyers and sellers, and in which promotional market screenings take place. Events such as this have been identified by Japanese organizations as valuable opportunities through which to finance, produce and promote films as festival-oriented products. In 2005, UNIJAPAN issued the promotional catalogue 'New Cinema from Japan' to coincide with the opening times of festivals and film markets in Europe and North America, a publication providing information on production activity as well as details on Japanese film distribution companies (UNIJAPAN, 2007, p. 2). This particular initiative recalls attempts in the 1950s to promote international awareness of Japanese cinema, most notably the Film Export Committee established by Eiren in 1953 and the international publication of the bulletin *Nihon eiga sangyo/Japanese Film Industry* (Yau Shuk-ting, 2009, p. 64). In addition to distributing catalogues at the festivals of Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Hong Kong and Busan, UNIJAPAN launched 'UNIJAPAN News', an English language online resource reporting on the latest activities of Japanese production and distribution companies.

Similar initiatives were established in association with major film festivals with the intention of introducing (and attracting investment to) new film projects suitable for the festival market. Between 2004 and 2007, promotional activities designed to increase awareness of Japanese filmmak-

ing received funding and support from a consortia of organizations that included UNIJAPAN, JETRO, METI and Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunka cho) (Table 5.3). With money made available through the Support Program for Participation at Film Festivals (courtesy of Bunka cho), various events and showcases were held, many of which were designed to make film projects more accessible to the burgeoning global market for Japanese cinema. As UNIJAPAN states, the programme would support Japanese film producers and artists participating at international festivals and film markets, with subsidies provided in the following areas: production of foreign language subtitles, production of promotional material and travel overseas (UNIJAPAN, 2007, p. 1). UNIJAPAN's (2007) fiscal report emphasizes the importance of festival participation in establishing and maintaining a Japanese market presence in Europe and North America, whether through promotional events, the establishing and fostering of networks with foreign consortia, or the creation of international coproduction projects.

Table 5.3 Promotional activities and funding for the Support Program for Participation in Film Festivals (2004 and 2005)

Promotional activities	*Festival*	*Organizations*	*Funds (in Japanese yen)*
Japan Pavilion set up at the International Village as an information and exchange site/ Japan Booth set up as a sales base on the Riviera/Japan Reception held at Majestic Hotel	Cannes (2004)	Bunka cho, UNIJAPAN, JETRO, METI	20,991,330
Japan Reception	Venice (2004)	Bunka cho, UNIJAPAN Japanese Embassy in Rome	1,752,133
Asia Desk showcase jointly organized with South Korea (KOFIC) at festival's industry market/Club rented by JETRO for 'Japan Lounge' event and Japan Reception	Toronto (2004)	Bunka cho, UNIJAPAN, Japan Foundation Culture Centre	3,801,109
Japan Booth opened at European Film Market Japanese Embassy in Berlin	Berlin (2005)	Bunka cho, UNIJAPAN, JETRO, METI	5,833,795
Total:			32,378,367

Source: UNIJAPAN (2005, pp. 2–3).

In the twenty-first century, the international film festival is integral to the promotion of Japanese films on a global scale, so much so that initiatives such as the Support Program for Participation at Film Festivals have been introduced. Japanese use the commercial and industrial opportunities provided by festivals and, by virtue of this, films and filmmakers themselves are marketed directly to the festival market. As a result, films conform to some degree to the conventions and regulations of the major festivals. Thomas Elsaesser points out that European festivals 'set the terms' for distribution, marketing and exhibition (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 99), while JETRO acknowledges that in Europe, many Japanese films are only shown in theatres 'after being artistically evaluated at the film festivals in Cannes and Berlin' (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2008, p. 13). In this sense, films often adhere to the conventions and expectations of established festivals in order to 'pass' into the wider global market. Festivals essentially serve as gateways that can potentially lead to distribution deals, effective marketing campaigns and bigger audiences, and this inevitably has an effect on film content. *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* was, for instance, premiered internationally at Venice in 2009. Due to a critically unsuccessful reception, the film was rescripted, reshot and remixed before a final cut was screened at the Berlin Market Premier of the European Film Market in 2010. This would, in turn, result in a North American premier the same year (at Tribeca), a wide marketing campaign, merchandising opportunities at Comic-Con in San Diego, and theatrical distribution in the USA with the Independent Film Channel.

Film selection too may influence what a filmmaker or studio decides to include in the final cut, while some directors have formed such close associations with festivals that their work conforms to certain conventions deemed suitable for the festival market. Along with organizations such as UNIJAPAN, JETRO and Bunka cho, Japanese filmmakers often focus specifically on developing strong long-term relationships with major festivals. In some cases, the conventions and commercial opportunities afforded by festival participation can even inform a filmmaker's mode of cultural representation, such as the self-reflexive strategies adopted by Daiei Studios in the 1950s or Shinya Tsukamoto's use of English language in *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*.

Perhaps more than any other contemporary Japanese director, Takeshi Kitano has developed a fruitful partnership with European festivals in order to maintain an internationally prominent auteur status. Kitano's emergence as one of the leading figures in Japanese cinema since the 1990s was partly facilitated by European festivals, the recognition of his

work by the likes of Venice and Cannes helping to usher in a new wave of foreign interest in Japanese filmmaking. In 1996, Kitano's sixth feature film, *Kizzu ritan/Kids Return* (1996) was screened at Cannes, followed a year later by *Fireworks* winning Venice's Golden Lion award for best film, and the in-competition screening of *Kikujiro no natsu/Kikujiro* (1999) at Cannes in 1999. Kitano has become a regular participant at Venice, with the festival consistently acknowledging his work: seven of his films have been screened in competition (*Sonachine/Sonatine* (1993), *Fireworks*, *Dolls*, *Zatoichi* (2003), *Takeshis'* (2005), *Akiresu to kame/Achilles and the Tortoise* (2008) and *Autoreiji: Biyondo/Outrage Beyond* (2012)), along with 11 award nominations (including seven for the Golden Lion) and five award wins (La Biennale di Venezia (2016a, b). In addition, Venice has endorsed Kitano in terms of marketing his films in English-speaking countries: the festival's official emblem features prominently on the UK DVD release of *Zatoichi*, while references to previous Kitano films nominated for the Golden Lion award are included in the UK DVD packaging of *Fireworks* and *Dolls*.

One way to think of Venice's long-term endorsement of Kitano is that it is a mutually beneficial commercial association between the two parties. Kitano benefits from the international 'shop window' which the Venice International Film Festival provides, a window through which the director can maintain an international status as a leading auteur. For Venice, the close association with Kitano, as well as with other internationally renowned filmmakers, provides cultural capital, with the festival providing a premier showcase for 'serious' auteur cinema. Elsaesser describes the director/festival relationship in terms of a nurturing relationship through which the festival plays an influential role in a director's development: 'Festivals then nurture these directors over their second (often disappointing) film, in the hope that the third will once again be a success, which then justifies the auteur's status, definitively confirmed by a retrospective' (Elsaesser, 2005, p. 99). With major European festivals committed to the development of national filmmakers into international auteurs, it is worth considering how such a relationship impacts on actual film content, and specifically cultural representation.

Cultural Performance in *Dolls*

As previously discussed, a self-reflexive mode of representation was often used by Japanese filmmakers in response to *Rashomon*'s success at Venice and the new commercial opportunities this presented. Festival exposure

(or the potential for it) therefore engendered a self-exoticizing approach to film content:

> The exotic settings, costumes, rituals and performance styles of Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi's *jidai geki* (period films), exhibited at Venice and then other international film festivals in the early 1950s, doubtless appealed to our orientalist fantasies of a mysterious exotic Japan, totally other from the world we knew. (Freiberg, 2000, p. 178)

As Freiberg goes on to say, a self-orientalizing tactic may be recognized in retrospect, the purpose of which was to break Japanese films into foreign markets and receive critical attention (Freiberg, 2000, p. 178). Critical attention and commercial success gained overseas via a positive reception at European festivals would have a significant influence on how filmmakers chose to represent Japan and how Japanese studios decided what type of films would be exported. Kitano's association with Venice since the late 1990s has engendered an exotic and self-reflexive mode of representation akin to those employed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Many Kitano films place Japan 'on display', from the postcard imagery of iconic Japanese and Okinawan landscapes in *3–4 X Jugatsu/Boiling Point* (1990), *Ano natsu, ichiban shizukana umi/A Scene at the Sea* (1991), *Sonatine* and *Fireworks* to the feudal spectacle of *jidaigeki* action in *Zatoichi*. More than most Japanese filmmakers in the twenty-first century, Kitano has successfully used the European film festival circuit to reach a global audience, often employing self-reflexive strategies of representation that combine overt cultural performance with generic art cinema aesthetics. As a result, the mode of representation in many Kitano films is culturally paradoxical and this, I would argue, is informed by the director's close association with European festivals. In the case of *Dolls*, film content, and specifically the representation of Japanese cultural iconography, are shaped to some degree by the non-Japanese context of the international festival. With the director closely associated with European festivals and Venice in particular, cultural performance is used as an effective strategy of representation, a strategy related to the commercial opportunities offered by this close association.

Dolls, Kitano's tenth feature-length film, is essentially a character study, albeit a study of several characters consisting of three thematically overlapping stories. In the first, a young man named Matsumoto (Hidetoshi Nishijima) leaves his fiancé Sawako (Miho Kanno) to enter into an

arranged marriage approved by his family. When a failed suicide attempt leaves Sawako institutionalized and suffering memory loss, Matsumoto flees his arranged wedding to care for her. The two embark on a journey to a mountain resort they had once visited, with Matsumoto hoping to rekindle Sawako's memories of their relationship. The second story focuses on an ageing *yakuza* boss, Hiro (Tatsuya Mihashi), a man plagued by regret for abandoning the woman he once loved, Ryoko (Chieko Matsubara), in favour of a life of crime. As he walks through a local park—the scene of his last meeting with Ryoko—Hiro discovers that his former lover has waited for him every lunchtime since their separation. Although Ryoko no longer recognizes Hiro, the two become friends, only for Hiro to be shot dead soon after by an embittered gangland rival. In the third story, traffic conductor Nukui (Tsutomu Yakeshige) becomes obsessed with a young pop star (Kyoko Fukuda). After she loses an eye in a car accident and becomes a recluse, Nukui expresses his devotion to her by blinding himself, an incident that leads to their eventual friendship.

Dolls' three overlapping stories are framed by a prologue and epilogue featuring a *bunraku* doll performance, a theatrical tradition dating back to the seventeenth century that uses puppetry in order to tell stories, usually of a romantic and tragic nature. Like Kitano's use of landscape and nature throughout *Dolls*, the *bunraku* sequences serve little narrative purpose aside from establishing the film's central themes of love, devotion and abandonment. However, they do underline the film's nationality as a key element of performance, and thus are an integral element of its cultural representation.

The puppets are controlled by actors, two disguised in black and one in elaborate formal dress, in front of a Japanese audience seated in a traditional *bunraku* theatre. A *shamisen*, a traditional Japanese stringed instrument, is played to accompany the songs performed by the play's narrator (*gidayu*), who recites Monzaemon Chikamatsu's *Meido no hikyaku/The Courier for Hell*, written in 1711, the tale of two lovers—Chubei and Umegawa—who flee the wrath of a local samurai only to die together in the mountains. The most famous practitioner of the *bunraku* tradition, Chikamatsu was noted for his portrayal of individuals having to contend with the opposing values of social obligation and personal desire, a conflict made explicit in both Matsumoto and Hiro's stories.

Although it is not the most widely known form of Japanese theatre, at least when compared to *noh* and *kabuki*, *bunraku* is nevertheless instantly recognizable as a Japanese cultural performance, with the use of tradi-

tional music, song and clothing distinguishing it as such. *Bunraku* has been acknowledged in Japan for its cultural specificity, particularly by the government who recognized its cultural value in the post-World War II years:

> [T]he government adopted the policy of designating the main performing artists of such traditional forms as *no*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* theatre as "Human Cultural Treasures," a practice that—combined with great successes abroad—drew much needed attention to *bunraku*'s unique cultural values. (Ortolani, 1995, p. 228)

Meticulous in its detail, the *bunraku* sequences underline the cultural specificities of costume design, physical performance and history, evoking the past as a legitimate strategy of representation via a literal cultural performance. Evoking the past is useful in creating authentic national spectacles, from traditional forms of theatre and local festivals to film exports, particularly those categorized as period or costume dramas. Specificities of history, place and physical appearance are put on display, establishing nationality as a key element in the audience's appreciation of the performance. *Dolls* evokes the quintessence of history through the use of *bunraku*, and specifically Japanese feudal history that predates the influx of foreign political, economic and cultural influence in the late nineteenth century.

For Kitano, historical spectacle is a means of placing Japaneseness firmly on display in ways that are accessible and commercially popular. In the final scenes of the director's 2003 film *Zatoichi*, a *jidaigeki* that updates a long-running series of films about a blind samurai, an elaborate folk dance sequence is staged. With little relevance to the film's overall themes and narrative, the inclusion of folk dancers, traditional musical instruments and elaborate costumes serves as a performance within the diegesis. Much like the *bunraku* sequences in *Dolls*, the action is not driven by narrative; rather Kitano presents a literal performance of cultural and historical specificity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, both *Dolls* and *Zatoichi* garnered attention and commercial success through the festival market. *Dolls* won the Golden Kinnaree award at the Damascus Film Festival and was, like *Zatoichi*, nominated for the Golden Lion at Venice. In addition, *Dolls* ranks nineteenth in JETRO's list of highest-grossing Japanese films in the USA (between 1980 and 2008), with a total gross of $4067 (Japan External

Trade Organization USA, 2009). As a legitimate commercial strategy, the evocation of the past and the staging of elaborate cultural spectacles are directly informed by a non-Japanese festival context. Commercial success and critical acceptance overseas thus legitimize cultural performance as an effective mode of representation, which in turn legitimize further attempts by the Japanese industry to produce films that cater to a foreign interest in exotic cultural spectacles. Key to creating such spectacles is the use of cultural iconography, i.e. visual signifiers that identify a film or a scene as inherently Japanese. This may involve the use of historical iconography and references to a national past, or it might mean the inclusion of national stereotypes and clichéd images by which foreign audiences may recognize and understand a film as a national product. Darrell William Davis points out that Kitano has found a use value for stereotypes as public exhibits for profitable spectacle (Davis, 2001, p. 74). This suggests a strategy of representation that is motivated by the need to stage cultural performances specifically for foreign audiences.

Dolls places Japan on display, using cultural, architectural and natural iconography to situate the viewer firmly in a Japanese cinematic space. This is hardly new within Kitano's œuvre; as Davis demonstrates, nature and cultural iconography play an aesthetic role in the director's most successful festival film, *Fireworks*, in which a *yakuza* named Nichi (Kitano) and his terminally ill wife Miyuki (Kayoko Kishimoto) embark on a trip around Japan:

> A key element of their journeys is the various landmarks they visit: Mt Fuji, *kare-sansui* rock gardens, a famous temple, cherry blossoms, snowdrifts, a traditional Japanese inn (*ryokan*). Given the nature of their trip, these places are highly romanticized. The landscapes and traditional iconography are a retail(or)ing of Japanese aesthetics to suit Kitano's movement into the international art cinema. (Davis, 2007, p. 291)

Similar postcard imagery appears throughout *Dolls*, with the characters Matsumoto and Sawako traversing numerous Japanese landscapes. As the opening title sequence fades into the film's first narrative, the couple are seen walking together through a tranquil forest setting framed by cherry blossoms in full bloom. Attesting to Kitano's self-reflexive approach to iconography, the scene uses one of *the* most clichéd Japanese images—cherry blossoms—an aesthetic strategy not dissimilar to Miike's use of Mount Fuji and *torii* gateways in *Sukiyaki Western Django*. However,

whereas Miike juxtaposes these cultural signifiers against the imagery of American and Italian westerns, Kitano does not draw attention to Japanese iconography in order to lampoon it or to distort geographical placement. Instead, the inclusion of nature, and cherry blossoms in particular, situates the viewer firmly within a Japanese context.

Tessa Morris-Suzuki identifies nature as a key feature of Japanese national identity, with identity demarcated through specific geographical features: as Morris Suzuki writes, the creation of nationhood involves the development of an image of the nation as a 'single natural environment', which then comes to be symbolized in the minds of citizens by mountains or deserts, shifting seasons, flowers, mammals, and birds (Morris-Suzuki, 2015, p. 5). In order to showcase Japan's natural iconography, *Dolls*' production was extended to accommodate the changing seasons, with principal photography stretched across a forty-day period, encompassing cherry blossoms in spring, red leaves in autumn and snow in winter. Throughout Masumoto and Sawako's journey, the viewer is presented with an array of deciduous forests, vistas, mountains, and finally the snowy expanses of the Minami Alps in central Honshu. While not devoid of symbolic meaning, the couple's journey primarily serves to place Japan on display through a series of postcard images that continually emphasize a national context. To emphasize this even further, Matsumoto and Sawako shed their everyday clothing for more traditional costumes, mirroring the costumes worn in the *bunraku* sequences. Although *Dolls* offers more than simply a touristic experience of Japan, the use of nature as an aesthetic strategy—flowers, plants and insects feature prominently throughout—infuses the film with Japaneseness. As is evident in most cases, films marketed via international film festivals use self-reflexive modes of representation, emphasizing culturally specific features such as feudal history, traditional costume, literal performances and, in the case of *Dolls*, Japan's natural iconography.

The incorporation of Japanese iconography, whether natural or man-made, has been integral to the transformation of Kitano's films into international commodities. Much of Kitano's work since the 1990s has made concessions to the growing international audience for his work. For example, an American setting, American protagonists and English dialogue were used in *Brother* (2000), a Japanese/UK coproduction that Tom Mes and Jasper Sharp consider to be Kitano's attempt at bridging the Japanese aesthetic to the United States (Mes and Sharp, 2005, p. 164). The Japanese filmmaker in this case is very much aware of how to present Japan in the most accessible (and sometimes most obvious) terms:

> Kitano gets to reinforce a lot of clichés about stiff, uncomprehending Japanese tourists lost in a foreign country [...] Kitano gives us the Japanese as the Americans have seen them, and as the Japanese have seen themselves reflected in American eyes ever since Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* was first published in 1946. (Mes and Sharp, 2005, p. 165)

In many of his most successful films, Kitano manipulates certain expectations of how Japan should be represented onscreen, presenting the nation through cultural performance and cultural cliché. Although not as reliant on crude Japanese stereotypes as *Brother*, *Dolls* places Japan on display in a way that conforms to both the expectations of an English-speaking audience and the conventions of a prestigious international film festival.

Just as studios, production companies and producers have recognized the commercial value of cultural performance in the shop window of the film festival, so filmmakers have self-consciously 'performed' according to the expectations engendered by festival success. As was the case in 1950s, there was an economic incentive for self-exoticism, leading some, Daiei President Masaichi Nagata in particular, to take a more narcissistic approach to cultural representation. In the twenty-first century, organizations including UNIJAPAN, JETRO, METI and Bunka-cho have pursued similar strategies to effectively market Japanese cultural products around the world, such as the Cool Japan Policy and the Support Program for Participation at Film Festivals, approaching cultural production and export as a national project in response to economic recession and an increasingly competitive global market. The cultural performance of *Dolls*, therefore, can be contextualized as a response to a pressing economic demand for export products that essentially advertise, as it were, the distinctiveness of Japanese culture, however staged this may be. Since the 1950s, international film festivals have provided a premier showcase in which to pursue a national project of cultural performance. This has led economic and cultural organizations to invest in self-reflexive modes of representation and support filmmakers who, like Kitano, can successfully put Japan on display.

The Conventions of 'Art Cinema'

As is evident in the success of Japanese films at major European festivals, there is an audience for self-reflexive cultural spectacles. European festivals have played a crucial role in maintaining such interest, bringing new films

to the attention of audiences, critics and film distribution companies. For Kitano, a close association with overseas festivals has not only provided an international shop window for his work, it has also had an impact on his representation of Japan. On the one hand, Kitano has catered to a wider international audience by presenting overt cultural performances. On the other, this has been done in a way that is accessible and, moreover, conventional within the context of prestigious art cinema events, such as the film festival. Cultural performance in many Kitano films, particularly *Fireworks* and *Dolls*, is invariably linked to the international contexts of the film festival and informed by its cultural and commercial dimensions. As *Dolls* illustrates, Kitano uses certain conventions of art cinema, admittedly a rather broad category and certainly a problematic one, in order to make the cultural specificity of his work accessible.

Dolls' self-reflexivity is informed by the need to export cultural specificity and, in the process, be influenced by the external cultural and commercial contexts of festival selection. As international events, film festivals provide a global stage upon which cultural performance can take place. The cultural specificity of such a performance must therefore conform to or be integrated with the international context of the festival. The mode of representation—cultural performance—is national in nature, yet is also international in regards to where it is exhibited (the festival) and the conventions of this space of exhibition.

Discussing how Japaneseness might be 'performed' according to a more universal principle, Naoki Sakai writes: 'Japan's uniqueness and identity are provided only insofar as Japan stands out as a particular object in the universal field of the West. Only when it is integrated into Western universalism does it gain its own identity as a particularity' (Sakai, 1989, p. 105). The presentation of Japanese uniqueness and identity in the 'universal field of the West' is a culturally paradoxical arrangement, whereby cultural specificity is presented and recognized only through a more universal, more non-specific context. As Sakai suggests, it is only when Japan is integrated into Western universalism does it gain its own identity, in other words, its cultural distinctiveness. This is a useful way of thinking about Japanese cultural performance as a paradoxical mode of representation. *Dolls* provides images specific to Japan, yet does so through the universal field of a Western film festival. The film becomes an amalgamation of Japanese cultural iconography and Western universalism, bridging any potential gaps between the Japanese text and a non-Japanese audience. Flexibility becomes a key factor here; the film represents not only Japan,

but also the universal field in which Japan is being represented. *Dolls* is simultaneously specific to Japan, yet accessible to a widespread audience because Kitano presents a Japanese cultural spectacle through an aesthetic style that is appropriate to an international art cinema context.

Regarding self-reflexivity in Kitano's work, Davis states that the director is 'selling Japanese film, but mostly he is selling himself, and doing this in a global market requires adjustments for global tastes' (Davis, 2001, p. 73). Kitano demonstrates flexibility as a director, making certain adjustments in order to sell cultural spectacle to a global audience. With films exported primarily through a network of established European festivals, such adjustments require the integration of culturally specific features into a more' universal' mode of representation in order to close the cultural gap between text and audience. For Davis, a more paradoxical mode of representation was a key factor in *Fireworks* winning the Golden Lion award at Venice in 1997:

> Ambiguity, subtle psychological states, memory, and romance are the relatively unusual ingredients, as well as explicit references to traditional Japanese motifs. *Hana-Bi*, then, is a key film, a cross-over to a new territory in the Kitano portfolio. Its status is as a work that reconciles the violent anarchy of a Kitano gangster picture with the contemplative aesthetic of a prestigious international art film. The film could be seen then as a Trojan Horse, two films in one. (Davis, 2007, p. 285)

Fireworks' cross-over success is attributed to its duality, its amalgamation of a Japanese film genre—the *yakuza* film—and the aesthetic of an international art film. Kitano follows a similar strategy with *Dolls*, incorporating various elements of Japanese culture, history and nature into a work that assumes the identity of a festival-oriented art film. Kitano thus effectively translates Japanese cultural spectacle to a global audience through a formal style one might associate with art cinema conventions. However, the idea of art cinema should be approached cautiously.

Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover argue that art cinema is an unreliable label (Galt and Schoonover, 2010, p. 3). Certainly art cinema is by no means a fixed term of reference; it can be viewed as an aesthetic category, a filmmaking sensibility or simply as a categorical term with which to market films to so-called cinephile and art house audiences. In all cases, the term art cinema broadly categorizes films and filmmakers for the purposes of promotion and distribution, and certainly this has been crucial in estab-

lishing many contemporary Asian directors, from Kitano to Wong kar wai, from Chen Kaige and Hou Hsiao Hsien to Kim ki duk and Hirokazu Koreeda.

As an institution of art cinema, festivals inform the creation of films suitable to art cinema tastes. Consequently, films are marketed as art often by virtue of *where* they are first exhibited. With many filmmakers able to maintain a venerable auteur status via regular festival participation, the conventions of such events have a bearing on the mode of representation in their work; as Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer note, the brand name of the auteur continues to provide the terms of reference through which cultural institutions both inside and outside Japan present and promote Japanese cinema (Phillips and Stringer, 2007, p. 15). In this respect, films are not simply national products; they also derive meaning from the international/global context of the festival and the paradigms of art cinema that characterize the institution.

The expectation is that an established auteur will produce works that are suitable to the institutional context of the festival, with festival conventions and regulations taken into consideration: 'although festivals promote the autonomous auteur, film directors face a variety of constraints when taking films to festivals. These constraints tend to reinforce formulae approved by festival directors' (Andrews, 2010, p. 10). Some of the major European festivals specify certain criteria for selecting films for in-competition screenings, with a strong preference shown for auteur projects that have the potential to attract large audiences. The 2013 rules and regulations section for the Locarno International Film Festival states the following:

> The festival del film Locarno aims to promote personal filmmaking of artistic merit […] The Piazza Grande section offers as world, international, European or national premiers works intended for a mainstream audience but made by genuine auteur filmmakers […]. (Festival del Film Locarno, 2013)

Certain 'constraints' may be introduced to ensure the submission of works by recognized auteurs that possess 'artistic merit'. A festival such as Locarno thereby maintains an institutional paradigm of art cinema according to which films can be marketed effectively. Therefore, in order for films to be successful at a festival, they must to some extent conform to this paradigm.

While allowing for different forms of cinematic expression, Locarno specifies a preference for mainstream films made by auteurs, in other words, filmmakers with a personalized and distinctive approach to style, aesthetics and subject matter who can be marketed in association with the festival. There are notable examples of the auteur/festival partnership—Mizoguchi and Venice (nine award nominations and three wins), Oshima and Cannes (five nominations and one win) and, of course, Kitano and Venice. Such an arrangement benefits the festival by allowing it to brand itself as a major global event in association with 'star' filmmakers, while the filmmakers' association with a major festival maintains their star billing. In the institutional and commercial contexts of the film festival, being validated as a genuine auteur, especially overseas, has aided many directors in their progression from 'national director' to 'international auteur'. Kitano is a prime example: a filmmaker and actor successful in his native country (albeit as a comedian and television personality more than as a film director), who, as a result of festival recognition in Europe, was able to use the commercial/industrial benefits of an association with Venice, as well as international distribution deals and critical acclaim in mainstream media.

In terms of global visibility, it became crucial for Kitano to maintain an auteur status by producing films of artistic merit suitable for the art cinema market. In association with Venice, Kitano's films were more easily marketed as art cinema with a broad international appeal, thus there is a commercial incentive to produce 'art films' as much as there are artistic motivations to do so. Art cinema, Steve Neale argues, is a mechanism of discrimination, a means of 'producing and sustaining a division within the field of cinema overall' (Neale, 2002, p. 119). So-called serious artistic films with a stamp of authorship are duly distinguished from film as mass entertainment. Although the divisions between art cinema and entertainment have been blurred somewhat by many of the major festivals—Cannes, for example, hosted the international premiers of *Moulin Rouge* (Baz Luhrmann, 2001), *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (George Lucas, 2002) and *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (Steven Spielberg, 2008)—an art cinema paradigm has been maintained, with the majority of films screened in competition being promoted as auteur projects. Kitano has been the beneficiary of the distinction between art cinema and entertainment, a beneficiary of what Peter Wollen calls the 'existential distinction between art films and popular films' (Wollen, 2004, p. 566). Given that Venice and Cannes have helped to distinguish Kitano as an auteur, it is unsurprising that his work oftentimes adheres to

conventions of art cinema. As is evident throughout *Dolls*, the mode of representation is paradoxical, a cultural performance made both accessible and conventional by virtue of *where* it is showcased.

Dolls as Art Cinema

David Bordwell suggests that art cinema as a mode of film practice shows that despite dissimilarities of style and thematic motifs between so-called art filmmakers, there are 'functions' of style and theme that are constant in art cinema (Bordwell, 2004, p. 775). Given the fact that the concept of art cinema is founded to a large extent on the work of auteurs who approach their work idiosyncratically, it is difficult to agree with Bordwell completely. However, there are certain functions that are characteristic of art cinema. Although critical of this term, Galt and Schoonover identify art films through recurring elements, 'typical features' such as an 'overt engagement of the aesthetic' (something which the visual spectacles of *Dolls* clearly demonstrates), 'unrestrained formalism' and an 'excessive visual style, use of colour and characterization' (Galt and Schoonover, 2010, p. 6). As Mes and Sharp point out, *Dolls* was praised for its 'cosmetic elements', its vivid colour, set design and cinematography (Mes and Sharp, 2005, p. 166). Kitano continually emphasizes colour and visual spectacle in *Dolls*, sometimes at the expense of narrative, producing a highly symbolic film featuring the changing seasons, flowers, ornaments, elaborate costumes, light displays and, in one sequence, *kabuki*-style masks. *Dolls* uses the aesthetics of *bunraku* theatre, traditional Japanese costumes and nature to provide an overt cultural performance, one that relies on a highly stylized form of representation.

Like Bordwell, Neale identifies certain conventions of art cinema that can be defined, albeit narrowly, through a number of textual characteristics. This includes an emphasis on visual style with a suppression of action, at least action in the conventional 'Hollywood sense', along with an 'engagement of the look in terms of a marked individual point of view rather than in terms of institutionalised space' (Neale, 2002, pp. 103–104), both of which are evident in *Dolls*. The film's emphasis on visual spectacle and the presentation of it through a subjective point of view are complemented by a distinct lack of 'action' in the conventional sense alluded to by Neale. In the first narrative, Matsumoto and Sawako are for the most part engaged in gradual movement as they traverse multiple landscapes on foot. This not only helps showcase Japan's natural beauty, it also suppresses the need

for action. This is a strategy employed by Kitano in *Boiling Point*, *Sonatine* and *Fireworks*, in which the sudden and brutal violence of the *yakuza* genre is continually undercut by extended sequences that feature nature and emphasize slowness, something identified as a typical element of Japanese art films in Rayna Denison and Woojeong Joo's study of UK audiences of Japanese cinema (Denison and Joo, 2012). The distinct lack of action in *Dolls* is further underlined by an interiorization of dramatic conflict, another characteristic of art cinema discussed by Neale (Neale, 2002, p. 104). When not walking, Matsumoto and Sawako are usually silent and static. Similarly, in *Dolls*' second narrative, Hiro is characterized by his stillness and lack of emotional expression; as Hiro sits on his porch reflecting upon his past—his abandonment of Ryoko, his violent crimes—guilt and regret are internalized in the actor's performance. In these instances, Kitano's emphasis on stillness and slowness adheres to a recurring feature of art cinema, as discussed by Neale, Galt and Schoonover, through which cultural performance and art film convention become interlinked.

To some degree, Kitano employs conventions of aesthetics and form through which to present Japan in a way that is typical, one could say, of the festival context in which *Dolls* was exhibited. Cultural performance is presented in the form of a conventional art film marketed as such via Venice, a culturally specific spectacle packaged as an accessible viewing experience. What is signified in the interaction between the Japanese film and the non-Japanese festival is a mutually beneficial relationship that maintains both the cultural distinctiveness of the film and the cultural power of the festival. Kitano stages a performance loaded with Japanese cultural signifiers, yet presents it in such a way as to avoid any potential cultural misunderstandings between the film and its intended audience. In this regard, Kitano displays flexibility in how he represents Japan. Meeting the festival's commercial demand for culturally distinctive Japanese cinema and conforming to the festival as an art film institution. *Dolls* is culturally paradoxical, a film marketed as both Japanese cinema and art cinema.

Departures: International Accessibility

In conjunction with film festivals, award ceremonies provide some of the most widely anticipated (and controversial) modes of international film recognition. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences have preserved the idea, through its award category for best foreign language film, that there is still a centralized film system (Hollywood) with peripheral

film cultures surrounding it (the non-English-speaking world). Before the establishment of this category in 1956, the Academy handed out eight honorary prizes to foreign language films, otherwise referred to as 'special awards' which acknowledged the achievements of filmmakers working outside English-speaking territories. Japan would be the recipient of three of these honorary awards—*Rashomon* in 1951, *Gate of Hell* in 1954 and *Miyamoto Musashi/Samurai, the Legend of Musashi* (Hiroshi Inagaki, 1954) in 1955. The initial success of Japanese productions at the Academy Awards (nine nominations and three wins between 1951 and 1967) (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2013) corresponds with the interest shown in Japanese cinema by major European film festivals at the time.

When Yojiro Takita's *Departures* won the Academy Award for best foreign language film in 2009, the situation was very different. A Japanese film had not won since 1956 and only *Tasogare Seibei/The Twilight Samurai* (Yoji Yamada, 2002) had been nominated since *Doro no kawa/Muddy River* (Kohei Oguri, 1981) in 1982. Takita's film appeared at numerous festivals worldwide throughout 2008 and 2009, including the increasingly prestigious Busan Festival in South Korea, specialist 'Asian cinema' events such as the Udine Far East Film Festival, the Munich Asia Film Fest, the Deauville Asian Film Festival in France and the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, as well as the Hawaii International Film Festival, an event which has traditionally been favourable to Japanese filmmaking. In light of its festival and award success, it is worth considering *Departures* as a second example of cultural performance, a film that reconciles the conventions of global art cinema with self-reflexive representation.

Departures is in many respects a film about returning home and the adoption of a simpler way of life. The film centres on Kobayashi (Masahiro Motoki), a thirty-something concert cellist who leaves behind his middle-class Tokyo life to return to his hometown in the largely rural Yamagata prefecture. Desperate for money, Kobayashi resorts to working as a *nokanshi*, an encoffineer, under the tutelage of Sasaki (Tsutomu Yamazaki). Kobayashi is trained to prepare the dead for 'departure', learning how to carefully wash (*yukan*), dress and apply make-up (*shinigeshou*) to the recently deceased through a highly ceremonial ritual performed in front of the mourners. Initially Kobayashi's career change is criticized by his wife, family and friends, and for culturally specific reasons. Buddhist funeral rituals were sometimes performed by *burakumin*, an underclass often stigmatized for taking on professions which put them in direct contact with

death—butchers, undertakers, and so on. Thus, despite returning home, Kobayashi becomes an outsider because he adopts a typical *burakumin* profession. Gradually, however, he excels as a *nokanshi*, a process that not only reconciles him with his wife, but also leads him to prepare the body of his long-lost father in the film's emotional climax.

Emmanuel Levy points out that many 'foreign language' Academy-Award-winning films have been global blockbusters—*La vita e bella/Life is Beautiful* (Roberto Benigni, 1997), *Todo sombre mi madre/All About My Mother* (Pedro Almodovar, 1999), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Levy, 2003, p. 211). *Departures* conforms to this pattern. Concerning both films and acting performances, Levy writes:

> To get Academy recognition, foreign players must appear in commercially successful movies. A good performance has no impact if it is contained in a small art film seen by few. Similarly, most foreign pictures nominated for writing or technical awards have been box-office hits or ranked high on Ten Best Lists by major film critics. (Levy, 2003, p. 210)

Having taken ¥3.05 billion at the Japanese box office (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan, Inc. 2008), *Departures* received its international premier at the Montreal World Film Festival and with Shochiku studios handing over the responsibility of international sales to London-based company Content Film, the film was swiftly sold to markets in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and South Korea. In the lead-up to its Academy Award nomination, *Departures* won the Grand Prix at Montreal, three prizes at China's Golden Rooster Awards and the audience award at the Hawaii International Film Festival. It would also travel further in the wake of its Academy Award recognition: Colombia, Israel and Russia all received the film before it was shown at the Berlin International Film Festival in February 2009. The international appeal of the film is largely attributable to its accessibility, yet it also provides enough exotic spectacle to be considered a cultural performance in ways similar to *Dolls*.

The Academy, like most film award panels, has its preferences concerning the subject matter, themes, and aesthetics of the films it chooses to acknowledge. Levy highlights 'eccentricities' such as disability, physical transformation, the portrayal of stigmatized characters and illness which tend to be favoured by the Academy (Levy, 2003, pp. 243–256), while genres such as biopics, musicals and earnest emotional dramas have tra-

ditionally proved successful. However, these patterns of consistency are more difficult to apply to the award for best foreign language film (traditionally a more diverse category), a section that has not always adhered to the trends set by the festival circuit.

While *Fireworks* and Imamura's *The Eel* appeared to herald the re-emergence of Japanese cinema in 1997 by winning the Golden Lion and Palme d'Or respectively, both went unrecognized by the Academy. In fact, in comparison to the major European festivals, the Academy has not been favourable towards Japanese films in recent decades. So why did *Departures* buck this trend? First, it was, like the vast majority of best foreign language film nominees, a considerable commercial hit domestically, ranking eleventh in Japanese box office standings for 2008 (Motion Pictures Producers Association of Japan, Inc. 2008). Second, *Departures*' popularity can be traced to Takita's counterbalancing of the morbidity of Kobayashi's profession and the mourning of the families with comedic scenes, such as Kobayashi being used as a model for his boss' training videos, or the discovery at one ceremony that a deceased woman has a penis. Furthermore, Kobayashi's voiceover throughout, coupled with an accessible plot, adds to the film's overall palpability.

There is evidently a level of accessibility in *Departures* that would explain its mainstream appeal. However, I wish to go further in analysing the film's international success in relation to 'international art cinema' conventions before turning again to the issue of cultural performance. The combination of art cinema as an institutional mode of presentation and the film's culturally specific elements underlines the fact that when situated in wider industrial contexts—the European film festival and the American Academy Awards—films are recontextualized, becoming culturally paradoxical texts that can be read according to different contexts.

Aesthetic Blandness: *Departures* as International Art Cinema

Departures is constructed in a similar fashion to Kitano's *Dolls*, carefully poised between exotic spectacle and what some critics—Steffen Hantke, for instance (see Chap. 4)—view as the aesthetic blandness of international art cinema. Early scenes take place in a version of Tokyo that is, similar to *Pulse*'s representation of the city, largely unremarkable and more notable for Takita's references to European bourgeois culture, such as the orchestra Kobayashi plays with and their recitals of Beethoven. In addi-

tion, Kobayashi lives in a bland apartment leading a typical middle-class existence with his wife. Even when the film moves to the natural surroundings of Yamagata, there are few of the tourist spectacles one sees in *Dolls*. Instead, the audience is greeted with a bleak and largely featureless landscape.

Despite the unremarkable rural surroundings featured in the film, the transference of the narrative from Tokyo to Yamagata is still significant in terms of the film's nationality. Conducive to the overarching theme of returning home, Kobayashi's new small town life corresponds with the fact that he takes on a more culturally specific profession as a *nokanshi*. Kobayashi returns home both literally and figuratively: his adoption of small town life constitutes a 're-Japanization' of his character following the Westernized bourgeois lifestyle he has led in Tokyo. Kobayashi's transformation over the course of the film is notable because it marks his reintroduction to a more 'Japanese' way of life, filled with specific cultural activities. Kobayashi thus engages with elements of a Japanese life he had neglected in Tokyo: he learns to cook traditional food using traditional methods and also enjoys traditional *furo* bathing. When such activities are viewed alongside the rituals Kobayashi performs in his job as a *nokanshi* (which I will discuss shortly), it is clearly apparent that cultural specificity in *Departures* becomes central to individual identity and the sense of being Japanese as opposed to being Westernized.

Kobayashi's adoption of more traditional habits and the performativity of his new job constitute a culturally specific mode of representation, one that often borders on the exotic, while the film's generic and aesthetic blandness contributes to its more conventional, cross-over appeal. To suggest, however, that *Departures* has a cross-over appeal because of its conventionality begs the question as to what conventions it obeys. Understood within the very broad category of international art cinema, the film fits into some of Neale, Galt and Schoonover's definitions of art cinema as a generic category. As noted previously, art cinema, according to Neale is, despite its diversity, identifiable through recurrent textual characteristics: a stressing of visual style; a suppression of action in the conventional sense; an emphasis on character over plot; and an internalization of dramatic conflict. Although the visual impact of *Departures* is not as immediate as that of *Dolls*, the use of rural exteriors, highly staged compositions and the ornate interiors of the encoffinment scenes gives the film a suitably 'artful' surface appearance. The film is also appropriately slow-paced in order to subdue conventional 'action', allowing funeral rituals to be performed

in real time, thus emphasizing the skill and meticulousness of Kobayashi and Sasaki's work. Most strikingly, the interiorization of dramatic conflict during these rituals is an indication that one is watching an 'art film' or at least a film made with artistic sensibilities.

The aesthetic concessions made by *Departures* towards art cinema as an institutional formal mode of presentation provides some indication that cultural performance can be framed by a more non-specific style. One should be aware though that this only provides an understanding of the film's surface appearance, its mode of presentation rather than its mode of address. *Departures* may make concessions to a more 'international' style, yet the inherent exoticism of Kobayashi's work as a *nokanshi* takes centre stage, with the film's nationality processed into highly formalized rituals. Functioning in a similar fashion to the *bunraku* sequences in *Dolls*, the encoffinment ceremonies act as both literal and symbolic performances of Japaneseness.

Cultural Performance as Ritual

Though not as extravagant as *Dolls* in displaying cultural iconography, *Departures* nevertheless features significant moments of cultural spectacle. This ensures that the film's 'physical signs' of Japaneseness contribute to an 'authentic' cultural experience. However, unlike the use of costume, landscape and nature in *Dolls*, which offers a background of cultural authenticity, the cultural spectacle of Takita's film is firmly foregrounded in the ceremonial rituals performed throughout by Kobayashi and his mentor Sasaki.

The depiction of *nokanshi* places tradition on show, the rites of encoffinment imbued with features of Buddhist ritualism, including the tapping of a bell to start the ceremony and the offering of prayers. The performative aspects of the ritual are carefully and meticulously played out. Kobayashi's training in the art of encoffinment and his preparation of the deceased is afforded considerable space and time within the narrative. Nothing is compressed into rapid editing as Kobayashi flexes the stiffened arms and wrists of the corpses, and covers the bodies with a sheet while the pre-encoffinment clothes are removed. He then carefully and respectfully washes the dead, before beckoning the watching relatives to pay their final respects. The care taken in these scenes by both the character in the diegesis and the filmmaker, the meticulous attention to detail and the poised professionalism of the act itself contribute to the Orientalist subtext of the

film in that it plays upon Japanese stereotypes of pursuing perfection in various aspects of society and culture. This, in turn, adds to the authenticity of the ritual, a ritual that recalls highly formalized Buddhist practices and, by association, archaic images linked to religious traditions.

The strict formality of the ceremony coupled with the carefully demarcated roles for both mourners and *nokanshi* creates a highly formal and ritualized environment in which careful preparation, attention to and appreciation of detail, and dignity are paramount. As cultural performances, the encoffinment scenes conjure up many associations with tea ceremonies and Japanese traditions of and beliefs in spirituality. The fact that such iconography is rooted in these beliefs by the director and that the associations it invokes concern very basic and stereotypical ideas of the Japanese, makes for an authentic surface encounter with nationality. The encoffinment rituals therefore function as performances through which the tourist gaze may enter the film and connect with its self-reflexive mode of representation.

There are several other signifiers threaded throughout *Departures* that contribute to a distinct sense of cinematic tourism. Although landscape is not fetishized to quite the same extent as it is in *Dolls*, the film maintains nature and rural surroundings as integral elements in Kobayashi's return to a more traditional, more Japanese way of life. Food, both in its preparation and consumption, is highlighted at different points, while *furo* bathing and a continual emphasis on bowing add to the overriding sense that cultural specificity is engrained in the narrative, the sense that one is clearly watching a Japanese film. One should also consider how the performance of nationality functions for those performing it.

Cultural performance is by no means a contemporary phenomenon. Since the 1950s, the Japanese industry has regularly produced films suitable for festival consumption based primarily upon self-reflexivity and cultural performance strategies. Performing nationality allows Japanese filmmakers to actively participate in the construction of cultural iconography rather than being bystanders to its consumption by 'outsiders', participating in what Iwabuchi calls a 'complicit relationship' between Japanese self-Orientalism and western Orientalism:

> A complicit relationship between Japanese self-Orientalism and western Orientalism comes in sight when the previously unmarked superiority of "the Occident" has to mark itself, when the boundary between the dominant and the subordinate is blurring. In the age of globalisation, which

> increases the political, economical and cultural interconnectedness of the world, this tendency will be intensifying. (Iwabuchi, 1994)

The relationship between Japanese films and major European festivals does appear to constitute a form of Orientalism whereby Japan performs itself, particularly when one looks at Japanese cinema in the 1950s and Kitano's work in more recent times. However, the mode of performance appears to benefit both parties, allowing the Oriental 'subject' to control the extent to which their work is seen as exotic.

What is clearly signified in the interaction between Japanese cinema and the festival/award circuit is not simply the exploitation of Asian cinemas by the Occident (though this still has a considerable bearing on the screening of Asian films at major festivals), but rather a mutually beneficial interaction that maintains cultural identity as a global commodity. *Dolls* and *Departures* both perform their nationality within the industrial parameters of international art cinema and in doing so conform to the expectations of art cinema as a marketing category. Thus, the films' popularity can be attributed to two contradictory factors—international accessibility and exoticism.

Conclusion

The importance of the festival as an international showcase has been recognized by Japanese production and cultural promotion organizations, leading to investment programmes designed to maintain Japan's festival presence in Europe. In the process, festivals have a significant impact, not only on the marketing of films and filmmakers, but also on the mode of representation. In many of his films, Kitano demonstrates a culturally paradoxical mode of representation that has been influenced to some degree by the European festival circuit. Venice, in particular, has provided an international stage upon which cultural performances have been showcased to a wider audience, whether through Japanese postcard imagery (*Fireworks*), historical spectacle (*Zatoichi*) or a combination of both (*Dolls*). Yet, this space of exhibition also serves to recontextualize Kitano's work as international art cinema.

The amalgamation of art cinema and Japanese cultural performance within the context of the festival appears to be the perfect symbiosis of cultural specificity, on the one hand, and accessibility on the other, ensuring that the cultural distinctiveness of Japan and the cultural importance of

the festival are both represented and preserved. Although this is a paradox, it is also a commercially viable strategy for Japanese filmmakers to stand out in the global film market, a market which, as the funding activities of UNIJAPAN, JETRO, METI and Bunka cho show, is increasingly important to Japanese film production.

Culturally paradoxical modes of representation are used to make films flexible in regards to their nationality, and therefore accessible to a wider audience. Kitano and Takita adopt the universal 'principle' of art cinema to showcase Japan's cultural distinctiveness and, in doing so, use the commercial resources afforded by film festival success. For both directors, being flexible in how one represents nationality has its commercial incentives. Major festivals offer various marketing opportunities—media coverage, critical reception, large audiences, award recognition and networking—that encourage filmmakers to produce cultural performances with foreign audiences firmly in mind.

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CHAPTER 6

Twenty-First-Century *Jidaigeki* and Commercial Ownership

With the European success of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* in 1951, Japanese studios began investing in the global commercial potential of historical dramas and films about samurai. This often involved the production and export of *jidaigeki*, a genre of period film set during the Tokugawa/Edo period (1603–1868) that focuses specifically on feudal society and, more often than not, the role of Japan's elite samurai caste within that society. From the 1950s to the 1980s, Japan produced a large number of *jidaigeki* films and its more action-based variation *chanbara eiga*, culminating in awards and screenings at the festivals of Venice, Cannes and Berlin. *Jidaigeki* became a Japanese signature genre, thanks in part to its success at European festivals. As noted in Chap. 5, ten of the thirty-one Japanese films screened in competition at Venice since the 1950s are *jidaigeki*, with twelve out of forty-eight featuring at Cannes. In response, Japanese studios and producers have often turned to *jidaigeki* for its marketability and authenticity, central to which has been the cultural icon of the samurai warrior.

Regardless of whether or not Japanese period films are truly authentic in terms of historical accuracy, they present the iconography of feudal society and the samurai in ways that are usually unambiguous in regards to nationality. Not only has this iconography helped define *jidaigeki* as a distinctive Japanese film tradition, it has also, somewhat paradoxically, appeared elsewhere. Attesting to the global commercial appeal of the samurai and Japan's feudal past, Hollywood has produced its own Japanese

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historical spectacles—*Shogun* (Jerry London, 1980), *The Last Samurai*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *47 Ronin*)—while appropriating elements of samurai culture in a range of films (*Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *Blind Fury* (Phillip Noyce, 1989), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3* (Stuart Gillard, 1993), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (Jim Jarmusch, 1999), *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *Kill Bill: Volume 2*, *Bunraku* (Guy Moshe, 2010), *The Wolverine*. At around the same time that Hollywood has shown an interest in Japan's feudal past, there has been a significant resurgence of samurai-related films in Japan comparable to *jidaigeki*'s heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. Although there are many instances of films which parody or subvert the generic conventions of *jidaigeki* (*Esu efu samurai fikushon/Samurai Fiction* (Hiroyuki Nakano, 1998), *Gohatto/Taboo* (Nagisa Oshima, 1999), *The Twilight Samurai*, *Mibu gishi den/When the Last Sword is Drawn* (Yojiro Takita, 2003), *Kakushi ken oni no tsume/The Hidden Blade* (Yoji Yamada, 2004), *Afro Samurai* (Fuminori Kizaki, 2006)), the increase in *jidaigeki* film production since the late 1990s constitutes a major reinvestment in the commercial potential of the genre and its apparent authenticity.

In this final chapter I will examine Takashi Miike's *13 Assassins* (2010) and its close observation of *jidaigeki* conventions. When viewed as a genre film, *13 Assassins* constitutes an 'authentic' Japanese cultural performance; by re-enacting a feudal past, the film evokes a distinctly Japanese cinematic world, one that is infused with the conventions of a culturally specific film genre. At the same time, *jidaigeki* is implicated in the wider commodification of Japanese popular culture in the twenty-first century. As a global commodity, the genre is culturally paradoxical, with non-Japanese consortia heavily involved in financing, producing and distributing certain films. As I will demonstrate, the creation of *13 Assassins* through international coproduction shows that *jidaigeki* is no longer a purely national phenomenon. The samurai is not simply represented in the context of Japanese cinema. The iconography of *jidaigeki* and samurai culture has been freely appropriated, particularly by Hollywood, and in some cases has been sold back to the Japanese market. Although this raises questions about the commercial and creative ownership of an authentic, quintessentially Japanese film tradition, I would argue that Hollywood's appropriation of *jidaigeki* iconography and the involvement of foreign production companies in films such as *13 Assassins* cannot be thought of simply as a 'takeover' of Japanese film production and content by other film industries. Whether imagined 'authentically' by Japanese filmmakers or reimagined

in Hollywood, *jidaigeki* remains a distinctive Japanese brand in the global market. Moreover, Japanese filmmakers and production companies are able to capitalize on the shared resources of international coproduction to ensure that *jidaigeki* reaches the widest possible audience. In this respect, Japan adapts to the increasingly diverse nature of contemporary film production and promotion, using transnational and culturally paradoxical practices that seemingly undermine the autonomy of the Japanese industry.

Cultural Authenticity in *Jidaigeki*

Few other film genres are as synonymous with Japan as *jidaigeki*. Although anime and J Horror, two of Japan's biggest film exports, are globally recognized, their cultural ambiguity raises questions about their representation of Japan. Whereas anime often incorporates signifiers of globalization—multiculturalism, global cities, Western popular culture—and J Horror films such as *Ring*, *The Grudge* and *Pulse* offer culturally ambiguous representations of Japan, *jidaigeki* presents its Japaneseness overtly. In stark contrast to anime and J Horror, *jidaigeki* and other period films remain distinctly Japanese because they present images that are undiluted; in other words, *jidaigeki* presents Japan as a culture relatively untouched by Western influences and modern processes of globalization.

Just as the American western denotes a specific time and place that is intrinsically American, *jidaigeki* appears quintessentially Japanese, a genre that situates the viewer firmly within a national cinematic space. From Kurosawa's celebrated samurai epics to the work of Masaki Kobayashi and Hideo Gosha, and from the action set pieces of the *Zatoichi* and *Kozure okami/Lone Wolf and Cub* series to period films made by contemporary directors, *jidaigeki* performs Japaneseness. Though period film genres are not exempt from pastiche (*Samurai Fiction*, for instance) or cultural hybridity (the orientalist smorgasbord of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* series and the samurai/blacksploitation anime *Afro Samurai*), *jidaigeki*, along with its more action-based subcategory *chanbara eiga*, has retained its cultural, geographical and historical identity on a textual level.

Jidaigeki's importance as a source of cultural authenticity can be traced back to filmmakers working in the post-World War II period who, following the end of film censorship under the US Occupation, used *jidaigeki* to articulate contemporary concerns about Japanese society. Kurosawa, in particular, achieved domestic and international success with *Rashomon*,

Seven Samurai, *Throne of Blood* and *Yojimbo*, films that not only popularized the samurai as a Japanese cinematic icon, but also provided a sense of cultural authenticity that could be appreciated both at home and abroad. Noting Kurosawa's fondness for Japan's feudal past, Stephen Prince writes:

> Kurosawa's intense feelings for pre-modern Japan, his perceptions of himself and his family in these terms disclose a view of the past as a living, sensuous reality. In his most recent films, the past has entirely displaced twentieth-century Japan. The major films that take the past as their subject—*Seven Samurai* (1954), *Yôjimbô* (1961), and *Red Beard* (1965)—shift their focus away from the modern world in an urgent search for a self that is not badly torn and splintered, and for a social world that does not grind its members to bits. (Prince, 1999, p. 203)

According to Prince, Kurosawa's work provided a form of escapism as well as nostalgia for a past that was both authentic and idealized. Throughout the history of Japanese cinema *jidaigeki* has served as an image of an authentic and at times romanticized Japanese society, and Kurosawa's work in particular has inspired filmmakers to continually revisit the past.

The past in question, at least in terms of *jidaigeki*, is that of the Tokugawa/Edo period, a time of relative stability following centuries of civil wars. As argued by S. A. Thornton, the categorization of *jidaigeki* as films set during the Tokugawa//Edo period dictates the year 1868 as the dividing line between *jidaigeki* and *gendaigeki* (films set in the contemporary period) (Thornton, 2008, p. 14). The beginning of the Tokugawa/Edo period in 1603 also distinguishes *jidaigeki* from other period films, even those featuring samurai. *Rashomon* and *Seven Samurai*, for example, are not *jidaigeki*, though they are often thought of as such; they are instead categorized as *sengoku eiga*, films set during Japan's 'warring' states period (1467–1603). Though the use of the term *jidaigeki* is a convenient way of categorizing certain films, it also underlines the importance of the Tokugawa/Edo era as a more authentic and more indigenous source of inspiration for filmmakers. Given the fact that Japan was isolated from most of the world during this period, I would argue that *jidaigeki* can be read as a culturally specific film genre, one that portrays a self-contained society. In response to the spread of Catholicism and other foreign influences, a policy of isolationism was enacted, first, by the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) and thereafter by his successors:

> The Tokugawa emphasis on dynastic stability ran counter to freedom of commerce and overseas trade. [...] By 1640 Japan was closing in upon itself commercially. Overseas ventures were forbidden. Portuguese and Spanish vessels were excluded. Only the English and the Dutch were permitted to trade through Hirado and Nagasaki. (Collcut, Jansen and Kumakura, 1991, pp. 140–141)

Japan's self-imposed isolation at this time is central to understanding *jidaigeki*'s authenticity as a mode of representation. Because of its temporal setting in the Tokugawa/Edo period, *jidaigeki* presents a self-contained, undiluted culture separated from the outside world. Moreover, *jidaigeki* depicts a society that predates the re-establishment of imperial rule in 1867, industrialization and the reintroduction of foreign trade and influence. In 1868, the Tokugawa shogunate collapsed, the system of rule by shogun (military dictator) was abolished and the emperor assumed the role of monarch.

Through *jidaigeki* Japan could be represented in terms of a more authentic and culturally distinctive location, a 'less threatening arena' in which to tackle contemporary social problems (Moeran, 2011, p. 163). The convenient time frame of 1603 to 1868 allowed filmmakers to articulate an indigenous national identity which, to borrow Darrell William Davis' description, was free from foreign adulteration (Davis, 1996, p. 220), in other words, the influx of foreign influences during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The temporal distance of the Tokugawa/Edo communicates a more monolithic representation of Japan, one that pre-dates a modernized Japanese nation state. As *13 Assassins* demonstrates, this is achieved through the incorporation of Tokugawa/Edo iconography. Cultural performance thus evokes an authentic cinematic space filled with connotative imagery, a space that is instantly recognized as authentically Japanese.

At this point I should clarify what I mean by authenticity. Regardless of whether they are historically accurate or not, period films present 'stable' images of Japanese locality based upon historical iconography (as opposed to the culturally 'unstable' images one might see in *mukokuseki* anime or recent horror films). It is certainly questionable as to what extent *jidaigeki* is historically authentic: Isolde Standish argues that filmmakers who use historical situations as their *mise-en-scène* actually tell us more about *their* time than about the time they are depicting (Standish, 2000, p. 2). Similarly, David Desser notes cinema's role in mythologizing the samurai

as opposed to presenting something genuinely authentic: 'Myths can be used to blur the distinctions between the natural and the conventional, between the fact of history and the idea of history' (Desser, 1992, p. 163). Cinematic representations of feudal Japan are deliberate and partly artificial in that they are performances of a perceived past. Authenticity in the case of twenty-first-century *jidaigeki* should not be mistaken therefore for historical actuality, nor should *jidaigeki* be understood simply as a static genre that can be easily defined through formal and narrative conventions.

The Generic Conventions of *Jidaigeki*

As is the case with most (if not any) film genre, there needs to be some consideration of genre flexibility when it comes to *jidaigeki*. Like any film genre, *jidaigeki* is malleable. Its generic conventions can be reinforced or subverted. Thomas Schatz writes:

> There is a sense […] in which film genre is both a *static* and *dynamic* system. On the one hand, it is a familiar formula of interrelated narrative and cinematic components that serves to continually re-examine some basic cultural conflict. […] On the other hand, changes in cultural attitudes, new influential genre films, the economics of the industry, and so forth, continually refine any film genre. As such, its nature is continually evolving. (Schatz, 2004, p. 691)

As Schatz indicates, genres have a tendency to evolve. Moreover, they become flexible; they communicate (through aesthetics, narrative or generic syntax) with other genres as well as with their generic 'cousins'. For example, although Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* differs considerably in style and tone from earlier Kurosawa period films, shared characteristics (usually of narrative and characterization) may be identified, while, at the same time, connections are made with the John Ford westerns that influenced *Yojimbo* and the Italian westerns that followed its narrative structure.

Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen argue that despite issues of categorization and genre evolution over time, there can be no doubt that 'treating a film as a representative of a familiar and perceptively formulated genre is often essential to a proper understanding of it' (Braudy and Cohen, 2004, p. 658). *Jidaigeki* is certainly not a static film genre. Its conventions and iconography can be experimented with or disregarded to suit changing artistic tastes and audience expectations. Yet what remains fundamental

is *jidaigeki*'s authenticity as a distinctive Japanese film tradition. Yoji Yamada's acclaimed 2002 film *The Twilight Samurai* is a good example: it is authentic in the use of a period setting and feudal iconography, but it also subverts certain expectations one would have of a violent samurai film. In a time of peace and stability, the film's main protagonist, Iguchi Seibei (Hiroyuki Sanada), is effectively relieved of any warrior duties. Instead he is consigned to the working life of a civil servant, carries a wooden sword and spends his spare time caring for his children and elderly mother: '[Yamada] seems to want to deflate the cinematic myth of the samurai. Indeed, Seibei does not in the least cut a dashing figure. He is poor, unkempt, and works the Tokugawa equivalent of a stuffy office job' (Howe, 2010, p. 100). As Yamada demonstrates, *jidaigeki* can be generically flexible while still adhering to formal conventions that define it as a genre. Certain characteristics, whether related to feudal iconography or recurring features of *jidaigeki* cinema, serve as signifiers of a film's cultural authenticity (which in turn may be recognized by audiences) or as reference points to which filmmakers can either conform or depart from.

Even in the case of films that subvert genre expectations, the connotative presence of the samurai and the eventuality of violence remain central to most (though not all) *jidaigeki* narratives, and most certainly in the case of *chanbara eiga*. The primary genre expectation, argues Alain Silver, is the swordsman: 'Whether this character is developed as a hero or an anti-hero, his physical introduction into the scene and the viewer's apprehension of him as the potential dramatic center are basic to all samurai films' (Silver, 2005, p. 42). Just as the lone protagonists of Hollywood westerns denote a specific time and place, and signal the inevitability of an eventual gunfight, the samurai occupies and defines a space that is distinctly Japanese.

The samurai's status as a national icon is embedded throughout popular culture, not only in Japan but around the world. Samurai have appeared in various mediums, from television and film to advertising and computer games. Samurai-related holiday packages are promoted by the Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO), while merchandise adorned with samurai iconography is available throughout airports, markets, toy shops and museums. One can witness Japanese soccer fans donning *chonmage* head caps in support of a national team nicknamed 'samurai blue'. The Samurai Japanese Restaurant chain can be found in various countries, including the UK, Spain, the USA, Canada and Australia. Samurai fighting techniques are taught in the form of martial arts such as *kendo*, *iaido*

and *jujutsu*. Given such global visibility, the samurai's appearance is immediately iconic, connoting an inherently Japanese space.

Through the recognition of established signifiers—the samurai being the most recognizable—one is situated, whether firmly or momentarily, in the world of *jidaigeki*:

> Just as the Western takes shape when we understand it not only by a series of narrative patterns but from iconographic clues as well, so too does the Samurai form, as distinguished from the mass of Japanese cinema. The key image in the genre is the samurai sword itself. The wearing, in full view, of the long killing sword (*daito*) immediately places one within the genre of the Samurai. (Desser, 1992, p. 163)

In conjunction with the samurai's appearance is the recognition of the sword, another key signifier that foreshadows the onset of violent spectacles that are often central to action-based period films. This became a key development throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with focus shifting from drama to action, or as Justin Howe writes, towards the 'significance of the swordfight' (Howe, 2010, p. 85). Similarly, Brian Moeran sees a divergence of styles between *jidaigeki* and its more action-based 'subdivision' *chanbara eiga*, with film critics regarding *jidaigeki* as serious art in which directors attempted to discover what was of unique value in Japanese history (Moeran, 2011, p. 163). Miike's *13 Assassins* lies somewhere between these period film variations, adopting a more nuanced *jidaigeki* approach to highlight the moral/ethical implications of the samurai lifestyle while providing brutal, audience-pleasing action sequences, most notably in its climactic forty-minute battle. Combining different aspects of the Japanese period film, Miike produces a landscape that is uniquely Japanese, a culturally connotative space in which authenticity is preserved and generic conventions observed.

In the 1960s, Kurosawa began to favour a more action-oriented approach in the films *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* (1962), with a greater predilection for violence referred to by Standish as cruel *jidaigeki* (*zankoku jidaigeki*) (Standish, 2005, p. 273). This shift towards highly choreographed action sequences and violence had a considerable influence on period films of the 1960s and 1970s. Swordfight-based narratives were adapted ad infinitum (partly in response to the commercial success of Hong Kong martial arts cinema in the 1970s) by the long-running *Zatoichi* series (1962–) about a blind, yet highly skilled *ronin* (masterless samurai), the *Lone Wolf*

and Cub films (1972–1980), *Shurayukihime/Lady Snowblood* (Toshiya Fujita, 1973), and the *Hanzo the Razor* trilogy (1972–1974). Prolonged swordfights, usually centred upon an undefeatable protagonist, became the primary expectation for audiences of samurai films. Following the swordfight films of the 1970s, *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* lost some of their widespread appeal, becoming part of a general downtrend in popularity which Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh attribute to the 'depletion of established formulae', whereby genres specific to popular cinemas from Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan lost ground commercially due to overproduction and competition from television (Davis and Yeh, 2008, p. 11). By the 1980s, even Kurosawa was struggling to secure domestic funding, turning instead to US and French financial assistance to make *Kagemusha* in 1980 and *Ran* in 1985.

13 Assassins and Generic Convention

With non-Japanese finance and production companies taking a greater interest in Japanese period films following the releases of *Kagemusha* and *Ran*, and with the emergence of cultural initiatives designed to encourage and promote Japan's cultural specificity, *jidaigeki* production has enjoyed a revival of interest, both at home and abroad. In recent years many established directors have turned their attentions to Japan's feudal past. Nagisa Oshima, Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Miike, Hirokazu Koreeda, Yoji Yamada and Yojiro Takita have all ventured into period film production, often combining the social drama of *jidaigeki* with the more violent, action-oriented elements of *chanbara eiga*. The increase in *jidaigeki* production since the late 1990s has represented a major reinvestment by Japanese studios and non-Japanese production and finance companies in the cultural authenticity and commercial potential of samurai cinema.

Miike in particular has invested considerably in the commercial popularity of period films by making *13 Assassins* in 2010 and *Ichimei/Hara-Kiri: Death of a Samurai* (2011) the following year, both of which adhere closely to many of the established conventions of *jidaigeki*. This is somewhat surprising given that Miike has often avoided 'traditional', stereotypical and generic representations of Japanese culture, society and national identity. In stark contrast to culturally hybrid films such as *Shinjuku Triad Society*, *Rainy Dog*, *Ley Lines*, *Dead or Alive*, *Ichi the Killer* and *Sukiyaki Western Django*, Miike's foray into *jidaigeki* is uncharacteristically conventional in terms of genre, derivative in regards to source material (*13*

Assassins and *Hara-Kiri* are both remakes) and, most significantly, culturally specific in the use of feudal iconography and generic features.

A major motivation for Miike to make *jidaigeki* has been the popularity and brand recognition of the samurai, both in Japan and elsewhere, which has attracted investment from British, French and US consortia. Foreign involvement has led to both larger budget productions and more widespread international distribution deals. It would seem therefore that Miike has been highly flexible in his cinematic representations of Japan in response to a global market. In presenting a convincing and recognizable Japanese cinematic space, Miike adopts certain conventions of *jidaigeki* that are identifiable across a range of films. These conventions are integral to cultural performance in *13 Assassins* and therefore to how one understands the film as an authentically Japanese text.

13 Assassins takes place during the Tokugawa/Edo period, a time of relative peace and stability. This is threatened, however, by the tyrannical Lord Matsudaira Naritsugu (Goro Inagaki), who threatens to plunge Japan back into civil war. With Naritsugu due to visit his brother the shogun in Edo and take up a key advisory role, his enemies concoct a clandestine plot of assassination. Veteran samurai Shimada Shinzaemon (Koji Yakusho) is entrusted with the task of assembling a team of assassins to eliminate Naritsugu and his troop of two hundred bodyguards, led by Shinzaemon's long-term rival Hanbei Onigashira (Masachika Ichimura). After a lengthy recruitment process, a diverse group of warriors are assembled. Finally trapping Naritsugu and his men in the remote village of Ochiai, the assassins employ a series of ingenious tactics to reduce the overwhelming odds. After an epic struggle that ravages the village, Shinzaemon fulfils his duty and murders Naritsugu.

13 Assassins' first scene employs various visual elements to establish its cultural, historical and cinematic authenticity. As the opening titles fade, a courtyard is revealed, its ornate, minimalist architecture a prelude to the large shrine at its centre. Kneeling before the shrine, clan elder Zusho Mamiya (Masaaki Uchino) opens his kimono to expose his torso and the white bandaging wrapped across it. Using a small tanto knife, Mamiya disembowels himself in protest against Naritsugu's tyranny. This act is a key reference point that attests to both the opening scene's historical authenticity and the film's generic fidelity. As a formal means of protest, this version of *seppuku*, a form of ritualistic suicide more commonly referred to in the West as *hara kiri*, references the act of *kanshi*, a rarely performed mode of *seppuku* designed to provoke social or political change. Stephen

Turnbull traces this practice to a famous incident in which young *daimyo* (vassal to the shogun) Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) was persuaded to take greater responsibility for his administrative duties by his retainer Hirade Kiyohide's letter of protest and eventual suicide (Turnbull, 1998, p. 305). The act of *seppuku* in *13 Assassins* underlines the historicity of the character's actions, while the *mise-en-scène* establishes authenticity through the features of the courtyard and the clothing worn by Mamiya. As a cinematic motif, suicide features heavily throughout *jidaigeki* and other period films. For example, *Hitokiri* (Hideo Gosha, 1969) climaxes with the suicide of its main antagonist Takechi (Tatsuya Nakadai), while in Kitano's 2003 version of *Zatoichi*, O-Shino (Yui Natsukawa) commits *jigai* (female suicide) in anticipation of her husband's death as he leaves to confront the eponymous blind swordsman.

There are two further suicides committed in *13 Assassins*: a young woman raped by Naritsugu slits her own throat, while her father-in-law later takes his own life according to the *seppuku* ritual. Both *Harakiri* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1962) and Miike's 2011 remake feature *seppuku* as the central component of their narratives. In Miike's version, poverty-stricken samurai Motome (Eita) requests permission to commit suicide in the esteemed court of Lord Kageyu (Koji Yakusho) even though his actual intention is to gain sympathy and, in turn, employment. Kageyu, however, calls his bluff by granting permission, thus obligating Motome to commit *seppuku*. As punishment for his deceit, Motome is forced to do this using a blunt wooden sword. The three samurai responsible for this cruelty are then forced to commit suicide themselves by Motome's adoptive father Hanshiro (Ebizo Ichikawa). As a culturally specific action governed by the strict moral codes of the samurai and a cinematic motif, *seppuku* functions as a culturally authentic action. Thus, it is significant that Miike chooses to open *13 Assassins* with the act of *seppuku*, an action rooted in samurai culture and threaded throughout a variety of period films (see Table 6.1). One might then conclude that *seppuku* serves as a generic feature in *13 Assassins*, one that initiates the film's self-presentation of Japaneseness.

In relation to another generic convention, Silver outlines the establishment of two central protagonists as exemplary swordsmen and their inevitable confrontation as a generic element of most action based *jidaigeki*: 'An encounter between master swordsmen frequently serves as the climax of the film, the event towards which most of the early narrative and character development is genotypically directed' (Silver, 2005, p. 43). In *13 Assassins* Naritsugu's chief bodyguard Hanbei speaks of

Table 6.1 Sample of major genre conventions in *jidaigeki* (1950s–)

Convention	*Films*
Tokugawa-Edo period setting	*Yojimbo/47 Samurai/Sanjuro/Jusan nin no shikaku/The 13 Assassins* (Eichi Kudo, 1962)/*Akahige/Red Beard* (Akira Kurosawa, 1965)/*Kedamono no ken/Sword of the Beast* (Hideo Gosha, 1965)/*Joi-uchi Hairyo tsuma shimatsu/Samurai Rebellion* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1967)/*Goyokin* (Hideo Gosha, 1969)/*Zatoichi to Yojinbo/Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo* (Kihachi Okamoto, 1970)/*Kamisori Hanzo/Hanzo the Razor: Sword of Justice* (Kenji Misumi, 1972)/*Ako-jo danzetsu/The Fall of Ako Castle (Kinji Fukasaku, 1978)/Shijushichinin no shikaku/47 Ronin (Kon Ichikawa, 1994)/Gohatto/The Twilight Samurai/Zatoichi/When the Last Sword is Drawn/The Hidden Blade/Shinobi/Shinobi: Heart Under Blade* (Ten Shimoyama, 2005)/*Bushi no ichibun/Love and Honour* (Yoji Yamada, 2006)/*Tsubaki Sanjuro* (Yoshimitsu Morita, 2007)/*Ichi* (Fumihiko Sori, 2008)/*Zatoichi za rasuto/Zatoichi: The Last* (Junji Sakamoto, 2010)/*13 Assassins/Hara-Kiri/Ruroni kenshin: Meiji kenkaku roman tan/Ruroni kenshin* (Keishi Otomo, 2012)/*Yurusarezaru mono/Unforgiven* (Lee Sang il, 2013)/*Ruroni kenshin: Kyoto taika-hen/Ruroni kenshin: Kyoto Inferno* (Keishi Otomo, 2014)/*Ruroni kenshin: Densetsu no saigo-hen/Ruroni kenshin: The Legend Ends* (Keishi Otomo, 2014)
Scenes involving *seppuku*	*Harakiri/Hitokiri/Zatoichi/13 Assassins/Hara-Kiri*
Two exemplary swordsmen established in narrative	*Sanjuro/The 13 Assassins/Samurai Rebellion/Goyokin/Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo/The Twilight Samurai/Zatoichi/When the Last Sword is Drawn/The Hidden Blade/Semishigure/The Samurai I Loved* (Mitsuo Kurotsuchi, 2005)/*Love and Honour/Zatoichi: The Last/13 Assassins*
Revenge and justice narrative	*47 Samurai/Yojimbo/Sanjuro/The 13 Assassins/Red Beard/Hanzo the Razor: Sword of Justice/Lone Wolf and Cub* series/*The Fall of Ako Castle/47 Ronin/The Twilight Samurai/Zatoichi/When the Last Sword is Drawn/Hana yori mo naho/Hana* (Hirokazu Koreeda, 2006)/*Tsubuki Sanjuro/13 Assassins/Hara-Kiri/Unforgiven*
Lone swordsman defeating multiple attackers	*Yojimbo/Sanjuro/The 13 Assassins/Red Beard/Samurai Rebellion/Zatoichi* series/*Lone Wolf and Cub* series/*Lady Snowblood/Ame garu/After the Rain* (Takashi Koizumi, 1999)/*Zatoichi/Tsubuki Sanjuro/Ichi/Zatoichi: The Last/13 Assassins/Love and Honour/Hara-Kiri/Ruroni kenshin/Runroni kenshin: Kyoto Inferno/Ruroni kenshin: The Legend Ends*

the fact that he and the main protagonist Shinzaemon have taken similar paths in life and that an 'ill twist of fate' (Hanbei having joined Naritsugu and Shinzaemon being chosen to assassinate Naritsugu) has brought them inevitably into conflict. Similarly, Gennosuke Hattori (Tadanobu Asano) is established in Kitano's version of *Zatoichi* as an exemplary swordsman, working as a bodyguard for the local *yakuza*, while, in parallel, his future rival Zatoichi cuts his way through a multitude of expendable villains. Hattori and Zatoichi are thus generically destined to meet as part of the film's climax. Even in the noticeably bloodless *The Twilight Samurai*, Seibei's eventual duel with the rebellious Zenemon Yogo (Min Tanaka) is constantly foreshadowed by both men's fighting prowess. In all cases, the audience is assured of an eventual confrontation because the films have remained faithful to the generic line of action-based *jidaigeki*, establishing the possibility of a final duel long before it takes place.

A consideration of recurring features in post-war *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* demonstrates the extent to which *13 Assassins* and other recent titles adhere to certain generic conventions. If one considers a range of popular *jidaigeki* and *chanbara* releases from the 1950s onwards, several recurring features emerge in addition to those I have previously discussed [Table 6.1]. A lone swordsmen pitted against a large group of attackers has been a staple of period films stretching back to the silent era, from the films of Daisuke Ito to Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* in 1961 and the long-running *Zatoichi* and *Lone Wolf and Cub* series. As a centrepiece spectacle, it has been used in contemporary productions, most notably in Kitano's *Zatoichi*, *13 Assassins*, *Zatoichi: The Last*, and in the finale of Miike's *Hara-Kiri*. Revenge and justice narratives are also common. As noted previously, Shinzaemon is entrusted with assassinating Naritsugu to preserve stability and avenge those murdered by him. In *Zatoichi*, siblings Okinu (Yuko Daike) and Seitaro (Daigoro Tachibana) seek to avenge their parents' murder at the hands of local criminals. In *Harakiri* Hanshiro enacts revenge against the court that forced his adopted son Motome into a painful suicide, while *47 Samurai*, the *Lone Wolf and Cub* series, *The Fall of Ako Castle*, and *47 Ronin* all centre around their protagonists' quests for revenge.

Adhering to certain conventions of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga*—a Tokugawa/Edo period setting, scenes involving *seppuku*, revenge/justice narrative, the establishment of two exemplary swordsman, and prolonged

battle sequences—*13 Assassins*, along with many other period films made in the early twenty-first century, presents an authentic and generically faithful cultural performance. The mode of representation throughout is unambiguous, both in terms of nationality and the film's depiction of a Japanese historical context.

The restaging of the past in recent *jidaigeki* indicates a significant reinvestment in the cultural specificity of the genre and its commercial potential, both in Japan and elsewhere. Many films are authentic in the sense that they convey this specificity through generic conventions that have been firmly established throughout the years. Yet, because *jidaigeki*'s commercial popularity has been so widespread, the genre cannot be conceptualized simply as a national phenomenon. While the mode of representation in *13 Assassins* is culturally unambiguous on a textual level, on a commercial/industrial level, different national contexts are represented in the film's financing and production. *Jidaigeki*'s transformation into a global commodity has been facilitated, in many instances, by foreign consortia and this in turn has led to the appropriation of Japanese cultural authenticity in Hollywood. Both issues raise questions concerning the creative and cultural 'ownership' of *jidaigeki*. With many *jidaigeki* productions supported by external consortia, and with feudal iconography being easily appropriated by other film industries, how culturally distinctive are Japanese period films in the wider contexts of transnational film production and film export? Despite its status as a quintessentially Japanese film genre, *jidaigeki* is subject to many of the same issues of global commodification that affect other signature genres. Contemporary *jidaigeki* must be understood therefore in terms of its cultural paradoxes; the fact that as a popular and distinctive national product, it also operates on a global scale.

Jidaigeki as a Global Commodity

It is not surprising that *jidaigeki* has had a major role to play in promoting Japanese popular culture in the twenty-first century given the global recognizability of the samurai as a Japanese cultural icon. The increase in *jidaigeki* film production during this time has coincided with the concerted efforts of Japan's creative and culture industries (along with government policy) to market Japan effectively as a consumer brand. With economic and industrial growth peaking in the late 1980s and recession having altered the dynamics of Japanese exportation, the promotion of popular culture overseas has become increasingly important to national

GDP. Distinctive brands such as anime, manga, Hello Kitty and J Horror have been prioritized for their global commercial potential.

The so-called Cool Japan initiative was co-opted by the Japanese government in the 2000s to capitalize on the popularity of distinctive cultural brands and this has continued to develop. In 2010, the Creative Industries Promotions Office was established by METI's Manufacturing Industries Bureau to maintain promotion of Japanese products under the Cool Japan rubric. In addition to film, other areas were targeted, including anime tourism. In a 2012 METI interim report, strategies were proposed to attract 'Japan followers' to 'meccas' throughout the country (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2012, p. 5). Such meccas included the Studio Ghibli Art Museum in Mitaka near Tokyo, a 'must-see' for followers of anime, while Otaku Tours were launched by the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) to invite English speakers to indulge in shopping sprees and visit anime and manga museums (Dension, 2010, p. 546). Similar to how anime's popularity has been harnessed to promote other culture industries, so too has the culture industry co-opted the authenticity of *jidaigeki* to promote national, cultural and economic growth. This has not only led to an increase in *jidaigeki* production, it has also extended to other areas of cultural promotion such as tourism. Recalling Ulf Hannerz's argument that the Japanese put their culture on exhibit as a way of displaying that culture (Hannerz, 1989, pp. 67–68), Koichi Iwabuchi shows that Japanese authenticity has been packaged as traditional culture, regardless of how authentic it actually is:

> Those Japanese cultural practices and materials that have been internationally exhibited or represented in the global forum have been predominantly officially sanctioned items of "traditional" culture which have little to do with contemporary Japanese urban culture. "Traditional Japanese culture" is a culture to be displayed in order to demarcate Japan's unique, supposedly homogenous national identity. (Iwabuchi, 2002, pp. 6–7)

More a 'chimera of authentic experience' (Tzanelli, 2007, p. 144), cultural heritage can be skilfully packaged for foreign visitors in conjunction with the global popularization of products such as film. The resurgence of *jidaigeki* film production throughout the 2000s and 2010s is thus implicated in a much wider commodification of feudal/samurai authenticity, with the industries of film and tourism filtering into one another.

In conjunction with the Cool Japan initiatives, the revival of samurai films has contributed to a revival in Japanese heritage tourism. Similar to its use of anime to attract visitors to Japan, JNTO promotes 'samurai tour' packages to visitors interested in exploring Japan's feudal history, including the 'In the Footsteps of the Samurai' tour launched in November 2010 (Japan National Tourist Organization, 2010). 'Shoguns and Samurai' tours operate to take visitors to historical sites in the former feudal capitals of Kyoto and Nara as well as rural locations around Honshu, while there has been a resurgence of battle re-enactments and samurai parades in places such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiraizumi in Iwate Prefecture.

Cinema of course offers its own form of cultural tourism, particularly in the case of historical films, thus samurai tourism relies heavily on foreign visitors' familiarity with *jidaigeki*. A prime example of film-related heritage tourism, the Toei Kyoto Studio Park, is promoted via an accessible, multilingual website (Toei Kyoto Studio Park Co., Ltd., 2016), offering English speakers the opportunity to participate in a range of activities, from swordfighting lessons to dressing in traditional costume. In addition, visitors can take guided tours of an actual Toei backlot film set with the clear implication that cultural authenticity is presented through the chimera of cinematic experience. Audience awareness of a Japanese cultural presence is heightened and there is every reason to believe that the 'knock-on' effect this has contributes to Japan's creative and cultural industries. According to their official website, the Hyogo Tourist Council advertises trips to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Himeji castle, declaring it a 'famous film location', notable for the Hollywood samurai epic *The Last Samurai* (Himeji Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2016). This particular example demonstrates how cultural heritage is promoted according to tourists' familiarity with cinematic representations of that heritage.

Tourist packages capitalize on the international commercial success of Japanese period films, particularly in English-speaking territories. As has been the case for other major Japanese film exports, period films have been distributed most effectively through home entertainment formats, allowing non-Japanese consumers to access a wide range of titles available on DVD and Blu-ray. Based on DVD sales in the US market, *jidaigeki* and other samurai-related films rank among Japan's most successful cultural exports, with 13 of the top 30 highest grossing Japanese live action films released in the USA (as of 2008): *Shogun Assassin* (ranked 27th); *Samurai Trilogy* (25th); *Yojimbo/Sanjuro*—Criterion Two Pack

(22nd); *Ran*—Criterion Collection (21st); *The Hidden Fortress* (18th); *Throne of Blood*—Criterion Collection (17th); *Zatoichi* (15th); *Yojimbo*—Criterion Collection (12th); *Kagemusha*—Criterion Collection (10th); *Rashomon*—Criterion Collection (4th); *Seven Samurai* (3rd); *Seven Samurai*—Criterion Collection (2nd); and *Akira Kurosawa*—Criterion Collection Four Pack (1st) (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2009). Theatrical grosses in the USA have also helped establish *jidaigeki* as a major cultural brand. Of the top 23 highest grossing live action films released in the US market (again as of 2008), seven are categorized as samurai-related: *Azumi* (Ryuhei Kitamura, 2003) (ranked 19th with a $24,268 box office gross); *The Hidden Blade* (17th, $37,090); *Gohatto* (14th, $114,425); *The Twilight Samurai* (8th, $659,765); *Zatoichi* (5th, $1,118,163); *Ran* (4th, $3,944,980); and *Kagemusha* (3rd, $4,000,000) (Japan External Trade Organization USA, 2009).

With *jidaigeki* becoming increasingly profitable, films about samurai and feudal Japan not only operate as distinctive national products, they also become global commodities. By virtue of this, *jidaigeki* becomes subject to different transnational processes—international coproduction, foreign financing and appropriation in Hollywood—that make it difficult to define the genre simply as a Japanese product, at least on a commercial level. Although films such as *13 Assassins*, *The Twilight Samurai*, *Zatoichi*, *When the Last Sword is Drawn* and *Hara-Kiri* provide authentic cultural performances, many of the commercial and industrial processes surrounding *jidaigeki*'s revival in the twenty-first century recontextualize the genre as a global phenomenon. As I have argued elsewhere, *jidaigeki* is by no means beyond the hegemonic reach of Western film production and film financing (Dorman, 2014). In the case of *13 Assassins*, British consortia have contributed to financing and international distribution, proving to be just as crucial to the film's success as its cultural authenticity. With that in mind, it is worth considering the impact of external commercial involvement on *jidaigeki* production and the appropriation of the genre outside Japan.

Creating Cultural Performance through Transnational Processes

Officially a Japanese/British coproduction, *13 Assassins* is culturally ambiguous on a commercial level. The involvement of London-based companies HanWay Films and Recorded Picture Company in the film's financing,

production and distribution raises questions about nationality, an issue highlighted by the UNIJAPAN International Promotion Department, who point out that the more common international coproduction becomes, the more ambiguous the film's nationality is (UNIJAPAN, 2009, p. 45). In order to determine different degrees of commercial ambiguity in Japanese coproduced films, UNIJAPAN present three industrial patterns of coproduction: (1) a film whose 'creators and investors' originate from several countries; (2) a film produced by a single country with producers, cast and crew from several countries; and (3) a foreign country investing in a Japanese film or a Japanese company investing in a foreign film (UNIJAPAN, 2009, pp. 43–45). Examples can be given to illustrate UNIJAPAN's definitions, [Table 6.2] examples that clearly problematize a conventional notion of national cinema. Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata*, for instance, appears firmly Japanese because its setting, subject matter and creative personnel are Japanese. Its sources of funding may not be Japanese, but this does little to alter the film's nationality on a textual level. *The Last Samurai*, on the other hand, is slightly more ambiguous. Its main actor and protagonist (Tom Cruise), production companies, funding sources, and dialogue language define it as a Hollywood product. Yet, aside from its language, the film is still recognizably Japanese on a textual level due to its subject matter and its historical and geographical setting. Similarly *13 Assassins* is textually Japanese and Japanese in terms of its creative personnel (cast and crew), while on a commercial/industrial

Table 6.2 UNIJAPAN's three patterns of coproduction applied to films

Pattern/definition	*Example*
Creators and investors from several countries in a film funded by those countries	*Tokyo!*—Two French directors (Michel Gondry and Leos Carax) and one South Korean (Bong Joon ho)/cast and crew from France, South Korea and Japan/funding from France, South Korea, Japan and Germany
Producers, cast and crew from several countries in a film produced by a single country	*The Last Samurai*—American producers/cast and crew from several different countries including Japan, the USA and the UK/American production companies (Warner Bros., the Bedford Falls Company, Cruise/Wagner Productions, Radar Pictures)
A foreign country investing in a Japanese film or a Japanese company investing in a foreign film	*Tokyo Sonata* (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2008)—Japanese production supported by Dutch capital. *The Ring*—American production supported by Japanese and American capital

level the film cannot be situated simply within the confines of a Japanese film industry, given the involvement of foreign production and distribution companies.

The content of *13 Assassins* is hardly ambiguous considering its generic and historical authenticity as a *jidaigeki* production. However, as an export product, the film is not defined simply on the basis of its content; one should also take into account the different national contexts represented in its production. The involvement of executive producers Toshiaki Nakazawa from Japan and Jeremy Thomas of the UK is particularly noteworthy, with their respective backgrounds reflecting the transnational nature of film industry practices in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In addition to supporting Miike's work as a producer (*Andromedia* (1998), *Chugoku no chojin/The Bird People in China* (1998), *Kikoku/Yakuza Demon* (2003), *Sukiyaki Western Django*), Nakazawa has been one of the main driving forces in the revival of *jidaigeki* and samurai films in the early twenty-first century, with credits that include *Azumi*, *Tsu desu oa rabu/Azumi 2: Death or Love* (Shusuke Kaneko, 2005), *The Samurai I Loved*, *Zatoichi: The Last*, *13 Assassins* and *Hara-Kiri*. Thomas meanwhile had worked as producer on several Asian/European coproductions, most notably *Merry Christmas Mr Lawrence* (Nagisa Oshima, 1983) (Japan and the UK), *The Last Emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987) (Italy, the UK, the USA and China) and Takeshi Kitano's *Brother* (2000), a multicultural, multilingual *yakuza* film set in Los Angeles. Thomas' finance and sales company HanWay Films supported *13 Assassins*' production. HanWay was also responsible for international distribution, securing a world premier at the Venice International Film Festival in 2010, theatrical screenings across Europe and North America, and widespread DVD distribution in the UK and the USA courtesy of Artificial Eye and Magnolia respectively.

13 Assassins is not the only example of a *jidaigeki* film receiving support from external production and funding. American, British and French consortia had been instrumental in reviving *jidaigeki* production in Japan since the 1980s, providing Japanese filmmakers with the financial means to produce period films on an epic scale. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* production in Japan began to decline, partly as the result of an oversaturation of generic, action-based *chanbara eiga* throughout the decade (this included franchises such as *Zatoichi Meets Yojimbo*, *Shogun Assassin*, *Lady Snowblood*, and *Hanzo the Razor*). As Ichiro Yamamoto, a producer at Shochiku Studios writes, there was a tendency in the late 1990s to reject *jidaigeki* at the planning stage due to

the genre's inability to bring in audiences and its expensive production costs (Yamamoto, 2014, p. 307). The critical and to some extent commercial decline of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* became part of a general downtrend in genre film production, which Davis and Yeh have attributed to the depletion of established formulae (Davis and Yeh, 2008, p. 11). Moreover, anime had in many respects superseded live action productions as the main source of samurai films, with the animated medium offering more excessively violent and fantastical spectacles than live action could provide.

In contrast, interest in feudal Japan overseas had been stoked by the success of James Clavell's 1975 novel *Shogun* and its television adaptation produced for the NBC network in 1980. Noting the emergence of 'Shogun fever' among the American public, Yoshiharu Tezuka points out that sales of Japanese food, sake and kimonos increased significantly at this time (Tezuka, 2012, pp. 120–121). The interest in samurai and feudal Japan prompted by the success of *Shogun* goes some way towards explaining American and French investment in Japanese period films during the 1980s, particularly in the case of Kurosawa and his return to samurai cinema after a period of commercial misfortune at the Japanese box office. Kurosawa's *Kagemusha* was produced in association with Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas and the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, and marked Kurosawa's return to the international film festival circuit when it was screened at Cannes. In addition, the film was nominated for two Academy Awards (Best Foreign Language Film and Best Art Direction) (Kohler, 2005, p. 59). This was followed by *Ran* in 1985, coproduced by French company, Greenwich Film Productions. Having taken six years to secure funding for *Ran*, Kurosawa eventually made what was at the time the most expensive Japanese film ever made, with a $12 million budget, thanks in part to the French producer Serge Silberman (Meyer, 2005, p. 194). What distinguished these films from other historical productions of the time were their epic scale, lavish costume design and extensive casts, which far exceeded that of lower budget genre productions in the 1970s and 1980s. Even more significantly, the international success of *Kagemusha* and *Ran* showed that a culturally specific cinema could be supported by external consortia without losing its authenticity.

Since the late 1990s, other Japanese filmmakers have sourced funding and production support from overseas, and in doing so have helped re-establish *jidaigeki* as one of Japan's leading film exports. Production

on Nagisa Oshima's 1999 film *Gohatto* was supported by Canal+ and Bac Films, while another French company, 7 Films Cinema, produced and distributed *After the Rain* the same year. In addition, Japanese/US cross-over companies Sony Pictures Entertainment and Warner Brothers Japan have invested in *jidaigeki* film production, Sony having produced *Uma wa miteita/The Sea is Watching* (Kei Kumai, 2002) while Warner Brothers contributed to the *Ruroni kenshin* trilogy between 2012 and 2014 (*Ruroni kenshin*, *Ruroni kenshin: Kyoto Inferno*, *Ruroni kenshin: The Legend Ends*) and Lee Sang il's 2013 remake of Clint Eastwood's 1992 western *Unforgiven*. With French, British, US and Japanese/US production companies investing in *jidaigeki*, Japanese filmmakers have been able to use foreign financial support and distribution networks to make their films accessible to the widest possible audience.

The collaboration of Nakazawa's Sedic International with HanWay Films and Recorded Picture company helped to ensure mainstream success overseas for Miike, a director who has often incorporated non-Japanese elements into his work while also accessing foreign production resources (see Chap. 3). Yet, given Miike's close associations with foreign consortia one might question the national identity of *13 Assassins* on a commercial/industrial level. Taking into consideration British involvement in *13 Assassins*, there are several ways of defining the film's national status. First, one could view it simply as a Japanese film on the basis of its subject matter, director, cast, dialogue language and production crew, regardless of HanWay Films and Thomas's importance in its production. The involvement of British consortia is largely inconsequential to the experience of watching *13 Assassins*; it is highly unlikely that most audiences would be aware of or even interested in the fact that they are watching an internationally coproduced film. However, the fact that they are able to see the film outside Japan in the first place is partly due to the involvement of non-Japanese consortia and their acquisition of widespread distribution deals. Although in this case content is firmly national, having been derived from the *jidaigeki* tradition, the context in which the film is made, promoted and sold is essentially transnational. This means that, as a commercial product, *13 Assassins* is culturally paradoxical. As UNIJAPAN have indicated, the more common international coproduction becomes, the more ambiguous a film's nationality will be.

The paradox of cultural performance, on the one hand, and transnational production, on the other, is symptomatic of a more globalized film industry and the effect this has had on local film production, not only in

Japan, but across Asia as well. In fact, as Peter C. Pugsley rightly points out, the collaboration between local industries and external consortia can be crucial to the success of cinemas outside Hollywood:

> In recent years sections of the Asian film industry have begun to capitalize in earnest on co-productions and the sharing of resources across national boundaries, such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and a significant rise in co-productions with the West, most notably through Hollywood and French co-productions. (Pugsley, 2013, p. 5)

For Japanese filmmakers, producers and production companies, the possibilities offered by international coproduction—shared resources, extra sources of funding, wider distribution—are not necessarily detrimental to the creation of national cinema. Transnational collaboration is in many instances conducive to the successful production and promotion of culturally distinctive cinemas. Foreign sources of finance, production support and distribution are made more accessible through an interconnected, culturally diverse network of film industries, a network that can be used to increase the global visibility of one's own culture. Simply because the mode of production may be decentred does not mean that the mode of representation is ambiguous, at least not in the case of culturally specific genres such as *jidaigeki*. Hence, *13 Assassins*, along with *Kagemusha*, *Ran*, *Gohatto*, *After the Rain*, *The Sea is Watching*, *Ichi* and *Hara-Kiri*, remain distinctly Japanese, not regardless of the transnational processes through which they are made, but partly because of them.

Creative and Commercial Ownership

Contrasting with the national spectacles of *jidaigeki* (yet also conducive to it), international coproduction has become a viable means of making Japanese cinema more ubiquitous in the mass of global cinema. Yet, coproduction does raise the issue of commercial ownership and where ownership ultimately lies. Creatively speaking, coproduced *jidaigeki* films are a product of Japan; its creators are predominantly Japanese and thus one would conclude that creative ownership in this case is Japanese. In regards to financing, production and international distribution, however, the centre of power is more difficult to situate. As noted previously, *13 Assassins* is notable for the involvement of Jeremy Thomas and HanWay Films. Even more significant though was the point at which Japanese con-

sortia were brought into the project by Thomas. In terms of commercial ownership *13 Assassins* was a British product before it was delivered to a Japanese studio. HanWay Films held the rights to the project with Miike confirmed as director before it was presented to potential buyers at the 2009 Cannes International Film Festival. Toho Studios purchased the rights for a Japanese theatrical release, by which point pre-production had already begun. In the process of being sold to Japanese consortia at Cannes, *13 Assassins* was separated from a national context. In this instance the ownership of the film cannot be firmly situated according to a single national context, whether British (financing and sales), Japanese (film production) or French (exhibition at Cannes).

Taking into consideration the appropriation of Japanese period films in other cinemas, one could go even further in discussing the issue of ownership. Despite their cultural specificity, the samurai, Japan's feudal history and the iconography of *jidaigeki* often appear in non-Japanese cinema and other media, from children's cartoons and computer games to Hollywood blockbusters. Films such as *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *The Last Samurai*, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, *47 Ronin* and *The Wolverine* show how *jidaigeki* can be incorporated into Hollywood creativity. *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, released in 2003, is peppered with samurai iconography and allusions to both *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga*. The film's main protagonist, The Bride (Uma Thurman), travels to Japan in search of revenge, a narrative modelled on the revenge/justice narratives common in Japanese period films. She wields a *katana* sword, the samurai's primary weapon, and in one memorable scene uses it to engage a group of attackers (the Crazy 88) in an epic confrontation inside a traditional Japanese *ryokan* (guest house). In the style of the exemplary swordsmen of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga*, The Bride defeats the Crazy 88 and this leads her to the film's final confrontation with the Crazy 88's leader O-Ren Ishii (Lucy Liu). With the fight staged in an ornate, snow-covered Japanese garden and with O-Ren dressed in a bold white kimono and carrying a traditional *wagasa* umbrella, Tarantino references the iconic *chanbara eiga* film *Lady Snowblood*, released in 1973, and its vengeful protagonist Yuki (Meiko Kaji). In doing so, Tarantino incorporates imagery from Japanese cinema and presents it within the pseudo-Japanese context of the film.

Since *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, Hollywood has attempted to portray Japan more authentically. *The Wolverine*, for example, places a non-Japanese protagonist, the Marvel superhero Wolverine, in a recognizable and visually iconic Japanese setting. Although the character is situated in modern-day

Tokyo, the film incorporates imagery derived from feudal history as well as *jidaigeki*—samurai armour and weaponry, *seppuku* rituals, traditional ceremonies and ninja—to lend an air of authenticity often lacking in the *Kill Bill* series. Moreover, *The Wolverine* provides a showcase for Japan as a location for foreign film production, with Tokyo placed on display for an international audience. Hollywood is literally brought to Japan and with it so too is a global audience.

Hollywood's use of Japan as an authentic location has increased significantly in the twenty-first century as major studios attempt to authenticate an American representation of Japan. The most successful example of this is *The Last Samurai*, released in 2003. Providing a romanticized vision of an 'authentic East', albeit a 'benign one' (Ma, 2008, p. 244), the film chronicles the last days of the samurai and their final stand against a newly modernized imperial army (the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877). Starring bankable Hollywood star Tom Cruise, *The Last Samurai* was a commercial success both domestically and internationally, while it was also nominated for three Academy Awards, one Golden Globe and three BAFTA awards. The film also enjoyed commercial success and critical acceptance in Japan, ranking second in the end-of-year box office for 2004 (Japan External Trade Organization, 2005b) and winning that year's Japanese Academy Award for Outstanding Foreign Language Film. With its content sourced from Japanese historical events and the *jidaigeki* tradition, *The Last Samurai* effectively sold Japan's own cultural specificity back to the Japanese market. Like other appropriations of Japanese period films made in Hollywood, the film signifies how commercially profitable creative ownership of Japanese source material can be. Indeed, the commercial success of Hollywood appropriations of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* in the Japanese domestic market is considerable and usually exceeds that

Table 6.3 Japanese box office grosses of Hollywood/Japanese films

Film	*Year of Japanese release*	*Box office gross (in US dollars)*
Kill Bill: Volume 1	2003	20,034,221
Kill Bill: Volume 2	2004	8,497,114
The Last Samurai	2003	119,268,595
Memoirs of a Geisha	2005	10,974,880
The Wolverine	2013	7,991,915
47 Ronin	2013	2,864,072

Source: Box Office Mojo (2013)

of more 'authentic' Japanese productions [Table 6.3]. This was certainly true of *The Last Samurai*. Grossing $119,268,595 at the Japanese box office, the film made a significantly larger profit than the most successful *jidaigeki* films released in the 2000s, including *Zatoichi* with a total gross of $23,696,316, and *13 Assassins* ($16,752,363) (Box Office Mojo, 2013).

In regards to *who* owns cinematic representations of Japan, there is of course no straightforward answer. Films are often created through interactions between filmmakers, producers, studios, distributors and financers that transcend geographical boundaries. Japanese film projects are often subject to decentralized processes of production and distribution, and are thus culturally paradoxical as commodities. Writing in *The Guardian* shortly before the UK theatrical release of *Zatoichi*, Ryan Gilbey makes the point that the resurgence of foreign interest in *jidaigeki* is not only attributable to Japanese cinema, but also to Hollywood productions that have appropriated and popularized samurai iconography:

> with *Kill Bill* and *The Last Samurai*, Hollywood has realised, as it first did 50 years ago, that the swish of a sword and the espousal of an austere and exotic philosophy can still set tills ringing. This is a boost, too, when it comes to exporting those movies to the lucrative Asian market, even if the idea of flogging *Kill Bill* to Japanese audiences is just a twenty-first century version of taking coals to Newcastle. (Gilbey, 2004)

If other film industries are able to incorporate distinctive elements of Japanese cinema into their productions and sell them successfully to Japan, then who actually owns these elements and how can cultural authenticity be considered wholly authentic or national in such circumstances? The fact that *jidaigeki* remains a globally popular genre that is simultaneously produced in Japan and appropriated elsewhere blurs the distinctions between national and transnational cinema. *Jidaigeki* is clearly part of a much wider shift in national film production whereby Japanese film content is not simply exported but also imported in the form of Hollywood releases.

Both creatively and commercially the samurai and period film genres are incorporated into a non-Japanese context (Hollywood production). Hollywood reaps the financial rewards of borrowing from Japanese sources to the point of selling images of *jidaigeki* back to Japan at a profit. This has also been true of Hollywood remakes of Japanese horror films (see Chap. 4). In both cases Japan provides a fertile breeding ground of ideas that are incorporated into Hollywood's machine of global success:

> It is not too much of a stretch to imagine that the interest in Asian films shown by western-based media giants is little more than an extension of the Orientalist trope—another attempt to exploit the creativity of the East, long milked for its unique and grand ideas [...]. (Pugsley, 2013, p. 4)

The 'takeover' of Japanese images, iconography and subject matter by Hollywood studios is far too easily simplified along Orientalist lines. It is easy to see Hollywood/Japanese films as a parasitical appropriation of ideas turned into exotic (and often stereotypical) representations of the 'Orient', which are then sold back to the original source. It would appear that ownership and therefore the power to represent lie squarely with Hollywood, leading to what Ziauddin Sardar describes as a created vision of the Orient that has become integral to the 'aesthetic of the West' (Sardar, 1999, p. 12). But, this does not take into account the possibility that Hollywood films like *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *The Last Samurai* and *The Wolverine* contribute (whether directly or indirectly) to the efforts of Japanese film workers and cultural policy-makers in establishing Japanese popular culture in a competitive global market. Nor does it suggest that Japanese popular culture is in fact able to capitalize on its increased global visibility, even if made more visible by Hollywood.

'There is much to suggest', writes Pugsley, 'that Asian media is well able to hold its own against encroaching Western media hegemons' (Pugsley, 2013, p. 4). International coproduction is one method through which local industries can 'hold their own' against larger industries. Coproduction allows industries to use funding and production sourced from other countries, and, as a result, create culturally specific films that can be sold overseas. *13 Assassins* clearly shows how Japanese film workers use transnational arrangements of coproduction and distribution to create authentic representations of Japan, representations that are accessible, marketable and profitable beyond Japan.

The 'Hollywoodization' of Japanese genre films is another way that the local industry can benefit from external consortia. As discussed in Chap. 4, Japanese film content is developed specifically for the purpose of selling that content to overseas parties. The All Nippon Entertainment Works (ANEW) was launched in 2011 with investment from the Japanese government. Charged with boosting the profitability of Japanese content in the global market, ANEW has contributed to Japan's global cultural pres-

ence by adapting local stories and characters to film production in other countries, usually by optioning undeveloped projects and selling remake rights to Hollywood. Compared to coproduction strategies, ANEW's attempts to make Japanese content more accessible are an indirect method of spreading Japanese cultural influence and one that clearly de-emphasizes the national origins of film content.

In contrast, the Hollywoodization of Japanese genre films represents a more obvious Japanese influence. Through the saturation of Hollywood films mass audiences are exposed to numerous features of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga*, actual Japanese locations, as well as acting talent: Sonny Chiba, Jun Kunimura and Chiaki Kuriyama in *Kill Bill: Volume 1*; Ken Watanabe, Hiroyuki Sanada, Koyuki and Shin Koyamada in *The Last Samurai*; and Sanada, Rila Fukushima and Tao Okamoto in *The Wolverine*. Sanada, an established actor in Japan since the 1980s and a regular presence in *jidaigeki* cinema, has benefitted from the wider exposure that comes with Hollywood roles. In addition to major roles in *The Last Samurai* and *The Wolverine*, Sanada has appeared in several Hollywood films, including *The White Countess* (James Ivory, 2005), *Rush Hour 3* (Brett Ratner, 2007), *Sunshine* (Danny Boyle, 2007), *Speed Racer* (Andy and Lana Wachowski, 2008), *The Railway Man* (Jonathan Teplitzky, 2013), *47 Ronin*, *Mr Holmes* (Bill Condon, 2015), and *Minions* (Kyle Balda and Pierre Coffin, 2015), while remaining active in the Japanese industry. By securing roles overseas, famous Japanese actors such as Sanada, Watanabe and Tadanobu Asano (who has appeared in the coproduction *Mongol*, *Thor* (Kenneth Branagh, 2011), *Battleship* (Peter Berg, 2012), *Thor: The Dark World* (Alan Taylor, 2013) and *47 Ronin* among other films) contribute to an increasing Japanese presence in global cinema, a presence that inevitably bolsters the efforts of cultural initiatives in promoting Japanese culture and creativity.

The presence of Japanese iconography, subject matter, locations and actors in Hollywood films suggests that they have been appropriated by Hollywood in a way that is detrimental to Japanese cinema's status in the global industry; ideas, images and actors are acquired from Japan and incorporated into big budget productions that dwarf the production costs and box office profits of films made in Japan. Yet, the Hollywoodization of Japanese cinema is not quite as straightforward an issue as it appears to be. With *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* imagery more prevalent than ever before, does the appropriation of Japanese cinema represent 'Japanization',

in other words, a Japanese influence that manifests itself in American cinema? Certainly, it testifies to how powerful and widespread Japanese popular culture is in the twenty-first century. Even if the representation of Japan in certain films may be inauthentic, stereotypical or even downright inaccurate, audiences around the world are nevertheless becoming more aware of Japan, Japanese culture and Japanese cinema via appropriated images.

Films such as *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, *The Last Samurai* and *The Wolverine* show how Japanese period films are incorporated into Hollywood, a testament to the global popularity of the samurai, yet also to the transnational influence of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga*. The appropriation of these genres and, more generally, the appropriation of East Asian cinemas in Hollywood is, however, more complex. The use of Japanese iconography in big budget Hollywood films is both problematic for the Japanese industry because ultimately it favours the appropriator commercially. Hollywood demonstrates its creative and commercial power; the power to appropriate, reinterpret and sell film content that has originated elsewhere, content that then becomes the property of Hollywood studios. American ownership of Japanese film content is emphasized even more by the fact that in many cases, including J Horror remakes and *jidaigeki* appropriations, Hollywood sells reinterpreted Japanese content back to Japan and, in the process, makes large profits.

On the other hand, the creative and commercial takeover of Japanese content by a larger, more globally ubiquitous industry does present certain benefits, specifically the promotion of Japanese popular culture around the world. This is particularly true of films that explicitly pay homage to *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* (*Kill Bill: Volume 1*) or strive to represent Japan authentically, whether using Japanese locations and acting talent to recreate historical events (*The Last Samurai*) or to situate an established Hollywood character in Japan itself (*The Wolverine*). In terms of who benefits from Hollywood's appropriation of Japanese cinema, the issues of creative and commercial ownership are certainly worth considering, given that the larger industry in this case reaps significant commercial rewards in using Japanese content, locations and actors. However, to think of this simply in terms of a hegemonic relationship between smaller and larger industries is reductive. Japanese film personnel have started to play a stronger role in Hollywood production and, even in the form of American cinema, audiences around the world are exposed to Japanese

iconography and, more specifically, the iconography of culturally specific film genres.

Conclusion

In becoming more globally visible and commercially profitable, the samurai and *jidaigeki* are no longer the sole preserve of Japanese filmmakers, producers and production companies. The cultural paradoxes evident in *jidaigeki* production show how distinctive national film genres can become subject to industry practices that seemingly undermine their distinctiveness. Yet, through such practices, *jidaigeki* reaches a larger audience. By using extensive networks of financing, coproduction and distribution, *jidaigeki* remains a culturally distinctive Japanese film product. In this regard, cultural representation is facilitated by global networks of film production.

Slightly more problematic than the commercial involvement of external consortia is the appropriation of samurai and *jidaigeki* iconography in Hollywood productions, particularly those that are successful in the Japanese market. Hollywood appropriates Japanese authenticity and generates greater commercial profits than actual *jidaigeki* productions are able to. Through appropriation, Hollywood's hegemonic position within the global film industry is maintained, as is its control over film content and representation. It is, however, reductive to consider this simply in terms of a hegemonic relationship between Japan and the West. Similar in many ways to American remakes of Japanese horror, the appropriation of *jidaigeki* represents the growing power and wide-reaching influence of Japanese popular culture in the English-speaking world. Through the transnational processes of film financing and coproduction and the representation of Japan in Hollywood, *jidaigeki* remains one of Japan's premier cultural exports in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the use of transnational arrangements of financing and production demonstrates Japanese adaptability to the realities of a globally interconnected and culturally ambiguous film industry.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusions

Across a variety of genres, from cult cinema and horror to drama and *jidaigeki*, contradictory images and ideas of Japanese national identity, ethnicity, cultural iconography and national cinema emerge. Japaneseness in its various forms is represented in contrasting ways as filmmakers, producers and production companies respond to the demands of a globalized film industry and an ever-expanding market for Japanese cinema. As I have demonstrated in this book, Japan's cultural specificity is presented to a global market, yet rarely is the act of representation straightforward; while some films emphasize their national identity through a strategy of representation which I have referred to as cultural performance, others de-emphasize that status, even going as far as to conceal cultural features. The cultural ambiguity generated by such contrasting representations is further compounded by the interconnected nature of global film production, with transnational processes of production, financing, distribution and exhibition factoring more and more into strategies of cultural representation. As a result, films are not only culturally paradoxical on a textual level, i.e. in the way they represent Japan, but are also ambiguous as national products because of the multiple national and transnational contexts of their actual production.

Due to paradoxical modes of representation and involvement from foreign consortia, film exports may be questioned as national cinema, particularly when external commercial and industrial factors have an influence on national film industries. Such factors can certainly have a profound

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impact on the representation of nationality. The constellation of influences, both internal and external, that shape national cinemas in the twenty-first century raises questions concerning the cultural distinctiveness of those cinemas and the level of autonomy national film industries have in regards to an expanding global market. My analysis of Japanese cinema in the twenty-first century provides readers with an opportunity to reassess the nationality of films created through transnational commercial and industrial processes, while also provoking a reconsideration of cultural representation. By this, I mean the representation of national identity, ethnicity, language and cultural iconography, and how modes of representation not only articulate cultural specificity, but also reflect a globalized film industry and a more diverse film market.

As many films demonstrate, the contrasts between cultural specificity and non-specificity, as well as those between a national film industry and a globally interconnected industry are not necessarily irreconcilable. The incorporation of external cultural features into Japanese films, *Sukiyaki Western Django*, *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man* and *Pulse*, for example, disorientates the perception and understanding of those films as 'national cinema'. However, this does not represent the victory, as it were, of culturally homogenizing forces over the specificity of Japan; on the contrary, cultural ambiguity and concealment can be used to articulate encounters between the nation and the external world. In other instances, transnational processes that seemingly undermine national autonomy, such as international coproduction and external financing, are used to reinforce cultural specificity: the clearest example of this is the role played by non-Japanese production companies in the revival of *jidaigeki* since the 1980s, and specifically their support of films that are overtly national in terms of content. Practices that contradict and undermine the concept of national cinema can therefore be conducive to the creation and popularization of culturally specific film genres, a collaborative arrangement that helps to maintain the cultural distinctiveness of national cinemas. One can conclude that despite engendering a sense of cultural disorientation, external factors often work in tandem with a narcissistic tendency to promote one's nationality and culture in a highly competitive global industry.

For Japan in the early twenty-first century, transnational collaboration has been vital in disseminating films at a time when gross national product has come to depend more and more on cultural production, certainly more so than it had during Japan's economic boom years. The creation and promotion of signature products, such as anime, manga,

computer games and film genres (J Horror, *jidaigeki*, etc.) have been given new impetus since the 1990s by government and culture industry policies designed to make Japanese pop culture internationally renowned and profitable. Japan raises its cultural capital in the global market and thus maintains a distinctive cultural presence. Ironically, however, this is often achieved by selling products that conceal or de-emphasize Japan's uniqueness, even to the extent that strategies of concealment (*kokusaika*, *mukokuseki*) and adaptation (glocalization) have featured heavily in the nation's cultural and economic output. For a nation so often singled out in film and cultural studies as a unique and self-contained culture, such strategies appear uncharacteristic, even counterproductive. Such a conundrum begs the question which is at the root of all the films discussed in this book: why is Japan represented paradoxically; what are the motivations for this?

Paradoxical Japaneseness

If one looks at certain modes of representation in Japanese popular culture, it appears that national identity and cultural distinctiveness are of little importance to filmmakers, film producers, animators, computer game designers and other creative personnel. Indeed, for many commentators on Japanese popular culture, the apparent lack of culturally specific features in Japanese products has been the subject of much interest and debate. Koichi Iwabuchi, for one, has produced a considerable and influential body of work exploring Japanese strategies designed to 'universalize' cultural and economic products (see Iwabuchi (2002, 2007, 2008). What Iwabuchi refers to as the 'transnationalization' of Japanese popular culture allows Japan to 'go beyond' its hitherto introverted and self-contained cultural formation (Iwabuchi, 2002, p. 69), to transcend cultural specificity and the restrictions of a national context in order to assert a leading role in both Asian and global cultural spheres. However, even when the restrictive national context is transcended, say, through the production of culturally neutral consumer products, the nation itself remains a distinctive cultural force able to assert its presence across the globe. Therefore, the global brand of 'Japan' is maintained, even in the form of cultural and economic products that do not scream Japan in the face of the consumer.

Like Iwabuchi, Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus (1988), Roland Robertson (1995) and to some extent Mika Ko (2010) have highlighted Japan's distinct/indistinct cultural presence in the global market and its

ability to assert a widespread influence in new, subtle and at times contradictory ways. What all seem to agree on is that Japanese cultural indistinctiveness is not detrimental to a distinctive cultural presence, but is in actual fact an important and even defining aspect of Japan's relationship with cultural and economic globalization. Furthermore, I would add that Japan's cultural presence, whether or not cultural specificity is concealed or performed, is inherent in all, if not most of the products that the nation has successfully exported. Consider, for example, the films analysed in this book. Whether emphasizing or de-emphasizing cultural specificity, many films nevertheless draw attention to Japan itself, either to disorientate one's perceptions of it as a unique and self-contained culture, or to reinforce its uniqueness.

Consider *Sukiyaki Western Django*, arguably one of the most culturally hybrid films to emerge from Japan in the twenty-first century. It adopts cultural features derived from other national contexts and underlines the malleability of national identity through an aesthetic style that lampoons cultural iconography. It is tempting to suggest that the film is explicitly anti-national in its subversion of national characteristics, most notably ethnicity and language. Yet, clearly at its centre, *Sukiyaki Western Django* is still concerned with Japan itself and specifically the essentialized nature of its national identity. For all its references to Italian and Hollywood westerns and its use of English language, the film is still national in the sense that it tells the viewer much about the construction (as well as deconstruction) of Japaneseness.

Although the content of many Japanese films suggests a lack of interest in the specificities of Japanese culture and society, this is simply a strategy designed to adapt specificities in a way that is accessible to the widest possible audience. Cultural concealment de-emphasizes Japaneseness so that films have a more universal appeal, while, on the other hand, cultural performance emphasizes it because, as has become abundantly clear in the 1990s and 2000s, an increasing number of consumers *are* interested in Japanese culture. In response to a diverse global audience, films have had to become increasingly flexible in how they represent the country that produces them. After all, many who purchase and enjoy Japanese products are not necessarily interested in their national origin, while many others are. Film and cultural production adapt to varying levels of interest across different audiences, invoking or revoking cultural specificity as and when required. One is not presented with a single monolithic representation of

Japan, but multiple Japans, some more culturally ambiguous than others, but all inherently Japanese in one way or another.

Softening Japaneseness

Writing in 1988, Jean Baudrillard saw the emerging paradoxes in Japanese cultural and economic production that have since characterized the content of so many export products. For Baudrillard, Japan operated as a 'weightless artificial satellite' able to adapt to the world around it and represent itself in a myriad of contrasting and contradictory ways:

> In the future, power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity who know how to exploit that situation to the full. Look at Japan, which to a certain extent has pulled off this trick better than the US itself, managing, in what seems to us an unintelligible paradox, to transform the power of territoriality and feudalism into that of deterritoriality and weightlessness. Japan is already a satellite of the planet Earth […] Whether we like it or not, the future has shifted towards artificial satellites. (Baudrillard, 1988, p. 76)

Presenting such a succinct metaphor of paradoxical representation, Baudrillard illustrates how a distinct cultural presence may be asserted by being adaptable to the changing demands of a global market (as well as the changing production practices this requires). Although terms employed by Baudrillard, such as weightless and artificial, are problematic, suggesting a certain lack of substance or meaning, the satellite is a fitting image with which to understand the nature of cultural production and export as it relates to globalization. If one thinks of cultural products as exports meant to circulate around the world, then it makes sense that they would demonstrate, as Baudrillard suggests, an ability to be paradoxical; to be culturally specific or not (or both) according to a global context.

Of course, being adaptable to a global market is not unique to Japanese cultural production. Several writers have identified the USA as a specialist in exporting culturally neutral products that simultaneously convey the universal and the national. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, assert that globalization is an extension of American political and cultural influence, an extension of the US Constitution into the wider world (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 182). Accordingly, Hollywood films may carry with them certain cultural or political values specific to the USA, yet do

so through the guise of universal entertainment. The same can be said of other iconic US products aimed at global consumerism: George Ritzer uses the term 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1998) to describe the global spread of the McDonald's fast food chain, a brand that is both American and, due to its global ubiquity, no longer specific to that context. Paradoxically, the presence and influence of the nation via cultural, economic and consumer exports are asserted, but not always overtly. This paradox is at the root of what Joseph Nye terms soft power (Nye, 1991, 2005), a nation's ability to maintain power and influence in ways more subtle and benign than aggressive political interference or military expansion. The exercising of soft power is neither a new phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to any single country. However, Japan, like the USA, is worth highlighting because of its use of culturally paradoxical modes of representation to 'soften' and assert a Japanese market presence.

Of great importance in recent years, writes Chris Burgess in *The Japan Times*, has been Japan's exercise of soft power, its 'ability to influence and attract others noncoercively through the use of cultural resources' (Burgess, 2008). Japanese soft power has manifested itself in various ways, most strikingly in the production of culturally paradoxical films, animation and computer games, and in the export of automobiles and electronics. For a nation whose military power and political influence were subdued in the late twentieth century (as the direct result of Japanese military aggression in World War II and the US Occupation), the production of internationally accessible goods became a viable means not only of boosting GDP, but also of re-establishing Japan on the world stage. In recent years deteriorating growth potential in the industrial/economic sector has opened up new possibilities for Japan's creative and culture industries. In the 1980s and 1990s, this meant an increase in the production and export of culturally neutral anime and computer games produced for Nintendo and Sega. Capitalizing on the growing international popularity of these products, various initiatives and brands have been launched in the twenty-first century to make Japanese popular culture more attractive to the outside world, as well as more distinctive.

When understood in the context of Japan's post-bubble economic recession, the production of accessible pop culture and the introduction of new creative and cultural initiatives aimed at foreign consumers appear as soft power, an assertion of national influence through export that helps counterbalance diminishing returns in other production sectors. To be adaptable, both to these developments and a burgeoning global market,

Japanese cultural production has had to change. As discussed throughout this book, there are both artistic and economic motivations for culturally paradoxical representation. For some filmmakers, national identity is already paradoxical and this is only emphasized further the more interconnected the world becomes. From *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*'s cultural hybridity to the culturally indistinct 'global city' of *Pulse*, filmmakers articulate the profound disorientation that occurs when the local and the global come into contact, yet also question the very fundaments of a distinctive national identity in a globalized world.

The desire to represent Japan, either ambiguously or, as is the case with *Dolls*, *Departures* and *13 Assassins*, overtly, is interwoven with economic motivations linked to the global market for Japanese cinema. Through more widespread distribution, exhibition and production practices, Japanese filmmakers and other film personnel have the opportunity to employ different methods of proliferation, some of which appear to undermine the notion of an autonomous and self-contained film industry. Yet, the use of production methods within a global industry, such as international coproduction, is itself paradoxical; in the case of coproduction, national and non-national resources are consolidated to create overtly national films that reinforce a sense of cultural distinctiveness. This, in turn, bolsters the nation's presence in the global market and the efforts of the aforementioned creative and cultural initiatives in promoting Japan as a global brand. By demonstrating a soft power strategy of cultural production and representation, the films analysed in this book illustrate the paradoxical nature of contemporary cinemas and film industry practices. Often contradictory and disorientating in their representation of Japan, these films are local/global texts borne out of disparate, but interrelated contexts.

Exporting National Cinema

I have sought to convey the different ways in which contemporary films appear culturally paradoxical. The films discussed are approached, first, as culturally paradoxical products on a textual level (see Chaps. 3 and 4) and, second, as culturally ambiguous products in regards to their commercial/industrial status (Chaps. 3, 4, 5 and 6). While cultural concealment can be related to Japanese soft power and reassessments of cultural and ethnic homogeneity, the industrial contexts of certain films are highly revealing of the ambiguity of contemporary film production. For example,

while contemporary *jidaigeki* films project stable images of Japaneseness, the investment of foreign capital and the appropriation of *jidaigeki* in Hollywood blur the distinctions between national and non-national film ownership.

Perhaps the transnational practices evident in both Japanese cinema and the global film industry as a whole might be of interest to Isolde Standish: 'Do such things as "national cinemas" exist, and if so where, and indeed is it possible and/or necessary to locate the "local" within the seemingly overwhelming co-opting forces of the postmodern "global" hegemony?' (Standish, 2005, p. 340). These questions, Standish suggests, arise out of many factors, including some discussed in this study, such as the 'promotion of "national cinemas" as a marketing strategy in the "art house cinema circuit"', 'the role of film festivals as markets for the sale of films', and the 'increasing hybrid nature of film content' (Standish, 2005, p. 340). In order to understand the effect of these external influences further, some of the questions posed by Standish are worth addressing.

First, Standish asks whether national cinemas exist and, if so, where. As I have argued, there is such a thing as national cinema that can be identified through certain cultural specificities: the thematic concerns of Japanese media horror; the cultural spectacle of *Dolls*; *jidaigeki* genre conventions. However, the idea of a distinctive national cinema is continually distorted, with cultural features being concealed and emphasized. Films may appear 'non-Japanese' aesthetically, yet still assert a distinctive cultural presence, while others appear highly Japanese, yet are created through transnational production processes. In addition, the fact that Japanese film genres can be appropriated, whether through remakes, homage or pastiche, and then successfully exported to the 'point of origin' adds another layer of complexity to the issue of national cinema. As to *where* national cinemas are to be located, this does not warrant a straightforward answer. What the case studies in this book indicate is that national identity and cultural iconography are adaptable and not restricted to an essentialist reading of what makes them distinctive.

Second, Standish queries if it is possible and/or necessary to locate the local within the co-opting forces of global hegemony. My analysis of cultural concealment and commercial recontextualization in *Sukiyaki Western Django* and *Tetsuo: The Bullet Man*, and the cultural spectacles of *Dolls*, *Departures* and *13 Assassins*, suggests that it is possible. That being said, national cinema can be co-opted in the form of remakes, the sale of film content and transnational production, while representation

itself is often constructed according to non-national commercial interests. Perhaps, more important than asking whether it is possible to locate the local within global cultural hegemony, is to ask, as Standish does, whether it is necessary. In terms of selling exports, I would argue that the promotion of local culture remains vital to the international success of film exports. This is particularly true when it comes to the promotion of films through specific policies and initiatives designed to establish the nation as a global brand. As the success of contemporary *jidaigeki* indicates, cultural specificity filters into many other aspects of national brand selling, tourism, for example, with the 'local' firmly established as a global commodity.

To answer Standish's question more directly, I would argue that it is necessary to locate the local within forms of global hegemony because cultural performance remains a vital element in the global profitability of cultural products. Japanese cinema has clearly indicated this at various points in its history. From the success of Japanese period films at major European festivals in the 1950s to *jidaigeki* in the twenty-first century, overt displays of locality have been instrumental in selling Japanese cinema internationally. Moreover, self-reflexive strategies of cultural performance provide a counterbalance to the strategies of cultural concealment triggered by what Standish describes as the co-opting forces of the postmodern global hegemony.

Contemporary Orientalism

The popularity of Japanese cinema around the world, and specifically its popularity in the UK and the USA, is still predicated to a large extent on its inherent 'foreignness'. Whether through the DVD packaging and promotion of horror and extreme cinema in English language territories, the success of cultural performance on the international film festival circuit or the external funding of *jidaigeki*, foreign interest in Japanese cinema is still heavily focused on and in some cases invested in Japanese 'uniqueness'.

Unsurprisingly, Japanese signature genres such as anime, J Horror, extreme cinema and *jidaigeki*, along with the work of directors Takashi Miike, Shinya Tsukamoto, Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Takeshi Kitano, are viewed as representative of Japanese film culture, despite offering somewhat contradictory representations of Japan. Also of little surprise is the commercial success of these genres and filmmakers internationally, whether this is measured in theatrical screenings, VHS and DVD sales, widespread distribution or recognition from major film festivals.

Such commercial success has exceeded that of more 'mundane' films that arguably represent Japanese life and society in the twenty-first century far more accurately, specifically the work of renowned directors Hirokazu Koreeda, Naomi Kawase, Shinji Aoyama, Shunji Iwai, and Yutaka Tsuchiya. The proliferation of Japanese popular culture in the twenty-first century is still reliant on the presentation of Japan as a unique, highly distinctive entity. This of course runs contrary to strategies of concealment that 'universalize' Japanese cultural products. However, I would emphasize that in order to make Japanese cinema more ubiquitous in the global market, filmmakers and film consortia have had to adopt paradoxical modes of representation, as well as transnational production and distribution practices. In this way cultural representation, both on textual and commercial/industrial levels, is balanced; it is both universally accessible and highly distinctive. In accordance, the reception of Japanese cinema in recent years has often appeared contradictory: some scholars, namely Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus (1988) and Susan J. Napier (2007), have suggested a disinterest in Japanese specificity among consumers of Japanese products (see Chap. 2), while cultural concealment in computer games, animation and film seems to indicate a need to de-emphasize Japaneseness in order to make these products accessible to non-Japanese.

At the same time, there has clearly been a resurgence of foreign interest in the Japaneseness of certain products. The popularity of *jidaigeki* and *chanbara eiga* and other period films, and their influence on Hollywood has been considerable, while the reception of Japanese horror by mainstream media and online fan communities has emphasized cultural specificity as a key factor in the cross-over appeal of many films. There has been a clear appreciation of the specific elements that make Japanese films distinctive, thus, leading to the production of more 'exotic' films which self-reflexively perform for a non-Japanese audience. The use of self-reflexive modes of representation evokes the issue of orientalism, an issue that, although not discussed in great depth in this study, nevertheless warrants some consideration in the context of twenty-first-century cultural performance.

The production of cultural performance films represents a desire for something distinctly local, both for the filmmaker and the audience. As has been apparent in English language studies of Japanese cinema, cultural specificity (or at least aspects perceived to be unique to Japan) is maintained as an essential element in both understanding and enjoying Japanese films. This is certainly evident in the consumption of Japanese cinema in the West, from the devoted 'fanboy' subcultures that have congregated

around specific genres (*kaiju eiga* monster movies, anime, J Horror, *jidaigeki*, *chanbara eiga*) to the marketing tactics of Tartan Films, Premier Asia, Optimum Asia and Media Blasters, who have used discourses of difference (Needham, 2006, p. 9) to promote Japanese films. In such cases, cultural otherness is central to Japanese cinema's success in the English language market. Similarly, otherness is a major factor in international film festival success, given the fact that most Japanese submissions to the major festivals in Europe have tended to be historical or self-reflexive in nature. The concealment of distinctive culture features in certain films is counterbalanced by an emphasis on nationality in others, therefore, indicating a considerable global market for films that represent Japan in exotic terms.

As I discussed in Chaps. 5 and 6, cultural/national identity can be performed; specific cultural signifiers are evoked, generic conventions of Japanese signature genres are adhered to, and ritualistic displays (*bunraku* theatre, *nokanshi* ceremonies) emphasize a national context. For many filmmakers, cultural iconography and Japanese film traditions have a distinct 'use value' in the global market. In *Dolls* and *13 Assassins* nationality is processed into performance, a self-reflexive strategy of representation partly motivated by external interest in Japanese culture and the commercial resources offered to Miike and Kitano. In this regard, Japaneseness is performed specifically to a non-Japanese audience in ways that reinforce notions of Japanese uniqueness and otherness. With Japanese film production linked more and more to an external commercial/industrial context, performing one's Japaneseness narcissistically is implicated in the Occident's desire to see the Orient as an exotic and easily consumable spectacle.

Yingjin Zhang argues that globalization tends to favour the global at the expense of the local (Zhang, 2010, p. 5). However, if one considers the promotion and consumption of Japanese films on a global level, it becomes clear that 'being local' plays a significant role in the global popularization of Japanese culture in the twenty-first century, with transnational production and distribution practices being used specifically *for* the exhibition of cultural specificity. The emphasis placed upon cultural specificities in film production and cultural policy-making (e.g. Cool Japan) shows that being 'other' in the eyes of the world has a use value that translates into both cultural and actual capital. Considering that cultural performance benefits the producing nation while catering to foreign expectations, it is easy to see how the export of Japanese cinema parallels Edward Said's definition of orientalism in the 1970s:

> Our initial description of Orientalism as a learned field now acquires a new concreteness. A field is often an enclosed space. The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe. (Said, 1978, p. 63)

From self-orientalizing strategies employed by Daiei Studios in the 1950s to the work of Kitano and Miike's first foray into *jidaigeki*, performing to the West in a highly staged manner is hardly a new mode of representation. The oriental 'subject' is still expected to perform within 'enclosed' spaces affixed to Europe and North America: the film festival, the *bunraku* theatre, traditional rituals, the feudal past, Japan itself. Performance as a mode of representation still requires an audience that will recognize it in terms of its foreignness, therefore, an essentialist/orientalist appreciation of Japanese culture is as vital to the global spread of cultural products as are strategies of concealment and accessibility.

Cultural performance, as it has been discussed in this book, is always related to external commercial/industrial contexts: film festival selection; the use of 'art cinema' as an effective marketing term; international coproduction; non-Japanese sources of funding. External consortia are heavily invested in the representation of Japan as a unique culture, a culture distinct from the rest of the world and the West in particular. This suggests an essentialist tendency, both in Japan and the West, to understand Japaneseness as otherness; to understand the 'Japanese' in terms of their difference from non-Japanese (Cazdyn, 2014, p. 26). A tendency still exists in the English-speaking world to perceive Japan along the same lines: the Japanese are 'like this' or 'like that'. So it is important that Japan finds new and flexible ways of representing itself, both as a highly distinct culture and a component of a wider global context. Paradoxically, Japan is drawn closer to its external audiences (made more familiar) through its products, while simultaneously maintaining a distance by appearing exotic in the minds of foreign consumers.

The films analysed in this book are not simply identifiable as products of 'national cinema'. Instead they raise questions about how one defines national cinema as well as cultural and commercial ownership in an increasingly globalized marketplace. 'Nation', 'nationality', and 'national culture' are all contestable within such a context, as film content and

production/distribution practices engender contradictory ideas about Japan. Though cultural performance provides the novelties of exoticism and otherness one might expect from Japanese film exports, those exports are also constructing a cultural identity that is and may continue to be highly paradoxical.

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Filmography of Case Study Films (in chronological order of release)

Kairo/Pulse
118 mins, col.
Released: 2001 (Japan)
Director: Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Screenplay: Kiyoshi Kurosawa
Cinematography: Junichiro Hayashi
Editing: Junichi Kikuchi
Sound: Makio Ika
Original Music: Takefumi Haketa
Producers: Ken Inoue, Seiji Okuda, Shun Shimizu, Atsuyuki Shimoda, Yasuyoshi Tokuma, and Hiroshi Yamamoto
Main Cast: Haruhiko Kato, Kumiko Aso, Koyuki, Kurume Arisaka, Kenji Mizuhashi, and Masatoshi Matsuyo
Production Companies: Daiei Eiga, Hakuhodo, Imagica, and Nippon Television Network Corporation (NTV)

Doruzu/Dolls
114 mins, col.
Released: 2002 (Japan)
Director: Takeshi Kitano
Screenplay: Takeshi Kitano
Cinematography: Katsumi Yanagijima

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Editing: Takeshi Kitano
Sound: Senji Horiuchi
Original Music: Joe Hisaishi
Producers: Masayuki Mori and Takio Yoshida
Main Cast: Hidetoshi Nishijima, Miho Kanno, Tatsuya Mihashi, Chieko Matsubara, Tsutomu Takeshige, and Kyoko Fukuda
Production Companies: Bandai Visual Company, Office Kitano, Tokyo FM Broadcasting Company, and TV Tokyo

Sukiyaki uesutan jango/Sukiyaki Western Django
121 mins, col.
Released: 2007 (Japan)
Director: Takashi Miike
Screenplay: Takashi Miike and Masa Nakamura
Cinematography: Toyomichi Kurita
Editing: Yasushi Shimamura
Sound: Jun Nakamura
Original Music: Koji Endo
Producers: Nobuyuki Tohya, Masao Owaki, and Toshiaki Nakazawa
Main Cast: Hideaki Ito, Yusuke Iseya, Koichi Sato, Kaori Momoi, Teruyuki Kagawa, Yoshino Kimura, Masanobu Ando, Shun Oguri, and Quentin Tarantino
Production Companies: A-Team, Dentsu, Geneon Entertainment, Nagoya Broadcasting Network (NBN), Sedic International, Shogakukan, Sony Pictures Entertainment (Japan), Sukiyaki Western Django Film Partners, Toei Company, Tokyu Recreation, and TV Asahi

Okuribito/Departures
130 mins, col.
Released: 2008 (Japan)
Director: Yojiro Takita
Screenplay: Kundo Koyama
Cinematography: Takeshi Hamada
Editing: Akimasa Kawashima
Sound: Osamu Onodera and Satoshi Ozaki
Original Music: Joe Hisaishi
Producers: Toshiaki Nakazawa, Ichiro Nobukuni, Toshihisa Watai, and Yasuhiro Mase
Main Cast: Masahiro Motoki, Tsutomu Yamazaki, Ryoko Hirosue, Kimiko Yo, and Toru Minegishi

Production Companies: Amuse Soft Entertainment, Asahi Shimbunsha, Dentsu, Departures Film Partners, Mainichi Broadcasting System (MBS), Sedic International, Shochiku Company, Shogakukan, TBS Radio and Communications, and Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS)

Tetsuo 3/Tetsuo: The Bullet Man
71 mins, col. and black and white
Released: 2009 (Japan)
Director: Shinya Tsukamoto
Screenplay: Shinya Tsukamoto and Hisakatsu Kuroki
Cinematography: Satoshi Hayashi, Takayuki Shida, and Shinya Tsukamoto
Editing: Yuji Ambe and Shinya Tsukamoto
Sound: Hirokazu Kato
Original Music: Chu Ishikawa and Nine Inch Nails
Producers: Shinichi Kawahara, Masayuki Tanashima, and Shinya Tsukamoto
Main Cast: Eric Bossick, Shinya Tsukamoto, Yuko Nakamura, Stephen Sarrazin, Akiko Mono, Tiger Charlie Gerhardt, and Prakhar Jain
Production Companies: Asmik Ace Entertainment, Kaijyu Theatre, and Yahoo Japan

Jusan-nin no shikaku/13 Assassins
141 mins, col.
Released: 2010 (Japan/UK)
Director: Takashi Miike
Screenplay: Daisuke Tengan and Kaneo Ikegami
Cinematography: Nobuyasu Kita
Editing: Kenji Yamashita
Sound: Jun Nakamura
Original Music: Koji Endo
Producers: Takashi Hirajo, Minami Ichikawa, Toshiaki Nakazawa, Toichiro Shiraishi, Jeremy Thomas, and Michihiko Yanagisawa
Main Cast: Koji Yakusho, Takayuki Yamada, Goro Inagaki, Masachika Ichimura, Yusuke Iseya, Hiroki Matsukata, Tsuyoshi Ihara, Masataka Kubota, Arata Furuta, and Ikki Sawamura
Production Companies: Asahi Broadcasting Company (ABC), Dentsu, Higashi Nippon Broadcasting Company, Hiroshima Home TV, Hokkaido Television Broadcasting Company (HTBC), Kyushu Asahi Broadcasting Company (KABC), Nagoya Broadcasting Network (NBN), Recorded

Picture Company (RPC), Sedic International, Shizuoka Asahi Television Company (SATV), Shogakukuan, Toho Company, TV Asahi, Tsutaya Group, and Yahoo Japan

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