

**CONSUMING JAPAN:
CULTURAL RELATIONS AND THE GLOBALIZING OF AMERICA, 1973-1993**

A Dissertation
Submitted
to the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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May, 2009

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the U.S. encounter with Japanese goods in the 1970s and 1980s. It argues that this encounter transformed social and cultural life in the United States by ideologically and materially introducing Americans to their first intense, sustained engagement with the processes of contemporary globalization. The dissertation proceeds thematically, first outlining the ideological transformation of American life. While some groups in the United States interpreted Japan's ascendancy to economic supremacy as a threat to U.S. national power, others, like scholars of international business, imagined Japan as the harbinger of a globalized future of economic prosperity and cultural homogeneity. Popular cultural representations of Japan reflected such understandings of Japan but also addressed the postmodern nature of the Japanese future, framing it as a borderless future in which Japanese corporations limited American political and economic freedoms. The second half of the dissertation examines the material globalizing of America—the U.S. consumption of Japanese goods like automobiles, VCRs, and Japanese animation (*anime*). The author argues in these chapters that the popular image of U.S.-Japan trade conflict during the 1980s obscures the nuances in the relationship that developed at the local level, where Americans consumed goods that transformed their lives, introducing them to new ways of thinking about the world and interacting with other societies engaged in global economic and cultural exchange.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I like to think of this dissertation as a work filled with big ideas. I cannot claim that those big ideas are all my own. They are the product of years of interacting with a vibrant intellectual community at Temple University. My friends and graduate school colleagues—Kate Scott, David Zierler, Holger Lowendorf, Kristin Grueser, Wendy Wong, and Rich Grippaldi—all read pieces of this work at various points and offered invaluable commentary, often of the informal and candid sort that only friends can share. The chair of the dissertation committee, Richard Immerman, persistently encouraged me to follow my interests and instincts, even when they led well beyond the boundaries of what we usually mean by “foreign relations.” I have told many prospective graduate students that they’ll never find a better advisor. The other members of the dissertation committee, Petra Goedde, Bryant Simon, and Naoko Shibusawa, have each contributed big ideas of their own that have improved this project immeasurably; I’m thankful for their guidance not only on the dissertation but also in becoming a professional historian. I am also grateful for the assistance of Will Hitchcock, who in this project’s earliest stages provided multiple opportunities for me to present my work publicly. Without the love, help, and encouragement of my parents, Linda and Henry McKeivitt, I would not have even tried to make it to this point. Finally, I want to thank my best friend and editor, Sarah Hughes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION – RESURRECTING THE ORDINARY IN U.S.-JAPAN RELATIONS

“Culture is ordinary,” Raymond Williams wrote, reflecting upon daily life in the rural farming valley in England where he grew up.¹ I suspect that, like Williams’ studies of British culture and society were for him, this project will be as personal to most Americans born after World War II as it has been for me. It is not exceptional that the material presence of Japan has always been a tangible reality in my life. I recall being ferried around in my grandfather's 1984 Toyota Corolla; for my seventh birthday, I received a Nintendo Entertainment System, an interactive device that came to dominate after-school activities to the detriment of my studies; my family regularly gathered around our first VCR, a bulky Panasonic, to watch the latest movie releases in the comfort of our home; reared on American food heavy in calories and light on subtlety, it took a herculean effort of epicurean openmindedness to get me to try, and enjoy, sushi as an undergraduate; today I drive a Toyota, own several electronics gadgets imprinted with the Sony label, and, like the 25,000 people with whom I attended the 2008 Otakon anime convention and the millions more who watch anime daily on television, I find Japanese cartoons to be more compelling than just about anything the U.S. entertainment industry offers. For me it has never felt unnatural to be surrounded by material manifestations of Japan, and I am not alone.

¹ Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope* (New York: Verso, 1989): 4.

Of course, none of this is extraordinary, and measured against the stories of international change that have dominated news headlines since I was born—from the Iran hostage crisis to the end of the Cold War and implosion of the Soviet Union to the events of September 11, 2001—they seem positively mundane, if not trivial. Yet that so many people could identify with such a personal anecdote begins to make my point: since roughly the mid-1970s the consumption of Japanese products has been a central facet of U.S. social and cultural life, but we lack a place for this story in our narrative of U.S. history in the twentieth century. Current understandings of U.S.-Japan relations during this period, which focus on state-level economic conflict and Cold War security debates, also fail to acknowledge the nuances of this important transpacific exchange. This dissertation argues that it was in those nuances, in the acquisition and consumption of Japanese goods as well as ideas and images of Japan, that the United States experienced its first intense, sustained engagement with the processes of contemporary globalization. Consuming all things Japanese helped create a globalized America, a condition that became so natural—so ordinary—that Japan’s role in that process has been overlooked. This dissertation resurrects Japan’s contribution to the transformation of American life in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

It does so from multiple perspectives, beginning at the national and then turning to the local and ending with the global. At the national level, a new popular discourse on Japan emerged in the mid-1980s as Americans bought an increasing number of Japanese products and pushed the U.S. balance of payments heavily in Japan’s favor. While this discourse borrowed from older racial discourses of the prewar and wartime years, which

portrayed Japan as a premodern society based on subservience to authoritarian warlords, it also incorporated new ideas and images that alternately represented Japan as a futuristic threat or a model of corporate behavior in a globalized world. Cross-cultural representations are never fixed; they can shift rapidly to accommodate changing socioeconomic realities, as both John Dower and Naoko Shibusawa have illustrated for previous periods of U.S.-Japan relations.² New ideas do not replace old representations. They are added to the well of cultural images from which cultural producers can draw, creating hybrid images that are often pastiches of old and new ideas. For example, U.S. propagandists during World War II appended the concept of the Japanese as subhuman animals to the nineteenth-century images of Japan as a militaristic warlord society, generating images of gorillas clad in military or samurai uniforms. Within weeks of Japan's surrender, however, new patriarchal attitudes mixed with animalistic imagery to produce representations of Japan as an adorable simian that Americans needed to protect and nurture.³

The potential for viewing Japan through racial binoculars remained after the war and occupation. But in the post-civil rights, post-Vietnam United States, Americans were more conscious of appearing to speak or act in ways that could be interpreted as racist. Racial interpretations of Japanese thought or behavior were thus borrowed from old scripts, but they were also attenuated in a political culture more attuned to racial thinking.

² John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³ See the images in Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 186-187.

What was new in the national discourse of the 1970s and 1980s was the image of Japan as the land of a globalizing, consumer-oriented future. Chapters 2 and 3 explore these shifting attitudes during the 1970s and 1980s, emphasizing the ways that Japan shaped an ideology of national power and identity in intellectual debates as well as popular television, film, and literature.

The national story, however, was not the only story. Refocusing the aperture on the local level reveals that the material impact of Japanese goods conflicted with the tone of national popular discourse and ideology. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explore local encounters with Japan to see how the embedding of Japanese products in American society connected individuals and local communities to developments in global commerce and culture. The consumption of a variety of Japanese products also complicated notions of national power and identity. Chapter 4 details the case of Marysville, Ohio, a small rural town outside of Columbus. In 1982 the Honda Motor Company opened the first Japanese-owned U.S. automobile production facility in Marysville, effectively transforming the economic and cultural landscape of central Ohio in the following decade. Chapter 5 examines how individual U.S. consumers engaged global cultural change by consuming the most prominent icon of early contemporary globalization: the VCR. Chapter 6 then highlights fans of Japanese animation, or anime, in their first dozen years of organizing U.S. communities. Anime fans created local communities of shared interest in a foreign cultural product and connected their communities to global cultural flows in ways unique for the late 1970s and 1980s. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue that brings the globalizing of America, courtesy of Japan, up to the present.

In all of these contexts, I argue, Japan served as a catalyst for the material and ideological globalizing of America. Arguably, Americans consumed more goods from Japan in the 1970s and 1980s than they had from any other foreign country in all of U.S. history, save perhaps Great Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴

Americans stocked their domestic spaces, driveways, and store shelves with material representations and manifestations of Japan. Ideologically, Japan and its corporations were central to the earliest debates about globalization, debates that were also linked closely to the origins of the concept of postmodernity.

The concepts of globalization and postmodernity both emerged from intellectual struggles to come to terms with the dramatic shifts in economy and culture in the United States and around the world from the early 1970s on. Workers at Honda's plants in Ohio, members of anime fan clubs like the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization, and cultural producers like Ridley Scott, the director of the dystopian, Japan-influenced *Blade Runner*, likely did not know or care what the words “globalization” or “postmodernity” meant in 1983, but they all nevertheless felt the impact of the socioeconomic processes and cultural and ideological shifts that these terms ultimately characterized, and they responded to these transformations in a variety of ways. From the local and national perspective in 1983, the globalized future looked much more Japanese than we today acknowledge. To borrow again from Williams, this dissertation aims to resurrect the

⁴ See T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Also, John Kuo Wei Tchen argues that Chinese goods played a formative role in defining U.S. national identity in the early republic. See John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

“structures of feeling,” the “meanings and values as they [were] actively lived and felt,” which were suffused with ideological and material representations of Japan in the decades before and after that moment.⁵

The dissertation situates itself within a number of historiographic and interdisciplinary debates about U.S.-Japan relations, globalization, cultural exchange, and consumption. To organize the discussion of relevant scholarly literature, I recommend thinking about the dissertation's contribution in terms of a series of concentric circles. The outermost circle addresses the broadest historical and interdisciplinary concerns; the innermost circle engages the most specific interests. There are four primary circles to appreciate.

The first and largest circle is the field of historical understanding concerned with placing the history of the United States in a transnational and global context. Several historians have pushed this cause over the last decade. These include Akira Iriye, Thomas Bender, and the duo of Charles Bright and Michael Geyer.⁶ In different ways each argues for transnational and global perspectives to be more than just ancillary fields

⁵ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132-133.

⁶ See Akira Iriye, “The Internationalizing of History,” *American Historical Review* 94 (February 1989): 1-10, and *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), and *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *American Historical Review* 100(4), October 1995: 1034-1060, and “Where in the World Is America?” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 63-100. Also see the essays in “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History: A Special Issue,” *Journal of American History* 86 (December 1999): 965-1307.

of U.S. history; these approaches should have a privileged place in the continuous critique and revision of the narrative history of the United States. This dissertation proceeds from a fundamental premise: histories of the United States at any point in the last four centuries are incomplete if they do not recognize the permeability of borders, international contexts, and the power of outside economic, social, and cultural forces to reshape life within those contested spaces defined as American. I describe the “globalizing of America,” instead of “the United States,” to imply that the processes of material and ideological interconnecting were broader and more multifaceted than traditional understandings of statehood and citizenship allow.

Inside this circle is another that concerns framing the history of the United States since the early 1970s within a global context that dissolves the artificial boundaries between the domestic and the foreign. Two disciplinary approaches are relevant: U.S. history from both a domestic and foreign relations perspective and the field of globalization studies. Different subdisciplines of U.S. history have tentatively staked out territory in exploring the period that began roughly with the economic shock of the oil crisis and the political shock of Richard Nixon's resignation. For historians of U.S. domestic politics and society, the post-1973 period was characterized variously by fallout from the Watergate scandal; two energy crises; a sense of “malaise” about the direction of the nation in the midst of a decade-long economic slump; the electoral triumph of conservatism; the rise to prominence of evangelical politics; the creation of a celebrity political culture with Ronald Reagan at its center; and the prominence of an urban-based,

narcissistic “yuppie” culture.⁷ Many historiographic holes remain to be filled, though; the absence of a significant work on race relations in “Reagan's America” is a particularly glaring deficiency. By illustrating the ways that the encounter with Japan transformed U.S. social and cultural life at the national and local levels, this dissertation complicates popular understandings of U.S. history in the not-so-distant 1973-1993 period.

Historians of U.S. foreign relations have followed a different tack, exploring the nature of Détente in the post-Nixon years; the “linkage” policies of the Carter years, with their emphasis on human rights; the Iran hostage crisis; the ratcheting up of a “second Cold War” under the first Reagan administration; “proxy wars” throughout the underdeveloped world; the Iran-Contra scandal; and the denouement of the Cold War and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁸ More

⁷ An excellent general survey of the period is James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). A recent exclusively political history is Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2001* (New York: Harper, 2008). Surveys of the United States in the 1970s include Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the Seventies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); and Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo, 2001). Overviews of the 1980s include Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); John Ehrman, *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); and Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁸ A thorough collection of essays on foreign relations during the Nixon-Ford years is Frederik Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); on foreign policy during the Carter administration, see Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); on the Iran hostage crisis, see David R. Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); on the Cold War as a global phenomenon during this period, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Surveys of foreign relations during the Reagan era, virtually all of which focus exclusively on the Cold War, include Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War*

historical work exists on the domestic U.S. experience than in foreign relations. Surveys of the era typically place an artificial division between the two, with one survey of the 1980s even unapologetically ignoring foreign relations altogether.⁹

Histories of 1980s domestic politics and foreign relations both suffer from the same deficiencies: an unhealthy fixation with Ronald Reagan (and also, in the foreign relations literature, Mikhail Gorbachev), evident in titles or subtitles like *Reagan's America*, “How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s,” “The Age of Reagan,” *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*, or the unabashedly hagiographic, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons*; an artificial demarcation between “the seventies” and “the eighties,” developing from a tendency to not only naturalize divisions in the turn of decades but also to see Reagan's election as a political-cultural caesura; and a pervasive neglect of the social and cultural experiences of non-elites.¹⁰ A major reason that historians of foreign relations remain wedded to the high politics of the end of the Cold War, while generally ignoring domestic culture and society, is that their interpretations have been influenced heavily by participants and political scientists who witnessed events firsthand.¹¹

(Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994); Don Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era: The United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1991* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).

⁹ See Ehrman, *The Eighties*.

¹⁰ See Garry Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Jack F. Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended* (New York: Random House, 2004); Paul V. Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005); and footnote 7.

¹¹ For example, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, and Provocations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992);

A sophisticated approach to U.S. culture and society as well as foreign relations during this period demands adopting a global perspective and looking beyond the political culture of the celebrity presidency and the end of the Cold War. Walter LaFeber, perhaps the most influential diplomatic historian of his generation, articulated this point in his provocative *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*, a concise analysis of the economic and cultural forces transforming the United States and the world in the late twentieth century. *Michael Jordan* simultaneously exemplifies the best thinking foreign relations historians have done on the question of U.S. globalization and is indicative of the limitations of a U.S.-centered narrative of globalization. LaFeber wrote at the beginning of his preface:

“[This book] argues that the world changed fundamentally in the 1970s and early 1980s. In this sense, the twenty-first century began during those years, for powerful forces that will shape the early part of the new century significantly appeared for the first time. Or, to rephrase, a new era did not begin with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991, but with the information revolution, the new power of U.S. capital and transnational corporations to drive that revolution, and the reaction—sometimes violent—in the United States and abroad to that revolution. This new era has been called the ‘information age,’ and described as ‘post-industrial,’ ‘post-modern,’ and even

Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); and Matlock, *Reagan and Gorbachev*.

‘post-imperialist’ or ‘late capitalist.’ Whatever it is termed, it marks the beginning of something different in world history.”¹²

A major part of that “something different,” I argue, was the U.S. encounter with Japan, which LaFeber, who ironically yet suggestively wrote a prize-winning survey of U.S. relations with Japan, largely overlooks.¹³ His important *Michael Jordan* actually serves as a case study of the sort of discipline-wide conceptual outlook that has written Japan out of the narrative of late twentieth-century U.S. history and globalization. Published in 1999, *Michael Jordan* appeared a full half-decade after the combination of Japan's 1991 economic recession, American Cold War triumphalism, and the boom of the U.S. information technology sector erased notions of “Japan as number one” and an inevitable, precipitous American decline. Japan was no longer on the popular discursive radar in 1999 as it was so prominently in 1989. (For example, *Time* magazine, a bellwether of national popular discourse, mentioned Japan in 192 separate articles in 1989; in 1999, the number dropped to 96, and a greater percentage of those mentioned Japan only in passing.)¹⁴

LaFeber's story of contemporary globalization is a de-Japanized, Americanized version. His significant historical actors, embodied in the “Jordan-[Phil] Knight-[Rupert] Murdoch-[Ted] Turner phenomenon,” defied national borders to set up networks of transnational capital and culture that made corporations like Nike, News Corp., and CNN

¹² Walter LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 13.

¹³ Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: A History of U.S.-Japan Relations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

¹⁴ *Time* archive search, <http://www.time.com/time/archive>.

as powerful as nation-states.¹⁵ The problem with LaFeber's narrative is that it attributes these globalizing innovations exclusively to American corporations. A more appropriate name for commercial and cultural globe-trotting might have been the “Morita-Honda phenomenon,” after the founders of Sony and the Honda Motor Company, two companies whose leaders thought and behaved in truly global terms years before U.S. companies did. Honda was producing motorcycles and then automobiles around the globe before Phil Knight ever heard the word “sweatshop.” Sony and a handful other Japanese companies were selling millions of Walkmans and VCRs in dozens of countries before Ted Turner launched a satellite or Michael Jordan donned a Chicago Bulls jersey.

More noticeable is LaFeber's writing of the narrative of post-1973 globalization history that removes both the Japanese contribution to contemporary globalization and the perceived threat of Japanese power in the United States, which not coincidentally peaked at the very end of the Cold War. “The Cold War between American capitalism and Russian Communism dominated much of the twentieth century,” LaFeber writes. “At the end of that day, the West had adjusted to the post-1970s technology and Communism had not. America and capitalism stood triumphant. After 1991, the nature of the struggle noticeably changed. It was now between new, technological forms of capitalism versus cultures pressured to adjust to changes demanded by the capital.”¹⁶ Here LaFeber exemplifies the trend of writing Japan out of the narrative of the 1973-1993 period, overlooking that country's status as the second largest economy in the world in

¹⁵ LaFeber, *Michael Jordan*, 156-157.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 162.

the 1980s, its contribution to the technological transformation that pushed communism off the world stage (Japan arguably created “technological forms of capitalism”), and its inventions of many of the techniques that defined global capitalism and culture from the 1970s on. Also, as I show in chapters 2 and 3, Japan's ascension tempered Cold War triumphalism, generating a national sentiment of melancholy for the future in 1991-1993, more than historians today acknowledge. While LaFeber does foreign relations historians a great service by indicating new paths of inquiry, his omissions point to the inadequacies of U.S. capitalism and transnationalism as exclusive conceptual categories in understanding the global transformations of the late twentieth century.

Incorporating a local-global perspective adopted from globalization studies fills in a number of the missing pieces. This dissertation contributes to this growing field in two foundational ways. First, it provides a historical, empirical example of contemporary globalization grounded in a particular time and place—a rarity in a field laden with theoretical writings and presentist imperatives. Although intellectuals have been articulating the idea of globalization for at least a quarter-century, scholarship generally fails to historicize the material and ideological conditions of this ubiquitous buzzword. Second, this project forces globalization studies scholars to recognize that the object of their attentions has transformed the spaces they live in as much as it has transformed the rest of the world. A sort of reverse Euro-, Western-, and Americentrism dominates globalization studies in the sense that scholars are more often concerned with the ways that Western or American economic, political, and cultural power have radically reshaped global material conditions and mentalities than with cleavages or changes within that

center of power. While globalization scholars often proceed with the commendable intention of drawing attention to the plight of the underdeveloped world, paradoxically such an approach actually ends up being Americentric in that it reaffirms the hegemony of the United States in a world of diffusing power. The most prominent example comes from sociologist George Ritzer, whose “McDonaldization” thesis asserts that capitalist forms American in origin have penetrated societies across the globe and transformed not just their cultural representations but the very structures of production and consumption.¹⁷

It is instructive to look at Ritzer's edited volume, *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (2007), as a compendium of up-to-date knowledge about globalization that is illustrative of trends and deficiencies in globalization studies. It includes articles by many important thinkers about the topic, including Ritzer, Roland Robertson, Anthony McGrew, and John Tomlinson.¹⁸ (While laudable for compiling a comprehensive list of articles on a topic of extraordinary diversity, the volume favors sociologists more than it should.) The *Companion's* concern is largely presentist, boiling down the major debates on the subject to the interests of “those who have 'globophilia' versus those who suffer from 'globophobia.’” Ritzer also suggests that globalization challenges the categories that social scientists have relied on for decades, especially “society” and “the state.”¹⁹

Historians can bring to this interdisciplinary field a sophisticated understanding of such

¹⁷ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: Revised New Century Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2004).

¹⁸ George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

categories, having dealt with their constructedness since at least Benedict Anderson's landmark *Imagined Communities* in the early 1980s.²⁰ Even when scholars of globalization do adopt a “historicist” approach, their purpose is to debate whether the phenomenon is something old or something new, not to give empirical weight to globalization as a historical process that affected groups of people in specific temporal and spatial contexts.²¹

From the beginning of the articulation of the concept, a central debate in globalization studies has been whether the phenomenon contributes to increasing cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity. The homogenization side, though, is increasingly becoming a straw man, and virtually all major scholars of globalization lean toward the side of increasing heterogeneity. (Ritzer is the notable exception, clinging to his awkward concept of “grobalization,” which is the global spread of his “McDonaldization,” intended as a counter to “glocalization,” or the idea that global flows manifest in a multitude of local differences. Ritzer asserts that the forms produced by global corporations—the fast-food restaurant, the strip mall—are powerfully homogenizing and difficult to overcome in local contexts.)²² I too conclude that in the United States from the mid-1970s onward the processes of globalization created increasing cultural heterogeneity. That said, I also believe it is time to move beyond that debate, accepting that globalization creates difference, and to begin excavating the ways

²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

²¹ For example, see Anthony McGrew, “Globalization in Hard Times: Contention in the Academy and Beyond,” in Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization*, 29-53.

²² See Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*.

that local cultural differences have been negotiated between powerful global forces and less powerful local agents, even in the United States. Such is the task that the interdisciplinary field of globalization studies can pass on to historians.

Scholars of globalization and historians of the postwar United States must converse with each other in order to create a more sophisticated representation of the origins and conditions of contemporary globalization since the early 1970s. What this dissertation illustrates for globalization studies is that global transformations affected the “first world” as much as they did the often-studied “third world.” Moreover, local-global studies of locations in the West can reveal a great deal about the nature of contemporary globalization. For historians of the United States, this study confirms that local American communities, like anime fan clubs or workers at Honda's Marysville plants, were shaped by global processes independent of national political and economic trends. Further uncovering the forces transforming American life in the last quarter of the twentieth century will require looking beyond the national frame. In the global sphere historians will find not only seemingly marginal social and cultural transformations, as in the case of U.S. anime fans, but also effects central to social and economic life, as with the proliferation of the VCR and the transnationalization of the Japanese automobile industry.

What local engagement with the global meant most often in the late-twentieth-century United States was the consumption of foreign goods, especially those from Japan. The subject of consumption in the late-twentieth-century United States is the third concentric circle. Research on the topic of consumption is growing and increasingly will

occupy the attention of U.S. and foreign relations historians.²³ Reaching this conclusion is as simple as acknowledging that throughout U.S. history more Americans have consumed foreign goods than have made foreign policy. (In fact, based on dwindling voter participation numbers in the last three decades, it is likely that more Americans have consumed foreign goods than have participated directly in democratic political processes.) As a subfield foreign relations history continues to move away from the narrow confines of elite policymaking toward articulating the broad contours of social and cultural interconnectedness between people within the borders of the United States and those outside. Consuming another nation's products has been a principal way for non-elite Americans to connect, albeit in highly mediated ways, with the rest of the world.

Like globalization, consumption needs defining. Many social science and humanities disciplines have growing literatures on consumption. An economist's definition will differ substantially from an anthropologist's, and the anthropologist's will differ from the sociologist's. Debates about consumption date back to the progenitors of

²³ Cultural historians trace studies of the consumption of popular culture to Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), first published in 1973. An early collection that addressed consumption broadly was Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). A much more robust literature exists on the consumption of American goods in Europe and the rest of the world than vice versa. For example, see Rob Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen The Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Reinhold Wagnleiter, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Richard H. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); and Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2005).

modern economics and sociology—Karl Marx and Max Weber—and, most linearly, to Thorstein Veblen's famous “conspicuous consumption” thesis, which posited that turn-of-the-century Americans consumed things they did not need in order to assert social status.²⁴ Veblen reflected a general educated Protestant disdain for material pleasures, one that was reproduced in the first half of the twentieth century in bastions of American elitism like ivy-league universities. The most sophisticated and cynical critiques of consumerism surfaced at mid-century from Frankfurt Schoolers like Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, who applied Marxist understandings to the notion of consumer choice and sovereignty, developing the “mass culture” theories that portrayed the trappings of consumer society as alternative means of class repression.²⁵

With the postmodern or cultural “turn” of the 1970s and 1980s, however, an understanding of consumption emerged that critiqued elitist attitudes toward popular culture. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the British anthropologist Mary Douglas were most influential in this respect. Bourdieu argued that “taste,” or the choice of which goods to consume, was determined by an individual's “habitus,” or one's disposition defined by economic and cultural capital; consumption habits, then, were a way of communicating the production and reproduction of social hierarchies.²⁶ Douglas also argued in favor of a model of consumption as communicative, as a means of

²⁴ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: Modern Library, 1961).

²⁵ A useful survey of the history of consumer theory is Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory, and Politics* (London: Sage, 2007).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 91-95, discusses the significance of Bourdieu's and Douglas' work to scholarship on consumption in the last two decades. See also, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984).

delineating individual status, group identity, and cultural images and ideas.

“Consumption is the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape,” she wrote. “Goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges.”²⁷ Since the rise of social history in the 1960s, U.S. historians have tried to unearth the construction and representation of social and cultural boundaries. Exploring how the consumption of goods communicated those boundaries holds much promise for research.

Historian David Steigerwald provides a lowest-common-denominator definition of consumption for U.S. historians: “how Americans have acquired and used goods not strictly necessary to biological existence.”²⁸ Absent from this definition is the process of meaning-making, of imbuing a good with the symbolic significance that allows it to function as either a fence or a bridge. In fact, goods “not strictly necessary to biological existence” are the ones most likely to attain great cultural significance because they can bestow status while being of minimal utility. (Of course, necessities can have powerful cultural meanings too; for example, nationalist discourse in Japan for centuries has made much of the centrality of rice to Japanese existence.²⁹) Whether an absolutist monarch's royal scepter or a presidential candidate's “flag pin,” nonessential goods are often valueless without the application of cultural meaning to them. Furthermore, the

²⁷ Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 1996), 37, xv.

²⁸ David Steigerwald, “All Hail the Republic of Choice: Consumer History as Contemporary Thought,” *Journal of American History* 93 (September 2006): 385.

²⁹ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “McDonald's in Japan: Changing Manners and Etiquette,” in James L. Watson, ed., *Golden Arches East: McDonald's in East Asia*, 2nd edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 175.

application of such meaning need not be performed by the individual acquiring or using a particular object.

Therefore, I define consumption as the production and reproduction of cultural meaning through the act of acquiring and/or using goods. This definition accentuates cultural understandings of consumption, acknowledging that the act of acquiring goods is more than an economic transaction. It also permits goods to acquire meanings in social contexts beyond the individual consumer—Detroit autoworkers, for example, applied all sorts of cultural meanings to the Toyota Corolla as an acquirable and usable good without ever having acquired or used one. Such a definition connects consumption to the overarching disciplinary concern with identity. It also opens up vistas on the contextual imperatives that influence consumption acts without fetishizing the interaction between individuals and goods.

If questions of identity are of vital concern to the historian, then the dissertation's central argument is that the vast majority of Americans related to Japan not as policymakers, diplomats, trade representatives, or even soldiers, but as *consumers*. The dissertation is titled “Consuming Japan” because it was Americans' identities as consumers—as people who made meaning out of the acquisition and use of goods—that dominated their attitudes toward and interactions with Japan and Japanese.

Lizabeth Cohen described the creation of a “Consumer's Republic” in the postwar United States, a society in which the individual's identity as a consumer of all aspects of social life—not just goods, but also politics, education, and so on—dominated the

restructuring of the postwar social and cultural landscape.³⁰ Cohen ends her detailed narrative in the 1970s with the Consumer's Republic firmly in place. It was the consumer-citizens of that republic who purchased hundreds of millions of Japanese products from the early 1970s, and it was that identity that most shaped responses to Japan.

The fourth and innermost circle is that of U.S.-Japan relations in the 1970s and 1980s. In the final year of his life, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Theodore H. White penned an article, "The Danger from Japan," that became a founding document for Americans critical of Japan's meteoric economic rise in the 1970s and 1980s. Before he revolutionized the art of presidential campaign reporting, White had served as a war correspondent in the Pacific. There he acquired his views of Japan and its people through the prism of racial and cultural propaganda that the United States successfully used to acculturate soldiers to slaughtering nonhuman Japanese, as John Dower brilliantly illustrated.³¹

White's article has been repeatedly cited as the first dissonant note struck in an eventual chorus of anti-Japanese voices.³² Yet lost in the attention paid to his attack on Japan's economic expansion was his critique of Americans' penchant for buying what

³⁰ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

³¹ Theodore H. White, "The Danger from Japan," *New York Times Magazine*, July 28, 1985, 19; Dower, *War Without Mercy*.

³² White is discussed in a number of pieces. See Hobart Rowan, "Low Point in Japan-Bashing," *Washington Post*, August 1, 1985: A19; Masao Miyoshi, *Off Center: Power and Culture Relations between Japan and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Andrew E. Barshay, "What Is Japan to Us?" in *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II*, ed. David A. Hollinger (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2006).

Japan was selling. After all, the shape of U.S.-Japan relations in the 1980s was entirely contingent on Japanese companies selling products Americans wanted. “No nation that thinks of itself as an assembly of consumers can resist Japanese penetration,” White cautioned. “But a nation that thinks of itself as a community has reason for alarm.”³³ By 1985 White's readers were conscious of the flood of Japanese goods but not yet fearful of its political and economic consequences. He asked them to make a choice between community and consumption, as if such a choice was possible. White assumed a critical posture toward the consumption of non-essential things, which nearly all Japanese products were. He presumed that such consumption was antithetical to the construction of unified communities.

But if recent trends in U.S. history are indication, then Americans have always used the consumption of goods as a means of defining local and national communities. Cohen's recent work has been significant in this respect. So too has that of T.H. Breen, who in *The Marketplace of Revolution* (2004) argues that the founding generation in the United States rallied around shared identities as consumers of the goods of the British Empire.³⁴ In both cases consumption served to connect local social realities to developing discourses of national identity. In the field of U.S. foreign relations, Kristin Hoganson has done the most in recent years to spark conversations about how Americans have used goods to define themselves against the foreign, while also incorporating the

³³ White, “The Danger from Japan.”

³⁴ Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*. A historiographic essay on the history of consumption in the United States, focusing on Cohen's and Breen's works, is Steigerwald, “All Hail the Republic of Choice.” See also in the same volume Breen's and Cohen's responses to Steigerwald.

foreign into their domestic spaces. Her exploration of “white, native-born, well-to-do American women” who “produced the globe” by decorating their homes with “an assortment of decontextualized things” guides U.S. historians toward an understanding of the domestic (in both sense of the word) impact of the “incoming tide” of global goods.³⁵

Contributing to this historiographic conversation, I argue that the consumption of Japanese goods for the first time connected a majority of Americans' local social realities to developing discourses of *global* identity, a sense that Americans were connected to powerful trends beyond their borders and control. What White missed in correlating increased Japanese production and export figures with American industrial decline was the fact that Japanese goods were in American homes because Americans chose to put them there; consumers liked how those goods changed their lives in small and big ways. A Honda Civic saved a commuter hundreds of dollars a year in gasoline; a VCR allowed users to dictate their media environments in ways previously impossible; anime connected fans to growing transnational communities enthusiastic about the celebration of cultural difference.

In short, Japanese goods were not imposed on mindless automatons; they were consumed for good reasons by critical consumers. Like the Frankfurt School's critique of “mass culture,” White's false dichotomy was rooted in the upper-class, male, elitist notion

³⁵ See Kristin L. Hoganson, “Stuff It: Domestic Consumption and the Americanization of the World Paradigm,” *Diplomatic History* 30 (September 2006):571-594; “Cosmopolitan Domesticity: Importing the American Dream, 1865-1920,” *American Historical Review* 107 (February 2002): 55-83; *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 254, 5. For an engaging theoretical contribution to the conceptualization of “domestic” and “foreign,” see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70 (September 1998): 581-606.

that cultural activity is meaningful only if it relates to the “life of the mind.” Most Americans, however, have never breathed the rarefied air of the halls of academia, and even in the allegedly nonmaterial realm of the spiritual their passions have often manifested in very material ways.³⁶

The contemporary ignorance toward Japan's impact on the United States in the last quarter of the twentieth century also finds its origins in the attitude that domestic social life and international relations must be governed by conflicts between big ideas—liberalism against authoritarianism, capitalism against communism (or statism), white against black, or rich against poor. In other words, modern history advanced in accord with competing metanarratives. Political, economic, and intellectual elites in the early Cold War successfully sold the U.S.-Soviet clash on big ideas. White's attempt to rally U.S. citizens against the consumption of Japanese goods, an effort to be repeated with increasing intensity and urgency over the half-dozen years that followed, failed to mobilize against big ideas. Japan “is a threat to our wallets, and not to our ideology,” observed the writer Charles Paul Freund in 1989 as he surveyed what the 1990s might look like. “[T]hat kind of opponent is a lot less culturally useful to us than have been such threats as Nazis and communists.”³⁷ Japan lacked the big story, the metanarrative, to challenge American-style liberalism and capitalism once both had recovered by the late 1980s.

³⁶ One of the most engaging works on material consumption in this respect is Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Charles Paul Freund, “Playing the 90's,” *Washington Post*, October 29, 1989: B1.

Japan's seeming lack of big ideas leads to the final conceptual concern of the dissertation. Time will tell if “postmodernity” proves to be the most appropriate way of describing our contemporary condition. But as it relates to this work, within the historical context under consideration, the concept of postmodernity was a direct product of the sense that the modern period of American hegemony was at an end. It was not just the debacle in Vietnam, albeit that was part of it. It was also the end of the idea that American-style liberal democratic capitalism represented the future, one of the promises of the first two postwar decades. The Kitchen Debate made sense in 1959 because Americans and non-Americans alike could reasonably believe that life in the United States foretold the shiniest, most prosperous future that any society had ever imagined. By contrast, a hypothetical debate between Walter Mondale and Leonid Brezhnev about the respective merits of the capitalist and communist systems would have provided an ideal premise for a comedy sketch on *Saturday Night Live* in the late 1970s.

It was a French intellectual, Jean-Francois Lyotard, who first detailed the “postmodern condition” in 1979. He succinctly described it as “incredulity toward metanarratives”; that is, the failure of grand stories of the liberation of the human condition.³⁸ Lyotard's famous pronouncement was more than an abstraction. It was grounded in the international economic and political realities of the 1970s and referred to the end of the most endearing Western narrative of the modern era: the promises of American liberal democratic capitalism. After racial conflict, Vietnam, Watergate,

³⁸ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. An important history of the concept of postmodernity is Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998).

energy crises, and stagnation, it was harder to believe the story of American modernity; as David Farber writes, “the torch had fallen.”³⁹ By the 1970s the other grand narrative of the twentieth century, the social justice promises of socialism, had not proven to be any more lasting either. Thus postmodernity by the end of the 1970s was a vacuum devoid of believable stories about the promises of human liberation.

Into the vacuum stepped Japan—the “Empire of Signs,” as theorist Roland Barthes called it, a land of ever-changing, floating signifiers attached to no fixed meanings and thus no metanarratives.⁴⁰ Barthes, a seminal semiotician, developed the notion, popularized in 1946 by Ruth Benedict in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, that there was no such thing as moral absolutism or universalism in Japan; ideas and behaviors were a product of circumstances, and the Japanese were acculturated to the constantly shifting “signs” of proper social behavior. As chapters 2 and 3 show, cultural elites as diverse as Harvard University political scientist Joseph S. Nye and author Michael Crichton pushed this idea one step further: Japanese culture had no core values or big ideas to offer the world. In Nye's case this meant that Japanese economic power ultimately could not challenge the global allure of American values; for Crichton the vacuousness of Japanese culture was the very thing Americans should fear most.⁴¹ In both instances, it was Japan's lack of a metanarrative that made it postmodern, or at least beyond-the-modern, to American thinkers and opinion makers.

³⁹ David Farber, “The Torch Had Fallen,” in Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the 1970s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 9-28.

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

⁴¹ Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

This ambiguous but fully historicized understanding of postmodernity/ism is as close to a definition as this dissertation provides. That sounds like an attempt to eschew responsibility for defining a slippery yet central analytical referent. It is not. Central to this work's understanding of postmodernity is the fact that by the time Japan assumed a central position in the way that Americans saw a changing world—say, by 1989—it was a commonly debated notion within intellectual circles that the developed world had entered a qualitatively new phase in the relationship between commerce and culture. While there was never a consensus on what exactly this meant or if it even was something truly unlike anything that had come before it, leading intellectuals incorporated the concept into their own study of the human condition. The idea mingled, I argue, with the notion that Japan represented a globalized future. Japan's rise to the status of a global economic superpower coincided with the increasing awareness of the concept of postmodernity; that much is empirically verifiable. Attributing the development of thought about postmodernity directly to visions of Japan is admittedly more tenuous, particular compared to the widespread connections between the origins of the concept of contemporary globalization and Japan's globalizing.

Chapter 2 links Japan to the rise of the concept of globalization while chapter 3 connects it with notions of postmodernity. A cursory survey of the most important theorists of both subjects reveals just how closely related the conceptualization of postmodernity and globalization were throughout the 1980s. Frederic Jameson, David Harvey, Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman, and Roland Robertson, among others,

began writing about both in the 1980s.⁴² In 1998 Jameson described the post-1973 period, in his characteristic way, as “some new or third, multinational stage of capitalism, of which globalization is an intrinsic feature and which we now largely tend, whether we like it or not, to associate with that thing called postmodernity.”⁴³ Jameson's ambiguity makes articulating a clear definition for both globalization and postmodernity difficult, but it at least makes clear that the two concepts have been inextricably connected.

As historians begin to flesh out these complicated questions, they must consider how changing conceptions of the United States in the world after 1973—tied to Japan's rise to power—influenced vanguard intellectual currents. Thus when I use postmodernity in this dissertation I historicize to the extent possible. I make no claims about what it means today, how it functions in contemporary intellectual or popular discourse. More than globalization, it is a word whose meaning is temporally and spatially contingent.

Japan was a palpable if not ubiquitous presence in the United States in the two decades after 1973, but such is no longer the case. Why not? Where did Japan go? There were several reasons for its cultural recession. The first and most obvious was

⁴² See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), *The New Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), and *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Development* (New York: Verso, 2006); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1992), and *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), and Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds., *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995).

⁴³ “Fredric Jameson, “Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 54.

material—the burst of the Japanese financial bubble in the early 1990s. Whereas before the 1980s American and European banks dominated global finance, by the end of that decade the four largest banks in the world, and eight of the ten largest, were Japanese. Assets in all Japanese banks were worth more than double those in all U.S. banks.⁴⁴ But Japan's “economic miracle” through the 1970s rested on state guidance of the country's innovations in industrial production—textiles, steel, automobiles, electronics, and so on. Japanese corporations built the finance system of the 1980s on speculation and the creation of paper value. Banks made bad loans that companies like Matsushita used to buy overvalued real estate, most notoriously in the United States. By 1998, by one estimate, the value of bad loans accumulated was worth 80 trillion yen, or 12 percent of Japan's entire GDP.⁴⁵

When the Ministry of Finance tightened credit markets in order to curb speculation at the bubble economy's peak, it triggered a collapse of the Nikkei index, the largest stock index in the world. From the fall of 1989 to the summer of 1992, the index plummeted from a high around 40,000 to a low near 14,000. The value of the losses, around \$7 trillion, was staggering. The ministry justified its actions by claiming that it was weeding out bad debt created by speculators. But by 1991, the Nikkei collapse spilled over into other sectors of the economy. Banks hesitated to make loans. Industrial

⁴⁴ Harvey, 166; Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium*, 2nd edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 235.

⁴⁵ Castells, *End of Millennium*, 233.

production between 1991 and 1994 declined 11 percent, consumer spending shrank, and the country's gross domestic product leveled at zero growth by 1994.⁴⁶

It is instructive that the years in which Japanese bank assets peaked, roughly 1989-1991, correlated to the years of the most virulent anti-Japanese representations in the United States (discussed in chapter 2). A “cultural lag” dragged out anti-Japanese representations into 1993, but at that point the material conditions of the Japanese economy no longer presented a perceived immediate economic threat to the United States. “When the bubble burst in 1990,” writes Thomas W. Zeiler, “three years of national income was wasted.” By 1996 the Japanese economy's rapid decline “erased most of the value artificially generated in the 1980s” and total assets were equivalent to those of the early 1980s.⁴⁷ Cultural representations of Japan in the United States followed suit, distancing from the heated rhetoric of five years earlier and returning to a discourse of guarded respect for Japanese industry and culture. Another East Asian financial crisis in 1998 exacerbated Japanese economic woes, and a decade after that the Japanese economy remains a shadow of its former self.

A second reason for Japan's disappearance from the discursive radar was, ironically, globalization. Japanese corporations showed Americans what a globalized future looked like in the 1980s. While those corporations were exporting global ideas and products abroad the domestic Japanese economy nevertheless remained insulated and

⁴⁶ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 314-317; Thomas W. Zeiler, “Business Is War in U.S.-Japanese Economic Relations, 1977-2001,” in *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951-2001*, eds. Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler (New York: Kodansha International, 2001), 243-246.

⁴⁷ Zeiler, “Business Is War,” 243; Castells, *End of Millennium*, 236-237.

structured in ways profitable for the national-economy system of the 1960s and 1970s but vulnerable in the globalizing world of the 1990s. The Japanese state and the cronyism of domestic capitalism could only shelter corporations from the impact of globalization for so long.⁴⁸ The United States benefited tremendously from the globalizing economy precisely because, as was the case when Japanese corporate bought real estate and set up production facilities in the United States, free-market ideologies, institutionalized during the Clinton administration, won out over protectionism. Anti-globalization activists never succeeded in erecting barriers to trade from countries employing exploited, inexpensive labor, and so corporations from Nike to Wal-Mart expanded rapidly on the profits from cheap imported goods. American jobs went overseas, but Americans paid less for just about everything—hardly an equal trade-off, but the allure of increased consumption stifled widespread dissent. In the process American corporations, not Japanese ones, came to symbolize globalization, and narratives of that phenomenon have consequently excluded the Sonys and Hondas who pioneered its forms. The globalized image of Michael Jordan spoke of the triumph of post-Cold War American capitalism. The story of American capitalism triumphant filled the vacuum left by Japan's economic collapse, exacerbated as it was by the very same processes its corporations created.

Also, while Japan's cultural presence is not as detectable today as it was in 1988, it still exists in less pronounced ways. VCRs and the first Sony Walkman have faded into obsolescence, but their descendants—DVD players, Apple iPods—are cultural icons of leisure activity, global consumption, and media transformation. Seemingly all of them

⁴⁸ Castells, *End of Millennium*, 237.

are manufactured in China, yet nothing ever bears a Chinese name, likely because “Chineseness” is not associated with luxury, quality, or cosmopolitanism. (If the Japanese case is any precedent, though, that day indeed lies in the future; and not coincidentally, China has replaced Japan atop the list of economic bogeymen.) Wherever they come from today, however, the forms originated in Japan.

By focusing a great deal on subjects that historians have largely ignored, I have unavoidably neglected other subjects. For example, I do not discuss U.S.-Japan security relations, not because I think they are unimportant, but because I do not think that the exciting “movement” in the relationship occurred in that sphere from 1973 to 1993. The few historical works that do address U.S.-Japan relations during this period show just how stifling the official relationship was.⁴⁹ For most of that period Washington and Tokyo remained in a holding pattern of Cold War complacency. Occasional uproar over U.S. military bases or news of a military technology sale to the Soviet Union aside, there is no evidence that any policymaker in power in either country ever considered acting on the notion that the other was anything less than a steadfast ally. As the Cold War gasped its final breaths in the late 1980s, more than a few commentators believed that East Asia's great economic power would establish itself as the next threat to U.S. global political hegemony. But there was no indication that any high officials in the Reagan, Bush, or Clinton administrations ever thought or behaved in a way that reflected such attitudes.

⁴⁹ See LaFeber, *The Clash*; Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler, eds., *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951-2001* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001).

Those fears and concerns played out in the public sphere—in the realm of discourse, in the realm of culture—and I address them. Clearly autoworkers in Detroit, cattle farmers in Texas, and rice growers in Arkansas had more reasons to be upset with Japanese trade practices than anyone in Congress or the White House. Such people rarely had access to institutions of international political or economic power.

Thus the subjects that usually occupy the attention of foreign relations historians prove inadequate for exploring a relationship that was complicated by the processes of contemporary globalization and the ideas and attitudes of discerning consumers. A more nuanced picture of U.S.-Japan relations, and of U.S. history during this period and across the centuries, demands attention to the ways local actors engaged with global economic and cultural developments to bring about the globalizing of America.

CHAPTER 2

HOW JAPAN WON THE COLD WAR: NARRATIVES OF GLOBAL POWER IN AN ERA OF IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE

Not even victory in the popular Gulf War could save President George H.W. Bush's 1992 reelection bid from a reeling economy. Candidate Bill Clinton's strategists knew that the recent recession was the incumbent's weakness and they sought to exploit it with a simple message: "It's the economy, stupid!" Yet Clinton was not the only, or even the first, candidate to tout the economic message. Former Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas emerged as the early frontrunner in 1991 and won the crucial New Hampshire Democratic primary in February 1992. His campaign brochure, "A Call to Economic Arms," described his "battle plan" to counter the "attack" from the "foreign ownership of industry" and real estate. It linked U.S. economic decline with the free-trade system's failure to account for "unfair" foreign competition. More than Clinton, Tsongas emphasized the changing international context of American economic woes. "The Cold War is over," he told audiences, "and Japan won."¹

Tsongas' quip reflected a painful paradox that many Americans confronted in the early 1990s: they had "lost" a trade war while winning a cold one. The rise of Japan to the status of an economic superpower forced Americans to rethink the nature of international power. Tsongas' awkward but sincere statement illustrated that he could access only the anachronistic vocabulary of the Cold War in order to explain the transformed state of international affairs. For decades political and economic elites

¹ Quoted in Dan Balz, "Tsongas, Clinton Top Democratic Field," *Washington Post* February 2, 1992; the Tsongas campaign brochure is available at <http://www.4president.org/brochures/paultsongas1992brochure.htm>; the Clinton campaign is recounted in James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 247-252.

across the political spectrum conceived of international affairs as a struggle between two ideological camps. Events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991 signaled a “victory” over communism and the “end of history.”² “In the aftermath of this [Cold War] triumph,” wrote the president of a progressive policy think tank, echoing Tsongas’ perplexity, “many Americans have a nagging sense that they somehow missed the victory party.”³

Victory was fleeting indeed. While American-style capitalism seemed poised to triumph in Eastern Europe, Japanese companies were buying some of its more recognizable symbols. In 1989 Mitsubishi purchased New York City’s Rockefeller Center and Sony bought Columbia Pictures just a year after acquiring CBS Records, which owned Columbia Records and the music of U.S. icons like Bruce Springsteen. While Springsteen sang about the tribulations of unemployed autoworkers, the U.S. automobile industry, the most enduring symbol of American industrial might, continued to cede ground to Japanese automakers more attuned to a post-oil crisis world. A consumer looking to purchase an American-made television, stereo, or VCR would find shelves stocked with Japanese products. Policymakers used obsolete abstractions like the “trade deficit” to understand the American desire for the hundreds of millions of products Japan sold in the United States during the decade. This chapter explores American efforts to understand Japan’s success in the ideological climate of the 1980s.

² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

³ Richard C. Leone, “Foreword,” in Jeffrey E. Garten, *Cold Peace: America, Japan, Germany, and the Struggle for Supremacy* (New York: Times Books, 1992), vii. Leone was president of the Twentieth Century Fund.

Political tensions ran high between Japan and the United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet the tone of official relations never rose above the level of an intense trade dispute.⁴ Cultural tensions, however, reached a boiling point in the last years of the George H.W. Bush administration, demonstrated by a spate of explicitly anti-Japanese publications.⁵ Many political and economic elites recognized the dissonance between official policy and popular discourse. A sizable segment of the U.S. population agreed with the economist Pat Choate when he warned that “America is selling its economy to Japan and surrendering the political and economic control that always accompanies such ownership.”⁶ Nearly seven out of every ten respondents to a 1989 *Business Week* survey believed that the “economic threat from Japan” posed a “more serious threat to the future of this country” than the “military threat from the Soviet Union.” Forty-one percent of respondents believed that “eventually Japan will take America’s place as the world’s leading economic and political power.”⁷ Such ideas permeated elite ideology and popular media images, and yet officials in the U.S. government never acted in ways that made these popular ideas seem determinative.

⁴ Surveys of U.S.-Japan political and economic relations during this period include Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler, eds., *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951-2001* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 2001); and Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997).

⁵ For example, see Leon Anderson, *Japanese Rage: Japanese Business and Its Assault on the West* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1992); George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, *The Coming War with Japan* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1991); and William S. Dietrich, *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: The Political Roots of American Economic Decline* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991); Pat Choate, *Agents of Influence: How Japan’s Lobbyists in the United States Manipulate America’s Political and Economic System* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

⁶ Choate, *Agents of Influence*, xv.

⁷ *Business Week*, December 18, 1989, 63.

Throughout this chapter I refer to the ideological position that the material success of a particular nation posed a threat to American power as the “zero-sum” or “nationalist” interpretation of international power; at the time this position in relation to Japan was labeled “revisionist,” for reasons discussed below.⁸ Adherents to this way of viewing the world were a diverse lot. They were united, however, in their conception of international relations as a zero-sum game between nation-states whereby a gain in international power for one state meant a loss of power for another. Zero-summers used the familiar language of the Cold War to describe how Japan benefited from American losses. As Thomas W. Zeiler notes, this type of language often used war metaphors to describe U.S.-Japan relations after the mid-1970s.⁹

In the 1970s, as David Farber writes, it seemed that “the torch had fallen” for the United States.¹⁰ The defeat in Vietnam was followed by two oil crises and further foreign relations debacles in Afghanistan and Iran in 1979. On the domestic front, the 1970s was the era of “stagflation,” a dangerous economic brew of stagnating growth and continued inflation, which translated into increasing unemployment and decreasing consumer capacity. The increased presence of Japanese products on American shelves and the ever-present concern about a ballooning “trade deficit” provided Americans with one convenient explanation for who was gaining at their expense. The perception that the

⁸ The economist Robert B. Reich used the phrase “zero-sum nationalism—the assumption that either we win or they win,” to describe attitudes toward trade policy in the late 1980s. See Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st-Century Capitalism* (New York: Vintage 1991), 306.

⁹ Thomas W. Zeiler, “Business Is War in U.S.-Japan Economic Relations, 1977-2001,” in Akira Iriye and Robert A. Wampler, eds., *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951-2001* (New York: Kodansha International, 2001), 223-248.

¹⁰ David Farber, “The Torch Had Fallen,” in Beth Bailey and David Farber, eds., *America in the 1970s* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 9-28.

balance of international power had changed considerably also created a need for intellectual explanations.

As Americans purchased Sony televisions and Toyota automobiles by the millions, then, publishers spilled oceans of ink to satiate the public's demand for explanations and clarifications of all things Japanese. Today's university libraries serve as museums for the era of Americans' Japan fixation. Hundreds of books about Japan published in English during this period collect dust; due dates stamped onto inside covers betray a flurry of activity after the mid-1980s and a marked decline in popularity around the mid-1990s.¹¹ On these shelves lies the archive of a curious moment in the history of American self-reflection. When American intellectuals looked in the mirror in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they saw Japan.

Yet in less than half a decade after Tsongas' campaign of anti-Japanese economic nationalism, Japan vanished. Certainly, the cars and VCRs remained. Nevertheless, the all-pervasive ideological construct of Japan was no longer an important feature of U.S. social and cultural life. What happened? Japan's powerful state and business institutions, so often labeled the source of its postwar "miracle," resisted any transformation. Japanese corporations had not stopped selling products to Americans or buying real estate in the United States. Japanese "culture"—another important contemporary explanation for Japan's success—had not changed. What happened to the Japan obsession?

What happened is that Americans rewrote the story. The intellectual framework for understanding Japan's position in the world changed. Quite simply, globalization

¹¹ Though anecdotal, a survey of this literature in Paley Library at Temple University reveals this trend.

“happened,” and the invention and dissemination of this new concept helps explain the end of the “era of bilateral acrimony” between the United States and Japan.¹² Of course, globalization was nothing new. Even its most shortsighted prophets date its arrival to the early 1970s. But in terms of the ways that Americans wrote and spoke about the relationships between the world’s many nations, globalization became the new organizational metaphor. It replaced Cold War-era definitions of international power that relied on the language of bipolarity, strategic forces, and army divisions. Economic power now mattered, and specifically the sort of economic power that could transcend the artificial borders built by centuries of political and military conflict and decades of ideological and geopolitical struggle.

Cultural power mattered too. As the chapters that follow illustrate, the consumption of Japanese goods in the U.S. garnered Japan a great deal of cultural power, though there was little recognition of it at the time, and the exercise of cultural power looked very different from the exercise of military power. By the early 1990s intellectuals labeled the exercising of such transnational economic and cultural power “globalization.” Globalism, an ideology promoting neoliberal trade practices and perceiving the capitalist world as a single interconnected market, emerged in support of the evolving concept of globalization. The Clinton administration replaced the Cold-War strategy of containment—in its broadest sense, a grand strategy that drew boundaries and ensured that they remained fixed and monitored—with a strategy of globalization, which recognized the increasing irrelevance of borders and positioned the United States to benefit most from such a development. In the American imagination, the world had

¹² Andrew Horvat, “Revisionism Revisited—the Era of Bilateral Acrimony,” *Japan Quarterly* 47 (September 2000): 33-41.

changed. Narratives of power in a globalized world replaced Cold War ways of thinking about the world.

Japan was central to the origins of the globalization concept in the United States but the country receded from the American global imagination once a decade-long recession settled over the economic superpower, seemingly halting its unbroken upward trajectory. U.S. business elites and intellectuals espousing globalism throughout the 1980s first conceived of the concept of globalization with Japan as the model of a dramatic world economic revolution that was transforming relationships between peoples and states; in fact, it was altering the very nature of power. Japan seemed to prove that a nation could reach the heights of international power without significant military capabilities. In the wake of the Japanese recession that began in 1990, however, Americans rewrote the narrative of globalization to position not Japan but the West (read: United States) at the center of the late twentieth century's international transformations. As a result, by the end of the century Tsongas' claim that Japan had won the Cold War rang of a different time, place, and optic on the world.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first examines several representative explanations for Japan's success, charting changing conceptions of Japan's place in the world, its consequences for American power, and how these ideas fit into U.S. racial and cultural perceptions of Japan. I examine in detail one document, "Japan 2000," that serves as a case study for the evolving conceptions of Japan and national power. In the last section, I explore the emergence of the globalist interpretation, which functioned as a less popular but no less significant counter to zero-sum nationalism. In contrast to the zero-sum interpreters, globalists saw Japan as an exemplar that could teach Americans

how to thrive in a world where money and media increasingly broke down real and imagined boundaries. This largely implicit ideological debate hinged on the credibility of different narratives of global power in the postwar world.

First a word of clarification: Throwing around terms like ideology and culture is bound to lead any historian into troubled waters. A wise college mentor once said that writing about ideology is “like trying to nail jelly to a wall.” While I appreciate the imagery, to me writing about culture poses even more severe challenges. Raymond Williams wrote, “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.”¹³ The difficulty of claiming to write about U.S. culture in this instance is compounded by the importance of the concept of culture to the historical subjects in this chapter. They thought and wrote in an intellectual universe that placed a premium on culture as an explanatory category. Instead of culture, as a consequence, I have chosen to employ the word “ideology” to describe the assumptions and values of the elites shaping the public discourse I describe in this chapter.

In this context Michael Hunt’s definition of ideology is most useful: “an interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexities of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests appropriate ways of dealing with that reality.”¹⁴ Hunt’s definition derives from the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz and others about the relationship between ideology and political culture. Like Geertz and Hunt, I see ideologies as inescapable, “integrated and coherent systems

¹³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87.

¹⁴ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xi.

of symbols, values, and beliefs,” not masks to be worn and removed by agents with narrow self-interest in mind.¹⁵ As I argue in this dissertation, an understanding of cultural relations must take account of the material as well as the mental interactions of subjects. Therefore no concept better describes my subject in this chapter better than Hunt’s ideology—a slippery word, but still easier to nail to the proverbial wall than either culture or jelly.

Revisionism and the “Japan Panic”

The Cold War taught Americans to fear gaps and deficits. George C. Scott’s character in *Dr. Strangelove*, General Buck Turgidson, parodied the Kennedy-era fear of an alleged “missile gap” with the Soviet Union when he implored his president to “not allow a mineshaft gap!”¹⁶ Beginning in the early 1970s the United States experienced for the first time in the twentieth century a new kind of gap—a trade gap. After maintaining a favorable world trade balance between \$2 billion and \$6 billion throughout the 1960s, and reaching a high of roughly \$12 billion in 1975, the United States would never again export more goods and services than it imported. Journalists regularly used the term “trade deficit”—implying something dangerously lacking—instead of the more neutral “balance of payments” to describe the changing dynamics of international trade.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12. Hunt writes about this older conception of ideology as it is found in the works of George F. Kennan and William A. Williams.

¹⁶ *Dr. Strangelove, or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, DVD, directed by Stanley Kubrick (2001; Culver City, CA: Columbia Pictures, 1964).

While even the relatively meager deficit of \$6 billion in 1976 alarmed some critics, concern over the gap peaked in the second half of the 1980s.¹⁷ The deficit reached an all-time high of nearly \$152 billion in 1987, a record unsurpassed until 1998. (Then another Asian economic power, China, commanded the deficit.) Of that \$152 billion, Japan accounted for almost \$60 billion, or roughly 39 percent.¹⁸ The U.S. Department of Commerce's monthly reports on the deficit reminded Americans like clockwork just how far their torch had fallen and, according to the popular metaphor, just how fast the Japanese sun was rising. To put it simply, was there no "trade deficit," there would not have been what two media studies scholars called the "Japan Panic," a moment of intense, uncertain, and ultimately fleeting fear of and fixation on Japan.¹⁹

The educated elite's efforts to evaluate Japan's success increased in proportion to Japan's actual economic growth. By the mid-1980s dozens of books had appeared, along with countless newspaper and magazine articles, assessing Japanese power and its implications for a weakened America. Making sense of the voluminous writing about Japan from the late 1970s into the early 1990s is crucial to understanding how Americans related to Japan through consumption, discussed in the chapters that follow. As David Engerman argues for the early Cold War, "the production and dissemination of knowledge both constituted a form of foreign relations and at the same time shaped

¹⁷ An example of early alarmism over the deficit is James C. Abegglen and Thomas M. Hout, "Facing Up to the Trade Gap with Japan," *Foreign Affairs* 57 (Fall 1978): 146-168.

¹⁸ Annual balance of payment statistics available at U.S. Census Bureau, "U.S. Trade in Goods and Services—Balance of Payments (BOP) Basis," <http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/historical/gands.pdf>. Statistics specific to trade with Japan available at Bureau of Economic Analysis, "U.S. International Transactions, 1960-Present," http://www.bea.gov/bea/international/bp_web/simple.cfm?anon=71&table_id=10&area_id=11.

¹⁹ David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 147.

American foreign policy as traditionally defined.”²⁰ Just as they did when they consumed cars or VCRs, Americans participated in foreign relations by composing and reading hundreds of books and thousands of articles about U.S.-Japan relations.

A majority of published writings on Japan, and virtually all published books, adhered to some variant of the zero-sum interpretation. By 1989 these writings had acquired the label “revisionism.”²¹ Revisionists understood that economic setbacks engendered a perilous loss of international political power—the power to influence the actions of other nations either through force or persuasion. This diverse group of academics, journalists, business leaders, and public policymakers attributed Japan’s power to a number of causes. In hindsight it is possible to divide revisionist explanations into two general categories: structural revisionism, which focused on Japan’s economic and political institutions, and cultural revisionism, which posited that Japan’s “unique” culture provided its people, businesses, and government with unfair advantages in the economic and political competition for international power.²²

²⁰ David C. Engerman, “Bernath Lecture: American Knowledge and Global Power,” *Diplomatic History* 31 (September 2007): 600.

²¹ The label was first attached by *Business Week*’s Robert Neff in a popular article, “Rethinking Japan,” *Business Week*, August 7, 1989, 44. Neff listed who he thought were the four most prominent revisionists: Chalmers Johnson, Clyde Prestowitz, Karel van Wolferen, and Commerce Secretary Robert A. Mosbacher. The “Gang of Four,” as they would be labeled in Japan, substituted James Fallows for Mosbacher.

²² These are not definitive categories. Some of the less conscientious revisionists regularly crossed lines, but a dichotomy between structuralism and culturalism is helpful in sorting out the wide range of attitudes. Representative structural revisionist texts include Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Karel van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989); I would even include Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), because he elaborated on the structural differences between the U.S. and Japan from which the U.S. should learn, though Vogel’s text was not alarmist, as many successors would be.

Representative cultural revisionist texts include Robert C. Christopher, *The Japanese Mind: the Goliath Explained* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983); Martin J. Wolf, *The Japanese Conspiracy: The Plot to Dominate Industry Worldwide—and How to Deal with It* (New

Structural revisionists like Harvard's Ezra Vogel or University of California at San Diego's Chalmers Johnson often worked in the academy and had extensive and rigorous research experience in Japan. Consequently their conclusions tended toward moderation and level-headedness, even among those that identified Japan as an economic threat (as Johnson did). Cultural revisionists as a rule were more scathing; their critics often accused them of racism, and they walked a fine line between intellectual discourse and "Japan-bashing."²³ The cultural revisionists eschewed the vocabulary of race (consciously so, in many cases), however, opting for the anthropological language of culture to describe the differences that enabled Japan to triumph economically at a time when the United States was suffering its worst economic slump since the 1930s. The categories of structural and cultural revisionists, though artificial, allow for a distinction between intellectuals with legitimate and thoughtful critiques, like structuralists Vogel and Johnson, and nationalists relying on a century-old "yellow peril" script.

What revisionists were revising was the post-1945 orthodox interpretation of Japan as a free-market capitalist, liberal democratic, Cold War ally. Prominent proponents of this view included Harvard University historian and former U.S. ambassador to Japan Edwin O. Reischauer and former senator Mike Mansfield, who

York: Empire Books, 1983); Jared Taylor, *Shadows of the Rising Sun: A Critical View of the "Japanese Miracle"* (New York: William Morrow, 1983); Mark Zimmerman, *How to Do Business with the Japanese* (New York: Random House, 1984); Jon P. Alston, *The American Samurai: Blending American and Japanese Managerial Practices* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986); James N. Fallows, *More Like Us: Making America Great Again* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); and William J. Holstein, *The Japanese Power Game: What It Means for America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990).

²³ The four most vocal revisionists, dubbed the "Gang of Four" (Chalmers Johnson, Karel van Wolferen, Clyde Prestowitz, and James Fallows) responded to accusations of racism and "Japan-bashing" in Chalmers Johnson, et al, "Beyond Japan Bashing," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 7, 1990, 54.

served as U.S. ambassador in Tokyo from 1977 to 1988.²⁴ All revisionists were united in their aim of popularizing an idea that was historically easy for Americans to accept: Japanese thinking and behavior differed fundamentally from “the West.” Revisionists could disagree, however, on whether those differences were social, political, economic, or cultural. Dutch journalist Karel van Wolferen, who lived in Japan and wrote frequently for American publications, summarized the general revisionist position when he wrote that there were two illusions that Americans (and Europeans) maintained: first, “Japan is a sovereign state like any other,” and second, “Japan belongs with [the U.S. and Europe] in that loose category known as capitalist free-market economies.”²⁵ An *Atlantic Monthly* editor, James Fallows, providing a typical cultural revisionist argument, wrote, “Japan has two cultural advantages America can’t match: a concept of racial unity and a tradition of effort for its own sake.... Both of these advantages make it easy for Japan to marshal nearly everyone’s efforts to a productive end.”²⁶ Though structural and cultural explanations differed, they both countered the early Cold War understanding of Japan as a free-market, democratic ally.

The first important text of Japan revisionism, Ezra Vogel’s *Japan as Number One* (1979), lacked the sharply critical tone of revisionist texts to come in the 1980s.

Nonetheless, it was important in launching Japan revisionism because it was the first popular text to describe systematically how Japan had succeeded while the United States

²⁴ See Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese Today: Change and Continuity* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1978). The cultural process of creating this popular understanding of Japan is detailed in Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Karel G. van Wolferen, “The Japan Problem,” *Foreign Affairs* 65(2), Winter 1986-1987: 290-292.

²⁶ Fallows, *More Like Us*, 28.

had failed at confronting the social and cultural dilemmas of modernity. Vogel, a sociologist at Harvard with decades of experience studying Japanese society, claimed that “Japan has dealt more successfully with more of the basic problems of postindustrial society than any other country.” The sociologist sought lessons in Japan’s success for the United States’ “malaise,” as President Carter infamously described it. Vogel was certain that “Japanese success had less to do with traditional character traits than with specific organizational structures, policy programs, and conscious planning.”²⁷ In other words, he believed that Japanese achievements were universally portable. Successful policies and practices were not based on any characteristics particular to culture or race. Therefore, those practices could be adapted to cure the ills—unemployment, declining productivity, class conflict, “stagflation”—of any “postindustrial” society.

In the years following the publication of Vogel’s celebratory book, several diplomatic developments contributed to a more critical perspective on Japanese growth. These included industry diatribes against Japanese automobiles and the Reagan administration’s request for Japanese “voluntary” export quotas, a high-profile lawsuit against Japanese television manufacturers accused of “dumping” on the U.S. market, and the widening trade gap, which nearly doubled from 1980 to 1981. In 1982 Chalmers Johnson, a political scientist at the University of California, San Diego, published the innocuously titled *MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The Growth of Industrial Policy, 1925-1975*. The book provided ammunition to an army of journalists and policymakers by introducing them to the structural and institutional differences between Japan and the United States. His well-researched book furnished critics with a bounty of empirical

²⁷ Vogel, *Japan as Number One*, viii, ix.

evidence that Japan's economic and political institutions were structured unlike those of any modern state. Johnson turned "MITI," Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry, into a media dirty word and made it synonymous with the shadowy "Japanese bureaucrats" to whom Americans attributed so much agency in the governing of Japan's institutions.

Like Vogel, Johnson aimed to promote Japanese solutions to American (or modern) problems. The sooner revisionists dispelled American policymakers of myths about postwar Japan, the sooner they could adjust to the conditions responsible for the trade imbalance and declining industrial competitiveness. According to Johnson, the most important explanation for Japan's economic "miracle" was the unique relationship between the state and the market. He labeled it the "state-guided market system," or the "capitalist developmental state," embodied in the institution of MITI.²⁸ MITI maintained Japan's "industrial policy," a buzzword most identified academically with Johnson and politically with Colorado Senator and presidential aspirant Gary Hart, to target specific industries for protection and growth. The ministry ensured that Japanese corporations had advantages over foreign competition. The Japanese state aided the steel industry, for example, by providing it with subsidies for exporting and protectionist barriers against imported steel.²⁹ These were, he emphasized, hardly free-market practices, and they left American producers at a disadvantage. The U.S. government continued to abet the deterioration of U.S. industry by allowing Japanese producers to sell in the U.S. market

²⁸ Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, viii. Johnson's analysis of the state-market relationship in Japan serves as the basis for Walter LaFeber's concept of the "two capitalisms" of the U.S. and Japan. See LaFeber, *The Clash*, chapter 12.

²⁹ Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle*, 268-272.

according to the tenets of free trade, while the Japanese refused to do so at home.

Throughout the 1980s Johnson vigorously advocated a similar U.S. industrial policy.

Vogel and Johnson stand out as rarities during this period because Japan studies specialists rarely engaged popular debates about Japan. As Andrew Horvat writes, “most revisionists in the decade were outsiders to the field of Japan studies and the popularity of their ideas was linked to an absence of policy-relevant research by Japan specialists.”³⁰

Vogel and Johnson helped to establish important themes early in the debate, but their colleagues largely dismissed the developing public discourse as media banter and crude nationalism, especially as humanities scholars turned increasingly toward the esoteric concerns of cultural studies. Consequently, a host of dubiously qualified authors usurped Vogel’s and Johnson’s ideas about the differences of postwar Japan and coupled them with persistent cultural stereotypes dating back to at least the World War II era, if not the nineteenth century. From the mid-1980s until the Japan fixation abated, the conversation would be dominated by what I call the cultural revisionists, consisting of journalists, business elites, and the occasional scholar working outside his expertise. Cultural revisionists were uninterested in nuance and historical contingency; instead they sought and constructed a representation of Japan that could be mobilized to meet nationalistic policy ends.

“For those of you with a yen for 172 pages of mindless hype, artless drivel, shameless racism and fathomless idiocy,” wrote University of Chicago historian Bruce Cumings in 1991, “I highly recommend *Japan 2000*.”³¹ Cumings “discovered” a

³⁰ Horvat, “Revisionism Revisited,” 33.

³¹ Bruce Cumings, “CIA’s *Japan 2000* Capers,” *The Nation*, September 30, 1991, 366-367.

remarkable revisionist document, produced secretly by the administration of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in conjunction with the Central Intelligence Agency, that identified Japan as nothing less than a menace to the American way of life.³² “Japan 2000” reflected virtually all of the pervasive revisionist-inspired cultural understandings of Japan, and therefore it warrants a critical exposition. “Our nation and its underlying values are threatened,” this document warned. “Above all, the answer lies in understanding the threat and developing a national will to preserve that which is so rapidly slipping away. It need not!”³³

The production of “Japan 2000” was embedded in a larger story of the relationship between RIT and the CIA. Throughout 1991, a local newspaper, the *Democrat & Chronicle*, revealed how the institute’s president, former Nixon staffer and retired U.S. marine M. Richard Rose, misled the Rochester community as to the nature of a sabbatical. He claimed to be assisting the George H.W. Bush administration with preparations for the Gulf War, but he was really in Langley, Virginia, assisting CIA

³² Andrew J. Dougherty, “Japan 2000.” Unedited prepublication copy. May 1, 1991. Dudley Knox Library, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California. The document was never published and it is unclear how many unpublished copies remain of the nine different drafts. To clarify, throughout the dissertation I put “Japan 2000” in quotation marks, following style guidelines for unpublished documents, since it remains unpublished. Writers at the time, however, often put the document in italics; I have not altered their formatting when quoting.

Also, the question of authorship is complicated. Andrew J. Dougherty is listed as the sole author, but he had no expertise in Japanese language, culture, or history. Those who attended the conference, though, did. My assumption is that Dougherty, Rose’s executive assistant, served as a scribe during discussions with the intention of writing up the proceedings in a publishable format. And so although I cite Dougherty as the author of “Japan 2000,” my assumption is that the document’s ideas came directly from conference discussions. I also assume that Dougherty played a small role in these discussions. Therefore throughout the chapter I credit Dougherty with authorship in the notes but I give the document agency throughout the text to convey that it was a group effort.

³³ Dougherty, “Japan 2000,” 84, 69.

operatives “prepare... to deal with the post-Cold War period.”³⁴ After this surprise the *Democrat & Chronicle* continued to publish revelations about RIT’s CIA connections dating back to the late 1960s. Rose’s resignation in 1992 followed a highly publicized fact-finding commission.³⁵

In May 1991 the *Democrat & Chronicle* published brief excerpts from an unpublished report, “Japan 2000: DEFCON 1.”³⁶ The document was the product of discussions held at an unusual weekend conference at RIT in October 1990, which brought together intellectuals, business leaders, former government representatives, and unnamed representatives of the CIA.³⁷ Though the report listed Rose’s assistant, Andrew J. Dougherty (a glorified secretary, in this case), as the author, the appendix listed eight discussants: Roy Amara, a Stanford Ph.D. and president of the Institute for the Future;

³⁴ Quoted in Jean A. Douthwright, “Rochester Institute of Technology: A CIA Subsidiary?” *Covert Action Information Bulletin* Fall 1991, 4-9; reproduced at <http://www.cia-on-campus.org/rit.edu/rit.html>.

³⁵ See Douthwright, “Rochester Institute of Technology”; editorial, “CIA U,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 24, 1991; William Glaberson, “College’s C.I.A. Links Cause Furor, and Soul-Searching,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1991; and Jim Rosenberg, “The CIA at RIT,” *Editor & Publisher*, January 18, 1992, 30.

³⁶ The report originally had the subtitle “DEFCON 1.” The version that I was able to obtain, however, no longer had this subtitle and was simply titled “Japan 2000.” According to one report, the document went through nine drafts before finally being discarded. The first draft was apparently dated February 1991, while the draft in my possession is dated May 1991.

³⁷ The extent of the CIA’s involvement is unclear. Some commentators have cited the CIA as the author of the report, which is technically erroneous since only Andrew J. Dougherty is listed as the author. David C. Kang, “Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks,” *International Security* 27(4), Spring 2003: 57-85, lists the Central Intelligence Agency as the author, perhaps revealing less the reality of the document and more how it is remembered by the few people who actually do. Contemporary media accounts varied on the CIA’s involvement. One journalist claimed that, along with the eight listed participants, “CIA personnel” also contributed, while the same journalist wrote elsewhere that the document was “prepared for the Central Intelligence Agency by outside specialists.” See Paul F. Horvitz, “CIA Spurns Report that Assails Japan,” *Washington Post*, June 12, 1991; and Paul F. Horvitz, “CIA-Funded Study Says Japan Lacks Global Responsibility,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 1991. Another article made explicit that the initiative was entirely Rose’s and Dougherty’s, as the document was “prepared for the CIA (but not at its request).” See Rosenberg, “The CIA at RIT,” 30.

Kent E. Calder, a Harvard Ph.D. and at the time a political scientist at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School; Jeffrey E. Garten, former State Department staffer and in 1990 Managing Director of the Stamford Company, a New York-based investment bank (Garten would later serve as under secretary for international trade in the Clinton administration); Chalmers Johnson; Robert C. McFarlane, former Reagan National Security Advisor and a central player in the Iran-Contra affair; Frank J. Pipp, a "retired group president of Xerox Corporation," formerly of Ford; the aforementioned Rose; and Tim Stone, "Director of Corporate Intelligence" for Motorola, who previously at the CIA "organized and led the Agency's intelligence analysis on foreign industrial competition, focusing on Japanese government and private sector programs."³⁸

It is unclear how much "Japan 2000" reflected the attitudes and discussions of the participants at the October 1990 conference. Several attendees, including investment banker Garten and political scientist Calder, claimed that the document "did not accurately reflect their views." Garten wrote to CIA Director William H. Webster, demanding that the CIA make clear that participants did not approve the draft and it did not reflect all of their opinions. Calder added that "Japan 2000" was a "sharp exaggeration."³⁹

Chalmers Johnson, curiously, did not denounce the document. To the contrary, he defended his involvement "as part of one's civic duty." Johnson asserted that the report, "while somewhat naïve, is an accurate reflection of the seminar discussions and of the

³⁸ Dougherty, "Japan 2000," 101-102.

³⁹ S.L. Bachman, "Japan: Critical Study Not Official U.S. View," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 17, 1991; Horvitz, "CIA Spurns Report."

problems in the U.S.-Japan relationship.”⁴⁰ He felt that “the CIA is not earning its money” in accounting for Japanese economic success and the lack of a U.S. industrial policy.⁴¹ Nearly a decade later, some scholars remained bitter that Johnson refused to denounce the document.⁴²

“Japan 2000” serves as a singular window on the popular attitudes of cultural revisionists. The document also reveals the shifting discursive boundaries of cultural attitudes in the United States in general. Very rarely did “Japan 2000” address the Japanese “race.” In fact, in several instances it explicitly self-identified as non-racist, reflecting sensitivity to the accusations of racism often leveled at Japan revisionists. Instead the document repeatedly references the uniqueness of Japanese “culture” and the advantages it provided Japan in international relations. The category of race lost nearly all of its popular legitimacy in the United States after the civil rights movement, the U.S. war against the Vietnamese people, and the emergence of the Holocaust in popular memory.⁴³ These social and military conflicts delegitimized race as an analytical category and pushed “culture”—disconnected from the physical body and thus not unjustly attributable—to the forefront of popular attitudes toward relationships between different groups of human beings.

⁴⁰ Cumings, “CIA’s *Japan 2000* Caper,” 366; Susumu Awanohara, “Paradigm Paranoia: CIA Report Warns of Japanese Economic Domination,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 27, 1991, 15.

⁴¹ Quoted in Awanohara, “Paradigm Paranoia,” 15.

⁴² This is mentioned briefly in Harry Harootunian and Naoki Sakai, “Japan Studies and Cultural Studies,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 7 (1999): 593-647.

⁴³ On the holocaust in American popular memory, see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

The document's emphasis on culture reproduced common American understandings of a Japanese "other." Much as the category of race served to dehumanize Japanese during World War II, highlighting culture also implied that the differences between the two countries were unbridgeable.⁴⁴ The document stated, "A general adherence to [the Imperial Oath of 1868] over the past 123 years speaks simultaneously to the culture and commitment and explains Japan's contemporary behavior."⁴⁵ (The Imperial Oath was reproduced at the end of the document.) Fixing Japan permanently in 1868 permitted liberal use of clichéd imagery like the samurai and feudalism to describe Japanese ideas and behavior. The idea also made clear that whatever changes affected Japanese society in the century and a quarter after 1868, the cultural universe its people inhabited remained resolute. When such imagery was ingested by many millions of Americans who would never meet Japanese "except through the medium of culture," as Melani McAlister puts it, cultural misunderstanding reached dangerous levels, especially in the context of intense economic competition.⁴⁶

The book most responsible for these attitudes toward culture—and listed in "Japan 2000"'s short bibliography—was Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.⁴⁷ Benedict's influence on postwar American thinking about culture, especially

⁴⁴ On racial images of Japan in World War II, see John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

⁴⁵ Dougherty, "Japan 2000," 4.

⁴⁶ Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1.

⁴⁷ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946. Benedict's book remains in print, with the most recent edition appearing in 2006, and is an important text not only in U.S. Japanese studies but also anthropology in general, despite its obvious flaws. For a thoughtful analysis of *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, see Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New

Japanese culture, was commanding. Not only did she provide Americans with a framework for understanding their enemy-turned-ally, but she generally employed culture as an explanatory model to an extent greater than any previous popular writer. A student of Franz Boas, Benedict explicitly rejected biological conceptions of race as a behavioral determinant. “Rather,” as Mari Yoshihara explains, “integrated cultural patterns, the unconscious logic of sentiments and assumptions, and the processes of enculturation were the keys to understanding people’s behaviors.”⁴⁸ This way of thinking about culture pervaded American thought in the postwar era and by the 1970s had trickled down to the popular level. The influential “linguistic turn” in cultural studies of the 1970s, spurred by such diverse scholars as Michel Foucault and Clifford Geertz, was influential in the academy but hardly made a scratch in the surface of popular understandings of culture in the United States. (Indeed, culture in the anthropological, not linguistic, sense remains the popular understanding of culture in the United States outside of the academy.) For Dougherty and the Japan revisionists, culture explained Japanese behavior; in many cases it simply replaced the word “race.”

If Edward Said had imagined the ideal text to illustrate an “orientalist” worldview in U.S.-Japan relations, it might look a lot like “Japan 2000.” Said’s *Orientalism* described European cultural images of the “Orient” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “Japan 2000” displayed many of the characteristics of orientalism that Said identified: the drawing of a sharp dichotomy between the culturally superior West and the inferior East; the universalizing of Western values to deem the East immoral; and the

York: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially chapter 7, “Re-Gendering the Enemy: Culture and Gender in Ruth Benedict’s *Chrysanthemum and the Sword*.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 178.

imagining of an Orient that is forever static and unchanging, while the West is progressive and changing for the better.⁴⁹ In 1991 an academic like Bruce Cumings was familiar with theories of how the West viewed non-Western societies, and therefore he could write that a better title for “Japan 2000” might have been “*Ethnocentrism 1900.*” The document reminded Cumings of a Kipling-esque defense of “Western civilization” against the backwardness and barbarism of the East.⁵⁰

Outside the academy American elites never absorbed such theories. Consequently, “Japan 2000” repeatedly drew a dichotomy between the cultures of East and West. The document argued that Westerners have a hard time interacting with Japanese because the latter’s “culture does not recognize the existence of transcendental or absolute truths.” Further, while the “ethical/moral underpinnings of Western business are held to be immutable,” the “Japanese Paradigm... disallows the existence of any set of absolute rules.” The document faulted “centuries” of Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian tradition for imposing “strict hierarchical arrangements” and “political and intellectual suppression.” The struggle between Western and Japanese cultures was emerging, and Americans would be mistaken to believe that these two cultures were compatible—“the cultures of the West and East are worlds apart and share very few values,” a caricatured echo of Rudyard Kipling’s infamous poem, “The Ballad of East and West.”⁵¹

In short, “Japan 2000” emphasized the stark disparity between U.S. and Japanese cultures. Historians of U.S. foreign relations have shown that American elites often

⁴⁹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), and also *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

⁵⁰ Cumings, “CIA’s *Japan 2000* Caper,” 366.

⁵¹ Dougherty, “Japan 2000,” 5, 17, 21-22.

assumed that vast cultural differences existed between the United States and non-Western societies and cultural differences can impede relations.⁵² In the case of U.S.-Japan relations in the 1980s, cultural revisionists believed that the differences between U.S. and Japanese culture became greater and mattered more because of the close relationship between the two countries. “Rarely in history,” wrote William J. Holstein, an editor for *Business Week*, in 1990, “have two societies of such vastly different values allowed themselves to become so interdependent.”⁵³ Robert Christopher claimed that “the thought processes of Germans, Russians, Saudis or Nigerians resemble our own sufficiently closely that when we put our minds to it we can usually deal with them.... Between Americans and Japanese, however, the gulf is both wider and deeper.... Americans have no idea how Japanese think and feel.”⁵⁴ This idea was another of Benedict’s legacies. Though she wrote about Japan (for which she had neither formal training nor language skills), she was acutely interested in how its culture differed from that of the United States, as the opening line of her book expressed: “The Japanese were the most alien enemy the United States had ever fought.”⁵⁵

⁵² Examples include Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounter Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Cultures of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Similar to the Japanese case, Andrew J. Rotter illustrates how the perception of cultural differences on the part of Americans toward India often determined the behavior of U.S. policymakers. See Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁵³ Holstein, *The Japanese Power Game: What It Means for America*, 3.

⁵⁴ Christopher, *The Japanese Mind*, 21.

⁵⁵ Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, 1.

Cultural discourses in Japan, which inevitably made their way across the Pacific, permitted revisionists to emphasize Japanese uniqueness. They frequently pointed to the concept of *nihonjinron*, which literally translates as “discussions of the Japanese,” to turn the accusation of racial and cultural exclusivity against Japan. The term broadly characterizes a writing and publishing industry in Japan that promotes cultural nationalism and the alleged uniqueness of different aspects of Japan, ranging from the homogeneity of the “Yamato race” to the distinctiveness of the Japanese islands.⁵⁶ For example, Kyonosuke Ibe, president of Sumitomo Bank, one of Japan’s largest, wanted to assure American readers of *Business Week* that “it took the Japanese to build Japan.” “So far, our strength has been in our homogeneity,” he wrote. “As a people, we could predict the reactions of 100 million people of a single race.”⁵⁷ A *Business Week* reader in 1982 wanted to set Americans straight too: “What most Americans don’t comprehend is that Japan is a homogeneous society that relies on a complete lack of friction from any of its parts.... They all act in a concerted fashion to ‘beat the gaijin.’”⁵⁸

Cultural nationalism is not unique to any society. But in the context of Japan’s economic success and long-standing U.S. perceptions of the Japanese as the most “alien” of all peoples that Americans encountered, the language of *nihonjinron* struck a dissonant chord. It provided revisionists with an opportunity to argue that the heterogeneity of American society proved its greatest democratic and pluralist asset and that, having conquered their own racial demons, Americans were in a privileged position to highlight

⁵⁶ Peter N. Dale, *The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), “Introduction.”

⁵⁷ Kyonosuke Ibe, “It Took the Japanese to Build Japan,” *Business Week*, October 6, 1980, 17.

⁵⁸ Readers report, “Wake Up, America,” *Business Week*, December 16, 1982, 8.

Japanese racism. Unlike the United States, “Japan 2000” stated, “Japan has no commitment to assimilate people of diverse cultures, ethics, or opinions. It is in these ways that Japan is racist. It is in these ways that Japan is not democratic.”⁵⁹ The journalist James Fallows, one of the more popular revisionists, wrote of the Japanese, “their fixation on the factors that make them unique in the world goes miles beyond what we normally think of as prejudice.” What was unique about the United States, he insisted in a direct challenge to *nihonjinron*, “is its assumption that race should not matter, that a society can be built of individuals with no particular historic or racial bond to link them together.”⁶⁰ The Japanese challenge forced revisionists to define what it meant to be American.

“Japan 2000” also exposed debates about the changing nature of international power. The authors claimed that Japanese culture was above all concerned with power—assessing it, achieving it, manipulating it, and basking in it. Thus Dougherty included an entire chapter on “The Nature of Power.”⁶¹ Japan’s rise portended “a revolution that will alter the very nature and use of power.” While vast natural resources and unrivaled industrial production once bankrolled U.S. international power, it was Japan’s ability to manipulate information technology and global systems of symbols that ideally positioned it to benefit from global transformations. As Dougherty wrote, “Japan has rewritten the rules of both international relations and international trade. It has sufficient power to make the world play by its rules.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Dougherty, “Japan 2000,” 25.

⁶⁰ Fallows, *More Like Us*, 7, 2.

⁶¹ Dougherty, “Japan 2000,” 10-18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 32.

The document's discussion of "the nature of power" suggested the influence of recent debates in international relations. In 1985 Richard Rosecrance, a political scientist then at Cornell University, published a provocative work for a popular audience, *The Rise of the Trading State*.⁶³ Rosecrance argued that "a new 'trading world' of international relations offers the possibility of escaping... a vicious cycle [of conflict] and finding new patterns of cooperation among nation-states." In a new international environment "states, as Japan has shown, can do better through a strategy of economic development based on trade than they are likely to do through military intervention in the affairs of other nations."⁶⁴ He claimed that Japan's power did not derive from traditional military and political relationships, and therefore it was not likely to seek traditional military and political power because it had no need for them. "It is not the American model that Japan will ultimately follow," he stated provokingly. "Rather, it is the Japanese model that America may ultimately follow."⁶⁵

Two years later Yale University historian Paul Kennedy joined the decade-old discourse on American decline by introducing popular audiences to debates about international power. His *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* sold 225,000 copies in 1988 alone.⁶⁶ The book recounted from a Realist perspective the major shifts in international relations since the sixteenth century, stressing that states had to balance

⁶³ Richard Rosecrance, *The Rise of the Trading State: Commerce and Conquest in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁶⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York: Random House, 1987); the 225,000 figure comes from Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 202.

economic resources and military capabilities to remain in the great power club. Readers did not have to look beyond the book's cover to get a sense of its presentist concerns (Image 2.1). Three cartoonish figures stood astride a globe shaped like a pedestal with three levels. At the front of the line, yet about to step offstage, was a Churchillian John Bull carrying the Union Jack. Behind him, at the very top of the world, but descending onto the second tier, was Uncle Sam holding an American flag. Behind the American, a Japanese figure best described as a bespectacled *sarariman* (salaryman—the quintessential image of the faceless Japanese white-collar worker) prepared to scale the summit and hoist a Japanese flag atop the globe.

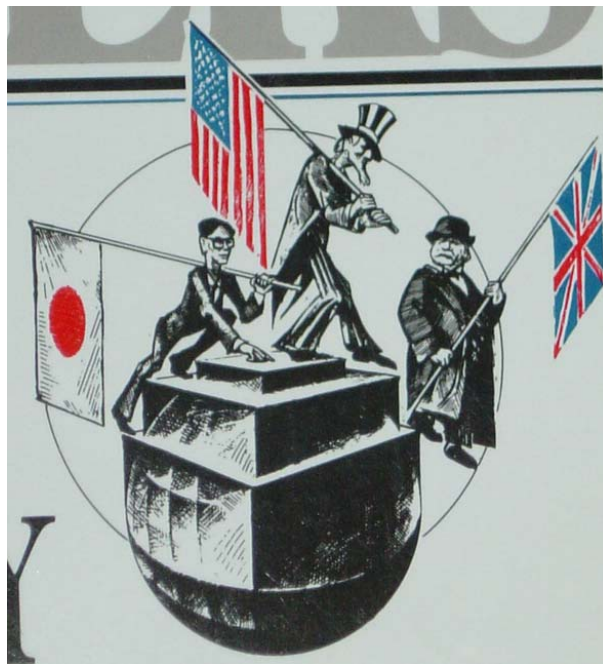


Image 2.1: Illustration from the cover of Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987).

Those readers able to make their way through nearly six hundred pages of meticulously detailed text found that Kennedy's history lesson was a lengthy allegory for American power in the late twentieth century. Historically, great powers fell when they

succumbed to what he called “imperial overstretch”: when military needs outweighed economic capabilities. The United States, he warned, sat on the brink of imperial overstretch because of the demands of the Cold War. Japan, on the other hand, did not have military commitments all over the planet and instead could dedicate its resources to domestic improvements and continued economic expansion overseas. If history proved a guide for great powers, then Americans should be vigilant about the Japanese sun rising over their shoulders.⁶⁷

Kennedy’s book inspired an international relations scholar of equal stature to respond with his own survey of the changing international system. In *Bound to Lead* (1990), Harvard political scientist Joseph S. Nye, Jr., countered Kennedy: “in a world of growing interdependence among nations... U.S. decline is the wrong question.” Instead Americans should have been asking, “How is power changing in modern international politics?”⁶⁸ “Power is becoming less fungible, less coercive, and less tangible,” he wrote. It was also becoming more diffuse—nongovernmental and transnational actors were taking advantage of new communications technologies and economic institutions, in the process contributing to the “diffusion of power away from all the great powers.” As a result, “soft power resources—cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions,” or “co-optive power,” were beginning to define a nation-state’s power as much as the traditional categories of military capabilities and political control.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁷ See Kennedy, chapter 8, “To the Twenty-first Century.”

⁶⁸ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), ix.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 188, 182.

United States may have declined, but no country had more co-optive power. Therefore the United States was “bound to lead.”

Japan was not. “Japanese consumer products and cuisine have recently become increasingly fashionable on a global scale,” Nye noted. “They seem less associated with an implicit appeal to a broader set of values, however, than in the case of American domination of popular communication.” He explained this by utilizing the Japanese uniqueness argument, claiming that Japanese culture had an “inward orientation” and rejected foreigners outright anyway.⁷⁰ A couple years later, Nye reiterated that the Japanese had discussed the need to internationalize, but “the United States and Europe have more universalistic cultures and more inclination to proselytize.”⁷¹

Nye’s way of representing Japanese power revealed a curious turn. For Japan’s orthodox interpreters, the country was a solid ally and a loyal imitator. For structural revisionists, it was a challenge to American policymakers; for cultural revisionists, Japan was a clear and present danger. Nye had weighed these claims and found Japan, quite simply, unappealing, or at least not as appealing as “the ethnic openness of the American culture and the political appeal of the American values of democracy and human rights.”⁷² Nye was not the first observer to judge Japan this way. Almost a decade earlier, journalist Lance Morrow had the same concerns in mind. “The deepest questions of the Japanese future revolve around Japan’s capacity to transcend the limits of its identity,” he wrote in *Time* magazine. The United States and the Soviet Union “stand for

⁷⁰ Ibid., 194-195.

⁷¹ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “Coping with Japan,” *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1992-1993): 100.

⁷² Nye, *Bound to Lead*, 195.

something in the world,” he continued. “What does Japan represent? Does Japan have a universal meaning?” Nye and Morrow both speculated that Japan lacked a big story—a metanarrative like U.S. democratic liberalism or Soviet social justice communalism—that could appeal to people across spatial and temporal borders. Without a metanarrative to serve as an answer to the universal problems of modernity, Japan existed in a localized postmodernity.

But for some Americans, the idea that Japan represented a postmodern future sounded promising.

“Citizens of the World”: The Japanese Corporation and the Invention of Globalization

In an auspicious year for dystopian visions—1984—the renowned science-fiction author William Gibson echoed George Orwell’s effort to imagine a future derived from the present’s more unsettling characteristics. His landmark novel *Neuromancer* brought to life a world in which the borders between the real and the virtual blurred; individuals and corporations struggled for the power to control the complex “matrix” of data that linked important financial centers around the globe. Gibson wrote, “Power... meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had attained a kind of immortality.”⁷³

Ridley Scott shared Gibson’s vision of the future. In the 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the director visualized Los Angeles nearly fifty years into the future as a truly global city. The presence of a cacophony of ethnicities and languages, with Japanese, Chinese, and

⁷³ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 203.

Russian signs and advertisements as ubiquitous as English, signaled that cultures and economies in the future could traverse borders as they had never done in the past. As in Gibson's world, corporations ruled: the Tyrell Corporation, a manufacturer of human-like robots called replicants, had the power to marshal the forces of law and order at its whim. In fact, state power is conspicuously absent in Scott's dystopia.

Two key ideas emerge from these visions. First, in Gibson's and Scott's futures, unprecedented power at the international level rested in the hands of corporations. They were unrestrained by "old barriers," meaning government regulations or the borders of nation-states. Second, Gibson chose the word "zaibatsu"—referencing the pre-World War II giant industrial conglomerates that powered Imperial Japan's war machine—to convey that the sort of corporations that "transcended old barriers" had a distinctly Japanese flavor. From today's vantage point, this second idea is more strikingly original: Japan rarely figures as the central national player in the unfolding late-twentieth-century drama of globalization. Popular and academic conceptions of globalization position the United States or the "West" as ground zero for a series of dramatic, worldwide economic, social, political, and cultural transformations.

The historical genealogy of "globalization" betrays a different story. As intellectuals and business leaders in the United States began to conceptualize "globalization" in the 1980s, no country was more central to their thoughts than Japan. It was the remarkable worldwide expansion of Japanese corporations in the 1970s and 1980s that first introduced Americans to the characteristics that they would come to associate with contemporary globalization. Japan was not only where Americans imagined the future leading, as Gibson and Scott did, but it was also where Americans

first learned what globalization meant. Globalization was not just a new way of explaining old processes; it was a way of conceptualizing the perceived shifts in power at the international level in the 1970s and 1980s.

First, the question of semantics: what I am not concerned with is debating the meaning of contemporary globalization. There are countless studies that do so thoroughly, yet the meaning remains contested.⁷⁴ Those studies often emphasize—and rightly so—that globalization is actually a process centuries, if not millennia, old. Yet while a process of increasing interconnectedness among all of the world’s people has been in motion since at least the fifteenth century, it is only within the last two decades that politicians, business leaders, intellectuals, and non-elites around the world have adopted the word “globalization” as shorthand for the vast changes resulting in unprecedented interconnectedness. Elites have espoused an ideology that has come to be called globalism—“an ideology that endows the concept of globalization with neoliberal values and meanings,” as globalization scholar Manfred Steger puts it.⁷⁵

Instead of rehashing the debate about when globalization began and what exactly it means, I seek to historicize our contemporary understandings of globalization. Where

⁷⁴ By “contemporary globalization” I mean those political, social, economic, and cultural transformations unique to the post-World War II world. This includes but is not limited to the global proliferation of new media technologies and instantaneous communications; the transnationalization of capitalism; the perceived homogenization of culture or the creation of a “global culture”; increased immigration; and quick and inexpensive modes of travel. Indeed, the empirical validity of some of these are questioned outright, particularly the issue of culture, which has seen a “fragmentation” resulting from globalization more powerful than homogenization. Some of the better introductory studies of globalization include Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd edition (New York: Palgrave, 2005); and Jurgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, translated by Dona Geyer (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Manfred Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2003). The Steger book more than any other comes closest to a discursive understanding of globalization—apart from its actual political, economic, cultural, and technological consequences, globalization is still a discursive creation of the 1980s.

⁷⁵ Steger, *Globalization*, 94.

did the concept come from and what shaped the various meanings applied to it? Some of the most important popular and intellectual understandings of globalization—the transnational turn of capitalism, the worldwide proliferation of new communications technologies, the perceived homogenization of culture, and the erosion of the borders and sovereignty of the nation-state—derive from the United States’ encounter with the growing power of Japanese corporations in the 1970s and 1980s. The discourse of Japan-as-globalizer was the reverse side of the coin to the Japan-as-national-threat worldview evinced in “Japan 2000.”

Locating Japan at the heart of globalization is difficult because the United States has been persistently absorbed in its own centrality to the narrative of late twentieth-century world history. Journalists and scholars writing about Japan’s challenge to American economic hegemony in the last quarter of the twentieth century have framed it as just that—at best a serious challenge and at worst a distraction from the teleological march of American power across the planet. When it came to defining the contours of the global changes occurring from the early 1970s on, however, no country was more central to the conversation than Japan.

Two groups were responsible for the narrative of Japan as a globalizing force. First, Japanese business leaders and intellectuals were interested in initiating a conversation with American elites about the meaning of Japanese economic success and its implications for the future. Second, some American business elites and intellectuals were fascinated by Japanese success and its relationship to the rapidly changing international business environment. This optimistic dialogue about the promises of a globalized future stood in sharp contrast to the more gloomy polemic described in the

previous section. Above the nationalistic noise some Japanese and Americans envisioned a “borderless” future of economic prosperity and technological transformation. This section examines contributions to that vision.

Throughout the 1980s several academic disciplines carried on quiet, self-contained conversations about “globalization,” “globality,” “global interdependence,” and the “global village.”⁷⁶ The most thoroughly developed understanding of global transformations since World War II, though, came from the academic business community. Academic journals like the *Harvard Business Review*, popular weekly magazines like *Business Week*, and industry specialty publications like the *McKinley Quarterly* represented the views of this community. Even before the discourse on globalization began in the early 1980s, one individual, Akio Morita, and the company he founded, Sony, presented a model for the global corporation in the 1960s and 1970s, laying a foundation for the later invention and articulation of the idea of globalization.

Sony and the Global Corporation

Beginning in the 1970s Japanese corporations assumed a greater presence in the daily lives of many Americans. Honda, Toyota, and Datsun sold automobiles that were inexpensive and fuel efficient compared to their American counterparts, an advantage in

⁷⁶ The media theorist Marshall McLuhan first used “global village” in 1962 to describe (in a derogatory sense) the effects on human societies of the growing interdependence of electronic media. See *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962). For evolving discussions in the 1980s, see Roland Robertson, “Interpreting Globality,” in *World Realities and International Studies Today* (Glenside, PA.: Pennsylvania Council on International Education, 1984), 7-20. Robertson, a sociologist, would later write an important early theoretical contribution to the study of globalization. See Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992). On the early discussion of globalization in international relations, see James N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence: Essays on the Transnationalization of World Affairs* (New York: Nichols, 1980); and Ray Maghroori and Bennett Ramberg, *Globalism versus Realism: International Relations’ Third Debate* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982).

the market after the oil crises of 1973 and 1979. Matsushita, through a variety of brand names like Panasonic and Quasar, distributed a wide range of consumer electronics. Arguably the consumption of foreign goods had not had such a radical impact on the ways that Americans went about their daily lives since the first decades of the republic.⁷⁷

The most iconic Japanese company in the American imagination was and continues to be Sony Corporation. Since 1961, when Sony became the first Japanese corporation to have its stock traded on the New York Stock Exchange, the company has managed to sell an image of global success and superior quality, consistently ranking at the top of the “Best Of” consumer polls that garner legitimacy and greater profits.⁷⁸ (A 1990 poll found that Sony was also the most recognizable brand name in the Soviet Union, followed by the German sports apparel company, Adidas.⁷⁹) Sony has also successfully marketed and sold another image: the global corporation, the company without borders or a distinct ethnic or national identity. As one reporter wrote for *Business Week* in 1987, “it is... the most international of companies.”⁸⁰ No one better cultivated the image of the global corporation than Sony’s co-founder, Akio Morita.

⁷⁷ Cases can be made that both British and, to a lesser extent, Chinese goods were central to U.S. national identity in the country’s formative decades. See T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

⁷⁸ Sony has ranked number one for seven straight years in the annual Harris Poll of “Best Brands,” beating out the likes of General Motors, Dell, Coca-Cola, and fellow Japanese companies like Toyota and Honda. See Harris Interactive, “Sony on Top in Annual ‘Best Brands’ Harris Poll for Seventh Consecutive Year,” *Harris Poll*, July 12, 2006,” http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=682.

⁷⁹ Frederick Ungeheuer, “Mr. Ambition’s Biggest Bid,” *Time*, July 23, 1990.

⁸⁰ Larry Armstrong, “Sony’s Challenge,” *Business Week*, June 1, 1987, 64.

The three most thorough histories of Sony Corporation construct remarkably similar narratives of Sony's rise to global prominence.⁸¹ Each recounts Sony's foundational mythology dating back to a World War II partnership between Morita, a talented physics student, and Masaru Ibuka, a wizard of electrical engineering. The two worked for the Japanese Navy designing sophisticated weapons systems, none of which ever found the battlefield. A couple of years after the war, the pair reunited to establish a company based on their shared passion for electrical engineering. Morita did so in open revolt against his birthright, which demanded he assume control of his family's highly profitable *sake* business—a symbolic break between traditional and modern. Instead of rejecting his son for disobedience, however, Morita's father invested heavily in what would become the Sony Corporation. Though each narrative portrays the pair's early years as dire, Morita and Ibuka had extensive connections to a world of political and economic influence, so their potential impoverishment was unlikely. By the mid-1950s the company was firmly established and profitable.

Most revealing of Sony's narrative of globalization is the origin of the name Sony. As Morita told it, he revised his vision of the company—the tongue-twisting *Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo Kabushiki Kaisha* (“Totsuko” for short)—after a visit to the European home of the respected Dutch electronics manufacturer, Philips. If Philips could design and sell products from a small Dutch village, then Morita could do the same

⁸¹ John Nathan, *Sony: The Private Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); “Sony Global – Sony History,” <http://www.sony.net/Fun/SH/>; and Akio Morita, with Edwin M. Reingold and Mitsuko Shimomura, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986). Nathan had extensive access to Sony archives and conducted interviews with virtually all of the important players at Sony, though Morita was incapacitated by that time and Ibuka had passed away. He mentions how, upon granting Nathan exclusive access, many of the Sony brass assumed Nathan would be writing an official history.

coming from a small Japanese village.⁸² However, he needed “a new name that could be recognized anywhere in the world, one that could be pronounced the same in any language.” The catchiest product names were short and easily recognizable—Ford, NBC, IBM, Sears. He recounted combining the Latin word for sound, *sonus*, with the English word “sonny” (as in “sonny boy”), which sounded bright and optimistic. “The new name,” Morita later said, “had the advantage of not meaning anything but ‘Sony’ in any language.” Further, since industrialized nations were teaching their citizens the world’s new lingua franca, English, everyone with the resources to purchase Sony products would be able to read the name. “[B]ecause it was written in roman letters,” Morita recalled, “people in many countries could think of it as being in their own language.”⁸³

Morita had to explain the unprecedented decision to write the brand name in roman lettering instead of Japanese characters, a decision resisted by many employees and Totsuko’s loaning bank: “It’ll enable us to expand worldwide.”⁸⁴ The story reveals the extent to which Morita believed early on that being recognized as Japanese put his company at a disadvantage in the global marketplace, whether because of ill feelings remaining from World War II, the stereotype of Japanese products as cheap and poorly made, or general Western racism. The name Sony “de-Japanized” Morita’s company and, because its two syllables were easily pronounced in nearly any language, simultaneously globalized it. Yet even in Japan the company affixed the brand name to its products in roman lettering. This revealed that although the company produced global

⁸² Morita, *Made in Japan*, 67.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁸⁴ “Sony Global – Sony History – Sony Corporation,” <http://www.sony.net/Fun/SH/1-6/h4.html>, accessed 3/11/07.

products, Western languages remained atop a global hierarchy, giving Sony more prestige than Japanese characters could.

An important element to Sony's and other Japanese companies' narratives of globalization was the *nihonjinron* concept that Japan was a racially homogenous island nation void of the sort of resources necessary to sustain a modern industrialized economy. American acceptance of this characterization perpetuated the myth of Japanese racial and cultural exclusivity. The myth made globalization seem natural and inevitable. Morita wrote, "With no natural resources except our people's energy, Japan had no alternative" but to establish a presence in the global marketplace (indeed, even to invent the concept of the "global marketplace").⁸⁵ *Time* magazine noted in 1971 that "Japan is the largest homogenous society on earth.... Harmony and order are also essential because the Japanese have always been jammed together on small patches of arable land."⁸⁶ *Newsweek* writers regularly echoed the same trope, describing Japanese "limitations as an island people dependent on imported raw materials and foreign markets."⁸⁷ Such ideas injected a sense of necessity and urgency into the narrative of globalization and naturalized the role of Japanese corporations in the global marketplace for both Japanese and Americans. Part of the *nihonjinron* feedback loop, Japanese created the myth of isolation, Americans reproduced it, and it made the globalizing of companies like Sony seem natural.

⁸⁵ Morita, *Made in Japan*, 74.

⁸⁶ "Japan, Inc.: Winning the Most Important Battle," *Time*, May 10, 1971.

⁸⁷ Angus Deming, "Japan Thinks Again," *Newsweek*, May 24, 1976.

By the early 1970s Americans already used Sony as shorthand to express two related ideas: in the “first world,” Sony meant cosmopolitanism; in the “third world,” Sony meant connectivity to larger trends taking shape in the global market accompanying uneven technological and economic development. To illustrate how connected the “barefoot peasants” in Guatemala were in 1964, for example, one journalist noticed that they strolled “along the dusty roads with \$40 Sony transistor radios slung over their shoulders.”⁸⁸ Also, “along South Viet Nam’s roads... little Sony radios are to be seen everywhere.”⁸⁹ And to show the malleability of even Communist Cuba’s economy to the larger forces of globalization, one journalist provided evidence for Havana’s connections to capitalism by noting that “a video room with Sony TVs” adorned the streets of Cuba’s capital.⁹⁰ The assumption was that the reader identified Sony as a global corporation, a signifier for cosmopolitanism and connectivity.

Such an identity helped sales and the corporate image, but above all, Akio Morita wanted to sell his corporation, its employees, and the people of Japan as “citizens of the world.” He wrote in his memoir how as Sony was beginning to reach beyond Japan’s borders he “was struck with the idea that our company had to become a citizen of the world, and a good citizen in each country where we did business.”⁹¹ (Morita and Sony were innovators in “global localization,” later dubbed “glocalization,” of adapting global

⁸⁸ “Booming Toward Elections,” *Time*, November 6, 1964.

⁸⁹ “The New Invasion of Greater East Asia,” *Time*, March 2, 1970.

⁹⁰ Cathy Booth, “Cuba: Dancing the Socialist Line,” *Time*, August 12, 1991.

⁹¹ Morita, *Made in Japan*, 92.

production and distribution practices to local social and cultural contexts.)⁹² Later he told a reporter writing about Japan's future, "I envy the younger generation of Japanese. They are citizens of the world."⁹³ His critics accused him of speaking as a nationalist to the Japanese population while wearing a globalist mask for the rest of the world. In 1989 he co-authored a book in Japanese, *The Japan that Can Say No*, which argued that Japan had the power to refuse to submit any longer to U.S. political and economic demands. His name and contributions were conspicuously absent from the English-language edition, however. He wanted to protect his and his company's image as a citizen of the world.⁹⁴

The concept of a "citizen of the world" was not novel. David Hancock argues that London merchants with economic and cultural interests spread out across the eighteenth-century Atlantic world saw themselves in such terms.⁹⁵ "Learned men" who crisscrossed the Atlantic, like Benjamin Franklin, adopted the title in the eighteenth century as well.⁹⁶ The concept of "world citizenship" was popular in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the founding of the United Nations.⁹⁷ These older notions, though, were based more on multinational or multiethnic cosmopolitanism.

⁹² Kenichi Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1990), 10.

⁹³ Quoted in Jill Smolowe, "The Challenges of Success," *Time*, April 13, 1987.

⁹⁴ Shintaro Ishihara, *The Japan that Can Say No*, translated by Frank Baldwin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991).

⁹⁵ See David Hancock, *Citizens of the World: London Merchants and the Integration of the British Atlantic Community, 1735-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁹⁶ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 89.

⁹⁷ This is mentioned briefly in Engerman, "American Knowledge and Global Power," 607.

Morita's conception is unique in its envisioning of a world of shared global identities. With products like the Walkman, Sony aimed to create a market of globalized consumers with uniform cultural identities. Morita's world citizenship concept was rooted in a vision of homogeneity, whereas older notions were based on pluralism.

The Japanese nation appeared to cede the power of identity to the Japanese corporation, giving rise to "companyism." As Americans learned more about the ways that Japanese corporations operated at home and abroad, they increasingly attributed to those corporations characteristics normally reserved to describe nation-states. Observers of Japan in the early 1970s were already reporting the kind of activities that would immortalize the "Japanese management style" in 1980s American business-speak. At some of Japan's best known companies "the day begins with everyone assembling to sing the company song. At Toyota the day opens with five minutes of supervised calisthenics."⁹⁸ Such activities may have been reminiscent of national anthems and the sort of training and discipline that a national military might conduct.

Loyalty to the company surpassed that to family and even nation. "Workers often display a quaint family spirit, referring to 'my' company, and my is written with the same Japanese character that represents family," said one article, adding, "68% of the Japanese managers polled said that business was more important to them than their families."⁹⁹ An employee at Sony's first American production plant in San Diego made a similar comment: "Working for Sony is like working for your family."¹⁰⁰ Mark Zimmerman,

⁹⁸ "Japan, Inc.: Winning the Most Important Battle," *Time* May 10, 1971.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ "Consensus in San Diego," *Time*, March 30, 1981.

who spent several years working in Japan, recounted “an ostentatious display of love for the company” at a company picnic: “a hundred young men in black ‘happi-coats’ . . . burst into a military song,” and “after the fourth rendition of the company song were running to their buses shouting ‘*Banzai!*’” Zimmerman made no distinction between the adjectives “military” and “company.”¹⁰¹ In a 1981 article, “How Japan Does It,” journalist Christopher Byron emphasized the standardized uniforms worn by all companies’ employees, from entry-level to executives, and that for “many Japanese, and especially those of the nation’s larger companies, life at the plant stresses the virtues of self-discipline and diligence.” Byron quoted a Japanese manager: “Employees in Japan view their company as an extension of their family life. Indeed many of them equate the importance of their company with that of their own life.”¹⁰² Citing such statements contributed to the transpacific *nihonjinron* feedback loop.

The impression created for Americans by this language was one of soldierly, or warrior-like, servitude. But unlike the iconic samurai of the past, these warriors marched on behalf of corporations, armed with briefcases and pocket translators. Americans mingled old cultural imagery with new. “Every day,” mused one *Time* article in 1971, reverting to wartime language of Japanese as insects, “thousands of neatly dressed, briefcase-toting Japanese businessmen, technicians, engineers and salesmen swarm over the globe.”¹⁰³ Journalist Lance Morrow affirmed a warrior image instead: Japanese businessmen “have traveled the world and studied its languages. They have worked its

¹⁰¹ Zimmerman, *How to Do Business with the Japanese*, 12.

¹⁰² Christopher Byron, “How Japan Does It,” *Time*, March 30, 1981.

¹⁰³ “Japan, Inc.: Winning the Most Important Battle,” *Time*, May 10, 1971.

trade routes with single-minded energy and curiosity, selling their wares, studying everything, plundering the remotest cultures and factories for information. They are Oriental Vikings armed with cameras and a samurai's resistance to jet lag."¹⁰⁴ Such language could give contradictory impressions. Americans could see on the one hand Japanese businessmen as a new cosmopolitan class, learning the world's languages and adopting its practices. On the other hand, images of "Vikings armed" with anything couched the globalizing of Japan in the language of warfare and conflict. In this one small example it is possible to see both nationalist and globalist readings of Japanese economic expansion.

Japan "Beyond National Borders"

Kenichi Ohmae was never a household name, but he was the sort of elite figure that Americans had grown increasingly more accustomed to throughout the twentieth century. He floated between academia (close associates at Harvard Business School and Wharton; later he would teach at UCLA), the business world (his employer McKinsey and Company's advising clientele was a who's who of *Fortune 500* companies), and government (though he did not hold an official position, he worked on behalf of the United States-Japan Study Group and other similar organizations).¹⁰⁵ Unlike the representatives of such "corporatism" that Americans had previously come to know, Ohmae was Japanese. Still, like his acquaintance Akio Morita, Ohmae believed that

¹⁰⁴ Lance Morrow, "All the Hazards and Threats Of," *Time*, August 1, 1983.

¹⁰⁵ See McKinsey and Company, *Japan Business, Obstacles and Opportunities: A Binational Perspective for U.S. Decision-Makers* (New York: John Wiley, 1982).

more important than being Japanese was becoming “a truly global citizen.”¹⁰⁶ His sober attention to the U.S.-Japan relationship gave him insight into Japan’s globalizing of America.

In his efforts to be “a truly global citizen,” Ohmae spent a great deal of time explaining to American audiences the increasing U.S.-Japan conflict and how both sides could overcome it.¹⁰⁷ He occasionally wrote editorials for the *Wall Street Journal* preaching conciliatory approaches and arguing that the U.S. trade deficit was “fiction.”¹⁰⁸ The titles of three of his English-language books—*Beyond National Borders* (1987), *The Borderless World* (1990), and *The End of the Nation-State* (1995)—reveal his opinions about the state of international relations in the 1980s and 1990s. They also show Ohmae to be a trailblazer in the area of globalization studies. Scholars of globalization today, however, do not recognize this. Their ignorance is in large part because Ohmae never wrote for their attention; instead, he wrote for the international business community.

Anticipating the argument of Thomas Friedman’s 2005 bestseller, *The World Is Flat*, Ohmae argued that the spread of corporations around the world created a vast redistribution of wealth that would ultimately end in greater global economic equality (“flattening,” according to Friedman), or at least equality in what he called the “Triad”—

¹⁰⁶ Kenichi Ohmae, *Beyond National Borders: Reflections on Japan and the World* (Homewood, Ill: Dow-Jones-Irwin, 1987), ix.

¹⁰⁷ Ohmae has published many books in English and many more in Japanese. His most recent U.S. publisher, Wharton School Publishing, erroneously states that Ohmae coined the word globalization in his 1990 book, *The Borderless World*. The word itself had been around for decades before 1990. However, Theodore Levitt of Harvard Business School (discussed below) first used the word in the sense we use it today in a 1983 article.

¹⁰⁸ For example, see Kenichi Ohmae, “Global Village No Place for Japanophobia,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, 1989.

the economic zone comprising North America, Europe, and Japan.¹⁰⁹ The global spread of corporations (many of them Japanese) and rapidly improving communications technologies were transforming the Triad into a giant homogenous market where all consumers' tastes were identical, regardless of national identity. This meant that a market of more than 600 million consumers existed—"a single race of consumers with shared needs and aspirations," he said, erasing even naturalized racial distinctions between nations—ready for any business brave enough to imagine a "world without borders." Some of the companies he noted as having successfully reconceptualized the global economy—"Seiko, Sony, Canon, Matsushita, Casio and Honda"—were all Japanese.¹¹⁰ The opportunities this market presented made it imperative for producers in the Triad to see beyond their petty national differences and recognize that the growth of global corporations meant that measuring wealth on a national scale was obsolete. Ohmae wrote, "a worldview based on outmoded concepts of nationality and traditional antagonisms between nations and ethnic groups is not useful in today's trade."¹¹¹ One journalist wrote of how Ohmae "startled a Washington audience by insisting that multinational corporations, not countries, matter."¹¹²

Because of the trade imperative created by economic and cultural homogenization, power in the international arena had a new master: the global corporation. Ohmae argued, "Lines on a map mean little" to "companies without

¹⁰⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

¹¹⁰ Kenichi Ohmae, "Becoming a Triad Power," *McKinsey Quarterly*, Spring 1985, 2-3.

¹¹¹ Ohmae, *Beyond National Borders*, 83.

¹¹² Walter S. Mossberg, "New 'One-Worlders' Are Conservatives," *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 1989.

countries.” “The world economy is now ruled by manufacturing and trading corporations, not nations,” he declared.¹¹³ Despite these changed conditions, U.S. elites continued to measure international power by old criteria: “our way of keeping score, and the politicians and bureaucrats who keep score, haven’t changed.” Debates about trade deficits were based on obsolete ways of thinking and measure power because “a company is interested in bottom-line results, not helping government cash registers ring at the port of export.”¹¹⁴ For Ohmae globalization and the power it awarded corporations was a fait accompli. As one summary of global business prospects in the 1980s put it, “the ‘whether’ of globalization is yesterday’s news: only the ‘how’ is still of interest.”¹¹⁵

Power would flow to those individuals who could take advantage of the “borderless world” by reigning over the corporate behemoths that had replaced the nation-state. The Japanese, Ohmae believed, were in a prime position to wield international power because they were rich in the one resource that really mattered in the borderless world: human capital. “Japan, with 120 million well-educated and hardworking people, is better endowed with the resources vital to success than any other nation in the world.” This resource would enable Japan to reach the heights of global power “without wielding military might.”¹¹⁶ Power in the borderless world was likewise detached from any fixed location and national identity. The vast natural resources that once represented real wealth and power meant little in Ohmae’s vision of the present state

¹¹³ Ohmae, *Beyond National Borders*, 24, 100.

¹¹⁴ Kenichi Ohmae, “Companies Without Countries,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, Autumn 1987, 50.

¹¹⁵ Herbert Hensler and Wilhelm Rall, “Facing Up the Globalization Challenge,” *McKinsey Quarterly*, Winter 1986, 53.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

of world affairs. Ohmae's ideas, developed from studying the global spread of Japanese corporations, are common elements in many standard interpretations of globalization.

Ohmae developed many of his ideas in dialogue with a group of intellectuals associated with the *Harvard Business Review* in the 1980s.¹¹⁷ It was in that journal in 1983 that Theodore Levitt, Edward W. Carter Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School, wrote the first article to use the word "globalization" in its title: "The Globalization of Markets."¹¹⁸ Levitt's article today reads like a manifesto for free-market capitalism and neoliberalism.¹¹⁹ First, he made even more explicit Ohmae's point about the homogenization of the world market: "The products and methods of the industrialized world play a single tune for all the world, and all the world eagerly dances to it." Levitt then quickly turned to Japanese companies as exemplars of the "emergence of global consumer markets for standardized consumer products."¹²⁰ The Japanese had been so effective, Levitt argued, because they created high quality products at low cost by selling the same product in every market without alteration for national differences. Japanese corporations recognized the homogenization of the world economy and culture better than anyone. In short, Japanese corporations did the most to speed the "globalization of markets." Instructively, Levitt subtitled one section of his article, "The earth is flat," anticipating the title of Friedman's bestseller by more than two decades and

¹¹⁷ Ohmae published several articles in the journal in 1988 and 1989. These articles became the basis for his 1990 book, *The Borderless World*.

¹¹⁸ Theodore Levitt, "The Globalization of Markets," *Harvard Business Review* May-June 1983, 92-102.

¹¹⁹ For references to Levitt's article, see "The Opportunity for World Brands," *New York Times*, June 3, 1984; and "Global Advertising with a Single Theme," *New York Times*, July 14, 1985.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94, 92.

providing further evidence that various understandings of contemporary globalization was shaped by the encounter with Japanese corporations through the 1980s.

A second article from the mid-1980s in the *Harvard Business Review* established another globalization cliché that contributed to the title of yet another bestseller.

Globalization and Its Discontents is the title of Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz's 2002 book, but it was also the title of a review article by *HBR* associate editor Alan M. Webber in 1985.¹²¹ Stiglitz discusses the role that major world financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund play in shaping globalization. Webber was still focused on Japan and the U.S.-Japan business relationship in shaping globalization. The “discontents” for Webber were American businesses attempting to “reshape their operations in response to globalization,” that is, in response to the effective management of Japanese corporations under the transformed global conditions.¹²²

Webber defined globalization as “the shift from national to global competition in a growing number of industries.”¹²³ This definition was much more specific and tailored to the international business community than the broader present contours of the word. Nevertheless, it is one of the many definitions of globalization in use today, and it was shaped fundamentally by the U.S. business community's response to the success of Japanese companies in the global marketplace. In both Levitt and Webber, we see early narratives of contemporary globalization. At the center of those narratives was not the

¹²¹ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002).

¹²² Alan M. Webber, “Globalization and Its Discontents,” *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1985, 38-54.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 38.

United States or the “West” but, just as Akio Morita and Kenichi Ohmae would have it, Japan.

The image of Japan as a “borderless nation” and the transnational economic and cultural behaviors of Japanese corporations decidedly mapped out power in a globalized world. Earlier in the postwar era American mass culture products proliferated across the globe and brought with them specifically American imagery. McDonald’s sold not only cheeseburgers but also an authentically American experience: fast food; Marlboro sold not only cigarettes but also the iconography of freedom in the American West. Sony and its Japanese competitors changed that practice. They consciously worked to eliminate any trace of the national origin or ethnic identity of a product. Levitt and others were excited about the possibilities. Japanese corporations promised a future of global markets with homogenized wants adjusted to the taste of transnational capital. Years before the organized anti-globalization movement arrived, the future looked bright—and Japanese.

Conclusion: American and Global Frontiers

As difficult as it was to take a distanced perspective from the rhetoric of both the revisionist and the globalist camps, a few observers saw the bigger picture of how both sides handled the restructuring of global power. One of the United States’ most sober historians of Japan, John Dower, wrote at the height of the Japan Panic:

Japan’s emergence as an economic superpower is inseparable from America’s decline as the hegemon of the capitalist world. For the first time in modern history, a nonwhite nation has challenged the West by the very standards of wealth and power which for over four centuries have been associated with

Western—and white—supremacy. This unprecedented development has been accompanied by rising tensions on both sides, and it is important to recognize that these tensions are rooted in the transformation of power relationships in the contemporary world. They are not irrational. They do not derive from ‘cultural differences.’ They are not fundamentally racist. Rather, the fear and tension we see today exists because the United States and Japan are competitors in a high-stakes, high-tech global economy that no one really understands or controls anymore.¹²⁴

Dower stated the point differently later in the same piece: “The rhetoric of ‘Japan as Number One’... captures a central fact of our times—not that Japan is in fact ‘number one,’ but rather that the structure of global power and influence is in the midst of a historic transformation, and no one can foresee what the outcome will be.”¹²⁵ The Japan Panic was the manifestation of revisionist fears about the unknown changes taking place in the global economy; globalist prophets, on the other hand, saw nothing to fear.

Those prophets had a few prominent champions before globalization took off ideologically and materially in the mid-1990s. Perhaps no supporter was more important than Robert B. Reich, an economist at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government who served in the Ford and Carter administrations and, not coincidentally, would serve as secretary of labor for all four years of the first Clinton administration. From that position he helped institutionalize the concept of globalization as a grand

¹²⁴ John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 262.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

strategy for the United States' role in the world—whereas containment once sought to construct borders, globalization aimed to bring them down.¹²⁶

In two books, *The Next American Frontier* (1983) and *The Work of Nations* (1990), Reich laid out his explanation for U.S. decline and his prescriptions for confronting the changed conditions of global economic power.¹²⁷ The first book tackled decline at the height of the Reagan recession. The answer to foreign competition was not to shut the world out, but to embrace the new global economy. Standardize high-volume production would in the future flow to the cheapest labor markets; the United States, therefore, should invest in the only resource that could not physically leave the country: its people, its “human capital.” “Japan understands this future,” he noted.¹²⁸

In his later and best-known book, *The Work of Nations*, Reich reiterated the imperative to invest in human capital. Every other aspect of national economies as policymakers understood them had slipped the moorings of national attachments and were floating free in a global economy. “Americans are no longer in the same economic boat (nor, for that matter, are citizens of other nations in the same boat). Yet the prevailing image remains fixed in our heads. The old picture gives comfort, suggesting national solidarity and purpose.” But “the very idea of an American economy is

¹²⁶ Works about globalization during the 1990s (like Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents*) do not yet discuss globalization in terms of a specific global strategy on the part of the Clinton administration. Chalmers Johnson considers globalization just another mask for imperialism, but he also sees it as a strategy for hegemony pursued by administration officials like treasury secretary Robert Rubin and his undersecretary, Lawrence Summers. Reich's decade of pre-administration writings about the potential benefits of globalization and his close personal relationship with Clinton made it likely that he was involved also in adopting globalization as an administration strategy. See Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Owl Books, 2004), especially chapter 9.

¹²⁷ Robert B. Reich, *The Next American Frontier* (New York: Penguin, 1983), and *The Work of Nations*.

¹²⁸ Reich, *The Next American Frontier*, 231.

becoming meaningless, as are the notions of an American corporation, American capital, American products, and American technology.” “So who is ‘us’?” he asked. “Us” was no longer the material accumulations of an advanced capitalist society; instead, “us” was the skills and abilities that American workers could contribute to a global economy.¹²⁹

Like Kenichi Ohmae, he thought the heated rhetoric of Japan-bashing was missing the point. A significant chunk—he estimated half—of the trade between the United States and Japan took place *within* global corporations, as when, for example, IBM’s Japan operations delivered components to the company’s U.S. operations. Chiding the U.S. fixation on trade deficits, Reich counseled, “The truth is that these days no one knows exactly, at any given time, whether America’s (or any other nation’s) trade is in or out of balance, by how much it is out of balance, or what the significance of such an imbalance might be.”¹³⁰

The Japan obsession, he speculated, was bigger than trade deficits and extravagant real estate purchases. In short, it was about the ways globalization, not “Japanization,” was transforming the United States. “As the 21st century approaches,” he wrote as he surveyed more than 35 books written on Japan in 1991-1992, “we can see, I believe, a profound unease about the coherence of American society.... The global economy is tightly linking our citizens to the citizens of other nations,” creating fear for the loss of a national identity to accompany the loss of a true national economy. Earlier in the twentieth century, he observed, Europeans used the specter of Americanization “to

¹²⁹ Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 7-8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

distract public attention from domestic problems. Japan plays a similar role for us today.”¹³¹

Reich made an implicit point that historians can develop more explicitly: much like Europeans from 1900 through the 1960s used “Americanization” as a catch-all for everything they disliked about the changes wrought by modernization, Americans in the 1980s and early 1990s used the prospect of a “Japanization” of the United States as a scapegoat for processes that more accurately characterized contemporary globalization. Richard Kuisel demonstrates how postwar French intellectuals blamed Americanization for consumerism, mass production, and other aspects of modern life that had less to do with American influence than with modernization in general.¹³² Similarly, what Reich suspected, and what can be confirmed in hindsight, is that Americans used Japanese success as a convenient explanation for the failures of U.S. industry to adapt to contemporary globalization in its earliest stages. The markers of Japanese success—corporations with ambiguous national identities, the global flow of finance capital, the proliferation of new media products, and even transnational popular culture like anime—did not “constitute a vicious plot,” as Reich said, but instead were indicative of a new way of thinking about the world and behaving in it, that is, globalization.

Thus when President-elect Bill Clinton selected his longtime friend Reich to head the Department of Labor, Clinton signaled that economic policy in the 1990s would reject the zero-sum nationalism that had generated so much anti-Japanese heat since the mid-1980s. Support for the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) and

¹³¹ Robert B. Reich, “Is Japan Out to Get Us?” *New York Times*, February 2, 1992.

¹³² Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

the World Trade Organization (1995), among other institutions of economic globalization, reflected the victory of a globalist outlook. The end of the Japan Panic, then, hinged not only on the Japanese recession of the early 1990s but also the coming to power of policymakers unsympathetic to protectionist nationalism in a changed world. It took elite accommodation to new economic realities in order for Americans to begin to write new stories of U.S. power in a globalized world.

CHAPTER 3

WAKARIMASUKA: SHIFTING AMERICAN IMAGES OF JAPAN FROM SHŌGUN TO RISING SUN

One reviewer of Michael Crichton's wildly popular 1992 novel, *Rising Sun*, worried that the popular author's nationalistic work of fiction "could be the only book about Japan that many Americans will ever read."¹ Based on the novel's success, that was a distinct possibility. But Americans may have also read James Clavell's similarly successful 1975 novel *Shōgun*, which sold more than seven million copies before an even more popular 1980 television reproduction aired. "*Shōgun* is... most Westerners' introduction to Japan," Clavell once said. "That's an appalling responsibility!"²

There were many nonfiction books published between 1975 and 1993 that tried to teach Americans something about Japan, a particularly pertinent task considering Japan's dramatic postwar climb to the number two position among the world's economies. Influential works included Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* (1979), Chalmers Johnson's *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (1982), and Clyde Prestowitz's *Trading Places* (1988). But for every American who read a book by one of these Japan "revisionists," or even for every American who read Ruth Benedict's seminal anthropology text, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), exponentially more received their images of Japan from popular media like television, movies, and literature—fictional

¹ Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Return of the Yellow Peril," *The Nation*, May 11, 1992, 636.

² Sheila K. Johnson, *The Japanese Through American Eyes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 111; quoted in Arthur Unger, "How Japanese Can a Westerner Feel?" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 15, 1980.

representations of Japan. This chapter examines images of Japan in popular entertainment media from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s.

Since it would be impossible to survey and analyze comprehensively images of Japan in American popular media over this two-decade stretch in a single chapter, this one will situate two popular texts—Clavell’s *Shōgun* and Crichton’s *Rising Sun*—within the context of the origin, climax, and rapid denouement of a perceived cultural crisis in U.S.-Japan relations: the Japan Panic. It will also briefly address several popular representations of Japan produced between the publications of *Shōgun* and *Rising Sun*. Both of these texts entered the world as bestselling novels; both reached even greater audiences when put to film. In addition, *Shōgun* and *Rising Sun* went to great lengths to serve not just as entertainment but as instruments of cross-cultural consumption and education. Clavell, a British writer, and Crichton, an American medical doctor turned popular novelist, were well read in the contemporary nonfiction literature on Japan and tried to expose their audiences to something of the “real” Japan in the process of entertaining.

Despite the similarities, their respective representations of Japan could not have differed more; separated by less than two decades, they appeared to come from two different centuries. Clavell’s novel offered a stereotypical yet respectful and admiring portrait of Japan, one which Americans could use to position Japan comfortably in their collective mental map of Western-style modernity. In contrast, Crichton pleaded with his American readers to see Japan as a challenge to the very existence of modernity, a conceptually *postmodern* threat to the sanctity of a “Western” (i.e., American) cultural tradition. Whereas Clavell’s Japan deserved American respect for reaching modernity by

way of its unique historical and cultural characteristics, Crichton's Japan aggressively sought the annihilation of American culture and society through racial and technological conquest. *Shōgun* and *Rising Sun*, therefore, illustrated that the concept of modernity was central to the ways that Americans gazed beyond their borders.

To situate the two representations of Japan in this chapter, it is useful to consider the concept of “modernity and power” as Frank Ninkovich has outlined it.³ Ninkovich conceives of the two in terms of how American policymakers throughout the twentieth century reduced the complexities of power in the international environment to easily comprehensible terms, but his thesis could explain the expression of popular attitudes toward international power in media like literature and film as well. Ninkovich argues that policymakers beginning with Woodrow Wilson believed that “the United States could be secure, as a polity and a society, only within the nurturing environment of a liberal world civilization.”⁴ “Modernization” (i.e., progress toward modernity) replaced “civilization” in policymaking discourse in the second half of the century. According to Ninkovich, “modernity was characterized by a legal-rational outlook dominated by science, the professionalization and bureaucratization of institutions, and, not least, the emergence of a global division of labor as a result of the workings of the market economy.”⁵ The United States could feel safe and powerful only in a world full of states that abided by the rules that it established and protected; in turn, states that played by American rules could benefit from American power. Policymakers felt unsafe when a

³ Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

state like Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union challenged the American vision of modernity and power.

Ninkovich's conception of modernity works well because it is fully historicized. He eschews any attempt to judge a society as premodern or modern and instead allows the concept to operate in its historical context. Whether or not they used the word "modern" or not, twentieth-century U.S. foreign policymakers articulated a perspective on the world that organized nations according to an informal hierarchy of development. At the level of policy such thinking manifested in programs like the Alliance for Progress; at the popular level, it took the form of films like *The King and I* (1956) and *The Quiet American* (1958). Modernity was only as Americans defined it, either explicitly in the push for modernization in the "third world" or implicitly in representations of non-Western societies.

After détente in the early 1970s, the Soviet Union no longer presented a threat to the American vision of modernity. Small challenges persisted in the underdeveloped world, often with Soviet backing, but détente's illusion of a world safe for American modernity and power remained uncontested. When Soviet leaders signed the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, they not only agreed to respect human rights in Eastern Europe, they also made a political and cultural investment in the ideological underpinnings of Western modernity.⁶

The perception of the security of modernity changed beginning in the mid-1970s with the rise of Japanese power. The representation of Japan in *Shōgun* serves as a starting point, illustrating that Americans were comfortable with Japanese power in 1975

⁶ See Daniel C. Thomas, *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

because it fit neatly into the American vision of modernity—according to the orthodox view, Japan was a capitalist, democratic, rationally governed Cold War client state that imitated the United States. *Rising Sun* serves as the other bookend, demonstrating how the rise of Japan through the 1980s jolted the American vision of modern world power. Persistent references to Japan as the society of the future, not only in *Rising Sun* but also in such popular texts as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Black Rain* (1989), revealed Japan as a *postmodern* threat to the fabric that held together American hegemony.

Following the discussion of postmodernity in the introduction, I use the word again with its contextual origins in mind. The concept emerged out of the 1970s, a period in which American decline manifested in numerous political, economic, and military ways. Postmodernity, first and foremost, would be a post-American age, one in which the United States held neither political hegemony nor monopoly on the credulity of metanarratives, according to Jean-Francois Lyotard's early articulation of the concept. To see Japan as a postmodern nation in the eighties meant to see it as having transcended, for better or worse, the need for a metanarrative that promised universal human liberation. In the case of those business leaders who saw Japanese corporations generating a denationalized global culture, it was for the better, as Japan's lack of a big story meant that ideology would not get in the way of commerce. For Crichton it was for the worse: Japan's postmodernity meant that in the future economic and political power would rest in the hands of a group of people unattached to absolute truths and universal values. Democratic values, human and civil rights, guaranteed individual freedoms—"culture," as the revisionists generally articulated it—Japanese postmodernity threatened

the sanctity of all of it. Postmodern Japan was Roland Barthes' "Empire of Signs," with no fixed meanings, and Fredric Jameson's sublimation of culture into commerce.⁷ For Americans the thought of Japanese power was ideologically discomfiting and disorienting because it seemed to leave a vacuum in place of the American-style promises of modernity.

In *Shōgun* James Clavell provided an apt metaphor for Japan's shifting position in the American mental map of modernity. Protagonist John Blackthorne's education in Japanese language and culture is encapsulated in the phrases *wakarimasuka*—"do you understand?"—*wakarimasen*—"I don't understand"—and *wakarimasu*—"I understand." Early in the narrative Blackthorne repeats the phrase *wakarimasen* with uncomfortable frequency, revealing to his Japanese captors and to the audience his struggle to come to terms with his new surroundings. As the story progresses, though, Blackthorne not only regularly uses the phrase *wakarimasu*, but his knowledge of Japanese language and culture enable him to live among the Japanese as no Westerner ever had—he becomes the first European inducted into the samurai class. Blackthorne's reconciliation with Japanese power is a metaphor for Americans' acceptance and understanding of Japan's position in the modern world of the mid-1970s.

The irony of Blackthorne's transition from *wakarimasen* to *wakarimasu* is that it reverses the American experience with Japan from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. Americans popular attitudes went in the opposite direction of the Englishman-turned-samurai's: by 1993, when *Rising Sun* was a bestselling novel and a blockbuster summer

⁷ Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

movie, American perceptions of Japan reflected a powerful insecurity about its place in the world that was not there when Clavell's novel first reached the bestseller lists in 1975. Whether they had any direct experience with Japan or not (most did not), Americans in 1975 were confident they understood Japan; by 1993, all of that was in flux. A shift from *wakarimasu* to *wakarmasen*, from confidence in American modernity to fear of Japanese postmodernity, serves as an apt metaphor for American attitudes toward Japan during this period.

Wakarimasu: James Clavell's Shōgun

On the night of September 15, 1980, 70 million Americans—more than 43 percent of the U.S. population—tuned their televisions to the NBC network for three hours of transpacific cultural education.⁸ That Monday, and for the remainder of the week, they consumed twelve hours of a \$22-million production of James Clavell's *Shōgun*, an epic novel about a British sailor's experience in Japan circa 1600.⁹ The viewing audience was the second largest in television history to that point, ranking only behind the premiere of ABC's rendition of Alex Haley's *Roots*.¹⁰ "When it first aired, the whole country stopped," recalled director Jerry London. "The movie theaters lost tons of money and the restaurants lost tons of money."¹¹ One of *Shōgun*'s producers tried to celebrate the miniseries' final night by serving authentic Japanese food at a party

⁸ "NBC, with 'Shogun,' Gets Its Best Ratings," *New York Times*, September 24, 1980.

⁹ James Clavell, *Shōgun* (New York: Random House, 1975); *James Clavell's Shōgun*, DVD, directed by Jerry London (1980; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2003).

¹⁰ "'Shogun' Ratings Second Only to 'Roots' Premiere," *New York Times*, September 18, 1980.

¹¹ Quoted in "The Making of *Shōgun*," *Shōgun*, DVD, directed by Jerry London (1980; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2003).

at his home. When he went to retrieve the food, though, he found the Japanese restaurant abandoned—anyone who had any interest in Japan was home watching the final three hours.¹² The miniseries “set off a wave of Shogun chic,” *Newsweek* reported. “Bars sold out of their supplies of sake, boutiques reported runs on kimonos.... Pop-culture trendies began sprinkling their conversation with words like arigato (thank you) and wakarimasu (I understand).”¹³

Shōgun serves as a beginning and an ending: it was the last exemplar representation of an orthodox interpretation of Japan and the first to acquiesce to Japan’s new role as a world power. Both the 1975 novel and the 1980 miniseries exhibit common postwar tropes that pervaded Western representations of Japan. It reflected many ideas about Japan and the Japanese that the anthropologist Ruth Benedict had popularized in *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, and which had dominated the ways Americans thought about Japan through the first three decades of the postwar era. This “orthodox” interpretation (labeled orthodox because it was the school of thought that Japan revisionists targeted in the 1980s) was best identified in the 1960s and 1970s with the eminent scholar of Asia and ambassador to Japan (1961-1966), Edwin O. Reischauer.¹⁴ Benedict and Reischauer’s Japan was that of traditional cultural icons like geisha, painting, calligraphy, and the tea ceremony (the “chrysanthemum” side); it also included samurai, *seppuku* (ritual suicide), and *bushido* (the “sword” side).

Anthropologist Sheila K. Johnson, one of the more sober voices (and thus largely

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Samurai Night Fever,” *Newsweek*, September 29, 1981.

¹⁴ See, for example, Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan: Past and Present* (New York: Knopf, 1956), and *The Japanese* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1977).

ignored) in the Japan debate of the 1980s, noted that the Benedict/Reischauer line “promoted a dangerously antiquarian and exceptionalist image of the Japanese” through the 1970s.¹⁵

Benedict and Reischauer’s Japan was James Clavell’s Japan. Clavell came to admire Japanese history and culture through cathartic experience—the eighteen-year-old British artillery officer was captured by the Japanese in Java in 1942. He spent the remainder of the war in prison camps throughout Asia, including the notorious Changi camp in Singapore, which provided the basis for his first novel, *King Rat* (1962). “I started reading about Japan’s history and characteristics,” he later said, “and then the way the Japanese treated me and my brothers became clear to me.... They thought we were dishonored, because it’s totally wrong in their culture to be captured, while we believe that by surviving we live to fight another day. I came to admire greatly certain characteristics of the Japanese.”¹⁶ Clavell’s influential popular representation of Japanese and Western cultural interaction was born of the violent encounter between Japan and the West in World War II, and yet it did not bear any animosity because Clavell saw Japanese behavior as a product of a cultural system and not a result of individual malice.

Clavell’s *Shōgun* is the story of John Blackthorne, a British sea pilot whose ship runs aground in “the Japans” in 1600. Over the next 1150 pages, or a condensed 12 hours of television, Blackthorne struggles to adapt to a new life in this exotic land. At

¹⁵ Johnson, *The Japanese Through American Eyes*, v.

¹⁶ Cynthia Gorney, “Orient Expressed: The Words of Novelist James Clavell,” *Washington Post*, February 2, 1979; Clavell quoted in Edwin McDowell, “Behind the Best Sellers: James Clavell,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1981.

first the European curses his captors as “heathens,” “monkeys,” and “savages,” especially when the Protestant finds that Japan’s previous experience with Europe had been mediated by equally barbaric Catholic Jesuit priests from Portugal. The Japanese reciprocate by casually referring to Blackthorne and his European shipmates as the “barbarians,” which was how Clavell translated the infamous Japanese word *gaijin*. The samurai in the village where Blackthorne lands torture and kill one of his crewmen—they boil him alive in a giant cauldron—and imprison the rest, treating the Europeans cruelly and feeding them rotted fish. On first arriving Blackthorne witnesses what seems like a spontaneous and arbitrary beheading of a peasant who offends a samurai by failing to bow deep enough. When Blackthorne curses the same samurai, he suffers the indignity of being urinated upon. (Here, assured the producers of the NBC adaptation, was a television first.)

Eventually Blackthorne, renamed Anjin (from the Japanese word for “pilot”—the audience learns that Japanese have difficulty with European l’s, th’s, and r’s), ends up in the care of Lord Toranaga, one of the two most powerful *daimyos*, or feudal lords, in all of Japan.¹⁷ Blackthorne has landed in the middle of a complicated political showdown between Toranaga and his rival for the position of shogun, Lord Ishido, and Clavell went to great lengths to describe in detail the political machinations of dozens of major and minor characters. Toranaga and his rivals come to realize that Blackthorne is an experienced sailor with unrivaled knowledge of the world outside Japan, and he also

¹⁷ Clavell loosely modeled his characters and narrative after historical events. John Blackthorne was based on the real-life William Adams, an Englishman who became the first European inducted into the samurai class. He was granted that privilege by the real-world equivalent of Lord Toranaga, Tokugawa Ieyasu, founding shogun of the Tokugawa dynasty.

offers an important counterbalance to what the Portuguese have told the Japanese for decades.

Meanwhile, the Anjin-san spends a great deal of time with Lady Toda Mariko, a Christian convert who speaks Portuguese and Latin (as does, conveniently, Blackthorne) and who translates for Toranaga. Naturally, Blackthorne falls in love with Mariko. As Mariko tutors Blackthorne in all things Japanese, the Englishman comes to respect this exotic land's beliefs and practices. He also becomes so important to Toranaga that the *daimyo* makes Blackthorne the first non-Japanese initiate into the samurai class; by this point, Blackthorne speaks Japanese with some fluency and is no longer uncomfortable with Japanese social and cultural practices. The Englishman's assistance helps elevate Toranaga to the position of shogun as the story ends.

The narrative was the sort that would appeal to many Americans: a strong-willed Anglo male in a strange land is forced to survive and adapt, learning and teaching along the way. Since the story was relatively commonplace, the cultural representations took on greater significance in what *Shōgun* meant for its American readers and viewers. Three representations in particular are important: Japanese, Westerners, and Japanese-Western interactions.

First, Japanese in *Shōgun* were stereotyped according to Benedict-Reischauer notions of what the Japanese think and how they behave. The behavior of Japanese men throughout the novel can be explained by statements like, "*bushido*, the Way of the Warrior, . . . bound samurai to fight with honor, to live with honor, and to die with honor; to have undying, unquestioning loyalty to one's feudal lord; to be fearless of death—even

to seek it in his service; and to be proud of one's name and keep it unsullied."¹⁸ Indeed, samurai eagerness to die by way of *seppuku*, or ritual suicide, left the reader wondering how such a population managed to be self-sustaining. Clavell's lively dialogue provided an introduction to both the sword and the chrysanthemum, revealing the persistent ambivalence that Americans felt toward Japanese. Instructing Blackthorne, the Portuguese pilot Rodrigues says:

“Of course all Jappos are different from us—they don't feel pain or cold like us—but samurai are even worse. They fear nothing, least of all death. Why? Only God knows, but it's the truth. If their superiors say 'kill,' they kill, 'die,' and they'll fall on their swords and slit their own bellies open. They kill and die as easily as we piss. Women're samurai too, Ingeles. They'll kill to protect their masters, that's what they call their husbands here, or they'll kill themselves if they're ordered to. They do it by slitting their throats. Here a samurai can order his wife to kill herself and that's what she's got to do, by law. Jesu Madonna, the women are something else, though, a different species, Ingeles, nothing on earth like them, but the men... Samurai're reptiles and the safest thing to do is treat them like poisonous snakes.”¹⁹

In this passage Clavell shows the reader much of the sword—the Japanese as brutally violent and indifferent to human mortality—and hints at the chrysanthemum—the “something else” that is Japanese women. Blackthorne discovers this “something else” to be their femininity, lax attitudes toward sex, and devotion and subservience to

¹⁸ Clavell, *Shōgun*, 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

their husbands. Clavell illustrated Benedict's point that the violent and the gentle aspects of Japanese "culture" were not mutually exclusive; this ambivalence existed in each individual, like Mariko's husband, one of Toranaga's most vicious samurai generals, who delicately performs the Japanese tea ceremony to make amends for offending her.

Clavell represents Westerners in two ways. On the one hand are the Jesuit priests, for whom Clavell can hardly hide his disdain, which might have struck a chord with Protestant Americans' historical distrust of the Catholic Church. The Jesuits embodied a pre-modern, pre-Lutheran West in which Europeans were instructed to abide by no moral code outside of that established by Church fathers. In the novel they are conspiratorial, opportunistic, and blinded by their hatred of Blackthorne's heretical devotion to England's Protestant Queen Elizabeth. Importantly, Japanese characters repeatedly note the priests' terrible "smell," implying that not only did the Jesuits physically stink because they were "barbarians," but their dogmatic Catholic ethics turned noses as well. Blackthorne initially reeks too, but as he adapts to his Japanese surroundings he loses his odor. The Jesuits never lose theirs.

Blackthorne represents another Europe—the Europe to come, the Europe of the Enlightenment and rational humanism, even the Europe of capitalism. He rejects as "impossible" the irrational Japanese belief that their emperor is a descendent of the gods. The Englishman detests the samurai elite's indifference to the sanctity of human life as if he were well versed in twentieth-century debates about human rights.²⁰ He distrusts Japanese motivations because they do not organize social relations with fiscal transactions. Ideologically Blackthorne is an anachronism, which is precisely why his

²⁰ For example, see his diatribe in *Ibid.*, 351.

character is essential to positioning the late twentieth-century American reader in relation to Japan and the Japanese. He is the contemporary Westerner in medieval Japan.

As such Blackthorne became Clavell's instrument of vicarious cross-cultural consumption. Blackthorne processes all the observations of other Europeans and the teachings of Mariko and synthesizes them with his post-Enlightenment Western sensibilities. The outcome is a profound respect for Japan, its people, and their beliefs and practices. The Englishman even comes to assess Japanese culture as superior to the West in a number of ways. Initially he is embarrassed by Japanese women's carefree attitude toward nudity, but then he finds this a more "natural" practice than the artificial shame the Church attaches to the human body. At first he violently opposes the practice of taking a bath, believing baths to transmit disease, but by the end of the story he sees Japanese hygienic practices as far preferable to the filthy habits of Europeans. After several months as the only European living among the Japanese, Blackthorne reunites with his crew. He is surprised to find not his close comrades, but a ragtag, smelly group of Euro-barbarians, feasting on fatty, oily animal flesh, refusing to bathe, and consorting with lower-class Japanese prostitutes. No respectable Japanese woman, Clavell notes, would touch such barbarians.

So taken is Blackthorne by Japanese culture, society, and his feminine escort that he chooses to remain in Japan (leaving a wife and child in England), where he serves as a trusted advisor to the new shogun, Toranaga. He comes to the conclusion that "much of what they believe is so much better than our way that it's tempting to become one of them totally."²¹ His conversion touches the core of Clavell's representation of Japan.

²¹ Quoted in Henry Smith, "Reading James Clavell's 'Shogun,'" *History Today*, October 1981, 39-42.

Japan is certainly different, Clavell emphasized, but difference need not imply inequality or inferiority. The implication for the contemporary reader was that the Japanese had simply found a different path to modernity. Like the West, they arrived at modernity through a rich history, devotion to a sophisticated moral code, and the refinement of “civilization.” Mariko rebukes Blackthorne’s implication early in the tale that because they behave differently, the Japanese are uncivilized; she retorts, “We find ourselves quite civilized, Anjin-san.”²²

It is significant that Clavell decided to perpetuate the language of “civilization,” which spoke to Americans conscious of the connections between modernity and power. It also implied that there were categories of both “civilized” and “uncivilized.” Including the Japanese in the favorable category of such a discourse, while also pointing out the cultural disparities between Japan and the West, was a way of signaling Japan’s acceptance into modernity—Japan could be different *and* equal, an idea that sharply contrasts with Western “orientalist” representations of Eastern “others” described by Edward Said.²³

The producers of a European orientalist discourse created a language of cultural and racial difference that also rested on unequal power relations. In Clavell’s representation of Japan, and in other U.S. representations from the 1970s, like Vogel’s *Japan as Number One*, the language of difference no longer carried with it connotations of unequal power. Clavell made this idea clear when one of his Jesuits chastises a fellow

²² Ibid., 350.

²³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978). A number of scholars have pointed out that Japan’s experience complicates Said’s orientalism framework. For example, see Susan J. Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 6.

priest: “You cannot equate Japanese with Indians or with illiterate savages like the Incas. You cannot divide and rule here. Japan is not like any other nation.”²⁴ The high-ranking Jesuit then proceeds to forbid a Portuguese captain from interfering in the internal politics of Japan, much as the Portuguese had done with regularity in the Americas. Later he tells the same captain, “How many times must you be warned? You can’t treat Japan like an Inca protectorate peopled with jungle savages who have neither history nor culture.”²⁵ Clavell wants the reader to see the Japanese as outside of or invulnerable to the sort of orientalist discourse that dominated Western thinking about the non-Western world. That modern Japan could be different *and* equal held important implications for how Americans would come to view Japan when, a decade later, its economic power appeared relentless.

The television adaptation of *Shōgun* reached an audience ten times that of the book’s and added an additional audio-visual level of representation to Clavell’s story. It presented more opportunities for audience interpretation. The most critical difference between Clavell’s novel and the television adaptation is that the latter contains a great deal of dialogue in Japanese that remains untranslated and lacks subtitles. The American viewer with no knowledge of Japanese was as lost in a linguistic fog as the fictional Blackthorne. It was a bold gamble on the part of the screenwriter, Eric Bercovici—an act of “*kimottama*,” one reviewer put it, which is “Japanese for chutzpah.”²⁶ Bercovici aimed to “take his [Clavell’s] story, turn it inside-out, and tell the whole tale of *Shōgun*

²⁴ Clavell, *Shōgun*, 292-293.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 305.

²⁶ Harry F. Waters, “Samurai and Shoguns at NBC,” *Newsweek*, September 8, 1980, 86.

from Blackthorne's point of view, where we understand what he understands, where we see what he sees, and whenever he gets confused, we are equally confused."²⁷

Describing Blackthorne's experience of being lost in a different culture, director Jerry London said, "It's equivalent today to landing on an alien planet."²⁸ One television critic wrote at the time that it "may be the world's costliest language lesson" with its \$22 million-dollar budget. "The use of untranslated Japanese is a ludicrous impediment to comprehension," he asserted. "Granted, after watching this 12-hour production, I now know 'dozo' means 'please,' and 'domo' means 'thank you.' But there must be an easier way."²⁹ Other critics from prominent news media sources, many of who screened the miniseries before its public broadcast, predicted wrongly that audiences would be confused and abandon *Shōgun* before its finale.³⁰ One even rebuked critics and industry analysts who banked on the miniseries' urban appeal, discounting its popularity with "allegedly 'less sophisticated' rural audiences."³¹

The result of Bercovici's decision was that, perhaps even more than the novel, the miniseries served as 12 hours of mediated cross-cultural consumption for its American viewers. Like the reviewer and the "pop-culture trendies" mentioned above, 12 hours of

²⁷ "The Making of *Shōgun*," DVD.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ John J. O'Connor, "'Shogun': Englishman's Adventures in Japan," *New York Times*, September 15, 1980.

³⁰ Along with *ibid.*, see also Waters, "Samurai and Shoguns at NBC"; Neil A. Martin, "NBC's \$12-Million Gamble on Shogun," *New York Times* September 14, 1980; Tom Shales, "Shogun: The Bravado and Blunders of NBC's 12-Hour Samurai Saga," *Washington Post*, September 14, 1980; and Arthur Unger, "'Shogun'—An Oriental 'Gone with the Wind'?" *Christian Science Monitor*, September 11, 1980.

³¹ Randy Shipp, "'Shogun' Extravaganza Gives NBC Rave Ratings," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 18, 1980.

Shōgun really did impart knowledge of basic Japanese language phrases. In addition to simple phrases for greeting, expressing gratitude, and so on, viewers learned that attaching *ka* to a sentence converts a statement to a question; they learned that Japanese verbs end in *–masu* (with the *u* virtually silent); and they learned that *–san* is a polite suffix attached to a person’s name, while the suffix *–sama* is reserved for great reverence. Americans acquired a sense of Japanese cultural practices like bowing and removing one’s shoes when going indoors; they also learned of attitudes, however stereotyped, toward everything from hygiene to food.

Clavell’s “research” into Japanese language and cultural practices gave the non-specialist reader the sense that the text had an air of authenticity; so, too, did the television producers’ decision to use “authentic” Japanese actors (as opposed to, say, Japanese Americans). Nearly the entire cast was Japanese. Many of them spoke little or no English, requiring a small army of translators on set. Heading the Japanese cast in the role of Lord Toranaga was world-renowned actor Tōshiro Mifune—the “John Wayne of Japan,” according to one producer—best known to U.S. audiences for his roles in the films of legendary director Akira Kurosawa, like *Rashomon* (1950), *Seven Samurai* (1954), and *Yojimbo* (1961).³² Mifune’s powerful, imperial scowl makes the viewer wonder if Clavell wrote the part with the actor in mind. (In fact, three years before the television adaptation, Sheila Johnson predicted somewhat facetiously that Hollywood would soon get its hands on the novel and put Mifune in the role of Toranaga.³³)

³² “The Making of *Shōgun*,” DVD.

³³ Sheila K. Johnson, “Review: Images of Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 2 (Summer 1976): 448.

Richard Chamberlain's portrayal of John Blackthorne also helped Americans visualize a metaphor for contemporary Japanese-American encounters. Chamberlain was an American actor, best known for his role as the title character on the American television series *Dr. Kildare* (1961-1966). James Clavell had wanted a British actor to portray the British Blackthorne, but both Sean Connery and Roger Moore turned down the role.³⁴ Chamberlain was "allowed to forgo completely any trace of an English accent," wrote a critic for the *New York Times*, "reducing the authenticity quotient by one significant notch."³⁵ Where Chamberlain lacked authenticity as a Brit, he made up for it by making it easier for Americans to identify with someone who sounded more like they did.

Shōgun was filmed entirely in Japan, the indoor scenes in Toho Studios in Tokyo and much of the rest on location in the village of Nagashima. "Fine Japanese actors and actresses like Tōshiro Mifune and Yoko Shimada add an even greater flavor of authenticity to authentic Japanese locations," wrote Arthur Unger of the *Christian Science Monitor*. "In fact, a late-tuner may believe he is seeing a subtitleless revival of that Japanese classic 'Rashomon,' so convincingly Oriental is the staging."³⁶ Achieving an authentic "Oriental" atmosphere was not easy for the American film crew. The producers recounted stories of cultural misunderstandings and mishaps.³⁷ About 130 Japanese workers joined the 30 Americans who traveled to Japan. The Japanese crew

³⁴ "The Making of *Shōgun*," DVD.

³⁵ O'Connor, "'Shogun,' Englishman's Adventures in Japan."

³⁶ Unger, "'Shogun'—An Oriental 'Gone with the Wind'?"

³⁷ There are interviews with several of the people responsible for production in "The Making of *Shogun*," DVD. Also see Martin, "NBC's \$12-Million Gamble on *Shogun*."

declined to use American power tools as they painstakingly constructed “authentic” Japanese sets circa 1600. Once those sets were constructed, the Japanese crew refused to “age” them by manipulating materials to give them a worn seventeenth-century look. Translating the director’s instructions into Japanese meant that, as Jerry London recalled, scenes that “could have been shot in a few hours” “took us two work days.” The conflict between the “hard-nosed, no-nonsense, pragmatic approach to filmmaking of the American production staff” and the “more subdued, painstaking, almost philosophical methods of the Japanese crew” was among the “inherent problems of a bicultural production.” By the end of filming, related the *New York Times*, the film crew felt much like the Europeans in Clavell’s novel, “washed ashore in a strange, unpredictable country whose culture, customs and people they neither understood nor liked, and whose only dream was one of escape back to their native land.”³⁸ The crew braved the dangers of filming abroad in the name of authenticity.

Those Americans best positioned to judge *Shōgun*’s authenticity, professional scholars of Japan, responded with mixed feelings to the popularity of the novel and miniseries. Some were pleased that both representations increased interest in Japanese culture and history, but others were skeptical of what they saw as the perpetuation of stereotypes, both positive and negative, and exaggerated notions of Japanese thought and behavior. Wrote one historian, “Many Japan scholars were put off by countless errors of fact, anachronism, linguistic bloopers, and the continuation of an ‘exotic’ Japan image.”³⁹

³⁸ Martin, “NBC’s \$12-Million Gamble on Shogun.”

³⁹ C. Cameron Hearst III, “Review of *Learning from Shōgun*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 41 (November 1981): 158-159.

Henry Smith, a historian of Japan at the University of California, read the novel after his students claimed that they had “learned a good deal from it about Japanese history”:

“Were samurai in fact given to beheading commoners on a whim and then hacking the corpses into small pieces? Were all Japanese of that era (or any era, for that matter) so utterly nonchalant about sex and nudity? Would a peasant really have been summarily executed for taking down a rotting pheasant? Was ‘*karma*’ in fact such an everyday word among the Japanese of the year 1600?... [I]t can certainly be said that in every case Clavell exaggerates and often distorts the historical reality.”⁴⁰

Shōgun’s success prompted Smith to edit a volume to aid college instructors who chose to use *Shōgun* in their classes—evidence that despite many Japan scholars’ reservations, some did not object to incorporating it as a text suited for in-class analysis.⁴¹ Most likely because it represented a Japan of the past and it did so favorably, despite the stereotypes and exaggerations, *Shōgun* did not elicit widespread protests against its representation of Japan and the Japanese that *Rising Sun* would 13 years later. *Shōgun* confirmed U.S. impressions about modern Japan even as it taught Americans the multiculturalist lesson of the compatibility of difference and equality.

Interim: From Colonizer to Colonized

Less than two decades separated the publication of *Shōgun* and *Rising Sun*. Their respective representations of Japan, however, seemed to be products of two different

⁴⁰ Smith, “Reading James Clavell’s ‘Shogun,’” 39, 40-41.

⁴¹ Henry Smith, ed., *Learning from Shōgun: Japanese History and Western Fantasy* (Santa Barbara: University of California Press, 1981).

centuries. The interim between these two texts witnessed the emergence of a virtual cottage industry dedicated to producing representations of the relationships between Americans and Japanese. Of course, they were not the first of their kind in the postwar era. U.S.-Japan relations were the subject of a number of films and novels during the first two postwar decades. These included dramatizations of the Pacific War, like the films *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *Never So Few* (1959); narratives of cultural conflict and reconciliation, like James Michener's novel, *Sayonara*, and the films *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *The Barbarian and the Geisha* (1958); and even an alternative history, Philip K. Dick's novel, *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which imagined the fate of the United States had Japan and Germany won WWII. These texts, though, confronted the Japan of the immediate postwar era, the Japan that had gone through a dramatic transformation from enemy to ally in just a few years. Postwar Japan in American eyes was a quiescent, subservient Cold War ally, and the ubiquity of stereotypical icons like geishas in popular culture reaffirmed that impression.⁴²

Unlike their immediate postwar predecessors, the run of popular cultural products beginning in the mid-1970s first confronted the perceived realities of Japan's "economic miracle" of the 1950s and 1960s. What *Shōgun* demonstrated was that Americans had accommodated to the reality and authenticity of Japanese modernity and power. With the media storm created by the increasing "trade deficit" between Japan and the United States, however, Americans increasingly perceived Japan's equality in the international realm as a threat to the very source of modernity, "Western" culture. Novels and films like *Black Rain* (1989) and *Dragon* (1990) helped in the process of constructing a well of

⁴² See Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

viscerally negative cultural and racial images of Japan. From this well Michael Crichton would draw on the worst nationalistic, racist material to produce *Rising Sun*, a novel and film with the power to exercise political and cultural agency while also reflecting existing images and ideas sloshing about in the cauldron of popular media.

The comfortable position Japan occupied vis-à-vis American (i.e., Western) modernity in the 1970s was expressed in two popular, albeit very different, films: *The Yakuza* (1975) and *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan* (1978). They both tell the story of Americans going to the Japan of the “economic miracle,” a Japan settling contentedly into its role as a modern industrial power and Cold War ally. Like *Shōgun* they show that not only had Japan attained a status of equality in modernity, but also it had done so partly on its own terms, mixing its “traditional” cultural features with what it had learned from Americans during the occupation to generate the political and economic requisites for membership in the modernity club. And like *Shōgun* both films show that the *gaijin*—translated, depending on the English speaker’s attitude toward Japan, as “barbarian,” “outsider,” “foreigner,” or, as only David Halberstam could put it, “*not one of us*”⁴³—can discover a “knowable” Japan, befriend the Japanese, treat them with equality, and respect the cultural differences that created two dissimilar but powerful nations.

The Yakuza, directed by Sydney Pollack, stars Robert Mitchum as Harry Kilmer, a former American occupation soldier returned to Japan after a quarter-century.⁴⁴

Against an homage to Japanese gangster (*yakuza*) films, Pollack sets Kilmer’s efforts to

⁴³ David Halberstam, *The Reckoning* (New York: William Morrow, 1986); Halberstam’s emphasis.

⁴⁴ *The Yakuza*, DVD, directed by Sydney Pollack (1975; Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 2007).

reconnect with a Japanese woman, Eiko, that he had tried to marry during the occupation; the woman's brother, Ken, then a young *yakuza* (played by the omnipresent Ken Takakura), had forbidden the marriage, and she respected his wishes. Kilmer returns to Japan because *yakuza* have kidnapped an American friend's daughter. To confront the *yakuza* Kilmer reconciles with Ken, a martial arts expert, who helps Kilmer fight the *yakuza* in several violent scenes. An audience accustomed to romantic endings would expect Kilmer and Eiko to live happily ever after, but a plot twist reveals that Ken was not Eiko's brother but her husband. He permitted Kilmer and Eiko's relationship because he believed that in postwar Japan she would be safer living with a U.S. soldier.

Kilmer returns to find that the woman (and the Japan) he fell in love with during the occupation has built a meaningful life for herself in his (and the Americans') absence. To an army buddy Kilmer complains, "Everywhere I look, I can't recognize a thing." His friend responds, "It's still there. Farmers in the countryside may watch TV from their tatami mats and you can't see Fuji through the smog but don't let it fool you. It's still Japan, and the Japanese are still Japanese." The statement was intentionally ambiguous—was this "still" the treacherous Japan of wartime or the subservient Japan of the occupation?—but Kilmer's elegiac mood symbolizes his return to a Japan that has moved beyond his memories into mature modernity. No longer the country of helpless geishas or adolescent men, the Japan of 1975 needed neither Kilmer nor the Americans.

The U.S.-Japan relationship provided light-hearted source material for *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*, the third film in the popular series about a ragtag California Little League team.⁴⁵ Tony Curtis plays Marvin Lazar, a show-business failure with an

⁴⁵ *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*, DVD, directed by John Berry (1978; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2002).

eye for publicity and spectacle. Lazar smells a profit in fundraising for the Bears' trip to Japan to play the Japanese Little League national champions. Once Lazar raises the money, the team travels to Tokyo for immersion into a world of cultural difference. The film tries to use racism to comical ends as a means of pointing out the uneducated players' (and universal American) provincialism and narrow-mindedness. For example, the obese catcher responds to charges that his team is afraid to play the Japanese champions by declaring on American television, "We ain't no cowards and there ain't no mother***** Nip gonna stand in our way."⁴⁶ More than three decades after the war, such antics were intended to elicit laughs.

One scene of cultural misunderstanding illustrates with unexpected poignancy the 1970s American gaze toward Japan. Lazar and the Bears attend the taping of a Japanese variety show in which the Japanese national team and its coach appear (Image 3.1). Initially the scene shows the American audience that the Japanese simply have mimicked this staple of postwar American television, complete with Japanese couples singing *Moon River* and the theme from *Happy Days*. Lazar, the American show-business veteran, becomes uncomfortable when he sees that the charismatic host of the show is making the Japanese coach nervous by asking him to sing onstage; Lazar fears the coach will be laughed offstage, victimized in the style of *The Gong Show*. With cameras rolling Lazar jumps out of his seat onto the stage and tells the coach that the Japanese are "not professionals"; he lectures the host patronizingly, telling him that "these kinds of game shows are in my blood, I know what I'm talking about." Security guards shuffle Lazar offstage as the Japanese audience gazes in quiet discomfort. The host of the show shakes

⁴⁶ This line of dialogue was censored in the film as well.

his finger at Lazar condescendingly, chiding in mixed Japanese and English, “*Iie—no, understando?*”



Image 3.1: The colonized chastises the colonizer in *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan*.

While the rest of the film relies on mocking American provincialism for cheap laughs, this one scene is more unnerving than comical. Marvin Lazar is the ugly American, the scorned colonizer, who fails to understand that Japanese modernity is not American modernity. Patronizing Westerners are not welcome in the Japan of the “economic miracle.” By the end of the film Lazar, who eventually befriends the Japanese coach, discovers that the Japanese have reached modernity, complete with their own brand of baseball, by doing it the “Japanese way.”

Both *The Yakuza* and *The Bad News Bears Go to Japan* were produced before Japanese business became a boogeyman. Ron Howard's 1986 comedy, *Gung Ho*, however, appeared just as the public discourse on Japan began to turn toward the alarmism represented in Theodore White's article on "The Danger from Japan."⁴⁷ *Gung Ho* (a Chinese, not Japanese, phrase) adopts a common rustbelt narrative: a fictional Midwestern town struggles to survive when the local source of employment, an auto factory, closes, putting most of the town's middle class out of work. A factory foreman, Hunt Stevenson (played by Michael Keaton), travels to Japan to convince the fictional Assan Motors to purchase the factory, rehire the workers, and restart production. Hunt gets a taste of stereotyped modern Japanese life while briefly in Tokyo (including a training seminar in which weepy managers plead for their livelihood before militaristic trainers), but most of the cultural interactions take place in the fictional Hadleyville, Pennsylvania. There, a team of Assan managers arrives from Japan to ensure that the factory operates according to Assan's exacting standards.

Several years later in *Rising Sun*, the mood surrounding a Japanese company's purchase of American property was much grimmer. But in the case of *Gung Ho* the Japanese are seen almost as saviors, bringing not only their money but also their expertise to the United States. (Though the story resembles that of Marysville, Ohio, in the early eighties, the screenwriter admitted to inspiration instead from the second Japanese auto plant in the United States, Nissan's facility in Smyrna, Tennessee.)⁴⁸ If *Gung Ho* had nonfiction kin, it was more likely to be Ezra Vogel's *Japan as Number One* than Pat

⁴⁷ *Gung Ho*, DVD, directed by Ron Howard (1986; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2002).

⁴⁸ Vincent Canby, "The Screen: 'Gung Ho,' Directed by Ron Howard," *New York Times*, March 14, 1986.

Choate's *Agents of Influence*; the former emphasized Japan's successful (and replicable) approach to modernity while the latter stressed the threat Japanese finance posed to American political and economic institutions. In the film the Japanese managers challenge the stereotypically lazy American workers to boost production, while the Americans try to impart their laidback sensibilities on the overworked Japanese. Cultural conflict and misunderstanding ensue. The workers believe the managers have made unreasonable production demands. Hunt lectures them on this account: "You know what you want to hear? You want to hear that Americans do things better than anybody else. They're kicking our butts, and that ain't luck—that's the truth. There's your truth. Sure, the great old American do-or-die spirit—yea, it's alive, but they've got it. Well, I'll tell you something: we better get it back." The film concludes with the Japanese and Americans getting their hands dirty together to break production records in time to earn bonus pay. Each side recognizes that it had lessons to learn from the other.

Though Japanese economic power was a reality in *Gung Ho*, there was no racial or cultural threat attached to Japanese power. This reflected trends in the discourse of U.S.-Japan relations during the 1980s. It was not until the decade—and the Cold War, not coincidentally—was nearly over that the off-and-on economic disputes between the two countries echoed overtones of racial conflict. Nastier representations emerged after Japanese started buying the physical space of the United States, including real estate icons like Rockefeller Center and Pebble Beach Golf Club. *Gung Ho* did not belong to that category because it portrayed Japanese business and power not as a threat but as a healthy competitor that can teach Americans, à la Vogel, how to confront the industrial challenges of late capitalism. The film's denouement, in which everyone comes together,

“riveting and spraying and putting on windshield wipers, rich and poor, yellow, black and white, white collar and blue,” points toward a vision of modern multiculturalism, not the racial and cultural threats of a Japanese postmodernity.⁴⁹

Rising Sun was not the first American popular novel or film to make the turn toward portraying Japan and the Japanese as dangerous. Two texts, Ridley Scott’s film *Black Rain* (1989) and Clive Cussler’s novel *Dragon* (1990), were representative of newer interpretations of Japan as a threat to Western-style modernity. Ridley Scott had a penchant for a Japanese *mise-en-scene* in the 1980s; the previous chapter noted how his vision of a globalized futuristic Los Angeles in *Blade Runner* (1982) was replete with Asian, particularly Japanese, imagery. For *Black Rain* Scott took his cameras to Osaka, Japan, to capture the ultramodern cityscape as a backdrop to a *gaijin*-in-Japan story, and his images of Osaka were eerily reminiscent of *Blade Runner*’s Los Angeles. Later he compared the imagery of both *Black Rain* and his 1980 film *Alien* to contemporary urban Japan.⁵⁰ A reviewer for the *New York Times* noted, “‘Blade Runner’ is set in the future. The Osaka of ‘Black Rain’ is a city of the future as realized today. Yet they could be the same place.”⁵¹ Another film critic stated, “We get the feeling that in Osaka we’re staring the near future in the face.”⁵² Like the U.S. intellectuals engaged in the earliest debates about the meaning of globalization, Scott predicted a Japanese-style future. Unlike their vision, though, Scott’s grew increasingly menacing over the decade.

⁴⁹ Rita Kempley, “‘Gung Ho’: Auto Manifesto,” *Washington Post*, March 14, 1986.

⁵⁰ *Black Rain*, DVD, directed by Ridley Scott (1989; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 2004); “Black Rain: The Script, The Cast,” *Black Rain*, DVD.

⁵¹ Vincent Canby, “Review/Film: Police Chase a Gangster in a Bright, Menacing Japan,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1989.

⁵² Jay Carr, “‘Black Rain’ Is Just an Exchange of Clichés,” *Boston Globe*, September 22, 1989.

Black Rain stars Michael Douglas as Nick Conklin, the prototypical renegade New York City police detective, the “generic Good Cop Broken Down by the World,” reeking of machismo and bend-the-rules individualism.⁵³ Conklin and his partner spend time in Japan after *yakuza* dupe them into letting a dangerous Japanese gangster escape custody. Douglas’ Japanese detective counterpart is Masahiro Matsumoto, played by Ken Takakura, once again typecast for American audiences as the stoic, masculine, yet thoughtful Japanese. (The “Clint Eastwood of Japan” would take on this kind of role a third time in 1992’s *Mr. Baseball*, another *gaijin*-in-Japan story about an aging American baseball player.) In a scene mixing traditional and modern stereotypes of Japan, *yakuza* on Japanese motorcycles murder Conklin’s partner by decapitating him with a *katana*. (Scott clearly sought to reveal cultural difference expressed in motorcycles: the Japanese are small, quick, with a high-pitched screech; in contrast Conklin’s Harley Davidson is large with a low muscular rumble.) Conklin must work with Matsumoto to hunt down the *yakuza* responsible and avenge his partner’s death.

Conklin’s *gaijin*-in-Japan story takes place amid the backdrop of a *yakuza* counterfeiting conspiracy, which is producing millions of fake U.S. dollars, thereby destabilizing the U.S. economy. The *oyabun* (a *yakuza* boss) explains that the counterfeiting is retribution for the American “black rain” that poured down upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki. “You made the rain black and shoved your values down our throat,” he tells Conklin. “We forgot who we were.... I’m paying you back.” It is not just the “bad” Japanese characters who express anti-American sentiments. Inspector Matsumoto articulates a similar sentiment in a heated discussion with Conklin: “Music

⁵³ Russell Stamets, “‘Rain’ Is a Puddle of Damp Ideas,” *St. Petersburg Times*, September 22, 1989.

and movies are all America is good for.... We make the machines. We build the future. We won the peace.” In *Black Rain*, unlike earlier popular representations of Japan, the techno-future has a Japanese face and it challenges American modernity.

In contrast to Blackthorne in *Shōgun*, Nick Conklin leaves Japan having learned virtually none of its language or cultural ideas and practices. Both characters provided the vicarious *gaijin*-in-Japan experience, but while Blackthorne accepted accommodation with Japanese difference, Conklin rejected the country’s culture as impenetrable. In *Black Rain* the *gaijin* will forever remain a *gaijin*, that is, unless the *gaijin* accepts colonization. The female protagonist in the film is Joyce, played by Kate Capshaw. Joyce is an American expatriate who runs a glitzy nightclub that serves the insatiable appetites of Japanese businessmen. Her character anticipated the Japanese conquering of white women in *Rising Sun*. Joyce has adapted to her new colonial subservience while Conklin refuses. When he obligatorily asks her what she means by *gaijin*, she responds, “a stranger, a barbarian, a foreigner, me and you—more you.” In the Japanized future, Americans are positioned on the outside looking in, the colonized forced to accept new realities of power.

Black Rain tiptoed around the idea that Japan’s ascendance was a threat to American culture and society. The popular adventure writer Clive Cussler’s 1990 novel *Dragon* broached the subject with all the subtlety of a nuclear bomb.⁵⁴ Though published in 1990, *Dragon* takes place in 1993. Cussler imagined that Japan’s economic power would continue to grow unabated and in the near future malicious Japanese corporations could challenge U.S. political hegemony. The “Murmoto Corporation,” headed by the

⁵⁴ Clive Cussler, *Dragon* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990).

archetypal evil madman “Hideki Suma,” has been illegally assembling nuclear weapons and plans to distribute them in the United States disguised in—what else?—automobiles. Cussler’s recurring character, “Dirk Pitt,” must join a covert team of Americans to prevent catastrophe. Suma’s plan is not to pour “black rain” down upon Americans but to use the bombs strategically to cripple the U.S. economy—again, Cussler eschews subtlety when it comes to implying that the Japanese were continuing to fight the Second World War by alternative means. It is also clear, in contrast to both Clavell and Crichton, that Cussler cares not for authenticity when it came to his Japanese subjects. He invents allegedly Japanese words that phonetically could not exist (like “Murmoto”) and mistakenly transliterated others (like “saki” instead of “*sake*” for the alcoholic beverage). Cussler’s representation of the Japanese exaggerates the tone of revisionist nonfiction literature—Japan was a challenger, not a friend—but places it in an older framework of cultural understanding, one more reminiscent of Sax Rohmer’s early twentieth-century evil Asian criminal mastermind, Fu Manchu.⁵⁵

Dragon shows the possibility of interpreting the U.S.-Japan conflict as more than a spat over trade. For the “bad guys” in Cussler’s story, a blend of racial and economic nationalism fuels their animosity toward the United States. One of Hideki Suma’s henchmen proclaims, “I bow to the emperor and our traditional culture. I believe in his divine descent and that we and our islands are also of divine origin. And I believe in the blood purity and spiritual unity of our race.”⁵⁶ Because Cussler’s Japanese wage a race war, there are few “good” Japanese in the novel. Even Nisei characters are perfidious.

⁵⁵ For example, see Sax Rohmer, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1913).

⁵⁶ Cussler, *Dragon*, 219.

“George Furukawa,” a Nisei U.S. intelligence operative, is a double agent working on behalf of the Japanese, as is “Roy Orita.” Furukawa’s parents emigrated to the United States shortly after the war because they “hated America and its multicultures,” and therefore they sought its destruction.⁵⁷

Cussler’s implication was that the racial bonds of a “unified” society were more powerful than national allegiances. Representing the U.S.-Japan clash in racial terms harkened back to the “race war” in the Pacific during WWII, and it differs sharply from the previous decade of primarily economic quarrels. Such a discourse was characteristic only of a very brief historical moment, one roughly corresponding with the presidential tenure of George H.W. Bush and the popularity of declensionist literature, like Paul Kennedy’s *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), works which almost always saw the United States losing where Japan gained. In the intermingling of this zero-sum nationalism with images of techno-futuristic Japan bent on a race war, popular author Michael Crichton mixed a potent brew for a controversial novel.

Wakarimasen: Michael Crichton’s Rising Sun

In contrast to *Shōgun*, which asked Americans to respect Japanese modernity and power, Michael Crichton’s *Rising Sun* demands that they be fearful of a Japanese *postmodernity*, a future in which the United States was no longer a superpower.⁵⁸ Such a future also implied subservience to Japan as a new colonial master—the United States’ vast natural resources, including its people, and particularly its women, were open to

⁵⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁸ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).

plunder by Japanese economic and cultural imperialists. Crichton exhorted his large audience to resist Japanese imperialism by ceasing to grant Japan inroads into the U.S. economy. One reviewer implicated the novel's relationship to political discourse, namely Paul Tsongas' 1992 economic-nationalist campaign slogans, by dubbing *Rising Sun* a "call to economic arms disguised as a police novel."⁵⁹ More than any other popular text, *Rising Sun* powerfully expressed the "Japan Panic": a widespread, intense, and ultimately fleeting moment of uncertainty about the security of the "Western" cultural tradition in the face of an assault from the "East."⁶⁰ At the time critics made apt comparisons to the "yellow peril" panics of the late nineteenth century and the 1930s. But previous "yellow peril" scares played on fears of a barbaric, premodern East, the sort that produced the conquering Mongol Khans. The Japan Panic of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which *Rising Sun* best encapsulates, instead focused the American gaze toward the postmodern, high-tech, Japan-dominated future.

If *Rising Sun* were simply the story of a corrupt corporation's efforts to cover up a murder, it would have been unremarkable. But the fact that the perpetrators are Japanese and the victim is a young white woman made *Rising Sun* a controversial statement in the heat of the Japan Panic in 1992. The novel chronicles two Los Angeles police detectives, Peter Smith ("Web" Smith in the film, an important distinction discussed below) and John Connor, as they investigate a woman's murder during an opening-night party at the Nakamoto Tower, a new high-tech high-rise built by a powerful Japanese corporation.

⁵⁹ M.R. Montgomery, "Gunning for the Japanese," *Boston Globe*, February 17, 1992.

⁶⁰ I adopt the term "Japan Panic" from David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 147, but the definition is my own.

Smith is the white American male everyman, purposefully nondescript, who struggles to adjust to the changing realities of power in Los Angeles by taking a job for which he seems entirely unprepared: he becomes the liaison between the police department and Japanese nationals living and working in Los Angeles, despite his ignorance of Japanese language and culture. As the central protagonist and the commonplace everyman, Smith exists to be the reader's eyes and ears.

The character of John Connor is considerably more provocative. Connor is an expert in all things Japanese. He lived in Japan for an undetermined period, he speaks the language fluently, and he understands Japanese cultural beliefs and behaviors so well that he can manipulate the Japanese he encounters based on this knowledge. Connor demands that Smith respect a *kōhai-sempai* (student-mentor) relationship if the duo is to solve the murder. In the first few pages of the novel Crichton indicates to the reader that John Connor serves as an authoritative guide to the complicated world of Japanese culture, a world that neither Smith nor presumably the reader knows. The Connor character is Crichton's fictional mouthpiece for cross-cultural consumption.

Through Connor, Crichton instructs the reader about a range of stereotyped Japanese customs, various sordid practices of the nefarious Japanese business community, and the collusion between U.S. politicians and their wealthy Japanese backers. Connor is a treasure trove of pop-anthropological wisdom. In their first encounter with representatives of the Nakamoto Corporation, Connor warns Smith, "Keep your hands at your side. The Japanese find big arm movements threatening."⁶¹ (One reviewer suggested facetiously that Crichton might have added that the Japanese

⁶¹ Crichton, 14.

“have this in common with the mountain gorillas of Rwanda.”⁶²) He then cautions, “for a Japanese, consistent behavior is not possible.” “All’s fair in love and war, and the Japanese see business as war.” “Basically,” he tutors, “the Japanese have an understanding based on centuries of shared culture, and they are able to communicate feelings without words,” implying that racial bonds run so deep as to permit telepathic communication. Connor’s cynical vision of multiculturalism takes shape in statements like, “behavior that seems sneaky and cowardly to Americans is just standard operating procedure to Japanese.”⁶³ A reviewer for the *Nikkei Weekly*, a Japanese English-language publication, described these dozens of cultural lessons as “a parody of anthropology guides to Japan.”⁶⁴

Crichton’s cultural lectures added a pessimistic revisionist spin to the orthodoxy of Ruth Benedict’s descriptions of Japanese culture. But unlike Benedict, who sought to remove physiological conceptions of race from cultural discourse, Crichton placed race at the center of U.S.-Japan relations. The omnipotent Connor, growing increasingly weary of dealing with the Japanese as the novel reaches its climax, declares that “the Japanese are the most racist people on earth.”⁶⁵ As the novel closes, Smith and the reader learn why Connor left Japan:

“Most people who’ve lived in Japan come away with mixed feelings. In many ways, the Japanese are wonderful people. They’re hardworking, intelligent, and

⁶² Vincent Canby, “A Tale of Zen and Xenophobia in Los Angeles,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1993.

⁶³ Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 59, 103, 218, 275.

⁶⁴ Jorge Ribeiro, “‘Rising Sun’ Doesn’t Rise Above Bashing,” *Nikkei Weekly*, March 21, 1992.

⁶⁵ Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 245.

humorous. They have real integrity. They are also the most racist people on the planet. That's why they're always accusing everybody else of racism. They're so prejudiced, they assume everybody else must be, too. And living in Japan... I just got tired, after a while, of the way things worked. I got tired of seeing women move to the other side of the street when they saw me walking toward them at night. I got tired of noticing that the last two seats to be occupied on the subway were the ones on either side of me. I got tired of the airline stewardesses asking Japanese passengers if they minded sitting next to a *gaijin*, assuming that I couldn't understand what they were saying because they were speaking Japanese. I got tired of the exclusion, the subtle patronizing, the jokes behind my back. I got tired of being a nigger."⁶⁶

As the previous chapter illustrates, Michael Crichton was hardly the first American to accuse Japanese of racism. Doing so was one way of glossing over racial conflict in the United States. It enabled critics like *Atlantic Monthly* editor James Fallows to react to Japanese racism and alleged racial homogeneity by arguing that the United States' ethnic heterogeneity was actually one of its strengths. Somehow overlooking the previous three centuries of race-based oppression, he argued, "One of the things that make America most unusual is its assumption that race should not matter, that a society can be built of individuals with no particular historic or racial bond to link them."⁶⁷ He wrote this in a book subtitled "Making America Great Again," in which he curiously dedicated the first several chapters to "explain[ing] American uniqueness

⁶⁶ Ibid., 370-371.

⁶⁷ James N. Fallows, *More Like Us: Making America Great Again* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 2.

largely through contrasts with Asian societies, especially that of Japan.”⁶⁸ (Fallows, like so many American critics of Japan during this period, had no particular scholarly expertise on Japan.) The ideological construct of a racist Japan permitted American commentators concerned with U.S. economic decline to marginalize racial disunity in the postwar era. Cities like Detroit crumbled as a result of industrial stagnation, and more often than not African-American communities disproportionately bore the economic burden.⁶⁹ That Japanese attitudes toward race played a central role in conceptions of American national identity in *Rising Sun* and many revisionist works speaks to the intensity and significance of the Japan Panic.

Crichton’s “research” into revisionist literature lent an air of authority to the Connor character’s pronouncements. Crichton acknowledged that *Rising Sun* is a work of fiction, but he nevertheless included a “bibliography” at the end of the book as evidence of his extensive background reading and to entice the reader to learn more about the Japanese role in the U.S. political economy. “Although this book is fiction,” he declared, “my approach to Japan’s economic behavior, and America’s inadequate response to it, follows a well-established body of expert opinion.”⁷⁰ The list included some of the more vituperative published works of Japan revisionism, like Prestowitz’s *Trading Places* and Pat Choate’s *Agents of Influence* (1990). Such an uncommon gesture for a fiction author is evidence that Crichton placed a great deal of weight on the validity

⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁹ For example, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 397.

of his critique of the collusion between the Japanese and U.S. political and business establishments.

As with *Shōgun*, translating Crichton's novel into a visual medium—in this case, a feature film with an expensive marketing campaign and a summer “blockbuster” opening—added a layer of representation that provided the much larger audience with visceral images of the U.S.-Japanese conflict. The television adaptation of *Shōgun* had portrayed the Japanese in a way that encouraged a healthy, if guarded, respect for Japanese modernity and power. Renowned Japanese actors portrayed Japanese characters with depth and diversity, even if those characters did evolve from persistent Western stereotypes. Those stereotypes, however, came from an earlier period when Americans saw Japan as a developing modern capitalist democracy and a junior partner in the Cold War. The stereotypes that Michael Crichton borrowed and helped to refine were of a more malevolent sort. By 1992 popular stereotypes had moved beyond Japan-as-modern-competitor to the more dangerous Japan-as-postmodern-colonizer. As such, director Phillip Kaufman's *Rising Sun* showed the Japanese in the United States as harbingers of an Asian-faced future.

The new images of Japan as a colonizing force struck the viewer from the film's outset.⁷¹ A group of Japanese men hang around a karaoke bar at midday singing the Cole Porter classic, “Don't Fence Me In,” symbolic of the Japanese effort to ride over the United States' “wide open country.” One of the Japanese men, whom the audience later discovers is Eddie Sakamura, a Japanese playboy with an influential businessman father, roughly handles an attractive young blonde woman, who turns out to be the murdered

⁷¹ *Rising Sun*, DVD, directed by Phillip Kaufman (1993; Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 2002).

Cheryl Austin. Eddie forces Cheryl into his ostentatious sports car while reprimanding her (Image 3.2). From the beginning the viewer sees that Japanese men have power over white American women. The representation of Eddie Sakamura is crucial, too, because he is played by Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, an actor with a muscular, masculine physical presence, a sharp contrast to the persistent representation of Japanese as “little men,” and a return to the wartime image of physically superior Japanese “supermen.”⁷²



Image 3.2: The Japanese threat in *Rising Sun*.

Crichton’s novel includes references to the relationships between Japanese men and white women, but the author more often focused his criticism on Japanese economic behavior. Because film is a visual and thus more visceral medium, it provided Kaufman with a canvas for emphasizing Japanese efforts to conquer and colonize American

⁷² On the “little men” racial stereotype see John W. Dower, *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 323.

women. The effect of the images of these relationships is meant to be both comically grotesque and disturbing. In an early scene depicting the opening-night party at the Nakamoto Tower, short-statured Japanese executives (here, a return to the “little men” image) stand in front of their dates—white models that tower over their escorts; white men are permitted only an emasculated, colonial gaze (Image 3.3). The Japanese conquest of American women is meant to be less amusing when Smith and Connor visit a *bettaku*, a “love residence,” a glorified brothel where Japanese businessmen house their American mistresses. One mistress exposes the domination of American women and the perversity of their Japanese patrons:

“These guys come over from Tokyo, and even if they have a *shokai*, an introduction, you still have to be careful. They think nothing of dropping ten or twenty thousand in a night. It’s like a tip for them. Leave it on the dresser. But then, what they want to do—at least, some of them.... And to them... their wishes, their desires, it’s just as natural as leaving the tip. It’s completely natural to them. I mean, I don’t mind a little golden shower or whatever, handcuffs, you know. Maybe a little spanking if I like the guy. But I won’t let anybody cut me. I don’t care how much money. None of those things with knives or swords... But they can be... A lot of them, they are so polite, so correct, but then they get turned on, they have this... this *way*.... They’re strange people.”⁷³

The Japan Panic, the fear that the Japanese were systematically dissecting the Western cultural tradition, is most powerfully expressed in *Rising Sun*’s representation of

⁷³ Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 70.

the relationships between Japanese men and white women. The conquest of American women represents the ultimate attack on Western modernity.



Image 3.3: The conquest of American women in *Rising Sun*.

Three other character representations are also significant: Smith, Connor, and Cheryl Austin's killer. The Peter Smith of the novel becomes "Web" Smith in the film. Peter Smith's ethnic identity was ambiguous, but most readers probably assumed he was Caucasian. Web Smith was portrayed by Wesley Snipes, a well known black actor. This added a third dimension of racial tension to that already existing between the white Americans and the Japanese. The viewer understood the implications when Connor tells Smith that the Japanese are "the most racist people on the planet." Using the metaphor of "nigger" to describe his feelings of isolation in Japanese society also had more meaning in the context of the film.

The representation of John Connor on film was meant to contrast sharply with that of Smith. The veteran Scottish actor Sean Connery portrayed Connor. As an older, seemingly wise Anglo man, complete with a distinguished white beard, Connery could deliver the most outlandish characterizations of the Japanese and make them believable for American audiences. One critic who gave *Rising Sun* a positive review wrote, “The film gets a lot done simply by making use of Connery’s authoritative presence.... It’s the quiet gravity of his stance, the comprehension in his eyes” that made Connery the physical manifestation of Crichton’s efforts to teach his audience about Japan.⁷⁴ Even Web Smith, who is initially skeptical of the knowledge and power of this older white man, eventually accedes to Connor’s wisdom.

In Crichton’s novel Cheryl Austin’s killer is a Japanese character named Ishiguro, an executive assistant with the Nakamoto Corporation. Philip Kaufman decided to change this for his film. Because the killer’s identity was changed from a Japanese to an American, some commentators noted that this meant Kaufman intended to tone down the racism of the novel. As one reviewer put it, “the image of an Asian choking an American woman would have been inflammatory.”⁷⁵ That is, of course, one possible reading. On the other hand, Kaufman’s American killer is Bob Richmond, a lawyer and lobbyist working on behalf of the Nakamoto Corporation. Richmond is one of the Americans responsible for “selling” America to Japan. When he is fingered for the crime at the end of the film, he flees, only to meet a grisly demise. Though viewers can read this scene as

⁷⁴ Jay Carr, “‘Rising Sun’: A Smart, Sexy, Subtle Thriller,” *Boston Globe*, July 30, 1993.

⁷⁵ Steve Persall, “Saving Face,” *St. Petersburg Times*, August 1, 1993.

downplaying racial hostility between Americans and Japanese, they can also see it as the American traitor—indeed, a race traitor—getting just what he deserved.

Some professional reviewers bought into Crichton's jeremiad, while others saw *Rising Sun* as racism and propaganda masquerading as benign fiction. A few celebratory reviews included comparisons to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the sense that, like those two classics, it would have an immediate ideological and political impact. "Every so often," wrote Robert Nathan in the *New York Times Book Review*, "a work of popular fiction vaults over its humble origins as entertainment, grasps the American imagination and stirs up the volcanic subtext of American life."⁷⁶ Other reviewers remained unstirred. Kunio Francis Tanabe, reviewing the book for the *Washington Post*, wrote that "even as fiction, it all seems too callous and irresponsible."⁷⁷ (Crichton shrugged off this negative review because it was "written, I believe, by an Asian-American.")⁷⁸ Generally, reviewers who gave the book or the film positive reviews used it to reaffirm their preexisting perceptions of the U.S.-Japan economic conflict; critics, however, saw *Rising Sun* as a malevolent step in the direction of racism and purposeful cultural obfuscation.

More important than the opinions of professional reviewers were the views of the reading public. Comments posted on early Internet message boards offer a unique glimpse into how non-elite Americans—those with no weekly column in a high-profile newspaper or magazine, talking in ways that might be heard around a water cooler—

⁷⁶Montgomery, "Gunning for the Japanese"; Robert Nathan, "Is Japan Really Out to Get Us?" *New York Times Book Review*, February 9, 1992, 22-23.

⁷⁷ Kunio Francis Tanabe, "Crime and Bashing: Michael Crichton's Degrading Digressions," *Washington Post*, February 3, 1992.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Montgomery, "Gunning for the Japanese."

consumed Crichton's work as a legitimate political and cultural commentary.⁷⁹ His bibliography and "research" apparently persuaded readers to accept his critique as more than a fanciful crime drama. "My own opinion," wrote one poster, "is that the majority of the comments made by the characters in the book are true and it made me aware of what kind of position the US is in with respects [sic] to Japan."⁸⁰ Another admitted that reading *Rising Sun* inspired him to learn more by reading Pat Choate's *Agents of Influence*.⁸¹ Yet another believed that "Mr. Crichton has the right idea about inspiring economic nationalism." He wrote, "I can pretty much agree with all of Crichton's harsh assertions about Japanese manipulateness [sic] and U.S. disintegration."⁸² Finally, one poster affirmed Crichton's representation of Japanese racism: "a friend of mine (black man in his 40's)... He used to say all these wonderful things about Japan/etc, but after he read this book he came up to me and said 'you know what, those japanese [sic] are XXXXXXs, they may smile at you during the day but plot against you during the night... they're all XXXXXXs.'"⁸³

The critical reaction against Crichton was even more powerful on these message boards than the chatter praising *Rising Sun*. A series of lengthy and heated debates erupted after one poster, apparently a Japanese living in the United States, wrote a

⁷⁹ These discussions come from Usenet newsgroup postings from the early 1990s. The Usenet email distribution system was one of the earliest open communication forums on the Internet. A full Usenet archive is available at groups.google.com.

⁸⁰ Peter Wu, "The Rising Sun by Michael Crichton," soc.culture.asian.american, December 30, 1992.

⁸¹ FJM, "Rising Sun (the book)," sci.econ, December 10, 1992.

⁸² Henry Robertson, "Michael Crichton," soc.culture.japan, March 4, 1993.

⁸³ Danielle T. Wei, "The Rising Sun by Michael Crichton," soc.culture.asian.american, December 31, 1992.

message titled “Fuck Michael Crichton” on a discussion board for Asian-American social and cultural issues:

“It would take a white man to do this. But, I strongly object to an individual taking this book to [sic] seriously (unless, you like revenge). Revenge and Scapegoating, that’s what this book is about. It is far below my personal honor and intelligence to go back to Nippon and write novels toward the dislike of the American People. Anti-Americanism is not my thing, but anti-japan [sic] is Mr. Crichton. To spread hatred and discord based of imagination. The white people is [sic] a master at doing this.... Mr. Cricton [sic] you [sic] book is only doing well among the Americans whose intelligence is as low as yours. It is not my pleasure to mass distribute my imagination about your culture be it British or American. If I chose to write anti-white American garbage as you have chosen to do [sic]. All of Asia would hate me! Your kind treat [sic] you like a hero.”⁸⁴

The anger inspired by Crichton’s representation of the Japanese is palpable in this posting, emphasized by the author’s struggle to translate his fury into a difficult foreign language. Many fellow subscribers to the newsgroup responded to the accusations by initiating a discussion, which quickly devolved into a “flame war,” over which society was more racist, the United States or Japan. Each side could muster up evidence for their arguments; some even used Crichton’s work to support their claims about Japanese racism. What is striking about this exchange, though, is that a single fictional text helped to shape decisively the way some people perceived a divisive political, economic, and

⁸⁴ Rikiya Asano, “Fuck Michael Crichton,” soc.culture.asian.american, July 16, 1993.

cultural issue. *Rising Sun* exercised real agency in shaping popular political and cultural debates.

Conclusion

Unfortunately for the Japanese people, but fortunate for the state of U.S.-Japan relations, the Japanese economy entered a recession in 1990-1991, one that would last a decade. Though economists saw the signs of the bubble economy's bursting in the early 1990s, it was not entirely clear until 1994-1995 that any real economic "threat" posed by Japan was a thing of the past. After all, *Rising Sun* was published in 1992 and the film appeared in 1993; both generated heated reactions from supporters and critics not yet attuned to a post-Japan Panic outlook. By 1995 the ramparts of American modernity appeared secure once again. The United States politically dominated the post-Cold War world and economically began to recognize how it could make the new rules of the global economy work in its favor. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the popular films and novels of the Japan Panic were a relic of recent history. The tendency to interpret the forces of non-Western global expansion as a threat to the sanctity of Western (i.e., American) culture, however, would only intensify after 2001. In many ways the neoconservatives who shaped the dynamics of foreign policy after September 11 learned the language of cultural conflict not only from the Cold War but also from the brief, intense, and ultimately fleeting moment that was the Japan Panic.

CHAPTER 4

OHAYO: (GOOD) MORNING AGAIN IN MARYSVILLE

To at least one viewer, the contrast seemed comical. Interspersed during the commercial breaks of the NBC Network's 1980 airing of its 12-hour epic miniseries of seventeenth-century Japan, *Shōgun*, Lee Iacocca told Americans just what he thought of the Japanese. The former president of the Ford Motor Company left Ford in 1978 after a bitter public feud with the grandson of the company's legendary founder. Now he was on television pitching Chryslers, having joined the failing company as president and CEO. "Every 10 minutes he came on with his Drop Dead Datsun and Toyota commercials," wrote Tony Kornheiser in the *Washington Post*—"a real first in point-counter-point programming."¹

If Bob Spinelli was watching, he could not have missed the irony. Spinelli was just a teenager when he got a job at the Ford assembly plant in Edgewater, New Jersey, a small community buttressed against the Hudson River facing New York State. In 1955 Spinelli was one of the first workers to walk through the doors of the majestic new Mahwah Assembly Plant, Ford's largest North American facility, located about 20 miles northwest of Edgewater. Four-and-a-half-million cars later, amid rumors that the Japanese company Nissan (known as Datsun in the United States until 1983) might buy the mothballed facility, he and his co-workers workers watched as the final car, a Ford Fairmount, rolled off the line. Like a mourner at a funeral delivering an impromptu

¹ Tony Kornheiser, "A Week of 'Shogun': A Retrospective from the Scene of the Occident," *Washington Post*, September 20, 1980. On Iacocca at Ford and Chrysler, see David Halberstam, *The Reckoning* (New York: William Morrow, 1986); and Douglas Brinkley, *Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress, 1903-2003* (New York: Viking, 2003).

soliloquy, Spinelli declared: “This is an American plant, built by Americans, and American cars should be coming out of it.”² On national television and in dozens of local events echoing Mahwah’s woes, the “auto wars” assumed a nationalist tone.

Yet three years later and 500 miles away, in a similarly small town just outside Columbus, Ohio, a very different scene was playing out. Drivers traveling northwest on U.S. Route 33 outside of Marysville could not have missed the billboard: at the very top was the name Honda, one of the three largest Japanese automobile companies that had stormed the U.S. market since the mid-1970s. Yet the billboard played on a passerby’s cognitive dissonance—beneath the Honda logo was a giant personalized Ohio license plate with the letters “HM GRWN.” A driver also might have noticed the bumper stickers on local-owned Hondas proclaiming, “Made in USA.”³ The message was clear: in rural Union County, Ohio, population 29,540, the American hands assembling cars defined the products’ national identity more than the Japanese name on their rear ends.⁴

The national identity distinction was more than a word game for the automobile industry in the early 1980s. It meant jobs, livelihoods, and sometimes even lives. The Big Three U.S. automakers (General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler) laid off more than a quarter of a million autoworkers in the early 1980s, most of them concentrated in the Midwest, which began living up to the moniker “Rust Belt” in earnest.⁵ At its worst the

² Quoted in Robert Hanley, “Last Ford Leaves Mahwah Plant,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1980.

³ Photograph with caption, “Proclaim Honda’s Presence Here,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, July 6, 1983; John Holusha, “Honda Plant Brings a Touch of Japan to Ohio,” *New York Times*, April 26, 1983; Bruce Horowitz, “Honda Not So Simple Anymore,” *Industry Week*, April 4, 1983, 45.

⁴ “Union County Population Shows Over 20 Percent Increase from 1970,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, February 20, 1981.

⁵ On Detroit’s woes early in the decade, see David Halberstam, *The Reckoning*.

national unemployment rate hovered near 11 percent in late 1982, and in scattered cities throughout the Midwest it exceeded 20 percent.⁶ For some men, unemployment challenged not only their ability to financially provide for their families, but also their sense of manhood and self-worth. Eugene Pfeiffer had been making \$430 a week at the Mahwah plant. “When you’re working, you have more respect from the family,” he said. “All of a sudden I feel like a piece of furniture around the house. I feel less than a man, less than a father.”⁷ For laid-off autoworkers the success of Japanese auto companies in the United States was a direct assault on American masculinity.

The feeling that Japanese industry was emasculating the American worker had the potential to translate into tragedy. On June 19, 1982, at the height of the worst U.S. recession since the Great Depression, two recently laid-off autoworkers and UAW members beat to death a young Chinese American named Vincent Chin. Encountering Chin as he left a bar on the night of his bachelor party, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz mistook Chin for a Japanese and used a baseball bat to express their feelings of emasculation. “It’s because of you little motherfuckers that we’re out of work,” Ebens reportedly said during the confrontation. Without acquitting Ebens and Nitz of individual responsibility for the crime—the U.S. justice system essentially did that, handing down a sentence of probation and a fine—the murder of Vincent Chin revealed the power of the Big Three’s and the United Auto Workers’ anti-Japanese campaigns of the previous three

⁶ Edward Cohen, “Despite a Recovery, High Jobless Rate Is Expected During the Next Two Years,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1983.

⁷ Quoted in “Majority from Ford’s Mahwah Plant Still Jobless,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1982.

years, permeated as they were by decades-old “yellow peril” imagery and stereotypes of “little men” working to outfox American competitors.⁸

David Halberstam’s *The Reckoning* (1986) remains one of the best histories of the U.S. auto industry. In it Halberstam described Detroit’s Japan panic in the early 1980s.

The U.S. industry feared

“not only that the Japanese made better autos, that they had newer plants, that the relationship between workers and managers was better, but that Japanese society, with its greater harmony, its greater belief and discipline in basic education, its more limited personal freedoms, was better prepared for the coming century.

That was the real crisis, the grimmer one that hung over America.”⁹

The United Auto Workers, representing much of Detroit’s attitude, responded to the success of the Japanese automobile industry by promoting economic nationalism, a story ably recounted by Dana Frank in *Buy American* (1999). According to Frank, the UAW took cues from the rhetoric of Big Three corporate leaders by framing Detroit’s financial troubles in the context of a “threat” posed by a Japanese “invasion” beginning in the late 1970s.¹⁰ Bob Spinelli, the 5,000 employees at the Mahwah Ford Plant, and the hundreds of thousands laid off in just a half-decade interpreted the auto wars through Detroit’s framework: having taken the U.S. steel and television industries, Japanese companies now targeted the biggest prize of all. When Iacocca bashed Japan on TV, when

⁸ Tim Kiska, “‘Vincent Provoked the Fight,’ Friend Says at Chin Trial,” *Detroit Free Press*, June 15, 1984; Alethea Yip, “Remember Vincent Chin,” *Asian Week*, June 19, 1997, 12; “Killers Stalked Vincent Chin: Ignored Evidence Indicates Killing Was Premeditated,” *Asian Week*, April 28, 1983, 5.

⁹ Halberstam, *The Reckoning*, 47.

¹⁰ Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), chapter 7.

autoworkers smashed Toyotas with sledgehammers, and when the unemployed murdered Asian Americans, Detroit established the national tone of the auto wars.

While they dominated the story, the Big Three and the UAW were not the only storytellers. The residents of Marysville, Ohio, welcomed a Japanese company to their small town as a salve for the wounds of economic recession. The consequences likely exceeded the most optimistic expectations. The fears Halberstam described proved partly valid—this Japanese company did, indeed, do things better than its U.S. competitors—but the future Detroit foresaw unfolded not thousands of miles away in Tokyo but less than 200 miles away in central Ohio. The case of Honda’s arrival in Marysville illustrates that the globalizing of Japanese capital and culture worked not to the benefit of a particular nation-state, but to the benefit of those local communities that could link up to global transformations taking place largely independent of the borders of the nation-state. Honda brought thousands of jobs to central Ohio while connecting the local community to global commerce and culture in ways much of the rest of the country would notice in the coming decades. The Japanese company spoke not the language of national, racial, or ethnic communities but of transnational corporate communities. When the defenders of the old national industrial order, the UAW, presented their grievances to the Marysville community, they seemed petty, bitter, and vestigial compared to what Marysville had already tasted and what Honda’s future promised. As Frank writes in relation to the Big Three, the UAW failed “to read the global handwriting on the wall.”¹¹ The residents of Marysville, however, took copious notes.

¹¹ Frank, *Buy American*, 161.

In October 1977 the Honda Motor Company of Japan announced its intention to build a motorcycle assembly plant six miles outside of a small central Ohio town, Marysville, the largest municipality and county seat of rural Union County. The local newspaper, the *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, noted an auspicious coincidence: “‘Ohio’ in Japanese means ‘Good Morning,’ and that’s what it was for residents of Union County and central Ohio” on the day of Honda’s announcement.¹² Over the following nine years, Honda invested nearly \$600 million in Union County as it constructed first a motorcycle assembly plant and then a much larger automobile assembly plant; by 1986 it had expanded the auto plant and built a third facility, the Anna Engine Plant, about an hour’s drive west of Marysville. The centerpiece, the Marysville Auto Plant (MAP), would be the first auto production facility in the United States owned and operated by a Japanese company. Anticipating the theme of Ronald Reagan’s 1984 presidential campaign, Honda’s arrival in Marysville signaled a social and economic renewal for a “Rust Belt” community—it was “morning again” in Marysville, and the dawn came from the Land of the Rising Sun.

It was no wonder, then, that the residents of Union County voted for the president’s reelection by a margin of nearly four to one in 1984. The dour Democratic unionism of Walter Mondale contrasted with Reagan’s can-do free-trading smile, and the latter’s shiny optimism embodied local changes in Marysville. At the same time, Honda’s arrival was not a product of Reaganism or Reaganomics—the company announced construction of the MAP a full year before Reagan took office. It was instead

¹² “Honda to Build Near Marysville,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 11, 1977. My description of Honda’s arrival and impact on Marysville relies necessarily on local and national press sources. My repeated requests to Honda for interviews and access to sources have proven fruitless.

part of a national trend of northern urban deindustrialization and relocation. Industries abandoned cities where labor was concentrated and well organized; some of them relocated production overseas, others bowed out completely (like steel), and still others moved operations to rural areas in the U.S. South, where labor was inexpensive and disorganized.¹³ Such deindustrialization was both a cause and a consequence of the economic woes of the late 1970s and early 1980s. When Honda began building in central Ohio it did so at a time of widespread economic instability, a condition neither initiated nor solved by the Reagan administration.

The opening of the Marysville Motorcycle Plant (MMP) in September 1979 coincided with the beginning of hard times to come for the community. Unemployment rates for Union County hovered near 6 percent, depending on seasonal agricultural employment, throughout 1979; the jobs the MMP provided to the “Original 64” employees hardly dented that figure in a county with a labor force of 13,000.¹⁴ Stagnant economic growth, particularly in the industrial Midwest, combined with rising consumer prices under the Carter administration’s watch to put strains on everyday life in Marysville as a new decade dawned.

But the “worst hard time” was yet to come. Unemployment in central Ohio climbed dramatically during the “Reagan recession” of 1981-1983, reaching levels not seen since the Great Depression. The 1982 average rate for Union County was 12.3 percent, reaching 14.5 percent just as the MAP opened its doors in November 1982; just

¹³ The classic work on this subject from the period is Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison, *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

¹⁴ The *Marysville Journal-Tribune* regularly published unemployment rates for every county in Ohio. “Ohio Labor Force Estimates, By County, November 1979” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 21, 1979.

three months later, the rate was close to 16 percent. Neighboring counties, from which Honda would also draw workers, had it equally rough: Logan and Champaign counties had 1982 unemployment rates of 12.5 and 12.7 percent respectively, while in Marion County, to Union's north, an astounding 16.9 percent of the workforce was jobless in 1982.¹⁵

But from a devastating low in 1982 Marysville would reach spectacular highs in the decade following the MAP's opening, exceeding both the company's and the community's expectations. During the recession, Union County's unemployment regularly rated as one of the dozen worst of Ohio's 88 counties—in a state, no less, that monthly ranked only behind Michigan for the nation's highest unemployment. Yet by April 1986 Union County's rate of 4.4 percent was the lowest in all of Ohio, and the occasion was the first in nearly two years that any Ohio county had a rate below 5 percent.¹⁶ By 1988 the county's average annual income of \$27,000 had passed every other county in the state. By 1992 Honda had invested \$2.4 billion in several production and assembly facilities in central Ohio, where it employed more than 10,000 people—not one of whom, the company liked to boast, Honda had ever laid off, even when it cut production to account for economic slowdowns. The nearly 400,000 Honda Accords produced every year in Marysville helped propel that vehicle model to the very top of the annual U.S. bestseller lists, made Honda the fourth largest automaker in the United States, and pushed it passed its Japanese rivals, Toyota and Nissan, in the effort to dominate the U.S. auto market. At the beginning of Honda's second decade in the

¹⁵ "Annual Averages for 1982," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, March 7, 1983; "Ohio Labor Force Estimates By County, November 1982," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 28, 1982.

¹⁶ "County Jobless Rate Lowest in State," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, June 5, 1986.

region, the MAP was “the single biggest and most productive auto plant in North America,” and the county’s former unemployment woes were a distant memory: the rate was 3.2 percent in 1990 and the local newspaper was “bulging with help-wanted ads.”¹⁷ *Ohayo*, indeed.

Despite the tremendous growth Honda’s Marysville experiment was not without its detractors. Heading the list was the catchall of “Detroit,” which included not only the Big Three U.S. automakers but also the United Auto Workers. In the 1970s the automakers alleged that the unfair trade practices of Japanese companies were responsible for layoffs nationwide. UAW President Douglas Fraser condescendingly echoed Iacocca’s accusations by claiming that nothing could stop continued layoffs “except for the Japanese showing some responsibility and restraining their exports.”¹⁸ Detroit got what it wanted in April 1981, when the Reagan administration negotiated “voluntary export restraints” with the Japanese government, limiting exports to 1.68 million annually until 1984 and thereafter renegotiating each year until quotas were fully lifted in the 1990s.

Of that 1.68 million, the Japanese government allotted Honda 348,000 exports to the United States, based on its third-place ranking behind Toyota and Nissan. In 1980 Honda, which relied on exports for 68 percent of its total sales (compared to 40 percent for Toyota and 46 percent for Nissan), had shipped nearly 380,000 units to the United

¹⁷ Scott Pendleton, “Honda Leads the ‘Transplants,’” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 30, 1990; Zachary Schiller, “The Backlash Isn’t Just Against Japan,” *Business Week*, February 10, 1992, 30; Doron P. Levin, “Auto Slump Hits Honda and Production Is Cut,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1991; Doron P. Levin, “Honda to Reduce Output at Auto Plants in Ohio,” *New York Times*, July 28, 1992.

¹⁸ Quoted in “Detroit Hopes the Worst Is Over,” *Business Week*, July 21, 1980, 62.

States.¹⁹ The Reagan administration's indirect protectionism threatened the continued growth of a company so reliant on global commerce. Shoichiro Irimajiri, the second president of Marysville's Honda of America Manufacturing (HAM), insisted in 1985 that the decision to build in Ohio was based on "our corporate philosophy, which told us that to serve the American market we must commit our resources to manufacturing in America."²⁰ It was a proverb straight from the Book of Morita.

The reality may have been a mix of Sony-style globalism and a sense of the protectionist rumblings in Washington. Honda announced construction of an auto plant in January 1980, a full fifteen months before the imposition of restraints.²¹ But previous U.S. business, labor, and government uproars over Japanese trade practices in the textile, steel, and television industries were less than subtle signals to the Japanese auto industry that it had best be prepared for a backlash against its challenge to the United States' flagship industry. Honda's Marysville expansion may have fit naturally into the company's globalizing philosophy, but it was also an expedient decision in a moment of uncertainty.

Whatever the impetus for building in what seemed like the unlikeliest of locations for a Japanese company, the decision proved an unqualified economic success for both Honda and central Ohio. For Honda, producing in Marysville helped it sidestep the "voluntary restraint," adding hundreds of thousands annually to its U.S. supply at a time when consumers demanded small, inexpensive, well-made, and fuel-efficient cars.

¹⁹ "Honda Building Overseas to Meet Demand Diplomatically," *Business Week*, January 28, 1980, 112; "Honda May Begin Car Production Early," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, July 6, 1981.

²⁰ Quoted in John Holusha, "Japan's Made-in-America Cars," *New York Times*, March 31, 1985.

²¹ "Honda to Proceed with Auto Plant," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, January 11, 1980.

Beating Toyota and Nissan in the race to assemble vehicles in the United States was the primary reason for Honda's leap to number one on the import list. For Marysville and Union County, the jobs Honda provided at a moment of economic trauma reignited business across the area. Ohio development officials estimated that for every new job Honda created in Marysville, three new jobs were created elsewhere in the state, meaning that Honda was directly and indirectly responsible for roughly 40,000 Ohio jobs in the early 1990s.²²

Honda's arrival altered social and cultural life for the Marysville community as much as it dramatically transformed the economic landscape of central Ohio, illustrating the impact beyond economics that global commerce and culture could have on local U.S. communities. For Honda's new "associates," as the company called all of its production employees, Honda promoted a work ethic that tried to transcend the divisions between labor and management in order to invest everyone in Honda "quality" and "pride." Local residents not employed by Honda noticed the changes in their community as well. Dozens of new Japanese residents brought a touch of ethnic and cultural diversity to an area populated almost exclusively by white faces.

The singularly impressive growth of the area would come only after the MAP opened its doors, but the Marysville community still warmly greeted the opening of the MMP and the hundreds of jobs it promised. The MMP produced its first motorcycle on September 10, 1979, and slowly increased production until it was ready to showcase the

²² Mary K. Marvel and William J. Shkurti, *The Economic Impact of Development: Honda in Ohio* (Columbus: Working Paper Series, School of Public Policy and Management, The Ohio State University, 1993), 18.

facility to the press and the public in April 1980.²³ The *Journal-Tribune* published a special 24-page insert that month welcoming Honda and informing locals about the company's products and which of their neighbors would be responsible for making them.²⁴ The supplement also began Union County's education in all things Japanese. It was titled "Nikkan Shimbun," which readers learned meant "Daily Newspaper." Also, two Japanese language characters adorned the cover; below them read, "The Two Japanese Symbols Shown Above Literally Mean 'With Happy Pleasure We Accept A Guest,'" meaning, of course, Honda. The "Nikkan Shimbun" was littered with warm welcomes from local businesses, congratulating Honda on its successful launch. It contained a dozen articles on various aspects of Honda's operations, from the mythology of its legendary founder Soichiro Honda to the company's emphasis on teamwork and the most rigorous quality standards. It also noted Honda's significant contribution in local property taxes, expected to be over \$200,000 in 1980, despite tax abatements that were part of generous incentives packages granted by local and state officials. (By the late 1980s, Honda's local tax contribution registered in the millions, most of it going to the local school system.)

The supplement concluded with an introduction to the plant's five managers. The top two executives were Japanese; the next three in rank were American. Significantly, no one was older than 48 years old, and none of the three Americans was even 40 years old—the entire plant, as early observers frequently noted and as pictures of the first

²³ "Honda Turns Key on Assembly Line," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, September 10, 1979.

²⁴ "Nikkan Shimbun," Special Supplement to *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 17, 1980.

employees attest, had a young feel to it, from the managers to the associates.²⁵ The very last page of the supplement was nearly blank white; about a third of the way down the page three brief lines stood in moderately small font, mimicking perhaps a haiku-like aesthetic: “Thank you Marysville. / You’ve made your town / Honda’s second home.” The only other item on the page was the Honda logo, near the bottom. The minimalist aesthetic would become a Honda trademark over the years. It presented Marysville with the image of an open and straightforward business that was grateful for the opportunity to be part of the community.

Despite the mutual goodwill the MMP alone could not solve the economic woes to come in the following three years. The dissonance between optimism about Honda’s growth and the darkening economic outlook was evident in the *Journal-Tribune*’s year end wrap-up: the top Ohio story for 1980, as the Associated Press saw it, was the “slumping economy,” while the top local story, as the staff of the *Journal-Tribune* voted, was Honda’s announced auto plant, which broke ground in early December.²⁶ As residents waited for the construction of the plant, with Honda seeking to boost its payroll from 500 to 2,500 employees, a series of local business closings painted a dire economic picture. In January 1982 food producer Nestlé announced it would close a local milk-processing facility, putting 138 people on the unemployment rolls. In April truck manufacturer Rockwell International announced that it was shutting the doors on its axle production facility in Marysville; the plant employed 530 people. To make matters

²⁵ Pictures of all of the “Original 64” associates who opened the MMP are reproduced in HAM’s official history; see Don Hensley, ed., *Building on Dreams: The Story of Honda in Ohio* (Honda of America, Mfg., Inc., 2004): 76-79. In Parish, “Media Gets a Close Look at New Plant,” it is noted that a reporter asked the average age of the associates but Honda refused to give that figure.

²⁶ “Slumping Economy Is Top Ohio Story in 1980,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 31, 1980; “Honda Expansion Top Story,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, January 2, 1981.

worse, the county's largest pre-Honda employer, the agricultural supply manufacturer O.M. Scott, announced the laying off of several hundred employees.²⁷ All of these numbers took a serious toll on the employment picture of a county that as of January 1982 had a total labor force of 13,847, 11.1 percent of which was already unemployed at that point.²⁸ One of Nestlé's newly unemployed expressed her fears: "You lose a job and you can't believe it. I have no idea what I will do except pray and hope to God I can find a job."²⁹ The dark clouds of unemployment came to define daily life in central Ohio.

Layoffs throughout 1982 and into 1983 were devastating to Marysville. Amid the avalanche of bad news, the *Journal-Tribune* reported that "Thousands Hope Honda Will Cure Area Unemployment Picture." For those recently laid off, "Honda could be a lifesaver." By August 1982 Honda had already received 10,000 job applications, three months before the MAP was set to start production.³⁰ The *Journal-Tribune's* editor pleaded with readers to get beyond the "negativism" plaguing the community in 1982. "Americans must think positive in times like these," Daniel Behrens wrote, in his sunny Midwestern, Reaganesque voice. "No matter how dark the picture is, it could be darker, and eventually a brighter day will return."³¹

²⁷ "Nestle Plant Closing Sept. 1," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, January 15, 1982; "Rockwell Plant Closing Likely After UAW Rejects Contract," April 27, 1982; "Scotts Announces Cutbacks," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, June 8, 1983.

²⁸ "Ohio Labor Force Estimates, By County, January 1982," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, March 1, 1982.

²⁹ Pat Parish, "Nestle Employees Voice Reactions to Recent Plant Closing Decision," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, January 19, 1982.

³⁰ "Thousands Hope Honda Will Cure Area Unemployment Picture," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, August 30, 1982.

³¹ Editorial, "Positive Approach Needed in 1983," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 31, 1982.

Such was the local economic picture when the press and public got their first look at the MAP in April 1983. Honda opened its doors for a week's worth of celebrations to officially inaugurate the plant that had produced its very first Accord, a slate-gray four-door model, on November 1, 1982, to little fanfare.³² Visiting reporters noted the hundreds of "young American workers in clean white uniforms and green and white caps." American and Japanese managers, too, wore the same pristine white coveralls as the associates, though they wore them over shirts and ties. The goal of the uniforms was to emphasize unity and teamwork to both insiders and outsiders—a management technique popularized in a flurry in recent "Japanese management" books and seminars in U.S. business schools. There was no separate executive cafeteria, and management all shared the same large office space. "The entire operation here," described *New York Times* reporter Kenneth Noble, "has a Japanese flavor."³³ Calling wage workers "associates," a practice adopted from the home office, illustrated that the company wanted workers to feel that they were a crucial part of the Honda experiment in Ohio, and not just another wage slave.

Another Japanese management technique made the voyage across the Pacific: the morning callisthenic exercises that would be immortalized in the 1986 film *Gung Ho*. The company reported that about 65 percent of the associates participated in the voluntary program. In Japanese plants the routine lasted five minutes; for whatever reason the American routine was only two. Associates voted on the music to accompany

³² Ibid.; Reports from the first day of production include "First Auto Rolls Off Assembly Line," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 1, 1982; Warren Brown, "First U.S.-Built Honda Rolls Off Line," *Washington Post*, November 2, 1982; "Honda's First U.S.-Built Car Rolls Out," *New York Times*, November 2, 1982.

³³ Holusha, "Honda Plant Brings Touch of Japan to Ohio"; Kenneth B. Noble, "Auto Union Battles Uphill in Japanese Plant in Ohio," *New York Times*, December 10, 1985.

their workout—the theme music from the popular television show *Magnum P.I.* defeated the themes from *The Rockford Files* and *Hill Street Blues*. One associate contracted his niece, an Ohio State University cheerleader, to design the routine. She brought the cheerleading squad in to perform several routines for the associates, who then voted on their favorite.³⁴

Some workers were suspicious of Honda's claims of enthusiasm for these Japanese practices. "Some of the exercises are really dumb, like clapping your hands over your head," one worker told a reporter anonymously; as for Honda's claim of 65 percent participation: "it's nothing like that." Employees estimated that aerobics participation in the MMP was about 10 percent, while nearly one-third of MAP associates performed calisthenics each morning, but only "because more than 100 American workers in the plant... have been trained in Honda's Japanese auto plants, where morning exercise programs are routine."³⁵ Of course, participation was voluntary, and the two-minute routine was just a flash in a long workday, but it nevertheless came to symbolize the different management approaches of Japanese and Americans. Nobody seemed to complain about the other allegedly Japanese aspects of the operation, like the required uniforms. They were simply management quirks accepted in exchange for highly coveted jobs. Even at the height of the UAW's heated campaign to unionize the plant against Honda's wishes, union supporters had to admit, as one pro-UAW welder did, that

³⁴ "Honda Begins Exercise Practice," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 14, 1982; Hensley, *Building on Dreams*, 18.

³⁵ James Risen, "Stretching It at Honda Assembly Line—Aerobics Get Mixed U.S. Reviews," *Detroit Free Press*, November 11, 1982.

most associates were “really happy with the Japanese—they’re pretty smart, and they know how to crank out cars.”³⁶

The *New York Times*’ Noble, observing operations at Marysville, described the associates’ demographics: “Perhaps most striking is the homogeneity of the work force. The average age of the assembly line worker appears to be 25, and virtually all are white. Most of them are drawn from a 25-mile radius of the plant.”³⁷ With so much surplus labor available in the Marysville area, much of it the product of layoffs at businesses that had been operating for many years, why would Honda hire the least experienced people from the available labor pool? Why so many young faces? Some speculated that it was a ploy on Honda’s part to discourage unionization, a game plan replicated two years later at Nissan’s plant in Smyrna, Tennessee. An older union sympathizer there claimed, “They hired a young, naïve workforce, the vast majority of whom [sic] had never been involved with the union, and Nissan has thrown propaganda at them from day one.... They really believe that this is the best place in middle Tennessee to work.”³⁸ The same dynamic operated in Marysville. The *New York Times*’ hypothetical 25-year-old associate would have been born around 1960 to rural-working parents (i.e., non-industrial and non-unionized) and would have graduated high school in the late 1970s, just as Detroit’s decline, and the concomitant troubles of national unions, made headlines. With the economic slowdown it was unlikely that he or she would have been hired in a large industrial firm in Union County before Honda’s arrival. “Unemployment lines bulged

³⁶ Quoted in Noble, “Auto Union Battles Uphill.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Quoted in Kenneth B. Noble, “Union Organizers’ Task Is Uphill at Nissan Plant,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1988.

with veteran autoworkers when Honda began building cars in America,” noted an AP article published in the *Journal-Tribune*. “But the company hired baby sitters, store clerks and farm hands to assemble Accords at Marysville.”³⁹ (The newspaper later criticized the author’s characterization of Honda associates and Marysville in general, pointing out that the “story was written from an outsider’s viewpoint,” an important theme returned to below in the discussion of the UAW.⁴⁰)

Fair characterization or not, the point was that the young, predominantly white faces (UAW black membership averaged near 20 percent) raised in rural Union County were not the UAW’s traditional constituency. Though Honda denied it and there is only anecdotal evidence to support it, Honda likely avoided hiring workers with union experience or potential union sympathies, i.e., workers over the age of thirty. Laid-off residents with union experience pointed out that they had sent resumes to Honda but had not received a call. One college-educated radio technician said, “I am reluctant to send a resume to them as I have been affiliated with unions”—his assumption, likely gathered from local conversations, was that Honda was not hiring anyone with union experience.⁴¹ The hiring process required potential associates to undergo several separate interviews with management, which included unusual questions that probed for “clues to their attitude toward work,” giving managers a sense of who might sympathize with a unionization campaign. A UAW official said, “You go through four screenings before

³⁹ “Honda Assumes Position of No. 4 U.S. Carmaker,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, March 4, 1985.

⁴⁰ Editorial, “Honda and Marysville Working Well Together,” *Marysville Journal Tribune*, March 8, 1985.

⁴¹ Clara Miller, “Newspaper Interviews Show Many Area Residents View Honda as a Positive Development Here,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 18, 1982.

they'll hire you, and they pretty well weed out anybody they don't want in those plants.”⁴² It was easier to find the sort of workers Honda wanted in central Ohio than in, say, urban northern Ohio or Michigan.

The near exclusivity of white faces at Honda led to charges of racism in hiring practices. The company decided on a “hiring radius” of 25-30 miles extending out on all sides of the MAP. This included all of Union County and parts of Champaign, Logan, Hardin, and Marion counties, but it stopped just short of the Columbus city limits, where the black population exceeded 20 percent. Honda used this radius, covering a largely rural and white area, to explain why only 2 percent of the workforce at the MAP was black. Following a 1988 study by the University of Michigan claiming that many Japanese corporations had systematically avoided establishing U.S. operations in areas with sizable black populations, the *New York Times* estimated that the MAP's black workforce was 2.8 percent while the black population of Honda's own defined hiring radius was actually 10.8 percent.⁴³ While the discrepancy between the two estimates is large, it could likely be explained in the five miles between the “25-30 miles” that Honda claimed had constituted their hiring radius, i.e., the five miles extending northwest from Columbus toward Marysville likely had a larger black population than the twenty-five miles after. Still, that does not excuse Honda's decision to exclude the population of Columbus from its labor pool.

⁴² Holusha, “Honda Plant Brings Touch of Japan to Ohio”; Peter Behr, “Honda Is Rolling Success Off Its Ohio Assembly Line,” *Washington Post*, May 3, 1987; quoted in “Honda Assumes Position of No. 4 U.S. Carmaker.”

⁴³ Ibid; John Holusha, “Japanese Faulted Over Black Hiring,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1988; Louise Kertesz, “Japanese Rapped on Black Jobs,” *Automotive News*, August 29, 1988, 1.

A group of 370 women and African Americans filed a federal discrimination lawsuit against Honda in 1987. Each claimed that the company discriminated against them in either a hiring decision or an opportunity for promotion. In 1988 the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission negotiated a settlement worth \$6 million, which awarded the complainants \$16,000, but also allowed Honda to sidestep acknowledgment of wrongdoing. This settlement followed an earlier one in which Honda paid \$460,000 to a group of 85 people ages 40 and older who claimed they were discriminated against based on their age.⁴⁴

To explain, as some commentators did, that Honda's failure to hire African Americans was a result persistent Japanese racism, most notoriously manifested in Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's comments about "lazy" African American workers, would be missing the bigger picture.⁴⁵ It is important to note that Japanese were not making all or even most of the hiring decisions in Marysville; white managers, who knew the area and its residents well, were. It would be difficult to imagine that the MAP's white managers would tolerate an explicitly racist hiring directive from Japanese executives. The added exclusion of older workers is significant because it suggests that management and executives likely identified African Americans and older candidates as potential union sympathizers. If Honda wanted to keep the UAW at bay then there was likely no more effective starting place than in the hiring process, where Honda could filter out urban black workers (whose 20 percent representation in the UAW outpaced their

⁴⁴ "Honda to Pay \$6 Million in Rights Settlement," *New York Times*, March 24, 1988; Matt DeLorenzo, "Honda to Pay \$6 Million in Bias Probe," *Automotive News*, March 28, 1988, 50.

⁴⁵ See James B. Treece, "What the Japanese Must Learn about Racial Tolerance," *Business Week*, September 5, 1988, 41.

representation in the U.S. population) and older workers (exposed to decades of union mythology, or even membership). It was an entirely unfair practice, to be sure, but one motivated by anti-union sentiments, not racism. (Women, unfortunately, had been the victims of nearly universal industrial workplace discrimination, so Honda was hardly a pioneer in that respect.)

Once they made it to the line, workers experienced a job environment that differed from life in Big Three plants in important ways. In a plant under a UAW agreement, there were several hundred types of job classifications, and employers could not assign employees to work outside of their classifications. At Marysville there were two job classifications on the line: production associates and machine maintenance associates. Honda emphasized flexible training so that associates could install windshields one month, move to wheel mounting the next, and so on.⁴⁶ A Honda advertisement in the local newspaper, part of the public “propaganda” effort of Honda’s early years, told residents what work was like at the MAP: “At Honda, people are encouraged to seek out better ways of doing a job. The thought here is to instill pride in one’s work.”⁴⁷ Flexibility in training facilitated this goal, giving associates a sense that they understood the entire production process and were responsible for managing it. Managers encouraged associates to think about and propose ways that they could perform their tasks more efficiently; associates received bonuses for suggestions that managers adopted.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; Holusha, “Japan’s Made-in-America Cars”; Noble, “Auto Union Battles Uphill.”

⁴⁷ Advertisement, “The Honda Team,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 26, 1982.

To instill the particular “Honda way” of managing an auto assembly line, Honda routinely sent a number of associates to Japan for several weeks of training. A Honda advertisement with a picture of several hundred smiling associates said, “Many of the people shown above have gone abroad to learn more about the Honda way of teamwork.”⁴⁸ This practice began even before production started at the MMP. In August 1979 ten Marysville associates traveled to Honda’s plant in Sayama, Japan, to, as associate Bob Simcox put it, “appreciate the quality of the product, learn mass production systems and learn the nature and customs of the Japanese people”—no small order for a mere three weeks. As of September 1982, just over a month before MAP’s opening, Honda had already sent 130 associates to Japan for training.⁴⁹

Just as important as the skills these trips imparted to associates was the new experiences it provided them—as many, both Americans and Japanese, would note over the years, Tokyo was worlds away from central Ohio. It is likely that most of these middle-class Ohioans traveling to Japan on Honda’s dime would have never had the opportunity to do so without the Japanese company’s support. Associate Steve Powell later said of his trip, “It was totally unreal for a country kid. You think the rest of the world lives the same way you do until you get there. It is very important to understand the culture.”⁵⁰ The training trips let these associates know that they were such an important part of the Honda family that the company would spend lavishly to show them, literally and figuratively, what the new globalized world looked like. Honda benefited by

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Clara B. Miller, “Local Honda Employees Visit Plants in Japan,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, August 1, 1979; Pat Parish, “Production Slated to Begin in November at Local Honda Manufacturing Plant,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, September 27, 1982.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Hensley, *Building on Dreams*, 18.

introducing “country kids,” who otherwise likely would have clung to provincialism, to a global perspective. Critics accused Japan of practicing a sort of economic colonialism by setting up shop in the United States; if that was the case in Marysville, it was a most benevolent sort, and it was winning associates’ hearts and minds.⁵¹

The Marysville community outside Honda’s doors also encountered global cultural exchange in a number of ways. Honda served as an official channel for doing so. When the company announced the construction of the MAP in April 1980, it also quietly established the Honda Foundation, dedicated to “youth education and U.S.-Japan cultural exchange” and “establish[ing] cultural ties between the area and Japan.” Honda would donate \$100,000 annually to the foundation for ten years, after which the foundation would operate off of interest from the endowment. The primary recipient of Honda Foundation funds would be “schools in the Union County area where Japanese families have settled.”⁵² One of the foundation’s first initiatives was a modest exhibit of traditional Japanese material culture. Some of Honda’s Japanese employees contributed to the display, sponsored by the foundation and the Marysville Art League, featuring “children’s toys, Japanese apparel, wood handicrafts, paper sculpture and tea ceremony accessories,” as well as educational setups showcasing the Japanese holiday of *Kodomo no hi*, or Children’s Day.⁵³

⁵¹ Behr, “Honda Is Rolling Success Off Its Ohio Assembly Line.”

⁵² “Honda Officers Host State, Local Officials; Confirm Construction of Auto Assembly Plant,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 18, 1980; “Quality of American Worker Is Best Says Honda President,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 21, 1980.

⁵³ Scott Underwood, “Traditional Japanese Items Exhibited in Marysville Art League’s Show,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, May 21, 1981, special insert.

The Honda Foundation's more extravagant initiative entailed sending local elementary and high school teachers to Japan to "help American teachers better understand the cultural and education background of Japanese children," sensitizing the teachers to the needs of the children of HAM's Japanese managers. Each year a half-dozen teachers and administrators would tour Japanese schools and cultural attractions (and Honda factories) with Honda paying their way. A kindergarten teacher, Betty Shipp, said of Honda's generosity: "If there was anything you wanted and you asked for it and [sic] the next day you had it." Shipp returned to Marysville with impressions of the Japanese education system that reflected pervasive American stereotypes of Japan. "The Japanese philosophy of education is that you improve yourself in order to improve the nation.... They consider [their knowledge] a virtue which they contribute to their nation." "Of course," she explained, "they have a more homogeneous feeling than the United States, being an island and all of one race." Marysville School Superintendent Clayton Pebble spent time in Japan learning about the educational background of the 25 Japanese students under his care. The self-described "country boy" not only got a better sense of the experiences and expectations of Japanese schoolchildren, but he had a once-in-a-lifetime tour of the country, which likely would have never happened for any of these exchangees had Honda not set up shop in Marysville.⁵⁴

Less official channels for cultural exchange were the day-to-day interactions of the local community and Union County's new Japanese residents. In a town of roughly 8,000 people, it was difficult for locals to not bump into one of their several hundred new

⁵⁴ Pat Parish, "Area Seeing Benefit of Honda Foundation," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 29, 1982; Susie Taylor, "Visit to Japan Helps Edgewood Teacher Understand Culture, Education Structure," *Union County Advertiser*, January 9, 1984; Dan Saddler, "Local Educator Learns from Trip to Japan," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 14, 1984.

neighbors.⁵⁵ They attended school district meetings, shopped in local stores (“It is surprising how much they spend and it is good they are spending their money in Marysville,” said a local market manager), and even participated in the local choir group.⁵⁶ By all accounts the Marysville community was pleasantly accommodating to Japanese families. The Hiroshi Matsumoto family observed, “When you meet someone here walking down the street, people smile and say hi. It’s a very good custom.” The *Journal-Tribune* tried to introduce Japanese “transplants” to the community with personal stories and interviews, reflecting the community’s interest in befriending the new residents from far away.⁵⁷ One article encouraged residents to put themselves in the shoes of the Matsumoto and Suzuki families:

“Imagine for a moment that you have been picked up and deposited in another country.... Few people speak the language you were brought up with. At work, the communication barrier slows the process of expressing your thoughts, ideas and instruction.... Little habits and customs which you took for granted in your old home suddenly seem important to maintain, because in this alien land they are different.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ I have not found demographic statistics for where Honda’s Japanese employees settled. Not all of MMP’s and MAP’s Japanese management settled in Marysville or even Union County. Some preferred the less rural atmosphere and more plentiful consumer amenities in the Columbus suburbs of Worthington and Dublin to the southeast. See “Thousands Hope Honda Will Cure Area Unemployment Picture.” There were approximately 180 Japanese Honda employees working in Marysville as of the opening of the MAP; it is likely, therefore, that Honda brought around 500 Japanese to the area by November 1982, and as the plant expanded, the number of Japanese managers probably grew as well. See James Risen, “Honda’s U.S. Debut Brings No Miracles,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1982.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Miller, “Newspaper Interviews.”

⁵⁷ Quoted in Lana Wetterman, “Japanese Families Adjusting to American Ways of Living,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 12, 1981.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The description echoed a *Shōgun* producer's comparison of John Blackthorne's adventure in Japan to "landing on an alien planet."⁵⁹

If there was any latent anti-Japanese sentiment, stemming from World War II for the older generation or recent trade conflicts for the younger, it remained hidden from public.⁶⁰ One curious reporter speculated that it only took place "quietly in the bars and in the graffiti of the Honda plant restrooms." "I'm not a Jap lover," a local bartender told him. "But I'm not a Jap hater, either." Overhearing the conversation, a patron complained that the Japanese did nothing for the community because they "don't spend their money here," which other accounts contradict.⁶¹ Whether anti-Japanese sentiments existed or not, most residents recognized that their economic interests lay in making the stay of Japanese transplants as hospitable as possible.

The language barrier presented the most formidable obstacle for Japanese transplants. Japanese men came to Ohio with English-language training and often spoke it all day at work. Younger children frequently arrived at school with almost no English, but as children tend to do, they adapted quickly, or school districts provided aid necessary to assimilate students. (The school district of Dublin, a suburb of Columbus, had 80 Japanese students, for whom the Honda Foundation funded a full-time language tutor.)⁶² For Japanese women, though, the transition was most difficult. None of them worked in

⁵⁹ Quoted in "The Making of Shogun," *Shōgun*, DVD, directed by Jerry London, 1980 (Burbank: Paramount Pictures, 2004).

⁶⁰ A conversation with an individual who asked not to be quoted contained a reference to a local survivor of the Bataan Death March, who was apparently angered by Honda's arrival, but I have not found any corroborating evidence.

⁶¹ Terry Oblander, "Honda, UAW Collide Head-On Thursday," *Akron Beacon Journal*, December 15, 1985.

⁶² "English Problems Concern Board," *Columbus Dispatch*, October 23, 1985.

the plant. It was unlikely they came to the United States with extensive English training in Japan. Once in Ohio, many filled the conventional role of homemaker, providing fewer opportunities for daily English-language interaction than husbands or children had. Local teachers noticed that Japanese mothers were frustrated because they could not fully articulate their expectations for their children's educations. Betty Shipp, one of the teachers who visited Japan, used her experience to compile a list of practical recommendations for anxious Japanese mothers.⁶³

The educational anxieties of Japanese parents, combined with a state government mindful of Honda's success and eager for more Japanese business, led to a proposal for a special state-sponsored Japanese-language school for the children of foreign executives. Japanese instructors would teach a Japanese-style curriculum to prevent an unfortunate education trend for transplant students: for every two years spent in a U.S. school, students lost one year in a Japanese school.⁶⁴ After all, few Japanese Honda families planned on permanent relocations; most anticipated three- to five-year stays. Parents worried that their children would miss the crucial cultural and language education they would have received in Japan. Betty Shipp explained that "parents don't want their children to forget that they are Japanese. That way, when they go back to Japan, they still have the culture."⁶⁵ To prevent a loss of national identity, several parents who had settled in nearby Columbus founded what would eventually become the Columbus Japanese Language School. In April 1980 three instructors taught fourteen children.

⁶³ Taylor, "Visit to Japan Helps Edgewood Teacher"; Saddler, "Local Educator Learns from Trip to Japan."

⁶⁴ "Ohio Considering School for Japanese Children," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, July 29, 1986.

⁶⁵ Taylor, "Visit to Japan Helps Edgewood Teacher."

Today more than 500 local Japanese students gather on Saturdays “in an atmosphere close to that of their home country” that is “conducive to their becoming successful members of Japanese society.” The current school board is dominated by HAM employees.⁶⁶ The school’s creation and success reflected the cultural tensions pushing and pulling on Marysville’s Japanese transplants.

The cause of the greatest conflict in Marysville during Honda’s first half-decade came not from the new members of the community—largely because Honda and the people it brought went to great lengths to make positive contributions to the community—but from an institution rooted in postwar U.S. industrial prosperity, the United Auto Workers. The proud union boasted representation in every auto production facility in the United States. From the opening of the MMP in September 1979 until March 1986, the UAW poured resources and personnel into its effort to organize the first-ever Japanese auto production facility in the country. Its failure to do so became “an embarrassment for the giant union.”⁶⁷ The UAW’s nationwide campaign of nationalism and xenophobia in reaction to layoffs blamed on Japanese success in the early 1980s failed to appeal to the workforce in Marysville schooled in a new type of global-minded industrial society. The UAW preached a return to the past; Honda promised the future. Having seen the benefits of global commerce and culture, the associates rejected the UAW’s nationalist entreaties.

⁶⁶ See the Columbus Japanese Language School’s website, <http://www.columbushoshuko.com/english.htm>.

⁶⁷ “Honda, UAW Mum on Efforts to Force Union Recognition,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 24, 1985.

The UAW declared early its intention to organize workers at Honda's Marysville operation. The April 1980 announcement of the construction of the MAP, with a projected employment for both the MAP and MMP at 2,500, came as no surprise to national leaders of the UAW. UAW President Douglas Fraser received confirmation of Honda's plans when he met with company representatives in Tokyo two months earlier, repeating the dogma that the "large market share taken by Japanese companies has cost American autoworkers their jobs"; building a plant in the United States would be a valuable corrective. Fraser urged "foreign car manufacturers to build plants in this country to take up the slack created by domestic auto industry layoffs."⁶⁸ Because the UAW had a presence in every single auto production or assembly facility in the United States, its leaders felt entitled to organize the workers at Marysville as well.

For its part, Honda's public stance on the UAW remained consistent: the company was neutral; if the associates chose to unionize, the company would work with the union.⁶⁹ It was no secret, however, that Japanese companies were reluctant to deal with American labor unions because of their perceived adversarial relationship with management. Autoworker unions in Japan were essentially company unions; management leaders regularly jumped from managing business operations to organizing labor relations, as David Halberstam illustrated in recounting the history of Nissan.⁷⁰ That workers would actively pursue goals contrary to objectives outlined by company management was anathema to Japanese business. Thus American business and labor

⁶⁸ "Honda Commitment Reaffirmed to UAW," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, February 14, 1980; quoted in "Honda Officers Host State, Local Officials."

⁶⁹ Lana Wetterman, "Honda Neutrality Reaffirmed," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 26, 1982.

⁷⁰ Halberstam, *The Reckoning*.

assumed that Japanese corporations would build in the United States only if they could avoid unions; if they could not, the money would stay in Japan.

A filing with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) during the MMP's first year of production tested Honda's neutrality policy. The Honda uniform required that all associates wear a green and white baseball cap emblazoned with the Honda logo—for a "Honda environment," a spokesman said. The company reprimanded several associates sympathetic to the UAW for wearing either a blue cap with a UAW logo or UAW pins on their caps and white coverall uniforms. These associates responded by filing a complaint with the NLRB, citing unfair labor practices restricting first amendment rights to free speech. The board found Honda to be in violation of workers' right to express their support for a labor union; Honda paid a fine and workers could thereafter wear UAW caps.⁷¹ It was only a small victory, but it likely taught Honda that it could not prevent unionization through the legal system. It would have to do so by winning hearts and minds on the shop floor and in the community.

The UAW had tallied its first victory before the MAP even started production. It won its second in April 1982, when all four of HAM's boiler operators voted for UAW representation in their division, the first and only successful vote the union would stage.⁷² Organizing the new auto plant would be the real prize for the UAW, a statement that no manufacturer could produce automobiles in the United States without submitting to the whims of the powerful union. In the lead up to the plant's opening, Douglas Fraser said

⁷¹ "Decision Due from NLRB on Honda-UAW Squabble," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 7, 1980; "Ruling May Affect Honda Uniforms," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 23, 1981; "Honda Discord," *Time*, November 3, 1980.

⁷² "UAW Vote Approved at Honda," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, July 3, 1981.

on NBC's "Meet the Press," "We're going to be camping out on their doorstep. The fact that they don't want us won't deter us."⁷³ UAW officials recognized that the campaign would take time, though, and so the union issue remained in the background for nearly three years as associates went about learning their tasks, Honda pushed to maximum production capacity and planned expansions, and union supporters organized on a person-to-person basis. Hugh Smith, a UAW official responsible for organizing the first-ever foreign auto plant in the United States, Volkswagen's facility in New Stanton, Pennsylvania, traveled to Marysville from his Toledo office once a week for five years to oversee the effort.⁷⁴

The union drama picked up steam in October 1985. Honda announced two major expansion plans that month: by mid-1986 it would increase the MAP's size from one million square feet to 1.7 million (making room for a new assembly line to produce the subcompact Honda Civic), and it would build a second auto assembly plant (what would eventually be the East Liberty Plant, opened in 1989). The expansion meant an additional 2,000 associates.⁷⁵ UAW officials saw this as the time to strike—it would be easier to win a vote among the plant's existing workforce of 2,500, nearly all of whom had already been exposed to the union's message, than to wait for thousands of new, inexperienced names to join the payrolls. In late October 1985 the UAW sent Honda a letter requesting union recognition without a vote. Typically, the UAW withheld such

⁷³ Quoted in "UAW Head: We'll Organize Honda," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, September 7, 1982.

⁷⁴ Robert W. Reiss, "Honda Workers Will Vote on Forming Union," *Columbus Dispatch*, December 15, 1985.

⁷⁵ "Honda Announces Auto Plant Expansion," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, January 10, 1984; "Honda May Build Second Auto Plant," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 2, 1985.

requests until it had received signatures on union cards from at least 30 percent of the workforce. Joseph Tomasi, UAW Region 2-B director, claimed the union had signatures from at least half of the associates.⁷⁶

Expectedly, Honda rejected the request for immediate recognition, opting instead to put the question to a vote among the associates.⁷⁷ Before rejecting the request, though, Honda management distributed a questionnaire to the nearly 3,000 associates in order, they claimed, to gauge the union's appeal. The company reported that more than 73 percent of associates who responded "advise the company to reject the union request" for immediate recognition. The UAW, in turn, called the questionnaire "p.r. and propaganda," and it charged Honda with intimidating its employees by asking them to give their opinions toward a union with supervisors observing.⁷⁸

Once a vote was set for December 19, 1985, an intense campaign ensued. "The union told us they're pretty sure they'll win," said an anonymous associate. Union sympathizers distributed literature on Friday afternoons as the day shift was departed and the night shift arrived. The UAW's earliest campaigns in Detroit had focused on wages, hours, and workplace safety, but those were virtually non-issues in Marysville. Base wages at Honda were around \$11 an hour, up about \$1 from 1983, while they were closer to \$13 for the UAW's Ford and GM workers. Still, \$11 was far more than most of Honda's young workforce was accustomed to. "We're dealing with people who have been bailing hay for \$2 an hour," said Bill Woodward, in his UAW hat. "They don't

⁷⁶ Paul Lienert, "UAW Nears Vote at Ohio Honda Plant," *Detroit Free Press*, December 15, 1985.

⁷⁷ "Honda, UAW Mum on Efforts to Force Union Recognition"; "Honda Officials Not in Receipt of Letter Requesting Recognition," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 24, 1985; "Honda Rejects UAW Recognition Request," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 31, 1985.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

understand us.” “Most of my friends make \$5 an hour,” said one associate, reflecting the reality of economic circumstances in the community apart from Honda.⁷⁹ Relatively high wages for the area, coupled with Honda’s record of safety (aimed at maximizing efficiency, if anything—happy, healthy workers work better), meant that the UAW’s historical bread-and-butter issues were moot in Marysville.

The UAW opted for a different strategy: it praised Honda for bringing many jobs to the area—praise few could disagree with—and told the community that it would push the company for even more. Associates, the union claimed, had complained of line speed, i.e., the number of vehicles that the line produced per hour. In advertisements the union argued that the current speed was “inhumane” and left associates “exhausted by the end of every day.”⁸⁰ The UAW would negotiate with Honda not to slow the line—which would, theoretically, slow production and thus slow profits—but to hire more people to produce the same amount of vehicles. Hiring 40 more people per shift would give associates break time equal to that of employees in GM and Ford plants. “People in the community need jobs,” said one ad, tugging at the community’s sensitivity to unemployment. “For its size, Honda is one of the most profitable companies in the United States. It can easily afford to hire more employees.”⁸¹ Besides line speed, the UAW also pledged to negotiate on behalf of the associates for job postings based on

⁷⁹ “Honda, UAW Mum on Efforts to Force Union Recognition”; Pat Parish, “Media Gets Close Look at New Plant”; Warren Brown, “Honda Making Inroads in the U.S. by ‘Doing Everything Right,’” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1985; quoted in “Honda Assumes Position of No. 4 U.S. Carmaker.”

⁸⁰ UAW Advertisement, *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 13, 1985.

⁸¹ Advertisement, “Honda Should Hire More People Now,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 6, 1985. The same advertisement also ran on December 10, 11, and 12.

seniority, shift and job transfer rights, and an effective mechanism for articulating shop floor grievances to management.

Associates pleased with Honda and unwilling to cede ground to the UAW did not watch passively. A 27-year-old associate named Lonnie Howard joined several other anti-union associates in founding the “Associates Alliance.” Howard claimed he was harassed at work for opposing the union. “You’re an idiot if you hand out literature for Honda, but you’re a hero if you hand out literature for the UAW,” he told a reporter. “This whole thing really makes me wonder who we’re going to be working for—Honda or UAW.”⁸² The AA aimed to be a counterweight to the UAW and its expensive informational campaign: “we don’t have the big UAW \$\$\$\$\$\$ from collecting union dues,” so they placed advertisements in the newspaper to spread the word that they were selling hats to raise funds for their organizing efforts. Their hats also had UAW logos on them, but superimposed atop the logo was a red circle with a strike through it, akin to a “No Smoking” sign.⁸³

The AA’s message was clear: “We Think for Ourselves.” The alliance not only lobbied for “no” votes, but it also wanted guarantees that associates would not be forced to unwillingly join the union should the UAW win the election. “I’ll tell anybody right now that they’re not going to get a dime out of me,” warned Howard. He also cautioned that unionizing would cost Honda an additional \$450 million—it is unclear how he calculated that figure—and the company would sooner fold its Ohio operations than sustain such a financial blow. AA advertisements also pointed out that the UAW had

⁸² Quoted in “Honda Officials Not in Receipt of Letter Requesting Recognition.”

⁸³ Advertisement, “The Associates Alliance,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 22, 1985.

been found in several court cases to have failed to represent adequately its own members, and that if an associate did not follow UAW marching orders, he or she could be fined, even for “crossing a picket line to work during a strike in order to support one’s family.”⁸⁴

The debate played out on the editorial page of the *Journal-Tribune*. Howard again defended his cause, acknowledge the UAW’s positive contributions to labor early in the postwar era, but noting that “as times changed and the Union became larger it has failed to recognize that the boom of the post WWII era is all but a fading memory with today’s young work force who quite frankly could care less about organized labor’s ‘proud’ history.” “We are not naïve,” he continued, “we know that the UAW today is big business, and we are well aware of its alleged ties to organized crime.” Howard concluded grandiloquently that a “no” vote to unionization would mean an “era in which all will share equally in the future of not only Honda but will inspire a nation that was founded on liberty, justice and freedom for all.”⁸⁵

Howard's allies helped bring the debate to the public sphere. Alliance member Charles Sessor asked, “If you have a good working relationship with your company, salary satisfaction, good benefits package, bonus packages and pension and retirement plan, then ask yourself, ‘Why do we need union representation?’” Based on his previous experience as a member of the union, he cautioned: “You will soon feel that the union is managing the plant, company rules become ‘just words’ and the only law is what your

⁸⁴ Ibid.; quoted in “Long Campaign for UAW Nearly Over, Vote Next Month Will Determine Fate,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 22, 1985.

⁸⁵ Letters to the Editor, “Readers Oppose Union,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 29, 1985.

union rep says.”⁸⁶ Employees attacked and defended Honda’s responses to work injuries—one said the company was negligent, while another said there was no evidence to contradict his own positive experience with Honda’s attentive medial staff.⁸⁷ The *Journal-Tribune* followed up these letters by surveying a grand total of ten residents of Marysville, six of who disapproved of the UAW. The newspaper reported the results with the potentially misleading headline, “Majority Opposed to UAW Takeover.”⁸⁸

Ultimately the weeks of debate were all for naught. Signs that the UAW would attempt to postpone the vote first appeared when UAW lawyers sent letters to members of the AA, and to newspaper editors who published their advertisements, threatening to sue over the improper use of the UAW trademark in the AA’s logo.⁸⁹ On Monday, December 17, two days before the scheduled election, news spread that the previous Friday the UAW filed NLRB charges against Honda for violating labor laws. The union accused the company of interrogating and intimidating employees with their questionnaires, increasing benefits and vacation time to discourage union enthusiasm, and permitting the Associates Alliance to operate as an “employer controlled labor organization.” A Honda spokesperson said, “Since the charges were filed late, we can only conclude UAW took this step because it knew it did not have enough support to win.” The NLRB ruling effectively forced a postponement of the vote. In response to

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Letters to the Editor, “Responds to Letter,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 13, 1985.

⁸⁸ Joan Christy and Susie Taylor, “Majority Opposed to UAW Takeover,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 5, 1985.

⁸⁹ Susie Taylor, “UAW: Stop Unauthorized Use of Organization Logo,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 11, 1985.

Honda's accusations, UAW's Tomasi countered, "I look forward to the day there can be an election at Honda in a truly neutral and legal atmosphere."⁹⁰

That day never came. On January 31, 1986, the NLRB dismissed the union's charges, and Honda demanded that the election be rescheduled immediately, though the UAW threatened to appeal the ruling. Some six weeks later the union completely withdrew its petition for an election, effectively ending the organizing campaign. Union officials cited the "spread of misinformation" and "a rapid influx of new hires" as their reasons for canceling—Honda was growing exponentially, having hired some 800 new associates between October 1985 and March 1986, an expansion of nearly 25 percent in six months.⁹¹ The UAW was correct when they assessed late 1985 as a do-or-die moment for unionization, yet their efforts still fell short.

Why did the UAW, arguably the most powerful industrial organization in the postwar United States, fail to organize the associates at Honda of America? There are several explanations. Most visibly, Honda was the central element to Union County's economic turnaround well before the scheduling of the election. Throughout late 1985 and into late 1986, economic news was generally on the positive side, with unemployment steadily declining nationally and statewide and dropping dramatically in Union County. While Honda's wages fell short of those in UAW-organized GM and Ford factories, they were very good by Union County standards. There was an undercurrent of concern among the associates and in the community that rocking the

⁹⁰ Joan Christy, "Honda-UAW Vote Postponed," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, December 17, 1985.

⁹¹ Susie Taylor, "With NLRB Charges Dismissed, Honda Wants Vote Date Re-Set," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, February 3, 1986; "Election at Honda Cancelled after UAW Withdraws Petition," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, March 18, 1986.

Honda boat might send it sailing back to Japan. Double-digit unemployment rates were too recent of a memory for associates to risk that. The UAW's most potent issue of the past, the economic well-being of the people it represented, was a non-issue for Honda's associates.

The Marysville community's previous experience with the UAW may have also factored into its rejection. The Rockwell International plant that shut down operations just as the MAP powered on the line had employed more than five hundred UAW members. In 1982 the plant had suffered a slowdown concurrent with the recession, and as a consequence management asked employees to approve a new contract that reduced wages and benefits. Management threatened to close the plant if the union rejected the contract; 96 percent of workers voted against it, and the plant closed.⁹² Though the workers essentially voted to resist attempted industrial blackmail, many in the local community nevertheless blamed the UAW for forcing Rockwell's hand. The memory of all those lost jobs was still fresh in 1985. Al Kinzer, MAP plant manager, remembered that moment as the UAW vote approached: "Nobody wants to work for a loser," he said, and a majority of associates agreed.⁹³

The UAW also chose to wave the nationalist flag in the continuing auto wars, a decision that disappointed Honda associates who believed the union actually had Marysville's interests at heart. In 1984 Democratic representatives in Congress proposed a "domestic content" bill that would have required all companies manufacturing automobiles in the United States to include a specific percentage, contingent on sales

⁹² "Rockwell Plant Closing Likely"; and "Explains Rockwell Union Position," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 30, 1982.

⁹³ Michael Cieply, "Meanwhile, Back in Marysville," *Forbes*, March 12, 1984, 127.

volume, of U.S.-made parts in each vehicle. The bill would mandate companies selling more than 900,000 vehicles annually in the United States to include 90 percent “local content” in vehicles; based on Honda’s projected sales, the company would have needed 70 percent U.S.-made parts in each vehicle.⁹⁴ The first Accords off the line at the MAP had about 50 percent local content. It would take almost ten years to increase U.S.-made parts to 75 percent, which in 1992 was a higher percentage than any of the Big Three, making Accords produced in Marysville “more American” than a Ford Taurus or Chevy Cavalier.⁹⁵ (As Halberstam noted, the auto wars’ biggest mouth, Iacocca, was also its worst hypocrite when it came to assembling Chryslers with inexpensive foreign-made parts.⁹⁶) Had the bill become law, the costs of complying might have pushed Honda out of Ohio, essentially punishing the company for bringing sorely needed jobs to the economically depressed Midwest. When UAW President Owen Bieber testified before Congress in support of the legislation, he signaled to the associates that he took his marching orders from Detroit, with its “Drop Dead Datsun and Toyota” campaign, and not from the needs of his union’s potential constituency. Joining a union that actively supported legislation that could have put associates out of work seemed counterintuitive.

There was a cultural explanation for the UAW’s failure as well. A stark “insider-outsider” discourse developed in Honda’s relationship with the community and the rest of the state and country. The jobs were welcome in 1980, but the national spotlight was not.

Reporters from big cities who knew nothing of Marysville based their stories on

⁹⁴ David T. Cook, “Honda and Its White-Coated ‘Associates’: Firm’s Expanding U.S. Facility Focuses Attention on Domestic Content Issue,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 6, 1984.

⁹⁵ “Honda Announces Intention to Use U.S. Parts, Material,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, June 9, 1982; Zachary Schiller, “The Backlash Isn’t Just Against Japan.”

⁹⁶ Halberstam, *The Reckoning*, 684.

preconceived notions about small-town life and how such a community would respond to a Japanese company. James Risen covered the MAP's first years for the *Detroit Free Press*, a newspaper with a vested interest in guarding Detroit's monopoly over the narrative of the U.S. auto industry. Risen repeatedly reproduced a dichotomy between a "sleepy little postcard village" tucked away in "corn and soybean farmland" on the one hand and "highly educated, affluent," and "high-powered Japanese businessmen" on the other.⁹⁷ *Journal-Tribune* editor Daniel Behrens later attacked a *New York Times* "yellow journalist" for his description of Marysville as "a one-horse backward community" and his largely unsuccessful effort to unearth anti-Japanese sentiment. "It's clear these so-called journalists represent areas which covet the fact that Honda located here," wrote Behrens. "Their biased reporting reflects the jealousy." It would not be the first time Behrens found fault with a national news organization.⁹⁸ Marysville resident Donald Robinson denounced the *Wall Street Journal* for "pretend[ing] to tell us (and the entire nation) our mood and thoughts about the Honda project.... We cannot allow a few out-of-state journalists to cause a cancer of distrust and hate."⁹⁹ Mayor Thomas Nuckles also defended his town, criticizing national media for portraying Marysville as a "down-in-the-dumps hamlet of 8,800." "They say all we're going to get from [Honda] is jobs,"

⁹⁷ Risen, "Honda's U.S. Debut Brings No Miracles"; James Risen, "U.S.-Made Honda Rolls Off Line Today," *Detroit Free Press*, November 1, 1982.

⁹⁸ Editorial, "Marysville Visited by Yellow Journalist," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, February 15, 1980; see also, Editorial, "Honda Has Been Gracious; Associated Press Has Not," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, April 29, 1983.

⁹⁹ Letters to the Editor, "Unhappy with Honda Article," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, October 15, 1982.

Nuckles said. “Well, what else do you want with an unemployment rate of 12.5 percent?”¹⁰⁰

Honda’s efforts to make itself part of the Marysville community not only through commerce but also through culture endeared it to residents. They jumped to the company’s defense because it had done more than any outsider to bandage local economic wounds and because Honda’s actions made evident its multifaceted commitment to Marysville. National media and the UAW had done nothing for the community, and sometimes even worked against its interests. Quickly the community lumped the two into the general category of “outsiders.” The response to an unassuming 1985 AP article about Honda’s rise to number four on the list of U.S. auto producers—due entirely to production in Marysville—demonstrated the insider-outsider dichotomy. The article repeated the backwater characterization of the town: “When trucks hauling auto parts and livestock aren’t whizzing by on U.S. 33, the clip-clop of horses pulling the black buggies of the Amish resounds on back roads near the plant. The skyline is church steeples, grain silos—and Honda.” It then discussed the unionization effort, portraying anti-union associates as young and naïve hicks while painting union sympathizers as experienced industrial workers trying to drag the ignorant into the twentieth century. After interviewing several pro-UAW associates about the “Honda way” of managing a plant, the author made his assessment: “after five years, many workers in blue [UAW] hats have concluded that the Japanese-style workplace democracy is a sham.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Lana Wetterman, “Mayor Critical of News Media for Distorted Honda Coverage,” *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, November 5, 1982.

¹⁰¹ “Honda Assumes Position of No. 4 U.S. Carmaker.”

The *Journal-Tribune* followed up at the end of the week with a cartoon mocking the article's depiction of Marysville: two hillbillies drank beer and rested under a money-growing tree while an Amish man rode a buggy in the background. Behrens asked angry readers to remember "that the story was written from an outsider's viewpoint." He then turned his attention to what he saw as the real issue: "American car industry experts had better take notice of the Marysville-Honda phenomenon, as it fortells [sic] a new world in manufacturing." He echoed the Associates Alliance when he observed that autoworker unions were relics of a bygone era: "Years of ever-increasing union demands and decreased attention to quality of work were a significant factor in the downfall of Detroit's worldwide automobile dynasty." Behrens concluded by mentioning GM's new Saturn initiative, an attempt to take a page out of the Japanese playbook by using sophisticated automated manufacturing techniques to produce small, efficient, inexpensive vehicles. If GM were wise, he said, they would not locate their new factory in Detroit, with its "polluted landscape and dispirited labor force." "No," he snapped, "GM will take its jobs to a town somewhere in the hinterlands where the people will work, and where government and unions do not conspire to extract blood from an anemic industry."¹⁰² (Perhaps GM was listening: Saturn ultimately landed in Tennessee, the same place Nissan went when it wanted to duplicate Honda's success.)

The lumping of the UAW into the category of "outsider" was its undoing. Chapter 2 described the frequent cultural and racial "othering" of Japan by groups in the United States fearful of the country's rapid economic growth. In the case of Marysville, however, the othering occurred not along national lines but along lines of global

¹⁰² "The Uninformed View of Union County" (cartoon) and Editorial, "Honda and Marysville Working Well Together," *Marysville Journal-Tribune*, March 8, 1985.

commerce and culture. The residents of Marysville stood on Honda's side and drew a line in the sand in front of the UAW and much of the national media. Lonnie Howard of the Associates Alliance proposed an in-house bargaining agent for the associates, thinking that it would "keep everyone from the outside world from telling us how to run our business."¹⁰³ The UAW had little chance in a plant where labor identified its interests so closely with that of management. In fact, there was no labor and there was no management; there was just the "Honda family." The UAW's nitpicking about line speed sounded like the past. With Honda promising a prosperous globalized future, the union never stood a chance.

Marysville's rejection of the UAW, a major beneficiary of the unprecedentedly powerful national economy of the first two postwar decades, in favor of a global corporation was indicative of the globalizing of America. In a world where national boundaries, both real and imagined, grew increasingly irrelevant, Honda connected a local community to global economic flows that bypassed the national level completely. Through their relationship with Honda, the Marysville community experienced globalization in an intensely local way. At the same time, the local-global connection empowered the community to mobilize against forces deemed "outsiders," namely, the UAW and the national media. It was the processes of contemporary globalization that facilitated Honda's transformative role in this small town.

At the level of national political culture, Marysville's transformation was one victory in a wave of conservatism that washed over the United States beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan. It was free-market economists, like Theodore Levitt at the

¹⁰³ Quoted in "Long Campaign for UAW Nearly Over."

Harvard Business Review, who touted most exuberantly the promises of a globalized economy.¹⁰⁴ National and state conservative Republican administrations paved the way for Honda in Ohio and successive transplants throughout the Midwest and South with tax-break incentives and a labor pool resistant to unionization. At a moment when government seemed too inefficient to create jobs and U.S. industries too stagnant, opening doors to foreign companies flush with capital was the free-market ideologue's response to recession and unemployment. The "new 'one-worlders,'" remarked Walter Mossberg in the *Wall Street Journal*, "are conservatives," in contrast to the "radical socialists" who once espoused dreams of a united international workers' state.¹⁰⁵ In a single world economy the most efficient and productive companies would create jobs and wealth for everyone. Earlier in the postwar era conservatism was most closely identified with unilateralists like Senator Robert Taft. By the 1980s the Reagan administration exhorted governments worldwide to tear down walls of all sorts from Germany to Japan, even while quietly tempering the free market with "voluntary quotas" like those imposed on Japanese automobiles.

Resistance to the one-worlders came in the form of protectionism from liberals, Democrats, and the voting constituencies that had once served as the bedrock of the New Deal coalition. Looked at cynically, the economic slump that began in the 1970s provided economic conservatives of the Taft variety the chance to do what they had failed to do throughout the century: destroy unions and government regulation. But to do so they had to adopt the mantra of internationalism. Those adopters—labeled, with

¹⁰⁴ See chapter 2.

¹⁰⁵ Walter S. Mossberg, "New 'One-Worlders' Are Conservatives," *Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 1989.

maddening perplexity, “neoliberals”—signed a pact with the devil that meant opening doors to the world, letting in the capital they wanted but frequently the people they did not. A corollary international outlook—“neoconservatism”—sought to transform the rest of the world in the United States’ image so that U.S. capital would find welcome places overseas. Amid these tectonic shifts in political culture, workers in central Ohio got jobs that made them happy, while others throughout the Midwest lost good jobs to workers in Latin America and Southeast Asia, who had little choice but to work for the paltry wages offered by globalizing U.S. corporations. Thus the struggling U.S. economy of the early 1980s was caught in a catch-22: protectionism would have kept good jobs from getting out but also prevented needed ones from getting in. The outcomes of neoliberalism—continual losses of jobs overseas, a U.S. auto industry on the verge of extinction, and now a teetering global economy—are hardly evidence that it was the lesser of two evils.

Honda’s Marysville experiment was just the first of the “transplants,” the name for Japanese factories relocating in the United States to take advantage of proximity to markets, bypass trade barriers, and, after 1985, reap the benefits of the yen’s appreciation relative to the U.S. dollar.¹⁰⁶ Nissan, Japan’s second largest automaker, opened a truck assembly plant in Smyrna, Tennessee, in 1983. The similarities to Marysville were striking: Smyrna was an economically depressed rural area 30 miles outside of a major

¹⁰⁶ Relevant works on “transplants” other than Honda, all written from a business perspective, include Peter Wickens, *The Road to Nissan: Flexibility, Quality, Teamwork* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Joseph J. Fucini and Suzy Fucini, *Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda’s American Auto Plant* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Robert Perrucci, *Japanese Auto Transplants in the Heartland: Corporatism and Community* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1990); and P.P. Karan, ed., *Japan in the Bluegrass* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

city (Nashville) with a largely white population.¹⁰⁷ The Smyrna plant became the second non-UAW auto facility in the United States when it voted down unionization in 1989. Japanese automakers Toyota and Mazda also started up U.S. operations in the mid-1980s in Fremont, California, and Flat Rock, Michigan, respectively, but those were joint ventures with GM in Toyota's case and Ford in Mazda's. (Toyota's massive plant in Georgetown, Kentucky, did not begin production until 1988.) The Fremont and Flat Rock joint ventures with two of the Big Three meant that those plants had to sign contracts with the UAW, lest the Big Three risk a fissure with the powerful union.¹⁰⁸ In its "Japaneseness," which was less Japanese than it was simply global, Marysville was unique. Yet there Honda started a trend: beginning in Canada and traveling south on Interstate 75, a traveler today first passes through Flint and Detroit, crumbling icons of the teetering U.S. auto industry, before passing through Mazda's Flat Rock, Honda's Marysville, Toyota's Georgetown, and, a bit off to the west, Nissan's Smyrna—Tokyo's new "Champs Élysées" of the 1980s.¹⁰⁹

Even if Honda were bad at publicizing its achievements—it is not—the auto industry and business world have lavished the company with enough praise to make the task unnecessary. Honda public relations material highlights one of the most pointed

¹⁰⁷ Holusha, "Japanese Faulted Over Black Hiring," claimed that 19.3 percent of Nissan's hiring radius was black, while just 14 percent of the workforce was. Again, as with Honda in Marysville, Nissan likely defined its radius to not include most of Nashville, which had a significant black population like Columbus.

¹⁰⁸ See John Holusha, "In Tennessee, the U.S. and Japan Mesh," *New York Times*, June 16, 1983; Halberstam, 634-635; "A New Land of the Rising Sun," *U.S. News and World Report*, May 9, 1988, 43; William J. Hampton, "Mazda's Bold Embrace of the United Auto Workers," *Business Week*, December 17, 1984, 40; and Maralyn Edid, "Why Mazda Is Settling in the Heart of Union Territory," *Business Week*, September 9, 1985, 94.

¹⁰⁹ William J. Holstein, "Will Sake and Sour Mash Go Together?" *Business Week*, July 14, 1986, 53.

quotes: “The last revolution in the auto industry didn’t happen in the Motor City,” wrote Paul Ingrassia in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2003. “It happened 150 miles away in Marysville, Ohio. Honda’s success in Ohio started Detroit on the road to reform.”¹¹⁰ For its part, Detroit has recognized this: housed in the Henry Ford Museum outside of Detroit, alongside the landmark automobiles built by the Wizard of Dearborn himself, sits the 4-door slate-gray 1983 Honda Accord that rolled off the production line in Marysville on November 1, 1982—not a Japanese car, not an American car, it is instead a monument to the global transformation of U.S. economic, social, and cultural life in the late twentieth century.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Quoted in “The Honda Way—One Team Changing an Industry,” Honda of America Manufacturing, Inc., promotional materials, ohio.honda.com, accessed May 8, 2008.

¹¹¹ The recorded message that plays while a caller waits on hold with Honda of America mentions this. I would know, having spent my fair share of time on hold with HAM.

CHAPTER 5

MEDIA LIBERATION: THE VCR AND CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

The second Battle of Poitiers proved Marx right: on its first run, history is tragedy; the second time around, it is utter farce. For customs officials in the small landlocked French town a hundred miles from the coast, the number “732” had a dual meaning: it was the year in which Charles Martel repelled an invading North African army at a battle of world-historical importance in that very town; it was also the code number assigned to all imported goods from Japan. With the French government’s decision to dam the flood of Japanese consumer electronics, particularly videocassette recorders (VCRs), however, the number came to represent in both instances resistance against a foreign invader. In 732 it was the Frank warlord Martel and his medieval army on the frontlines; in November 1982, it was customs director Pierre Galliot and his band of eight customs inspectors. These nine men, the French government decided, should inspect every VCR that entered France, no matter the time required.¹

Galliot grinned wryly as he explained his troops’ task: the special inspectors, “hand-picked for slowness,” had to “thoroughly examine” all documentation to ensure it was sound and, more important, written in French; they had to open every container and remove “a substantial number” of VCRs from their packaging to check serial numbers; and to be certain that the documentation did not lie, inspectors had to dismantle select VCRs to certify that they were made in Japan. In the ten months it took to implement the new regulations and assign Poitiers as the sole customs entry point for VCRs in all of France, 642,000 units had entered the country, nearly three times as many as in all of

¹ Paul Lewis, “The Latest Battle of Poitiers,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1983.

1981; since then, Galliot's inspectors had struggled to clear 10,000 units each month, consigning hundreds of thousands to warehouses throughout Poitiers.² The bottleneck created by *la Résistance* at Poitiers severely limited Japanese VCR imports and made those available to French consumers considerably more costly.

To be sure, the French state had economic motives. It had recently nationalized the country's largest electronics firm, Thomson. In 1982 fears of increased foreign competition motivated Thomson to attempt to purchase a controlling interest in the West German electronics giant Grundig, an ultimately unsuccessful bid. It also sought, again unsuccessfully, an alliance with Europe's largest consumer electronics manufacturing, the Dutch firm Philips, to produce VCRs for the European market. Curtailing the flow of cheaper—and many consumers would claim higher quality—Japanese VCRs would open the French market to products made in the European Economic Community. Japan had exported nearly five million VCRs to the EEC in 1982, and Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) had conceded to an annual quota of 4.55 million in discussions with EEC negotiators in February 1983. European consumers wanted VCRs and Japanese companies had plenty of them, but European companies wanted a piece of the action in the exploding consumer electronics industry. As industrial policy, the Battle of Poitiers was pragmatic, if not embarrassing, economic protectionism.³

But the French response to Japan's consumer electronics boom also hinted at the cultural significance of the VCR's proliferation—this was France, the bastion of Western

² William Safire, "The Battle of Poitiers," *New York Times*, November 22, 1982; *Ibid.*

³ "An Electronics Entente Against Japan," *Business Week*, December 6, 1982, 48; "Europe Gangs Up on Japanese Electronics," *Business Week*, March 21, 1983, 25; E.J. Dionne, "Japan Video Accord Leaves Europeans Weary But Hopeful," *New York Times*, February 22, 1983.

civilisation. “France is not going to keep out Japanese VCRs no matter what they've done,” said the early prophet of globalization, Theodore Levitt. “It will come in underneath, sideways, over borders, through piracy, through smuggling. It will come in because people want it. They want the quality; they want the price. Somebody will have it; just like drugs it comes in.”⁴

For a relatively expensive product—costing anywhere from \$300 to \$5000 in 1985, depending on whether one bought one legally in Moscow, Idaho, or on the black market in Moscow, Russia—the global demand for the VCR was unprecedented. The number of people worldwide who knew what a VCR was in 1976, let alone owned one, was negligible; just ten years later, some estimates put the number of VCRs in operation worldwide at 100 million.⁵ Neither radio nor television could compare to the VCR in the scope and intensity of its proliferation over such a short period of time. The global desire for a VCR was extraordinary, and acquiring one held promises of increased status and independence. A journalist told the story of a small village outside of Islamabad, Pakistan, where residents lived without running water or electricity. “In the middle of the cluster of baked-mud houses is a gleaming new concrete and brick room in one corner of which is stacked a 22-inch television set, an unpacked videocassette recorder and a stereo tape-recorder,” she wrote. “We are waiting for the government to put in electricity,” said one of the residents, “but even without it we feel rich with all these goods around us.”⁶

⁴ “Theodore Levitt on Global Goods,” *Washington Post*, September 23, 1984. On Levitt and globalization theory, see chapter 2.

⁵ Gladys D. Ganley and Oswald H. Ganley, *Global Political Fallout: The First Decade of the VCR, 1976-1985* (Cambridge: Center for Information Policy Research, Harvard University, 1987), 1.

⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 47.

Of course, sales made Japanese companies like Sony and Matsushita rich in hard currency. They also helped to drive up many national trade deficits with Japan, including France's, prompting economic nationalist reactions in Western Europe and the United States. But the money consumers spent, the extensive black market networks established, and the stories told of people in underdeveloped areas desiring to acquire, trade, and use VCRs all reveal that this consumer electronics product that benefited Japan economically also had significant cultural meaning for users as an icon of the global imagination. So what kind of meanings did VCR consumers apply to this suddenly ever-present technology?

The Japanese VCR signified the potentials of the globalizing of America. At the same time, its role was even more noteworthy beyond U.S. borders. In both instances, the VCR possessed liberatory power for its users. American users defined their liberation in the language of what Lizabeth Cohen calls the "Consumer's Republic," i.e., democracy meant the freedom of consumer choice, autonomy from national corporate media, and independence from the shackles of rigid scheduling blocks.⁷ In the non-Western world, where VCRs were often harder to come by, the device signaled democratic liberation from political repression, poverty, and the evils of underdevelopment. Both in the United States and abroad, the VCR was tangible evidence that new processes of interconnectivity were breaking down borders of all kinds. As a result, the hundreds of millions of people with access to these Japanese products could choose to be exposed to previously inaccessible content expressing cultural difference. In multinational countries like the United States, such opportunities opened new vistas of cultural experience; in

⁷ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

countries mindful of a mythical cultural legacy, like France, they unnerved officials; in authoritarian states, they threatened the guardians of political power. Whatever kind of liberation the VCR promised, the outcome was always a step toward global interconnectedness.

In short, the VCR became the first icon of contemporary cultural globalization. By consuming VCRs Americans participated in what was likely their first mass, yet personal, encounter with the “local-global nexus” that came to define late twentieth-century globalization.⁸ As a device in the home, the VCR gave the impression of being in control of an expanding media universe; yet the hundreds of millions of devices circulating worldwide by the early 1990s placed Americans within a larger global cultural transformation that they could never hope to control. The Internet would later refine the ways that consumers could access information anytime and anywhere, independent of physical and legal state borders and often in opposition to them. In a clumsier way, the VCR enabled ideas and images to traverse the globe with greater autonomy from the people and institutions that produced cultural content than any previous technology had ever allowed. It was a dramatic evolution in the “age of mechanical reproduction” that Walter Benjamin described, a further step away from a text’s “parasitical dependence on ritual,” permitting mass global audiences to apply their own meanings to cultural images.⁹

⁸ See Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); and Ulf Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 224.

The meaning attached to the VCR thus broadened from its introduction in the mid-1970s as just another consumer electronics product for affluent Westerners to a ubiquitous tool of global social and cultural consequence by the mid-1980s. By the end of the 1980s, the VCR's meaning for its consumers around the world was divorced from the intentions of the corporations that first produced and marketed the device in the late 1970s. It was a tabula rasa onto which different groups could project their hopes and fears about rapid global changes. In the globalizing world of the 1980s, the VCR took on a life of its own.

What often got lost in the attention paid to the transformative effects of the VCR was that the device was exclusively Japanese in origin. Whereas global consumers embraced or rejected American products for their "Americanness," the iconography of the VCR was often devoid of images of Japaneseness. Many French dismissed American products like McDonald's, Levi's, and Hollywood films for being too American in the 1960s and 1970s (while plenty of their compatriots welcomed the same products). The Battle of Poitiers, though, did not revolve around rejections of Japaneseness so much as it did around the conditions of global capitalism. The French state recognized the money to be made in the domestic and global VCR market in ways that they did not for the fast-food or blue jeans market, because there were no objections to the VCR as a cultural object. After all, the VCR presented the opportunity for viewing French films (or Indian, or Chinese) as well as American. McDonald's was a symbol of Americanization in France and Toyota was a symbol of Japanization in the United States, but the VCR was not a symbol of Japanization anywhere, even though virtually every VCR sold on the world market before the late 1980s was produced in Japan. Even when U.S.

congressmen smashed Toshiba products with a sledgehammer on the front steps of the Capitol building, they did so not because Toshiba (a major VCR producer) was selling too many products in the United States but because the company was selling advanced technology to the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Thus while the VCR became a cultural icon with a variety of meanings in its first decade, it was rare that it meant “something Japanese,” or that its being Japanese affected consumption patterns. Therefore it crossed national borders without the stigma of a national identity.

Japanese VCRs also helped define the notion that the world had entered a new, “postmodern” state. “If there is any single technological watershed of the postmodern,” writes the Marxist historian Perry Anderson, “it lies” with “the arrival of color television” in the early 1970s.¹¹ Color television could represent “reality” to viewers in ways that black-and-white television could not. As a device that could reproduce those representations of reality at the ready, the VCR provided an additional level of simulacra, images of representations of reality. In working to define the contours of the postmodern age, thinkers like Anderson, Frederic Jameson, and David Harvey all saw the VCR as a harbinger of a future in which “the machinery of images”—what Anderson called “perpetual emotion machines”—were capable of “transmitting discourses that are wall-to-wall ideology.”¹² Again, as with the articulation of the concept of globalization, Japanese corporations provided the tools that defined a new era. Yet they figured only tangentially into explanatory narratives of cultural and ideological change. If the VCR

¹⁰ Editorial, “When Japan-Bashing Goes Too Far,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1987.

¹¹ Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (New York: Verso, 1998), 88.

¹² *Ibid.*, 89. See also Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (New York: Blackwell, 1989).

contributed anything to the Japaneseness of postmodernity, it was to emphasize that Japan's future was devoid of metanarratives—the VCR was a device that could transmit narratives, but one seemingly devoid of its own.

Highlighting the VCR's early life in the United States and worldwide complicates the image of U.S.-Japan relations in the 1970s and 1980s. In illustrating how Americans engaged with Japan in material ways independent of the “Japan-bashing” discourse, the chapter also shows how they engaged cultural processes that eventually would be associated with “globalization.” Moreover, discussing the VCR's global proliferation provides a more nuanced picture of Japanese internationalism generally. It was not, as many Western commentators thought at the time, simply about economic imperialism or colonialism; what Japan did was provide new, potentially revolutionary means for people to communicate across borders and cultural divisions.

The chapter first explores VCR consumption in the United States as a symbol of the nationwide cultural shifts changing the ways Americans lived their lives. The marketing of VCRs in the United States reveals an imperative for consumer education as companies tried to convince consumers of the necessity of the VCR and its ability to transform personal lives. In trying to attract customers through an acculturation process, the demands of capital drove the earliest cultural meanings of the VCR. Slick advertising sold the VCR as a device of individual consumer liberation. Scholars, journalists, and commentators adopted this vocabulary as they tried to come to terms with the cultural transformations affecting the United States and the world.

In the second section, I examine the VCR's global impact, which was even more transformative than its U.S. reception. VCRs spread across the planet at a rate

unprecedented for a consumer electronics product, even surpassing the proliferation rates of television. Researchers projected their hopes for global cultural change onto the device as they examined its impact on underdeveloped and authoritarian societies. Western travelers traversing the globe in search of exotic experiences always seemed to stumble across the VCR, shattering their notions of non-Western cultural purity. Much as the Internet would be by the late 1990s, the VCR became the 1980s icon of cultural globalization.

The videocassette recorder's pre-history dates to the 1950s, when an array of American and Japanese companies began experimenting with the placement of images onto videotape.¹³ The first iteration, produced for industrial use by the U.S. Ampex Corporation, meant that television broadcasters no longer needed to air programs live; Ampex machines allowed viewers on the west coast to watch programs at the same hour as viewers on the east coast.¹⁴ It was not until Japan's Sony released the U-Matic unit in 1972 that a viable videotape recorder (VTR, a generic category to which VCRs belonged), weighing in at a "portable" 60 pounds, entered the market, but it was still priced well out of most consumers' budgets as it was intended for professional use.¹⁵ Sony used what it learned from the U-Matic experience to develop, produce, and market

¹³ For a thorough technical pre-history of the VCR, see Frederick Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Julia R. Dobrow, "Introduction," in Julia R. Dobrow, ed., *Social and Cultural Aspects of VCR Use* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990), 10.

¹⁵ Wasser, 70-71; James Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, The Japanese, and the Onslaught of the VCR* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987), 93.

the first commercially successful consumer VTR, and the first VCR available, the Sony Betamax.

Inundated with electronic media in the United States of the early twenty-first century, where instantaneous information gratification is only mouse clicks away, it is difficult to appreciate what the Betamax did when it arrived on the U.S. national market in 1976. Unless a consumer was connected to an early cable- or satellite television service—both still very much in their infancies—the television viewing options were limited to what the three major networks offered. Even so, missing a favorite program, movie, or live event like a sports game because of inconvenience or conflicting scheduling meant likely never seeing it again. By connecting the 45-pound Betamax to a television, viewers could overcome such problems. The device recorded sound and video from a broadcast signal onto videocassettes about the size of a paperback book. The 1976 model permitted viewers to record only one hour's worth of programming, but subsequent models allowed for up to three hours of recording.

The Betamax's recording function was the real trick. Throughout the 1970s several U.S. manufacturers had introduced VTR units to the U.S. market, but they all failed to catch on like VCRs would because they performed only playback functions and did not allow users to record. Avco's Catrlevision, RCA's Selectavision, and MCA's Discovision formats gave consumers the option to watch prerecorded material from a limited catalogue, but these companies stopped short of including recording functions for fear of antagonizing copyright holders. The Japanese companies that developed the various VCR formats did not accept such limitations.¹⁶ The divergent national paths of

¹⁶ Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video*, 59-60.

VTR development stood as a metaphor for two countries moving in opposite directions: manufacturers in the United States, turning inward in the 1970s, clung to a system of media governed by national laws; producers in Japan, beginning with the Betamax, developed products of unlimited potential for a borderless future.

In less than two years after Betamax's U.S. introduction, more than twenty different brand-name companies offered VCRs to the consumer market. Prices ranged from \$1,000 to \$1,300, putting the VCR in the "luxury goods" category until spikes in demand and supply led to significant price drops in the early 1980s.¹⁷ Producers were split between two formats that performed the same functions but were incompatible: Betamax and VHS ("video home system"). On the Betamax side sat, among others, Sony, Toshiba, Pioneer, and Zenith; on the VHS side were JVC, Panasonic, Sharp, Mitsubishi, and RCA. This VCR "format war" has been of interest to scholars writing about the VCR for two reasons: first, because most histories concentrate on VCR production; second, because the field's great innovator, Sony, eventually lost.¹⁸ In telling the story of VCR consumption, though, only one important point emerges: whoever won (VHS did), the winner was guaranteed to be Japanese. "Today the superiority of the Japanese in the home VCR field is so overwhelming," wrote journalist James Lardner in 1987, "that no American manufacturer even bothers to try making such a product."¹⁹ Seven years into the VCR's lifeline, at the beginning of a several-year run in which VCR sales doubled annually in the United States, Japanese companies accounted for more than

¹⁷ "Home VTRs Under 15 U.S. Brandnames," *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, June 27, 1977, 8-9; "Video Cassette Recorders: Key to a New TV World," *Consumer Reports*, September 1978, 506.

¹⁸ See Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video*, 72-75; Lardner, *Fast Forward*, 11-22.

¹⁹ Lardner, *Fast Forward*, 11.

95 percent of global VCR production.²⁰ (European manufacturers Philips and Grundig, producing almost exclusively for the European market, largely accounted for the rest, while several Korean and Taiwanese manufacturers produced negligible quantities.) Americans could visit local appliance dealers and see VCRs branded with the names of “American” companies like Zenith, General Electric, and RCA, but they would not find a single VCR produced in the United States on those shelves—all were manufactured in Japan for distribution by American companies.²¹ So whether a VCR was Betamax or VHS, Sony, Panasonic, or RCA, expensive or budget-priced, if it was purchased in the United States, or virtually anywhere else in the world, it was Japanese.

Sony’s campaign to market the Betamax was successful because the company was selling more than just another electronics gadget; the company pushed the Betamax “as a tool of consumer empowerment.”²² Sony founder Akio Morita promoted the mythology of the Betamax’s origins in his 1985 autobiography: “In the fifties and sixties... I noticed how the TV networks had total control over people’s lives.... [I]t was that control of people’s lives that I felt was unfair.” Thus when he and Sony brought the Betamax to the market, they pushed its ability for “time-shifting,” a futuristic-sounding phrase that Morita coined.²³ “Time-shifting” simply meant the ability to watch at 11:00 p.m. a program that had aired at 8:00 p.m. Looked at narrowly, the Betamax gave consumers more flexibility in their television viewing habits; in Morita’s conception,

²⁰ “World VCR Capacity Near 30 Million,” *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, July 16, 1984, 8.

²¹ Manuel Alvarado, ed., *Video World-Wide: An International Study* (London: John Libbey, 1988), 128.

²² Wasser, *Veni, Vidi, Video*, 50.

²³ Akio Morita, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 231-232.

later to be adopted by a cohort of academic researchers and commentators, the Betamax bestowed on users the power to control time itself.

Since consumers would not inherently understand the operations of a VCR, early Betamax and VHS marketing campaigns connected the theme of consumer empowerment to an educational impulse. Sony provided local retailers with template newspaper and magazine advertisements into which they could insert the name of their business. They all showed a sharp, simple image of a Betamax machine under different headlines like, “How to Wake Up to Late Night Talk Shows,” and “How to Take a Summer Vacation and Never Miss Your Favorite Shows.” A brief paragraph beneath the image explained in simple language just what the Betamax did—what, when, how, and how long it recorded. The ads finished by evoking the image of empowerment: “You’re always stuck watching what the networks want. Why not watch what you want instead?”²⁴

Of course, television was a natural medium for attracting Betamax and showing off its features. Powerhouse advertising agency Doyle Dane Bernbach designed several television commercials for the Betamax's launch. The most notable starred Bela Lugosi as Dracula, who returns home from “work” and says to the camera, ““If you work night like I do, you miss a lot of great TV programs. But I don't miss them anymore, thanks to Sony's Betamax deck.”²⁵ In another, a cab driver ending his night shift says to his colleagues, “Good morning, gentlemen, I'm going home to watch the late show.” The narrator informs the viewer that with “Sony's revolutionary Betamax deck... now you can automatically videotape your favorite show, even when you're not home, and watch it

²⁴ “Sony Newspaper Ad Program,” informational booklet for retailers, Sony of America, no date (1978?).

²⁵ John Nathan, *Sony: The Private Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 106.

anytime you want.”²⁶ Like the print ads, the commercials aimed to get across to consumers what the Betamax could do to improve lifestyles.

Manufacturers reached across competitive lines to co-finance lengthy advertising supplements in popular magazines like *Time*.²⁷ A common marketing technique, these supplements looked more like educational and informational articles than standard advertisements. The supplements tried to educate consumers about the ways that the VCR could improve their lives, how it would allow them to “be an active participant in video land.” The VCR recalled how in the “good old black-and-white days of the late 40’s, and again in the early 1960’s when TV went colorful, tele-viewing was a social affair.” Interspersed in the twenty-page section of informational text were advertisements for Sony, JVC, Toshiba, and other VCRs, each promising to transform the ways users experienced media.²⁸

The introduction to a VCR lifestyle began in advertisements and continued at local retailers. Brochures sought to comfort the consumer who might have felt overwhelmed by the confusing advanced technology. Retailers could provide customers with a copy of “Daddy, What’s a Betamax?,” a “beautifully illustrated booklet that answers every child’s (and adult’s) questions about Betamax.” (After all, what parent has not had to answer the question, “If I record a show, will it stay recorded forever?”) The booklet served the dual purpose of educating customers and assuaging their insecurities

²⁶ “Sony SL-7200 Betamax Commercial #1—1977,” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvN-0qK7jSU>.

²⁷ For example, “The Wonderful World of Home Video,” Special Advertising Section, *Time*, October 30, 1978.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

about complicated new technologies.²⁹ For hesitant retailers Sony offered a booklet titled “How to Sell Betamax (As If You Needed Help),” which suggested ways to approach both inexperienced electronics customers as well as the “Sophisticated Customer.”³⁰ Along with educational literature, customers would find a “Demonstration Center” at retailers that showcased a Betamax on a Sony television, displayed on two pedestals that informed the consumer of the Betamax’s various basic recording and playback features.³¹ While it did not push the boundaries of consumer marketing, the Betamax campaign successfully introduced the U.S. public to the ways that VCRs could affect their daily habits, evidenced by the tremendous boom in VCR sales in the product’s first decade. (That the VHS format ultimately outpaced Betamax did not mean that Sony's marketing campaigns failed; on the contrary, Sony's competitors in the “format war” adopted Sony's advertising techniques for their own VCRs. Betamax's failure was instead a result of Sony's many Japanese competitors, particularly the giant Matsushita, allying against the innovative company.³²)

It was not just shoppers who noticed Sony’s calls for consumer empowerment in the “largest ad campaign ever put behind a single Sony product.” The week before NBC broadcast the classic film *Gone with the Wind* in November 1976, a full nine months after the Betamax went on sale, electronics retailers saw their shelves wiped clean of blank Betamax cassettes. For executives at MCA, the parent company of NBC and Universal

²⁹ “Sony Product Literature,” informational booklet for retailers, Sony of America, no date (1978?).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Betamax Demonstration Center,” Sony of America retailer and advertiser information binder, 1980.

³² Nathan, *Sony*, 110-111.

Studios, the cause was obvious: as many as 25,000 Betamax owners were taping the film for their private collections. This, said MCA president Sidney J. Sheinberg, was blatant copyright infringement at a cost “almost impossible to estimate.”³³ MCA, joined by Disney, filed suit against Sony in an attempt to stop the company from marketing and selling the Betamax. Japanese companies had given consumers recording features when U.S. companies feared to do so; predictably, Betamax rattled Hollywood’s cage, and the ensuing court battle became a showdown between Japanese hardware and American software—though the participants did not frame the corporate battle in the stark terms that, say, the U.S. automobile industry did.

Sony’s plan was simple: stall the court decision long enough to sell so many units that enforcing an MCA-Disney victory would be near impossible. In this effort they were aided by their VHS competitors, who were outselling Sony by a three-to-one ratio at the beginning of the 1980s.³⁴ The legal battle bounced from court to court following a number of decisions and appeals until it finally reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which issued a ruling in Sony’s favor in January 1984. Sony and its VHS competitors had already won a de facto victory at that point anyway—an estimated eight million VCRs were in use in American homes at the beginning of the year.³⁵ But the Court certified the legality of what millions of Americans did on a daily basis: “time-shifting for private home use must be characterized as a noncommercial, nonprofit activity,” wrote Justice

³³ Quoted in “Why Sony’s Betamax Has MCA Seething,” *Business Week*, November 29, 1976, 29; “The Home Replay Fray,” *Newsweek*, December 13, 1976, 66. For a detailed history of the ensuing court battle between Sony on one side and Disney and MCA-Universal on the other, see Lardner, *Fast Forward*.

³⁴ “Video Cassette Recorders,” *Consumer Reports*, May 1982, 230.

³⁵ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1984* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1984), 23.

John Paul Stevens. That he rejected MCA-Disney's discourse and adopted the language of VCR culture created by Morita and Sony—one executive's "time-shifting" was another's "copyright infringement"—meant that the court acquiesced to the vocabulary of transformation that sustained the VCR's popularity. Stevens continued, "Moreover..., time-shifting merely enables a viewer to see such a work which he had been invited to witness in its entirety free of charge."³⁶ If a program was free to watch the first time, why should it cost anything to watch again?

Washington Post television critic Tom Shales intoned the victory cry: "Citizens! Hear me! We are free! Free to tape as we choose!" Shales carried on, "It transpires that even in a technocracy ruled by vast conglomerates, there is a sixth freedom: The freedom to tape.... Without such freedoms, life in a video age is nothing. This was not a victory for Sony. This was a victory for the human race."³⁷ Shales' tone was facetious, but he nevertheless hit a sincere note: the VCR provided users with a kind of freedom that Hollywood and its Congressional allies threatened to deny. Through satire Shales struck the moment's Orwellian overtones. "One giant step for man, one giant kick in Big Brother's pants," he wrote. "No more stuffing the Betamax machine under the bed at every unexpected ring of the doorbell.... No more midnight meetings of Time-Shifters Anonymous."

In repeatedly sounding the cry of freedom, Shales was poking fun at a real trend: a wide array of media scholars, technology and lifestyle journalists, and representatives

³⁶ "Excerpt's from Court's Majority and Dissenting Opinions," *New York Times*, January 18, 1984.

³⁷ Tom Shales, "I'll Tape Tomorrow; And So Will You, Thanks to the Court," *Washington Post*, January 18, 1984.

of the electronics industry (if not VCR users themselves) followed Sony's lead in praising the VCR as a tool of consumer empowerment and as a bellwether of future media liberation. Placed in the broad sweep of U.S. history, replete with African Americans, women, immigrants, and other groups struggling to broaden the horizons of the ideal of freedom, some of the words used to describe the VCR's effects appear almost comical in retrospect. For example, in a study of the ways VCR users sought to avoid watching commercial advertisements, two researchers put their findings in historical context with no detectable irony:

“The 1960s and the 1970s witnessed a number of profound social movements—civil rights, antiwar, counterculture, and women's liberation. As for the 1980s, historians might consider another—the television viewer's liberation movement. For the first time in the history of the medium, a majority of viewers have taken control of what they watch, when they watch, and how they watch television. Indeed viewers throughout the world are uniting behind the liberating technology of the video cassette recorder.”³⁸

Such language could have been dismissed as scholarly tunnel vision had it not been so common. One scholar who published a book and a number of articles on the VCR “heralded... [the VCR] as the technology that could liberate viewers from both the rigors of television scheduling and from the relative narrowness of television content.”³⁹ Yet another researcher, this one studying the Turkish reception of the device, viewed “the

³⁸ Barry S. Sapolsky and Edward Forrest, “Measuring VCR ‘Ad-Voidance,’” in *The VCR Age: Home Video and Mass Communication*, ed. Mark R. Levy (London: Sage, 1989), 148.

³⁹ Julia R. Dobrow, “Away from the Mainstream? VCRs and Ethnic Identity,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 193.

VCR as a liberating technology that allows viewers a range of taste in media content never before possible.”⁴⁰ A scholar studying audience behavior gushed that it was “the introduction of the VCR that emancipated the TV audience from being a *passive viewer* to an *active viewer*.”⁴¹ The greatest hyperbole came from a publication that synthesized general trends in communications research. It claimed that “all the evidence says that this time we are in the presence of a real revolution and that we should call it by its name”:

“As a true revolution, the emergence of video has been like an explosion, full of energy and even passion, provoking divisions, inflicting wounds, destroying, upsetting and, also, raising hopes and promising new riches in the so-called ‘television wasteland.’... [T]he video revolution has taken the world by storm, caught the popular imagination with incredible speed and set itself up as the universal entertainer of the future.”⁴²

Not just scholars waxed profoundly over the VCR’s transformative effects. As it tracked the explosive annual growth in VCR sales, industry publication *Consumer Electronics Annual Review* noted early in the technology’s life cycle that the “video revolution” provided consumers genuine “viewer liberation.” Two years later it expounded on the industry’s sense of the trend:

“A transformation which is both evolutionary and revolutionary is now under way —changing not only the nature of the consumer electronics industry but the

⁴⁰ Christine Ogan, “The Worldwide Cultural and Economic Impact of Video,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 245.

⁴¹ Carolyn A. Lin, “Audience Activity and VCR Use,” in Julia R. Dobrow, ed., *Social and Cultural Aspects of VCR Use* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1990), 75. Emphasis in original.

⁴² Jose M. De Vera and Jim McDonnell, “Video: A Media Revolution?” *Communication Research Trends* 6 (1985): 1.

American home and the American lifestyle. The key word is ‘video’—and the changes involved in our basic sources of information, entertainment, education and communication. The video revolution with its potential effects has already been compared to the revolution of the early 20th Century brought about by the automobile.”⁴³

The normally austere *Consumer Reports* labeled the earliest line of VCRs the “Key to a New TV World” and pondered the democratic possibilities: “For more than a generation, television has been changing the way people live.... We the people have a chance to change television—or at least soften its dictates to us. The instrument of blessed change may well be the video cassette recorder.”⁴⁴ Several years later, as the VCR market began to boom, the monthly nonprofit magazine informed its readers, “A video cassette recorder isn't just another pretty machine. It can free you from the tyranny of the TV schedule.”⁴⁵ Like advertisements, which shifted their focus from educating consumers about the basics of a VCR to promoting quality, value, or features, *Consumer Reports'* coverage of VCRs shifted from describing the basics in 1977-1978 to extensive testing of the advanced features available on nearly four dozen models in 1983.⁴⁶ The magazine, which was usually guarded in assessing product claims, had accepted the VCR

⁴³ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1980* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1980), 13; *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1982* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1982), 9.

⁴⁴ “Video Cassette Recorders: Key to a New TV World,” *Consumer Reports*, September 1978, 505.

⁴⁵ “Video Cassette Recorders,” *Consumer Reports*, May 1982, 230.

⁴⁶ “Video Cassette Recorders,” *Consumer Reports*, July 1983, 327-335.

as part of every consumer's media experience. It even adopted the language advertisements provided.

The earliest marketing campaigns for the Betamax and other VCRs in the 1970s showed that the hyperbole of media transformation surrounding the VCR *preceded* the technology's extraordinary growth in the 1980s. So when media scholars did take note of the VCR boom beginning in 1982, Sony and the Japanese competitors who followed had already placed a descriptive vocabulary at their disposal. It was Sony, after all, who told consumers that the VCR could emancipate them from the shackles of broadcast television, setting the tone and framework for critical commentary on its success.

The VCR thus became a self-fulfilling prophecy for industry types and researchers, as import and sales figures skyrocketed from the early 1980s on. In 1976 the Betamax was the only VCR model available on the U.S. market, and Americans purchased only 30,000 of them.⁴⁷ Sales increased by nearly 700 percent in 1977, with VHS and several other brand names entering the market. Still, the 200,000 units sold and the \$141 million in VCR imports remained a pinprick in a consumer electronics industry on which Americans annually spent \$12 billion in the late 1970s.⁴⁸ But soon that 30,000 became 200,000, then 400,000, and two years later, 800,000. Annual sales jumped another 70 percent to 1.36 million in 1981. That year VCR imports from Japan were valued at \$1 billion, surpassing for the first time the value of U.S. television imports, previously the crown jewel in Japan's consumer electronics exporting industry.

⁴⁷ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1977* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1977), 14.

⁴⁸ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1978* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1978), 1, 14, 27.

Thereafter annual sales growth rates were 49 percent in 1982, 102 percent in 1983, 86 percent in 1984, 41 percent in 1985, and 10 percent in 1986, at which point annual U.S. sales plateaued at roughly 11 million per year. They valued just under \$4 billion in a consumer electronics market worth more than \$40 billion annually.⁴⁹ Whatever the assessments of observers, the material reality of VCR proliferation was nothing short of phenomenal.

And it all came from Japan. In the VCR's first decade, Japanese companies regularly shattered their own monthly export records. It took nearly four years for monthly exports to the United States to reach 100,000 units. Monthly figures then skyrocketed to the half-million mark by June 1983 and surpassed one million just one year later.⁵⁰ Annual U.S. VCR imports hit a high of 17.6 million in 1986, at which point the U.S. market was clearly saturated; prices dropped and demand leveled off. Imports nevertheless remained above 10 million units into the 1990s.⁵¹

As a result, the acquisition and use of VCRs were increasingly becoming part of the experience of American life in the 1980s. There were an estimated three million VCRs in operation in the United States at the beginning of 1982, or roughly one for every 77 people in the country. Americans would buy some 60 million units in the seven years to follow, and by 1989 VCRs were in 61 percent of the roughly 90 million U.S.

⁴⁹ See *Consumer Electronics Annual Review* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1979-1989).

⁵⁰ "Japan Sets VCR Export Record in Sept.," *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, November 3, 1980, 10; "Japan Shatters VCR Export Record," *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, August 8, 1983, 11; "Japan Exported Million VCRs in June," *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, August 6, 1984, 11.

⁵¹ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1987* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1987), 51.

households.⁵² At roughly 2.5 persons per household, that meant that nearly 140 million Americans had access to VCRs in their homes. VCRs were ubiquitous outside the home too, populating schools, workplaces, and waiting rooms in dentists' offices. That the VCR could do what it did—transmit information and images at the whim of users—signaled that a majority of Americans had connected to a world transformed by new media by the end of the 1980s.

This development was not lost on enterprising social scientists. They surveyed and interviewed users, combed through video rental stores, and queried time-shifters about their habits as if they were conducting an ethnographic study of a Pacific-island village. Articles and book chapters appeared in academic publications—not marketing journals—on such topics as VCR users' knowledge of the various advanced features of their devices (the authors were disappointed that users incapable of performing the simplest operations—like setting the VCR's clock—undermined the authors' intuition that the VCR signaled some kind of global revolution); whether people re-watched programs they had already recorded and viewed (yes, yes they do, concluded the author); and how Israelis made decisions about what videocassettes to rent (it seemed that Israelis did not put nearly as much thought into their decisions as the author had).⁵³ Perhaps novelist Don DeLillo had in mind these scholars, obsessed as they were with making “a formal method of the shiny pleasures” of American life, when he created the “American

⁵² See *Consumer Electronics Annual Review* (Washington, D.C.: Electronic Industries Association, 1982, 1989).

⁵³ Akiba A. Cohen and Laura Cohen, “Big Eyes But Clumsy Fingers: Knowing About and Using Technological Features of Home VCRs,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 135-147; Julia R. Dobrow, “The Rerun Ritual: Using VCRs to Re-View,” in Dobrow, ed., *Social and Cultural Aspects of VCR Use*, 181-193; Akiba A. Cohen, “Decision Making in VCR Rental Libraries,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 30(5), May-June 1987: 495-508.

environments” department of a generic Midwest college in *White Noise* (1985).⁵⁴ The arcane attentiveness to the transformational potentialities of the VCR seems curious in retrospect, but only because the transformations these researchers eyed in the 1980s have since become central facets of the globalized media experience of the developed world. Today the connected world has virtually unlimited access to information and entertainment, “freedom” of media choice, and, as researchers found when they looked beyond U.S. borders, the ability to exchange media globally and independent of the power of the nation-state.

There were reasons for excitement. Still, there were other reasons to think that the American VCR experience was less substantial than the device’s global impact. “Freedom of choice has not opened up a whole new vista,” wrote one of the few dissenting voices, “it has only given viewers a greater opportunity to watch what they want to when they want to. What they want to watch is the same as they always have watched.”⁵⁵ Virtually all middle-class Americans with televisions could access at least a half-dozen broadcast television stations by the early 1980s; by that point, too, many millions had already subscribed to cable television systems providing access to dozens more channels. In short, what the VCR could do—provide access to a variety of programming, or more simply, information—was not as significant in a country where viewers already experienced the sensation of choice in the form of competing broadcast networks and cable television. So VCR owners in the United States largely used their devices to record and watch programming to which they had already been exposed.

⁵⁴ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 9.

⁵⁵ Paul B. Lindstrom, “Video: The Consumer Impact,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 49.

In fact, for the first half-decade of the VCR's market lifespan, the option to view anything other than recorded programming from broadcast or cable television was limited. Video rental operations, which would become ubiquitous in strip malls across the country by the late 1980s, were still a relatively new and sparse phenomenon early in the decade. There were 2,500 rental stores nationwide in 1980, each charging roughly \$7 per cassette rental. (Purchasing prerecorded features films was prohibitively expensive, too, generally costing between \$80 and \$100 each.) By 1989 there were 30,000 rental stores in the United States, and the cost of rentals dropped to just over \$2 per cassette.⁵⁶ Also, only about 15% of “early adopters” used their VCRs in conjunction with a video camera, though the number of camera owners would increase significantly in the late 1980s with the availability of “camcorders,” which contained both a VCR and a camera in one compact unit.⁵⁷ In short, while the VCR promised big things—cross-cultural global communication, empowerment against powerful corporate media—most Americans did not take advantage of what scholars saw as the product’s vast potential. Instead, they recorded and watched episodes of *Dallas*, hardly an act of cultural resistance.

The VCR's apotheosis in the United States was the portable consumer electronics embodiment of what journalist Tom Wolfe called the “Me' Decade,” or what the historian Christopher Lasch labeled, with just a bit more cynicism, the “Culture of Narcissism.”⁵⁸ A generation of baby boomers had matured in the turmoil of the second

⁵⁶ Wasser, 101.

⁵⁷ *A Study Among Videocassette Recording System Owners—1979*, Dan Bowdren Associates (New York: 1979), 16.

⁵⁸ Tom Wolfe, “The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening,” *New York Magazine*, August 23, 1976, reproduced at <http://nymag.com/news/features/45938/>; Christopher Lasch, *The Culture*

half of the 1960s. During those years they had learned that “revolutionary change” meant challenging the state's monopoly over the exercise of violence at home and abroad, and “liberation” meant supporting nationalist movements against imperialism in the “third world.” In the 1970s, according to Wolfe and Lasch, that generation looked inward and sought individualistic “change” and “liberation.” As a well educated generation entering the workforce, newly flush with expendable income, baby boomers looked to companies like Sony to provide them with “change” and “liberation” without leaving the house. Marketing that played off baby boomers' self-representations as a generation acculturated to revolutionary change won over the young, wealthy, upwardly-mobile, urban professionals who would come to be called Yuppies in the 1980s. The VCR put a new world in Yuppie hands; whether they took advantage of it is a different story.

It was the material reality and the subjective experience of the VCR's expansion outside the United States that really accentuated the device's transformative potential. Around the world, populations unspoiled by unlimited access to television content more fully took advantage of the potentially transformative uses that scholars had foreseen. And Japanese corporations made certain that VCRs were available. By the end of 1984 they were already producing nearly 30 million units annually, only about half of which either stayed in Japan or went to the United States.⁵⁹ Increasing production and imports

of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

⁵⁹ “World VCR Capacity Near 30 Million,” *Television Digest with Consumer Electronics*, July 16, 1984, 8.

meant that as many as 200 million units were in operation worldwide by the end of 1988.⁶⁰

Governments and researchers paid close attention to the social and cultural significance of global VCR proliferation. The material reality of a hundred million VCRs was momentous enough for UNESCO to commission “a study on the international flow of video hardware and software.” The UN cultural agency mandated researchers to chronicle “the creation in the blinking of an eye a whole new medium of communication, which is fundamentally individualistic, anarchic even, almost beyond institutional organization.... As such, it is a medium profoundly worrying to many governments as it dances with ease around their efforts to control the directions of their cultures.”⁶¹ The resultant report noted the VCR's tremendous growth in the “video rich” areas of North America, Japan and Southeast Asia, the Arab countries, and Western Europe. While the United States and Japan expectedly had high levels of VCR “penetration,” fifteen other countries had penetration rates over 50 percent. They were as diverse as Ireland, Nigeria, and Kuwait, the last of which had the world's highest penetration rate at near 90 percent, with many households owning two units.⁶² Where VCRs were in greatest demand, the report and others like it concluded, was where citizens had money but did not have access to an abundant media environment like that in the United States.⁶³ So while Americans

⁶⁰ Alvarado, ed., *Video World-Wide: An International Study*, 323.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, vii, ix. Alvarado's edited collection was the published version of the UNESCO study.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5, 323.

⁶³ See also Alvarado, *Video World-Wide*; Douglas A. Boyd, Joseph D. Straubhaar, and John A. Lent, *Videocassette Recorders in the Third World* (New York: Longman, 1989); and Douglas A. Boyd, “Home Video Diffusion and Utilization in Arabian Gulf States,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 30(5), May-June 1987: 544-554.

used their VCRs to watch programming that virtually anyone with a television could already access, people in countries like Kuwait and Nigeria used the VCR to watch cassettes with content that was difficult to find. Much of it, of course, was American or Western European.

The unlimited potential of access to new and previously scarce content was what most troubled governments, particularly authoritarian ones in Eastern Europe, China, Iran, and elsewhere. Both the illicit trade of untaxed, unauthorized VCRs and the viewing of prohibited content threatened authoritarian control over media, information, and culture. “Despite widespread bans on both VCRs and videocassette programming,” noted a Harvard study, “people globally are viewing at present almost whatever they choose to,” and governments were unsuccessfully cracking down.⁶⁴ The UNESCO report, for example, claimed that the Iranian government instituted a death penalty policy for anyone caught trafficking in VCRs. It did not, however, cite a specific case, and the practice continued to flourish. This juxtaposition suggests that researchers exaggerated such claims to highlight the VCR as a tool of political resistance.⁶⁵ True or not, rumors that repressive governments were cracking down on VCR trafficking illustrated how seriously observers interpreted the VCR's potential for global social, cultural, and even political transformation. “Because VCRs and cassettes travel so rapidly and relatively inconspicuously, they penetrate even the most closed societies...,” wrote the authors of a study of VCRs in the underdeveloped world. “The result is that national and ideological

⁶⁴ Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, xi. This report was produced at Harvard University's Center for Information Policy Research, an entity itself indicative of scholarly interest in the impact of new media. The institution was founded in 1973 as the Program on Information Technologies and Public Policy and today exists as the Program on Information Resources Policy.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

policies imbued in the people for years without much outside interference now must cope with polished, contrary views brought into homes by videos.”⁶⁶ Where information was hardest to access, the VCR thrived, promising a future free of authoritarian limitations.

Atop the list of edifices most prone to crack via video was the Soviet Union. Like all “luxury” imports, VCRs were only accessible to a small fraction of elite Communist Party members. Nevertheless, units flooded into the country through a number of black-market channels and by 1984 VCRs could be found “in a growing number of apartments inhabited by members of the large Soviet elite,” reported the *Washington Post*. “The electronic revolution offers numerous threats to a system that has been based on government monopoly of information and unrestrained censorship.”⁶⁷ In 1985 the Soviet government acknowledged its inability to stem the tide of illegal units and so committed to producing 60,000 Soviet-made VCRs by 1990.⁶⁸ But nobody wanted the \$1,500 Soviet-made units; the \$5,000 Japanese-made ones represented real foreign luxury.

Software was as difficult to come by as hardware. Videocassettes followed the underground flow of black-market goods in cities like Moscow and Leningrad. Overdubbed versions of Western films produced on the cheap would often have just one Russian voice narrating the action and summarizing dialogue. The most effective pipeline for smuggling in Western material were the official state artists and athletes who could travel abroad, make purchases, and pass through customs checkpoints with few restrictions. Underground political activists also adopted VCR technologies for their

⁶⁶ Boyd, Straubhaar, and Lent, *Videocassette Recorders in the Third World*, 35.

⁶⁷ Robert G. Kaiser, “Is 'Veedeyo' a Blow for the Bolsheviks?” *Washington Post*, September 9, 1984.

⁶⁸ De Vera and McDonnell, “Video: A Media Revolution?,” 3.

purposes, giving rise to the word “Magnitizdat,” the video equivalent of Samizdat underground literature.⁶⁹ “[T]he single issue that most exercised the Soviets was not the nuclear arms race, or the war of espionage, or Afghanistan or Nicaragua or Cuba, or even the rising confidence of China,” wrote Pico Iyer in 1988, “but simply the resistless penetration of video.”⁷⁰ “What a blow to the Bolsheviks!” cried an elderly Soviet citizen upon first seeing a VCR.⁷¹

Authoritarian governments everywhere saw the VCR as an icon of the social and cultural transformations indicative of a new, unstable global age in which borders became increasingly porous. “Where controls have been rather rigorously attempted, they have usually been ineffective... even in those countries where information suppression is a high art,” noted a Harvard study.⁷² VCRs represented changes greater than the individual, yet changes in which the individual could partake and changes that transcended state power. “VCRs and videocassettes represent the fulfillment of some of the world's wildest fantasies,” noted the Harvard study. “They symbolize the usurpation of control by private individuals over a mass source of information, a control that many governments consider their domain.”⁷³ Never before had so many governments dedicated so much attention to the proliferation of a consumer electronics product.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Douglas A. Boyd, “The Videocassette Recorder in the USSR and Soviet-Bloc Countries,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 261-262; Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, 24-26.

⁷⁰ Pico Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-So-Far-East* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 6.

⁷¹ Quoted in Kaiser, “Is 'Veedeyo' a Blow for the Bolsheviks?”

⁷² Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, xi.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*, chapters 6, 8, 10.

Repressive governments did not need to worry about the subversive potential of television because governments held monopolies over the tools that transmitted signals to televisions. (The same can be said for radio, but U.S.-funded programs during the Cold War like Radio Free Europe and Voice of America sought to undermine the legitimacy of the Soviet government, and a television equivalent was only in its infancy in the 1980s.)⁷⁵ VCRs operated independent of state control over the means of their use (except, of course, access to electricity). That made governments worry.

The groups most interested in moving VCRs and videocassettes across relatively porous state borders were smugglers, who sought potentially lucrative profits, and immigrants, who wished to stay connected to the cultures of their homelands. Smugglers would purchase VCRs where they were relatively inexpensive and easy to move and bring them into countries with purposefully high import tariffs. Such movement often inflated statistics: in Panama, for instance, it seemed that every resident of the country owned several VCRs, if the sales statistics were to be believed.⁷⁶ Thus Panama served as a hub of VCR smuggling throughout Latin America; Arab states, to which South Asian immigrant labor flooded in the oil boom 1970s, functioned as a similar distribution point for VCRs smuggled into India, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines by returning laborers.⁷⁷ Returned émigrés, often among the lower economic classes, also brought

⁷⁵ See Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (St. Martin's, 1997), 29-56. The United States Information Agency launched its satellite television service, "Worldnet," in 1985. Peter W. Kaplan, "U.S. Agency Transmits TV Programs to Europe," *New York Times*, April 23, 1985.

⁷⁶ Boyd, Straubhaar, and Lent, *Videocassette Recorders in the Third World*, 18.

⁷⁷ Boyd, "Home Video Diffusion and Utilization in Arabian Gulf States," 549.

VCRs home for the use of the families, introducing the devices at the popular level in ways that would not have been possible without global labor migrations.⁷⁸

The promises of profit drove smuggling, as the worldwide black market for videos was already worth \$1 billion in 1983, but the practice also served a utilitarian purpose: it provided popular access to media and content that were either prohibitively expensive or simply unavailable. In the Philippines, an estimated 99 percent of videocassettes on the market were pirated material, but that phenomenon existed because illegal copies were exponentially cheaper than legal imports from the West—a crooked but nevertheless effective form of import-substitution policy. In other countries, like Pakistan, where import tariffs were 100 percent of the VCR's value, as much as 80 percent of VCR hardware was smuggled into the country illegally.⁷⁹

The profits smugglers made usually came from indigenous consumers who wanted content unavailable in their home countries; also profitable, however, was supplying immigrants around the globe with tools and content that helped them stay connected to the homes they left. An Indian immigrant to the United States described his relationship to video: “There is a small but tightly knit [Indian] community here. We regularly gather to watch the films together. We eat Indian foods. We wear traditional Indian clothes, which we don’t always wear. It reminds us all of home, and of how we are Indians in another land.” Another Indian explained, “We left [India] because things were very bad. But when we watch the movies, we see only what was good.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, 46.

⁷⁹ Boyd, Straubhaar, and Lent, *Videocassette Recorders in the Third World*, 36, 40.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Julia R. Dobrow, “Away from the Mainstream? VCRs and Ethnic Identity,” in Levy, ed., *The VCR Age*, 200, 201.

Connecting with home through video also facilitated resistance to assimilation or homogenization efforts in countries receiving immigrants. Malaysia's minister of information even complained that Chinese immigrant laborers preferred to watch videos illegally smuggled from China than government-sponsored programming about national development on one of the two state-run television networks.⁸¹

The cross-border exchange was even more remarkable because it happened despite the different national standards developed for television systems. The United States, Japan, much of Latin America, and several other countries adopted the NTSC system for displaying images on a television; many more countries used the PAL system, including most of Western Europe; France and the Soviet Union used a third system, SECAM. The three systems were essentially incompatible without extensive knowledge of how VCRs operated. Yet so much exchange, particularly from the NTSC United States to PAL regions in the Middle East and most of Asia, still occurred. Part of this was possible because the only multi-system units that Japanese companies made were shipped to the Middle East, a major distribution point for global smuggling. In the United States, immigrants who wanted to watch incompatible content from home could turn to a company like Instant Replay in Miami, which modified standard Japanese VCRs to play recordings from any of the systems. The company promised that their "Image Translator" VCRs were "Your Passport to World Communication."⁸²

What governments worried about more than immigrants watching home-country content, nonetheless, was not the Japanization of their societies, even though virtually all

⁸¹ Boyd, Straubhaar, and Lent, *Videocassette Recorders in the Third World*, 34; "South-East Asian Television: A Switch-Off," *The Economist*, October 8, 1983, 77.

⁸² Vic Sussman, "Up Against the Video Wall," *Washington Post Magazine*, August 16, 1987.

of the devices they sought to ban were designed and produced in Japan. What posed a greater threat was potential Westernization or Americanization that countered government efforts to define the limits of national cultures. An estimated 60% of videocassette software available globally in 1985 was American in origin.⁸³ The VCR created a cacophony of images from around the planet. More often than not, images from dominant Western culture were “hybridized” with indigenous cultural imagery, that is, they mingled imagery from several cultural sources to create new “hybrid” cultural products.⁸⁴ It was in light of this reality that Pico Iyer, one of the most prolific travel writers of the last quarter century and an informal ethnographer of early contemporary globalization, referred to the United States as the “Great Communicator.” His stories, however, also implicitly reflected the presence of Japan as the Great Facilitator.

The British-born, Indian-American Iyer set out across the globe in search of “the brand-new kinds of exotica thrown up by our synthetic age, the novel cultural hybrids peculiar to the tag end of the twentieth century.”⁸⁵ His travels took him to places as varied as Hanoi and Havana, Kyoto and Kathmandu. As a U.S. citizen, he was sensitive to the “allure and immediacy” of the popular culture of the “Pax Americana” everywhere he visited. People in seemingly remote Nepal were as familiar with Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* as mall-dwelling teenagers in Los Angeles; Vietnamese knew Meryl Streep’s face from posters lining the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, even if her eyes were creatively “orientalized”; and the trendiest spots to hangout in downtown Reykjavik had names that

⁸³ Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, 1.

⁸⁴ On cultural hybridization see Hanerz, *Transnational Connections*; Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁸⁵ Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu*, 10.

offered to transport their patrons to L.A. or Texas.⁸⁶ To be sure, Hindi movies had audiences in Southeast Asia (even if nobody understood the language), but “when it came to movies and TV, the United States remained the Great Communicator. And if pop culture was, in effect, just a shorthand for all that was young and modern and rich and free, it was also a virtual synonym for America.”⁸⁷

Yet what was so surprising about Iyer's stories of hybrid cultural encounters was not the extent to which he found America everywhere; it was the extent to which he did not realize that he just as often found Japan everywhere. Where he found American software, it inevitably was transmitted on Japanese hardware. He saw Sony Walkmans, televisions, and radios; the “holy trinity of the New China” happened to be Sony, Sanyo, and Seiko.⁸⁸ For Iyer, though, it was VCRs that had the most transformative impact:

“[N]ot only had distances in time and space been shrunk but the latest weapons in cultural warfare—videos, cassettes and computer disks—were far more portable than the big screens and the heavy instruments of a decade before. They could be smuggled through border checkpoints, under barbed wire fences and into distant homes as easily, almost, as a whim. In the cultural campaign, the equivalent of germ warfare had replaced that of heavy-tank assaults.... More important, the video revolution was bringing home the power of the Pax Americana with greater allure and immediacy than even the most cunning propaganda.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Pico Iyer, *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 113, 76.

⁸⁷ Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu*, 7.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

Smugglers and entrepreneurs took advantage of the demand for VCRs in unexpected locations. Iyer recalled a plane full of Indians flying home from Bangkok loaded down with VCRs to be sold in India. He met a young Indian man whose “great dream... was to be hired as a VCR importer, one of those black-money makers who paid men to go to Singapore and Bangkok to bring back video machines they could sell for vast profit.”⁹⁰ Iyer found in Kathmandu, tucked away in the Himalayas of Nepal, more than 50 video clubs, where entrepreneurs with \$3,000 VCRs admitted dozens of viewers, for a couple of rupees each, into dimly-lit inner sanctums where they might watch Hindi, kung-fu, or American films.⁹¹ Whereas one VCR in an American household might affect the lives of a half-dozen people on average, a VCR in an underdeveloped region could potentially reach hundreds of people.

When Iyer journeyed to the loneliest places in the world, his out-of-place traveling companions always seemed to be Japanese businessmen. They smiled nervously at attendants on flights to North Korea where the in-flight literature accosted them as “heinous Japanese marauders.” In the “Hidden Kingdom” of Bhutan, they huddled together in hotel restaurants in dark blue suits braving the foreign food for the good of the company. *Sararimen* populated the expensive new condominiums popping up in Shenzhen, China.⁹² It was as if the preexisting presence of Japanese commerce had already thrust these regions into Western-style global connectivity. For fellow world traveler Gary Jennings, who retraced the steps of Marco Polo, the Japanese presence

⁹⁰ Ibid., 259, 277.

⁹¹ Ibid., 94.

⁹² Iyer, *Falling Off the Map*, 13, 100; Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu*, 147.

brought on a sense of despoiled premodern innocence. After “I bribed my way into a camel caravan of smugglers.... Some of the romance rubbed off...,” he wrote, “because you would think a desert caravan would be smuggling spices, perfumes and slave girls. Do you know what they were carrying? They had Sonys and VCRs dangling on the humps of camels.”⁹³ It was as if Japan had already beaten the West to those locations that had yet to be globalized.

If the United States was the “Great Communicator” of the global age, then Japan was its Great Facilitator. It provided the tools by which populations around the world could access American content. Without Japanese consumer technologies like the VCR, the post-Cold War world—the era in which “globalization” became a discourse-defining paradigm—would have never developed an American face, for better or worse. Anti-globalization forces coalescing in the second half of the 1990s chastised Hollywood for cultural imperialism and attacked mega-corporations like Nike for economic imperialism without acknowledging that neither would have been possible without Japanese corporations giving U.S. companies the tools to do so. The attention paid to the VCR's transformative potential, which grew in inverse proportion to the attention devoted to the VCR's “Japaneseness,” illustrated how it was the first icon of cultural globalization.

Why was the VCR's Japaneseness of relatively little importance? In the discussion of the U.S. automobile industry in the previous chapter, Honda's Japanese identity was central to the debate about its arrival in Ohio, where participants in Honda's growth built walls to deflect the national media's insistence that what was happening in Marysville was part of the story of Japanese ascendancy. In the chapter that follows, the

⁹³ Quoted in Ganley and Ganley, *Global Political Fallout*, 23.

national identity of Japanese animation—its Japaneseness—was central to that product's appeal to social communities throughout the United States that constructed networks of cultural meaning out of their enthusiasm for a foreign cultural product. As for the consumption of the VCR, however, it was rarely consumed as something particularly Japanese, and there were both economic and cultural reasons for that national ambiguity.

Economically, the Japanese VCR did not fall prey to the assorted groups vocally protesting Japanese economic growth. In all of the previous industries that Japan's planning ministry, MITI, singled out for growth, the United States had an equivalent industry with plenty of political clout. The textile, steel, television, and automobile industries were all important contributors to the United States' postwar economic boom, and each was part of the story and image of the productivity and ingenuity of American labor. When all four industries began reeling under the combined stresses of stagnating production, rising inflation, and increasing foreign competition in the late 1960s (for textiles and steel) and 1970s (for televisions and automobiles), industry leaders targeted Japan as a convenient explanation for a host of industrial and managerial failures.

There was no equivalent in the U.S. VCR industry because there was no U.S. VCR industry. Japanese corporations created the industry, and those U.S. companies that sold VCRs simply slapped their brand labels on Japanese- (and then Korean- and Taiwanese-) made units. Economically, the VCR boom posed no threat to any powerful U.S. industry, and if anything, it created jobs for Americans in the distribution, marketing, and retailing of consumer electronics, a market on which Americans annually spent more than \$43 billion by the end of the 1980s.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *Consumer Electronics Annual Review 1989*, 6.

Americans by and large did not culturally identify the VCR as something Japanese because, as Kenichi Iwabuchi puts it, the VCR just did not “smell” Japanese. Iwabuchi, an anthropologist who has written on the transnationalism of Japanese popular culture, argues that certain Japanese products, which he calls the “three Cs” of consumer electronics, cartoons, and computer/video games, flow through global cultural networks with no recognizable national or ethnic Japanese identity, no detectable “cultural odor.” He writes, “The cultural impact of a particular commodity is not necessarily experienced in terms of the cultural image of the exporting nation.”⁹⁵ In other words, just because the VCR was not consumed as something Japanese, in the way that sushi, anime, or even a Toyota could be, does not mean that it did not have a cultural impact. The political scientist Joseph Nye argued at the end of the 1980s that it was the United States’ “soft power,” in the form of popular culture that supposedly transmitted a universalist ideology of democratic liberalism, that made people around the world sympathetic to American power.⁹⁶ The VCR’s more ambiguous cultural influence points to the nature of transnationalism in a world of decentralized power. As a unique product, one that was not just a text for consumers to read but a commodity that could “mediate between texts, spaces, and audiences,” the Japanese-made VCR introduced Americans to processes and experiences that they would come to associate with globalization in the 1990s.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 24-28.

⁹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 188.

⁹⁷ Iwabuchi, 25.

CHAPTER 6

“YOU ARE NOT ALONE!”: ANIME AND THE GLOBALIZING OF AMERICA, 1977-1989

The two thousand people filling “every seat in the biggest room in Baltimore” on the final night of the 1983 World Science Fiction Convention were not waiting to see the summer’s biggest sci-fi blockbuster, *Return of the Jedi*. Instead, these devoted fans lingered until 1:00 a.m. to screen a film virtually unknown in the United States—the Japanese animation feature *Uchū senkan Yamato: kanketsuhen* (Space Battleship Yamato: The Final Chapter). Before the showing, though, the convention organizers forewarned the audience that the film’s Japanese sponsors had sent the wrong film, *Saraba uchū senkan Yamato: ai no senshitachi* (Farewell Space Battleship Yamato: Warriors of Love), a 1978 chapter of the long-running, *Star Wars*-like “space opera.”¹ Yet despite this blunder, the show went on and the capacity crowd remained seated and enthralled by this uncommon spectacle.²

To this audience, the wrong film was still new and different. No *Yamato* film was commercially available outside Japan, and virtually none of the convention attendees understood the film’s Japanese dialogue. Accounting for the lack of subtitles, two organizers “provided a running commentary in English,” though one later admitted that

¹ I have translated these film titles literally because in 1983 no official English-language adaptations yet existed. These would both see U.S. releases in the 1990s as *Final Yamato* and *Farewell to Space Battleship Yamato: In the Name of Love*.

² This story is recounted in R.F.’s response (November 15, 2005) to a questionnaire I distributed electronically to anime fans of the 1977-1989 period. Hereafter these responses are cited as such: R.F. response, November 15, 2005. For respondents who are not published authors I have chosen to use initials for anonymity. For readability I have created pseudonyms for names in the text. See the bibliography for a list of respondents. The questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix A.

his fluency in Japanese was suspect at best.³ Yet the language barrier was insignificant. What was important was not the message of this particular film but the audience's participation in the imaginative communal act of watching something different, something Japanese—something global. That night in 1983 the World Science Fiction Convention in Baltimore served as the frontline of cultural globalization by showcasing Japanese animation, better known today as *anime*.

As it crossed the Pacific, anime provided the fans in Baltimore and thousands more across the United States with more than just entertainment; it presented an opportunity to participate in a global community that fostered local cultural difference. Anime looked unlike the children's cartoons of U.S. television, and it told stories that challenged viewers' emotions and worldviews more than the feel-good films of George Lucas' and Steven Spielberg's Hollywood. When anime aired at a science-fiction convention or a fan club meeting, it offered audiences spaces where they could experience mediated cultural exchange with anime's Japanese creators and with fellow fans on the other side of the world. Across the United States the Japanese medium inspired the creation of anime fan clubs: local non-elite social communities that envisioned a world of cultural interconnectedness. The case of anime thus serves as one tangible, local illustration of the impact of Japanese cultural globalization on the United States in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

This chapter examines the role that the consumption of one Japanese product, anime, played in the reciprocity of global cultural exchange within the United States—the globalizing of America. The impact of anime consumption on local U.S. communities

³ R.F. response, November 15, 2005.

began in 1977 when enthusiasts in Los Angeles established the first anime fan club. Over the next dozen years, emerging social communities at the local and national level used this foreign cultural product to reorient individual and group identities according to a new awareness of transnational or global interconnectedness. Until 1989, when entrepreneurs founded the first U.S. anime import company, thus turning the corner toward anime's commercialization, fan communities existed solely because of grassroots, "do-it-yourself" initiatives. U.S. anime fandom in its first decade was a form of intercultural relations at the level of middle-class, non-elite private citizens; it was also an aspect of the U.S.-Japan relationship mediated almost exclusively through the exchange and consumption of anime texts. Like the consumption of millions of automobiles and VCRs, anime's reception illustrated how the U.S.-Japan relationship was one that took place most often in the realm of consumption, and the identity Americans most often assumed toward Japan was that of the consumer.

In this chapter I analyze several representative anime before exploring a few central aspects of the fan experience that enabled non-elites to participate creatively in global cultural exchange. Exploring the activities of fan communities in the 1980s—the decade before "globalization" entered the popular lexicon—can illustrate for foreign relations historians how non-elite Americans at the local level engaged with the sweeping social and cultural transformations of the late twentieth century. I conclude with suggestions for rethinking the history of U.S. cultural relations in light of the case of anime.

Before exploring how fans created global cultural spaces in the late twentieth-century United States, an introduction to anime's characteristics and a look at some exemplary texts from this era is appropriate. Simply, the term anime (denoting both singular and plural) refers to any and all television or film animation produced in Japan.⁴ The genres of anime are as diverse as U.S. popular entertainment, if not more so. Mindlessly lighthearted and comical anime—a large segment of it, like the once-ubiquitous *Pokémon*, marketed to children—share the big and small screens with sophisticated philosophical treatises with large adult audiences, like Mamoru Oshii's critically acclaimed *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and Hayao Miyazaki's Academy Award-winning *Spirited Away* (2002). In Japan animation has never been pigeonholed as children's entertainment as it has in the United States. Its popularity in Japan is linked to the omnipresent *manga*, which is often translated as “comics,” but which more closely resemble what Americans call “graphic novels.”⁵ American visitors to Tokyo frequently are struck by the number of adults passing time on a train with noses buried in the latest volumes of favorite manga. Many of the most popular anime series first appear as manga.

Anime's first break on Japanese television, Osamu Tezuka's *Tetsuwan atomu*, based on Tezuka's 1950s manga of the same name, aired in early 1963.⁶ (Tezuka, the “godfather” of manga and anime, credited his trademark style to an earlier moment of

⁴ In Japan animation of any national origin, including the United States, is anime. In the United States, however, fans have worked hard to ensure that the word “anime” refers only to animation produced in Japan. Well into the 1990s Americans used the words “anime” and “Japanimation” interchangeably, but the latter died off because of the authenticity of “anime” and the potential of offensively mispronouncing “Japanimation.”

⁵ The classic English-language work on manga culture is Frederick L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics* (New York: Kodansha, 1983).

⁶ Jonathan Clements and Helen McCarthy, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2001), 373-374.

cultural transfer: he adored Walt Disney cartoons like *Bambi*.)⁷ *Testuwan atomu* signaled the birth of a popular culture phenomenon in Japan. Anime's popularity increased gradually in the country from the mid-1970s. Science-fiction (SF) series like *Uchū senkan Yamato*, *Kidō senshi Gundam*, and *Makurosu* generated large and dedicated fan bases. So too did series like *Urusei Yatsura*, a comedy that mixed SF themes with commentary on contemporary Japan. By the early 1990s the anime *otaku*, or obsessed fan, had become enough of a Japanese cultural icon to be the target of a popular spoof, the film *Otaku no video* (1991).

Some of the earliest anime on Japanese television crossed the Pacific and became familiar to American children of the 1960s as *Astro Boy*, *Speed Racer*, *Gigantor*, and others. Few if any American viewers, however, were aware of these programs' Japanese origins because U.S. editors stripped the animation of all visual and plot references to Japan. For producers like Fred Ladd, responsible for the U.S. adaptation of *Gigantor*, Japan in the 1960s was an inexpensive source of animation that could be Americanized, or "denationalized," without great effort.⁸ Ladd took for granted that the original animation's "Japaneseness" would not appeal to U.S. audiences. This assumption from the early sixties continued to guide the editors of commercial anime imports through the late 1980s. It was not until after the rise of grassroots anime fandom in the eighties that U.S. producers recognized the commercial potential of anime's cultural difference as expressed in its Japaneseness. While producers' assumptions about mass audiences

⁷ Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 44-46.

⁸ Fred Ladd, "Commentary," *Gigantor*, DVD, produced by Fred Ladd (1964; Los Angeles: Rhino Home Video, 2004).

defined anime's commercial presence until the late eighties, growing fan demands for cultural authenticity defined its underground existence. The commercial boom of the 1990s was the result of several U.S. companies rectifying this tension by giving the die-hard fan community what it wanted.

Aside from the run of children's cartoons in the 1960s, anime was relegated to marginal status in U.S. popular culture in the 1970s and 1980s. In the early eighties Japanese anime companies had half-heartedly tested the U.S. market but concurred with Ladd's notion that animation produced for Japanese viewers would not have wide commercial appeal.⁹ The medium's fortunes shifted in the early 1990s with the founding of several U.S. companies dedicated to importing anime and manga not for Americanization but for their appeal as exotic foreign products. Films like *Ghost in the Shell* then regularly appeared on video-store rental shelves with little or no editorial denationalization; also, children's series like *Sailor Moon* occupied coveted after-school broadcast slots. (It should be noted that anime imported for the U.S. children's television market continues to undergo extensive editing to remove "mature" content like violence or bloodshed; Japanese signifiers, however, remain untouched.) By 2000 a children's anime series, *Pokémon*, illustrated anime's exceptional U.S. and worldwide growth. As one study of the *Pokémon* phenomenon claims, it was "the most successful computer game ever made, the top globally selling trading-card game of all time, one of the most

⁹ Fred Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2005), 28.

successful children's television programs ever broadcast, the top-grossing movie ever released in Japan, and among the five top earners in the history of films worldwide."¹⁰

Anime has been so successful—a major source of Japan's "gross national cool," as an oft-cited *Foreign Policy* article called it—that some scholars have suggested it is a potential "soft power" tool of Japanese foreign relations.¹¹ The United States is hardly the only country whose popular culture has recently experienced an infusion of "J-Pop." Anime and manga have also found receptive audiences in Italy, Germany, France, and other European countries; East and Southeast Asia; and throughout Latin America, notably in Brazil.¹² Yet, despite Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura's recent appointment of an "anime ambassador"—the popular animated robot cat Doraemon—Joseph Nye's political science concept is anachronistic in an era when cultural images and ideas flow independent of state power, not in support of it.¹³ Instead, by the turn of the twenty-first century anime served as a medium for transmitting more ambiguous images of Japaneseness to hundreds of millions around the globe.

¹⁰ Joseph Tobin, "Introduction," in *Pikachu's Global Adventure: The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*, ed. Joseph Tobin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

¹¹ Susan J. Napier, "The World of Anime Fandom in America," *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 53; Anne Allison, "The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture and Millennial Capitalism," *Mechademia* 1 (2006): 13; and Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool," *Foreign Policy* May-June 2002: 44-54.

¹² See John A. Lent, ed., *Animation in Asia and the Pacific* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Jacqueline Berndt and Steffi Richter, eds., *Reading Manga: Local and Global Perceptions of Japanese Comics* (Leipzig: Leipzig University Press, 2006); Heike Elisabeth Jüngst, "Japanese Comics in Germany," *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology* 12 (2004): 83-105; Marco Pelliteri, "Manga in Italy: The History of a Powerful Cultural Hybridization," *International Journal of Comic Art* 8 (Fall 2006): 56-76; and Sonia Luyten, *Cultura pop japonesa: mangá e animê* (São Paulo: Ed. Hedra, 2005).

¹³ "Doraemon Sworn in as Anime Ambassador," *Daily Yomiuri*, March 21, 2008.

What sort of cultural message was anime transmitting when it first arrived in the United States? As with VCRs, Koichi Iwabuchi argues that anime, like much of Japanese popular culture, is “culturally odorless.” Iwabuchi defines “culture odor” as “the way in which cultural features of a country of origin and images or ideas of its national, in most cases stereotyped, way of life are associated *positively* with a particular product in the consumption process.”¹⁴ Unlike American products, which travel abroad loaded with American ideology and symbolism, Japanese products do not. Throughout the Cold War, for example, U.S. companies like Marlboro and Levi’s sold goods in Europe using the positive iconography of the American West. Japanese products like the VCR and the Walkman, on the other hand, did not cross the Pacific in the eighties loaded with Japanese cultural values or ideology.

According to Iwabuchi, a product’s cultural odor is also associated with “racial and bodily images of a country of origin.” Thus one could assume that a product like anime, which constantly reproduces images of bodies, Japanese or otherwise, would transmit Japanese racial images as well. This is not generally the case. Iwabuchi and other scholars cite the claims of anime directors who argue that anime demonstrates the concept of *mukokuseki*, translated as “someone or something lacking nationality,” or simply, “denationalized.”¹⁵ Indeed, the uninitiated viewer often comments that the characters in anime do not “look Japanese.” Though anime today exhibits a wide range of diverse characters, a typical male protagonist drawn in the seventies or eighties might

¹⁴ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 27. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28; Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 20.

have cream-colored skin, brown hair, big and round blue eyes, and a non-descript face, while artists would typically add long eyelashes and a voluptuous figure for female protagonists. Anime's most celebrated director, Hayao Miyazaki, once cryptically attributed these vaguely Western-looking characters to the fact that "the Japanese hate their own faces," while another eminent director suggested that Japanese animators "unconsciously choose not to draw 'realistic' Japanese characters if they wish to draw attractive characters."¹⁶ Whatever the reason, anime characters lack features that non-Japanese audiences might link to ethnic Japaneseness.

This "nonculturally specific anime style," as Japanese literature scholar Susan J. Napier calls it, appealed to American audiences in the seventies and eighties because it was aesthetically transnational—its apparent nonethnic style facilitated its diffusion across borders.¹⁷ Like Sony VCRs and Honda Accords, anime could cross borders without carrying a distinct national identity. The *mukokuseki* style may have been ambiguous, yet it also subtly adhered to Western racial and gender hierarchies in its representations of male and female bodies. The representation of characters like *Yamato's* Nova, with her blonde hair and slim figure, or Shinji Ikari from the popular series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), with his brown hair and blue eyes, allowed these Japanese creations to be simultaneously Western and transnational. It is ironic, then, that so many fans tied their interest in anime to their fascination with its Japaneseness. The Japan that fans encountered on television or in club gatherings was a highly mediated one that crossed the Pacific after passing through the *mukokuseki* filter. Still, cultural odor is

¹⁶ Quoted in Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

relative to the nose of the smeller, and what seemed denationalized to a prominent anime director could smell a lot like Japan to a young person in California. It was this complicated intersection of production and consumption, the mingling of Japanese and Western aesthetics, genres, and racial and gender categories, that permitted anime to be a truly hybrid global product.

Star Blazers, a 1979 U.S. television series adapted from the early-seventies Japanese version of the aforementioned *Yamato* series, is a fitting example of anime as a globalized product. *Star Blazers* is a science-fiction epic. The SF genre lends itself to themes of transnationalism because, as in *Star Blazers*, it often envisions a future in which the divisions between “races” of the Earth pale in comparison to the divisions between intergalactic races. (Of course, viewers can read interplanetary conflicts as representative of earthly international divisions, too.) Centralized world governments are common SF tropes, accentuating planetary unity. *Star Blazers* also emphasizes moral values and narrative elements recognizable beyond Japanese borders—duty and sacrifice, war and peace, love and personal relationships, good and evil—which aided in its transition to non-Japanese locales.

Star Blazers tells the story of the *Space Battleship Yamato*, a resurrected World-War-II-era battleship reconstructed into a space weapon and charged with saving Earth.¹⁸ The *Yamato* launches to repel an invading alien force and then travels many light years away to acquire material essential to reviving the planet’s destroyed environment. The invading alien force, the Gamilon Empire, has used nuclear-like “planet bombs” to render Earth’s surface radioactive and uninhabitable. The Gamilon invasion represents two

¹⁸ *Star Blazers: The Quest for Iscandar*, DVD, produced by Westchester Films (1979; Teaneck, NJ: Voyager Entertainment, 2004).

significant issues of transnational concern in the postwar era: the threat posed by nuclear proliferation and the human destruction of the natural environment.

In transforming the Japanese series *Uchū senkan Yamato* into *Star Blazers*, Westchester Films, the U.S. production company, purposefully obscured the *Yamato*'s history. To many Japanese living in the postwar era, the name *Yamato* was reminiscent of the sacrifices of WWII and a racial self-referent. The *Yamato*, the largest battleship ever built, sunk near Okinawa in April 1945 in a suicide mission to prevent American forces from seizing the island.¹⁹ Its name derived from the mythical Yamato race from which the imperial state claimed the Japanese people descended.²⁰ In the U.S. overdubbed version (or “dub,” that is, with English-language dialogue to replace the original Japanese voice-acting), characters refer to the *Yamato* by name only in the first episode, and the fact that Japan built the battleship with the explicit intention of fighting Americans goes unmentioned. Editors also deleted scenes showing the *Yamato*'s final heroic moments fighting the U.S. Navy. (In a striking moment of lingering anti-American sentiment, the American fighter planes move in similar patterns to the enemy Gamilon, and the same ominous “bad guy” music accompanies the WWII flashback.)²¹ As the ship enters the plot, its captain tells the *Yamato*'s story: “This was a great battleship at a time when great fleets sailed the seas and there were wars among the nations of Earth. It sank in one of the last wars between countries. All wars ceased when Gamilon began bombing us.”

¹⁹ Naval Historical Center, “Japanese Navy Ships—Yamato (Battleship, 1941-1945),” Department of the Navy, <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-fornv/japan/japsh-xz/yamato.htm>.

²⁰ John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 262-290.

²¹ Walter Amos, “The Star Blazers You Didn’t See,” *Mangazine* 36 (November 1994), reproduced at <http://www.desslok.com/INFO/didntsee.htm>.

American viewers saw that, whatever the *Yamato*'s checkered past, in *Star Blazers* it represented humankind's unified military power against an invading alien force. To inaugurate a new era of international peace and cooperation, the *Yamato* is renamed the *Argo*, referencing the ship of Greek mythology's Jason and the Argonauts; *Star Blazers*' U.S. producers substituted this Western culturally-specific reference for a Japanese one.

Editors did not have to rework racial and bodily representations in *Star Blazers* for consumption by U.S. audiences. The series' nonethnic characters already reflected a Western racial hierarchy. Though the main protagonist received an Americanized name—Susumu Kodai became Derek Wildstar—his physical appearance remained unchanged from the Japanese original; he has long, flowing brown hair, a strong chin, and large round eyes. In the first episode he and his partner stumble upon a woman they describe as “beautiful”—she is tall and thin with long blonde hair, blue eyes, and pale white skin. Though drawn in a “nonculturally specific anime style,” this character still reinforces the primacy of Western aesthetic categories as the embodiment of attractiveness in anime (image 6.1).

Star Blazers first aired in syndication in several large media markets in September 1979. It differed from its 1960s anime predecessors in the United States, like *Astro Boy* and *Speed Racer*, in that its producers aimed for an audience of teenagers and young adults instead of children. It was also serialized; like a soap opera, viewers had to watch episodes consecutively or they would miss crucial plot developments. These two elements helped create a small but dedicated U.S. fan base for *Star Blazers*. Fans enamored with the series found upon investigation that *Star Blazers* derived from the long-running Japanese *Yamato* series. *Star Blazers* was thus a watershed for anime in the

United States, serving as the first series to entice fans to learn more about other Japanese animated shows. One fan, who later went on to a career in the nascent U.S. anime industry, said of *Star Blazers*, “it was my ‘poison’—the series that put me beyond any turning back.”²²



Image 6.1: Nova and Derek Wildstar from *Star Blazers*. (Courtesy Voyager Entertainment.)

²² A.C. response, November 16, 2005.

Star Blazers and the anime that followed it on U.S. television continued to undergo extensive editing to erase its Japaneseness, but they retained enough difference from common broadcast fare to hint to captivated viewers that something non-American lay behind their favorite program. Another prominent example was the popular SF series *Robotech*, which first aired in 1985.²³ Producer Carl Macek managed to amass enough episodes for U.S. syndication (which required a minimum of 65) by combining the animation from three unrelated Japanese series, writing a new script for American voice actors, and following the editorial trend of downplaying national origin. The Frankensteinian result continues to enrage anime purists, but the show attracted a significant viewing audience that also eagerly consumed associated product tie-ins like books and character models. Enthusiastic fans, like their *Star Blazers* compatriots, discovered the show's Japanese origins and used *Robotech* as something of a gateway drug to exploring other anime and connecting with fellow fans. The dean of U.S. anime fans, Fred Patten, writes that *Robotech* was “arguably the single anime title to have the greatest influence in bringing the existence of Japanese animation to the awareness of the public.”²⁴

Within a year of its initial release, *Robotech* aired in syndication in roughly 90 percent of television markets in North America, and commercials for product tie-ins were ubiquitous during after-school television hours. Ratings demographics revealed that among teenage viewers 70 percent were male, but among the coveted 18-49 age group,

²³ *Robotech: The Macross Saga*, DVD, produced by Carl Macek (1985; Houston, TX: A.D. Vision, 2001).

²⁴ Patten, 34.

53 percent of viewers were female.²⁵ Likely teenage boys watched for the fast-paced action sequences, pitting giant human-piloted robots against each other, while adult women and men appreciated the mature “space opera” storylines about friendships, romance, and the tragic social consequences of war.

Growing public awareness led to demands from nascent fan communities for more accessible anime. Fans were particularly interested in what they considered “authentic” anime, untouched by the corrupting hands of American editors, which was difficult to acquire in the United States unless one was connected to one of the national fan clubs (discussed below). The demand for authenticity inspired *Robotech* producer Macek, assisted by animation expert Jerry Beck, to launch Streamline Pictures in 1988. Streamline was the first U.S. company created to import, translate, and subtitle or overdub anime for distribution in the U.S. theater and home-video markets. One of the company’s early projects, *Akira*, became the first anime released with limited distribution in theaters in December 1989.²⁶ *Akira* also became, arguably, the most well-known anime feature-length film in the United States.²⁷

With Streamline’s adaptation of *Akira* fan communities got a more “authentic” product. The only violation of authenticity was the English-language dubbing, which Streamline produced in lieu of the subtitling preferred by fans. Otherwise, the company curbed efforts to minimize the film’s Japaneseness. The main characters’ names, Tetsuo

²⁵ “Robotech Broadcast and Ratings History,” Robotech.tv, <http://www.robotech.tv/info.php?id=history>.

²⁶ Patten, 38, 40. Patten, 39, mentions that Miyazaki’s *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* was Streamline’s first theatrical release, though it was only shown on one screen, whereas *Akira* had (very limited) national distribution on college campuses and in arthouse theaters.

²⁷ *Akira*, DVD, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo (1987; Geneon Entertainment, 2001).

and Kaneda, remain unchanged. The plot unfolds in Neo-Tokyo, and Japanese-language characters appear in the background of many scenes. Promotional posters advertised the film as an English-language adaptation of a Japanese original, and they did not hide the director's Japanese name, Katsuhiro Otomo.²⁸ Streamline advertised *Akira*'s Japaneseness, linking images of futuristic Neo-Tokyo to popular images of Japan as a futuristic utopia/dystopia from U.S. films like *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Black Rain* (1989). The film only played to small audiences on college campuses and in independent theaters, yet it gained a cult following in the early nineties thanks to a commercial release on videocassette.

Streamline marketed *Akira* specifically as a Japanese product, but the film continued to display the same transnational themes that made anime like *Star Blazers* and *Robotech* appealing beyond Japanese borders. Through the SF genre *Akira* expressed as well as any work of art the terrible global nuclear anxieties of the eighties. Its opening scene, which flashes the date "1988.7.16" in front of contemporary Tokyo moments before an atomic explosion annihilates the city, hauntingly articulates the fear and immediacy of nuclear holocaust. Otomo's dystopian vision of the future also reflects anxieties about the technological transformation of the natural environment. Tetsuo and Kaneda, members of a nihilistic motorcycle gang, ride through the crumbling streets of Neo-Tokyo, seemingly drowning in mass media, corporate advertising, and buildings that reach endlessly to the sky. Neo-Tokyo's hyper-urbanism is reminiscent of director Ridley Scott's vision of a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles in *Blade Runner*. (As homage to Scott, director Otomo also set *Akira* in the year 2019.)

²⁸ Some are available at "Paper Goods," BlueBlade Akira, <http://www.bbakira.co.uk/merchandise/paper/paper.htm>.

The film culminates in the grotesque transformation of one teenage protagonist, Tetsuo, from an adolescent outcast to a world-destroying monster. Through government experimentation Tetsuo acquires the powers of the character Akira, who had earlier attained “the power of a god” through the same government research. Tragically, Tetsuo wields this power only to destructive ends because of adolescent immaturity and foolish pride. Tetsuo’s body swells to the size of an Olympic stadium, generating another citywide nuclear catastrophe. The film then ends with characteristic anime ambiguity; from within a divine white light a voice whispers, “I am Tetsuo,” suggesting the dialectical nature of destruction and creation. American viewers might have read these climactic scenes as an allegory of Japan’s newly acquired global economic power in the eighties. In a U.S. popular discourse that often framed Japan’s postwar political and economic development in the language of maturity, one possible reading of *Akira*’s apocalyptic conclusion, once the film crossed the Pacific, was that Japan was emotionally unprepared for the consequences that accompanied extraordinary global power.²⁹

Akira set a new benchmark for artistic achievement in the Japanese medium. Yet Otomo’s creative accomplishment was more significant as a commercial turning point in the United States. Streamline’s production marked the birth of an industry that would grow exponentially in the 1990s and profit greatly from properties like *Ghost in the Shell*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Pokémon*. *Akira* was also a triumph for the U.S. fan community, which had been growing since the late 1970s. Streamline’s *Akira* and the boom of the nineties resulted from fan demands for anime that was not simplified and Americanized, anime that provided a more “authentic” Japanese cultural experience. The earlier persistence of

²⁹ On the language of maturity in postwar U.S.-Japan relations, see Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

U.S. producers to downplay anime's Japanese origins had actually intensified the fan community's insistence on the authenticity of a foreign product. Fans were able to achieve their goals because they had organized into visible cultural communities that flourished in a variety of local, national, and global spaces.

From its birth in 1977, early U.S. anime fandom's most conspicuous characteristic was its emphasis on activism within the community. Activism manifested primarily in three forms: fan clubs, conventions (or "cons"), and in the creation of an underground, self-published, English-language literature on anime. The demand for activism contributed to a unifying sense of community and permitted participants to experiment with new cultural identities. Active commitment also required vigorous imagination in order to envision national and transnational communities of shared experiences. As fans organized clubs, attended national conventions, published underground literature, and eventually conversed over the Internet, they connected local communities to global cultural trends and contributed to the globalizing of America.

Benedict Anderson first directed historians to the ways that media create communal solidarities, or "imagined communities," by connecting individuals with shared identities across vast spaces.³⁰ In *Modernity at Large*, a provocative statement on cultural globalization, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai updates Anderson's framework for a globalizing world. Since the 1970s media have become deterritorialized and are no longer reigned in by the boundaries of the nation-state—boundaries, both real and imagined, that print media had helped to define in the eighteenth and nineteenth

³⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991).

centuries, as Anderson demonstrated. The transnational media of the late twentieth century, coupled with worldwide immigration and consequent diasporic communities, have made the “work of the imagination” central to new “global subjectivity”—a new way for non-elites to think about the world and their places in it.³¹ In other words, as a result of cultural globalization people have been able to envision communities that shape group identities and claim individual loyalties while transcending national borders. Appadurai provides insight into the way anime fans’ global subjectivity manifested in the imagining of new cultural communities at the national and transnational levels. While there was nothing “imaginary” about local fan clubs that met in person, much cultural work went into the process of envisioning connections, material or not, to communities around the world.

Fan clubs, cons, and underground literature from this period illustrated fans’ conscious efforts to define anime as a distinct cultural category, to develop knowledge about the medium and its relationship to Japanese culture, and to construct boundaries to mark the territory in which legitimate fan behavior could take place. Like the “media fans” that Henry Jenkins describes in his seminal work, *Textual Poachers* (1992), anime fans were “spectators who transform[ed] the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture.”³² Fandom maintained the “function of an interpretive community” and the “status of an alternative community,” allowing participants a space in which to critically and communally engage anime texts.³³ This “work of the

³¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1-3.

³² Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 23.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

imagination” often took place with an oppositional attitude toward mainstream U.S. entertainment media, though it would be unwise to assume a simplistic, binary mainstream-vs.-underground tension—after all, without *Star Wars*’ unprecedented mainstream success, *Star Blazers* would have found neither a producer nor an audience when it did.

Early anime fandom matured in a political climate frequently hostile to Japanese economic growth, yet it also bloomed in a consumer culture more ambivalent toward Japanese products like automobiles and VCRs. In this context, the promotion of anime as a Japanese object could be an act of resistance to mainstream political culture, though the construction of fan communities as nonpolitical spaces made such resistance largely implicit. Rather than being indicative of a political attitude, the consumption of anime was instead one small part of a nuanced U.S.-Japan relationship that took the form of a trade conflict at the international level but manifested in the acquisition and consumption of hundreds of millions of goods at the level of the individual consumer. The heated rhetoric of the “trade wars” obscured the fact that Americans desired Japanese products.

The construction of fan communities began in local settings with the organization of fan clubs. The first club dedicated exclusively to anime was the Cartoon/Fantasy Organization (C/FO), founded in May 1977 by several Los Angeles-area fans who had all previously attended meetings of the popular Los Angeles Science Fiction Society (LASFS). The C/FO met monthly to watch episodes of English-language commercial anime from the sixties, like *Astro Boy* and *Gigantor*, and newer series like *Star Blazers* and *Battle of the Planets*. Occasionally they watched videotape copies of Japanese-language anime that aired on local cable access stations. (It was the availability of

relatively inexpensive VCRs on the consumer market after 1975 that facilitated the consumption of these rarely broadcast programs. Had the media studies scholars discussed in chapter 5 discovered anime fans in the 1980s, they would have stumbled upon a rare group of American using the device to its full cultural potential.)³⁴

Around 1979 the LASFS began to receive requests from Japanese SF fans for videotaped copies of popular U.S. series like *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galactica*. The C/FO responded to the call by sending copies of those programs in exchange for tapes of untranslated, unsubtitled anime recorded from broadcast television in Japan. This transpacific exchange provided fans access to “pure,” unedited anime. None of the C/FO members understood Japanese; nevertheless, one fan says that interest in the videos was so high that club members “were willing to watch them and guess what the dialogue was about.”³⁵ Far from discouraging screenings, the language barrier contributed to anime’s appeal because it accentuated anime’s difference from the popular U.S. media that fans were accustomed to consuming.

From humble origins the C/FO expanded by the late eighties to nearly three dozen chapters in major cities like New York and Chicago and unexpected locations across the rural Midwest and South.³⁶ The locations of fans from the period demonstrated the varied places that Americanized commercial anime reached in syndication in the seventies and eighties. Of course, the California and New York markets had stations airing anime, particularly on local-access Japanese-community stations where Japanese immigrant

³⁴ A useful history of the VCR is Frederick Wasserman, *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

³⁵ Fred Patten response, October 28, 2005.

³⁶ J.B. response, November 2, 2005; T.B. response, November 6, 2005; A.C. response, November 16, 2005.

populations thrived. More surprisingly, more than one station in rural Oklahoma aired *Star Blazers*.³⁷ Local stations in rural areas were not motivated by a sense of cosmopolitanism to purchase syndication rights to these programs; they were, simply, cheap content. But where commercial anime like *Star Blazers* established a beachhead, fan communities began to take root, interested in more than just the anime available in syndication. Fans could then make contact with a C/FO chapter to join or to get information on forming a new local chapter.

Many fans also participated in large clubs independent of the C/FO, like Rhode Island's Anime Hasshin club, which had over four hundred members on six continents at its peak and boasted that it was the "largest international anime fan club of its time."³⁸ The independent Boston Japanimation Society, which still meets today, also had a sizable presence in fan networks and at conventions in the Northeast.³⁹ It is important to keep in mind that the C/FO, Anime Hasshin, and other similar clubs were large, record-keeping organizations with officers who scheduled meetings and kept track of dues payments, membership rolls, budgets, and inventories. Countless less formal gatherings also occurred in domestic spaces across the country.

Fans labeled large but informal meetings outside the scope of clubs, "disorganized fandom." Some fans were dismayed by what they saw as the petty politics of clubs like the C/FO, which controlled the distribution of underground non-commercial anime. In November 1985 a San Francisco Bay Area resident founded A.N.I.M.E. (Animation of

³⁷ T.B. response, November 6, 2005; B.M. response, November 15, 2005.

³⁸ L.S. response, November 14, 2005.

³⁹ This group is mentioned in *The Rose: Newsletter of Hasshin RI* 1, no. 1 (January 1987): 2.

Inter-Mediary Exchange) as an informal gathering space for fans. Within two years A.N.I.M.E. grew to a “monthly barbeque-and-video-watching party of sometimes 200 fans from all over Northern California.”⁴⁰ The parties were “a great departure from organized fandom,” said one fan, an alternative for “fans who were totally disgusted by organized fandom and its power-tripping Secret Masters.”⁴¹ (The national C/FO organization broke apart in the late eighties due to squabbles over control of and access to underground anime videocassettes.) Even though fans of the “disorganized” variety chose to avoid local club politics, they nevertheless participated in the imagined community of fandom. In fact, one proud participant in disorganized fandom started the first successful anime discussion network on the Internet, a mailing list dedicated to the series *Urusei Yatsura*, a “slice-of-life” comedy which fans could only acquire through underground videotape-copying networks.⁴²

The remarkable system of exchange and distribution that early anime fans utilized demonstrated the interconnectedness between local communities and the global flow of culture. One U.S.-Japan anime pipeline began with U.S. military personnel at C/FO Rising Sun, a club chapter at Misawa Air Force Base in northern Japan. The club videotaped anime broadcast on Japanese television and mailed these copies to fan acquaintances in San Francisco. A distribution network based in the Bay Area then made multiple copies and sent them to C/FO chapters throughout the United States.⁴³ Many

⁴⁰ Patten, 35.

⁴¹ M.C., “A Brief History of rec.arts.anime,” Eyrie Archives, <http://archives.eyrie.org/anime/00HISTORY.gz>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ This particular pipeline is recounted in a paper on copyright law, Sean Leonard, “Progress Against the Law: Fan Distribution, Copyright, and the Explosive Growth of Japanese Animation,”

other similar pipelines existed. Marc Carlson acquired episodes of *Maison Ikkoku* and other anime from a friend in Japan and shared these at A.N.I.M.E. meetings.⁴⁴ Canadian fan Tom Edwards was so enthusiastic about building the library of his fan club, J.A.C. Victoria, that he purchased a second VCR and a computer, to connect to other anime fans at universities, and began copying and distributing videotapes throughout North America.⁴⁵ Laura Whittier in Sacramento received videocassettes from an American military friend stationed in Okinawa; she then duplicated and dispensed these throughout the C/FO network.⁴⁶ Tape exchange was by and large a nonprofit affair. Often only a blank videocassette and postage reimbursement were necessary, especially if a fan was a dues-paying club member. The goal was not to violate copyright or intellectual property laws but to distribute anime and expand the U.S. fan community. (In fact, an unwritten rule in the fan community today is that fans are expected to cease distributing Japan-only anime once a U.S. company purchases the North American distribution rights.)

The videocassettes traded via underground networks contrasted considerably with the commercial anime that had enticed fans on U.S. broadcast television. Dialogue was in the original Japanese, there were no subtitles, and underground anime were uncorrupted by American editors and censors. While SF anime like *Mobile Suit Gundam* were among the favorites of fans hooked by programs like *Star Blazers*, non-SF underground series like *Urusei Yatsura* and *Maison Ikkoku* were popular because they dealt with daily life in

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 12 September 2004,
<http://web.mit.edu/seantek/www/papers/progress-columns.pdf>.

⁴⁴ M.C. response, November 1, 2005.

⁴⁵ T.E. response, November 14, 2005.

⁴⁶ L.W. response, November 4, 2005.

contemporary Japan from comical, romantic, or nostalgic perspectives. These series attracted fans interested in anime specifically for its Japaneseness, i.e., its representation of a particular national culture.

Despite the fact that so few of the fans understood Japanese, the appetite for these underground tapes was insatiable. Some fans were “annoyed” by the language barrier and decided that the next logical step was “to actually try to go out and learn the language—which I did.”⁴⁷ (Some of those that did so early were fortunate to launch careers when the U.S. anime industry boomed in the nineties.) Some fans used anime as an excuse to learn Japanese, but most had neither the resources nor the time to dedicate to learning a new language. Even Fred Patten, who spent decades running fan clubs like the C/FO, amassing an enormous anime and manga collection, and speaking publicly on behalf of the fan community, never learned to speak or read Japanese fluently.⁴⁸ On the other hand, while earning two engineering degrees from Johns Hopkins University, Sharon Stapleton taught herself Japanese for the noble purpose of translating anime for her fellow fans. She typed translations and distributed them through mail order, charging only enough to recover printing and shipping costs.⁴⁹ Once again, the emphasis was on global community, not commerce.

Clubs adopted a variety of practices to deal with the language barrier. Often those familiar with a program’s plot or with some Japanese language skills would shout out summaries of what was happening onscreen. “Other times,” recalled one fan, “the tension

⁴⁷ R.A.W. response, November 14, 2005.

⁴⁸ Fred Patten response, October 28, 2005.

⁴⁹ C.S.S. response, November 14, 2005.

or comedy would cause viewers to start ‘filling in the dialog’ that was missing with their own version, out-loud,” which gave club gatherings a feeling of public ritual and aided the work of the imagination that enabled fans to “think up my own dialog for stories that had no translation available.”⁵⁰ Henry Jenkins, observing a U.S. fan club dedicated to the live-action program *Beauty and the Beast*, noted a similar phenomenon when the club attended a French-only screening of several episodes. According to Jenkins, “mutual assistance was required to decipher the narrative content since none of the members was fluent in French. The members were encouraged to ‘shout out’ if they could make sense of any of the words...; there was ongoing speculation about what was happening on the screen.”⁵¹ As with anime, the act of interpreting the foreign was a communal effort.

With linguistic obstacles placed in the way of understanding content, the medium of anime became the message. Club gatherings were as much about the communal activities of watching, interpreting, and participating as they were about anime’s content. Viewing occurred in a social environment of like-minded individuals, not in the privacy of one’s home, contributing to the social construction of a distinct community. As one fan insightfully commented, “It was... comfortable to view these shows with the same ‘characters’ in the audience constantly. There is a social aspect that can and had caused the club members to accept one another, without too much judgment. We were all being sort of ‘weird, together.’”⁵² More than just opportunities for entertainment, then, clubs became real communities, complete with norms and behaviors expected of members. The

⁵⁰ S.P. response, November 13, 2005.

⁵¹ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 76.

⁵² S.P. response, November 13, 2005.

sense of local community embodied in clubs fostered the social cohesion necessary to envision larger national and transnational networks of shared interest, especially since connections with fans outside the United States were more imagined than real. Sharing one's couch, then, turned a domestic space into a site a global engagement.

The work of the cultural imagination continued at the regional and national level at cons, where anime fans congregated for one or several days' worth of interaction. One fan described cons as "a buffet/smorgasbord of ideas, philosophies and beliefs, but in a friendly environment of mutual respect."⁵³ During the eighties enthusiastic fans traveled to SF and comic-book conventions throughout the country with VCRs and anime tapes in hand. Anime screenings, often staged in small rented hotel rooms with a VCR and a handful of con attendees, introduced the medium to new fans. In 1981 a group of fans based in the New York metropolitan area established the "Gamilon Embassy" (named for the "bad guys" of *Star Blazers*) with the mission of traveling to cons in the Northeast and publicizing anime to SF audiences.⁵⁴ At bigger conventions, like BayCon '86, which boasted an eighty-hour anime marathon, anime was shown twenty-four hours a day.⁵⁵ (Today, large annual anime cons in the United States welcome attendees numbering in the tens of thousands.)⁵⁶ The popular practice of cosplay, or attending a con costumed as a favorite anime character, also emphasized the participatory nature of the anime fan community. Participants could spend dozens of hours assembling elaborate homemade

⁵³ J.J. response, November 16, 2005.

⁵⁴ Patten, 29.

⁵⁵ "Japanese Animation Program Guide," a Smith/Graham/Johnson production for BayCon '86, photocopy from the private collection of Lorraine Savage.

⁵⁶ See the list of anime conventions at AnimeCons.com, <http://www.animecons.com>.

costumes. Cosplay was another debt to SF fandom—it was the “Trekkies” (or “Trekkers,” as some preferred) who dressed up like Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock that made cosplay a con institution in the seventies.⁵⁷

The final facet of anime fandom that emphasized community activism was the creation of an underground literature. When I asked fans from this period, somewhat naively, what underground anime literature they had read, I did not expect so many to respond instead with the titles of “fanzines,” club newsletters, and amateur press associations (APAs) to which they contributed. Fans provided artwork, news updates, gossip, reviews, and fan fiction, a style borrowed from SF fandom wherein authors wrote their own stories about anime (or fictional universes like that of *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*) that already existed.⁵⁸ The successful APA *Bird Scramble!*, for example, published fan-authored stories about characters from the late-seventies series *Battle of the Planets*, adapted from the Japanese *Gatchaman*. An APA, which functioned as a precursor to Internet message boards, required that every subscriber contribute something to the publication; hence one could not receive *Bird Scramble!* if one did not participate. What Jenkins says of television fans of the period applies equally to underground anime publishing: “Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raided mass culture, claiming its materials for their own use, reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions.”⁵⁹ Participation in the creation of an English-language anime literature provided an opportunity to actively

⁵⁷ See Lincoln Geraghty, *Living with Star Trek: American Culture and the Star Trek Universe* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2007).

⁵⁸ For examples of *Star Blazers* fan fiction, see Frederick P. Kopetz, ed., “Visions: Virtual Fanzine,” <http://visions.comet-empire.com> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁵⁹ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 18.

engage in creative cultural work and reinforced the social commitment required to be a part of the fan community.

The Rose, the newsletter for the Hasshin RI (later Anime Hasshin) fan club, serves as an example of the underground literature produced in the first years of local underground publishing.⁶⁰ The first issue of *The Rose* stated that the “purpose of Hasshin RI is to circulate information about Japanimation as it comes to us and to show Japanese animation.”⁶¹ In just three years the newsletter grew in size from ten pages to twenty-five, illustrating the concurrent growth in knowledge about anime in the United States and proving Hasshin RI successful in its original goals. The improvement in size, paper quality, artwork, and density of information from issue 1 (January 1987) to issue 19 (January 1990) was significant.

The nineteenth issue celebrated *The Rose*’s third anniversary. It dedicated nearly a third of its pages to networking with the national and global anime fan community. It contained encouragement for contributions, merchandise for sale, news about other national clubs, and addresses for clubs, media, and club members.⁶² Features like short synopses of various anime series, a word puzzle, and a page with lessons on Japanese vocabulary typified the efforts of fans to expand the boundaries of the U.S. knowledge base. It also reflected fan interests in learning more about the culture that produced anime, as reflected in the vocabulary lesson page from the nineteenth issue (image 6.2).

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Lorraine Savage, editor of *The Rose*, for providing copies of issues of the newsletter from 1987 to 1990.

⁶¹ *The Rose* 1, no. 1 (January 1987): 2.

⁶² *The Rose* 4, no. 19 (January 1990).

NIHONGO LESSON: 4

by L S

kore – this	koko – here
sore – that	soko – there
dore – which	doko – where
dare – who	naze – why
itsu – when	ikura – how much

Hon wa doko desu ka?
Book (object) where is (question)?
Where is the book?

Kore wa dare desu ka?
Who is this (person)?

Kore wa seito desu.
This is a pupil.

Kono kimono wa ikura desu ka?
How much is this kimono?

VOCABULARY

dō itashimashite – you're welcome
gaikokujin – foreigner
hajime – beginning
hikōki – airplane
kaizoku – pirate
kao – face
kasei – Mars (lit. fire planet)
korosu – to kill, murder
ohashi – chopsticks
sō desu – oh, well
tabi – journey
tegami – letter
tokei – clock
tomodachi – friend
tsubasa, hane – wings
uchū – space, universe
yūsei – planet

ichi-gatsu – January (lit. one moon)
ni-gatsu – February (two moon)
san-gatsu – March (three moon)
shi-gatsu – April
go-gatsu – May
roku-gatsu – June
shichi-gatsu – July
hachi-gatsu – August
ku-gatsu – September
jū-gatsu – October
jūichi-gatsu – November
jūni-gatsu – December (twelve moon)

getsu-yōbi – Monday (lit. moon day)
ka-yōbi – Tuesday (fire day)
sui-yōbi – Wednesday (water day)
moku-yōbi – Thursday (tree day)
kin-yōbi – Friday (money/gold day)
do-yōbi – Saturday (land day)
nichi-yōbi – Sunday (sun day)

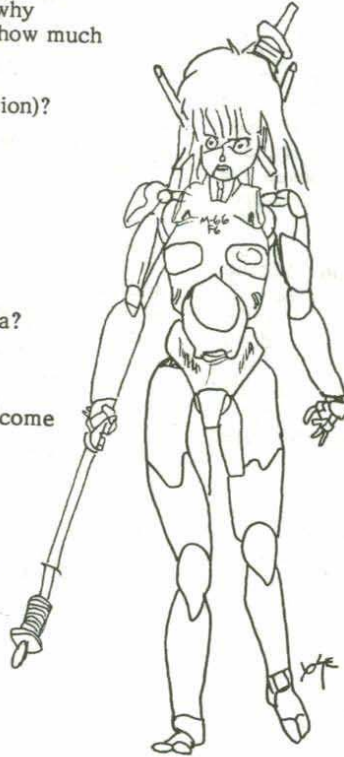


Image 6.2: Japanese vocabulary lessons and fan artwork from *The Rose*, 1990. (Courtesy

Lorraine Savage.)

The May 1989 issue demonstrated explicitly the way anime fans envisioned their community through underground literature. A map, prefaced by the comforting words, “You are not alone!,” pinpointed the location of every known anime fan club, totaling forty-six, in the United States (image 6.3). The editors encouraged readers: “Don’t be shy, write to these clubs... and make new anime friends.” Through this map, an artifact of the global imagination, anime fans envisioned a national community that traversed vast open spaces to connect groups with shared cultural affinities.

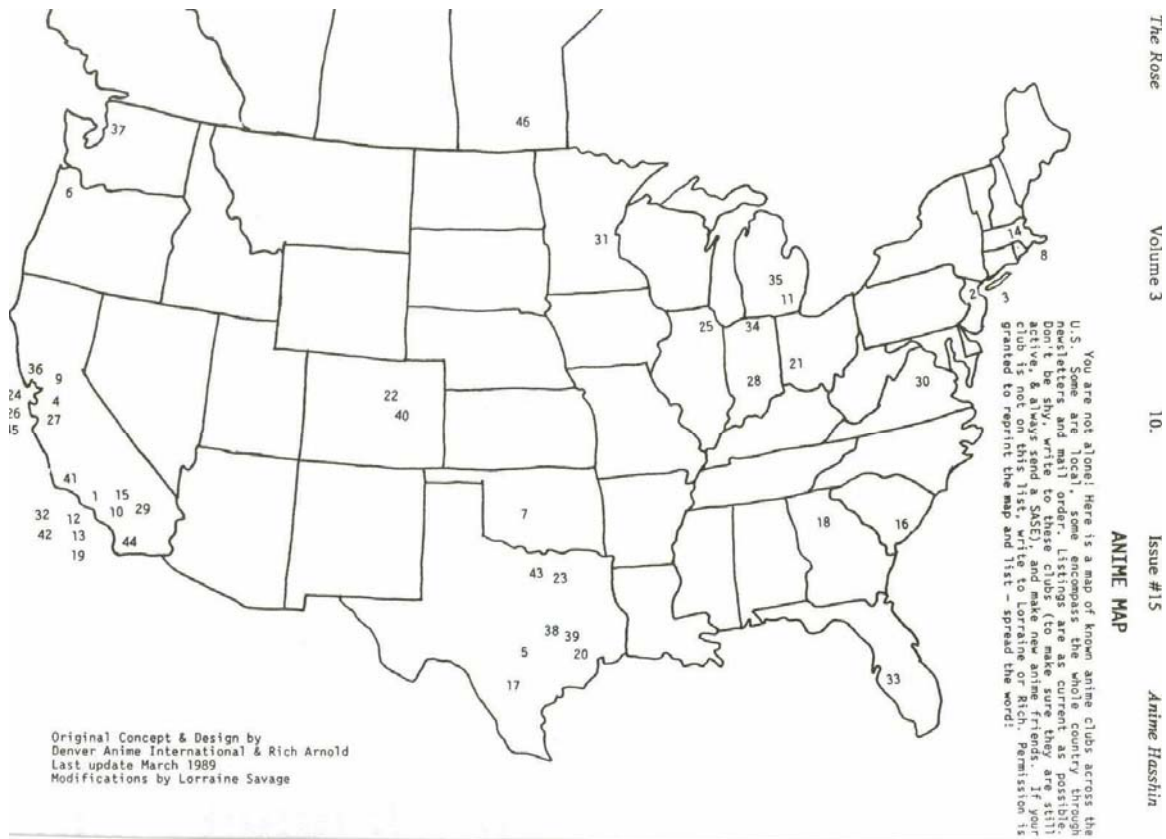


Image 6.3: *The Rose*’s map of anime fan clubs, with the comforting words, “You are not alone!” (Courtesy Lorraine Savage.)

The Rose also provides insight into fans' demands for cultural authenticity. Most discussion space of particular anime was dedicated to underground, Japanese-language anime and, because of either the language barrier or the feeling of authenticity these anime provided, reviews were uncritical. Contributors reserved their venom for U.S. producers' corruption of "pure" anime. Donald Morris, reviewing Carl Macek's post-*Robotech* union of two popular anime, *Captain Harlock* and *Queen Millennia*, referred to the end result, *Captain Harlock and the Queen of 1,000 Years*, as an "ANIMATED ABORTION."⁶³ Karl Waters criticized the infamous English adaptation of Hayao Miyazaki's classic *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, titled *Warriors of the Wind*, for reducing the two-hour original to ninety minutes and for obscuring the poignancy of the environmentalist message of the original.⁶⁴ On the other hand, commercially imported anime had potential to satisfy fans, much like the English adaptation of Miyazaki's *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (a Streamline production), if it appeared that the importers strived to maintain the integrity of the original. Ted Peterson wrote, "The English version is uncut. None of the names were changed. The translation, as nearly as I can tell, is quite faithful to the original."⁶⁵ (Exactly how he could tell was not clear.) By 1990 fans praised U.S. production companies that responded to their demands by leaving anime as unchanged as practically possible, as Streamline did with *Akira*.

By the nineties underground newsletters like *The Rose* gave way to two trends in anime fan communication: professional magazines and, more importantly, the Internet.

⁶³ *The Rose* 2, no. 9 (May 1988): 5-6, pseudonym.

⁶⁴ *The Rose* 2, no. 11 (September 1988): 4-5, pseudonym.

⁶⁵ *The Rose* 3, no. 15 (May 1989): 5, pseudonym.

The Usenet newsgroup rec.arts.anime signaled an important moment in the transnationalizing of U.S. anime culture.⁶⁶ As one fan stated, rec.arts.anime “was more or less a global forum,” though until the early nineties access was limited to Americans, Japanese, and Europeans at universities linked to the Internet.⁶⁷ The newsgroup launched in January 1988 under the initiative of one of the founders of A.N.I.M.E.⁶⁸ Message traffic was slow at first, but it exploded in late 1989 with, ironically, the release of Disney’s successful animated film, *The Little Mermaid*. The resulting high volume of messages about U.S. animation instigated debates about the definition of anime, why it should be restricted only to Japanese animation, and why it deserved its own newsgroup distinct from all other forms of animation.

A 1988 challenge to rec.art.anime’s subject matter witnessed a group of subscribers attempt to create a separate newsgroup to discuss only animation produced in the United States. They claimed that rec.arts.anime “was felt to be too biased towards Japanimation,” which one contributor derisively called “Jap Warrior Robot shows.”⁶⁹ (One fan also admitted that the new newsgroup had “become necessary in order to prevent friction over nationalistic issues.”)⁷⁰ This discussion reflected the developing perception among fans that anime was a unique cultural category that deserved to be distinguished from dissimilar U.S. media. It also illustrated the establishment of an

⁶⁶ The website for the rec.arts.anime archive is <http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.anime/about>.

⁶⁷ D.B. response, November 19, 2008.

⁶⁸ M.C., “A Brief History of rec.arts.anime.”

⁶⁹ “OFFICIAL Proposal for creation of Rec.Arts.Cartoons,” rec.arts.anime, September 22, 1988; “FINAL CALL FOR VOTES—Creation of Rec.Arts.Cartoons,” rec.arts.anime, October 22, 1988.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

“other”—U.S. entertainment—that anime fans used to define their own identity. The more often fans discussed U.S. popular culture, the better they were able to articulate anime’s expression of cultural difference.

The attitudes that manifested in public debates about the rise of Japanese economic power were visible in these online arguments and ruminated within the larger anime subculture, illustrating that fans’ interests frequently ran counter not only to U.S. mainstream entertainment but also popular political attitudes. While fans from the period recall clubs as explicitly nonpolitical spaces, fan activism on behalf of a Japanese product was an implicit statement of cultural politics at a time when labor unions directed “Buy American” campaigns and United Auto Workers smashed Toyotas with sledgehammers at union picnics.⁷¹ Such overt “Japan bashing” was inherently incompatible with the attitudes of the fans that enjoyed anime precisely for its Japaneseness. “Buy American” campaigns were rooted in economic nationalism, while anime fandom required a more cosmopolitan, globalized worldview, one that embraced positive cultural representations of Japan at a time when such representations were more uncommon than not.

In fact, anime fandom encouraged enthusiasts to explore Japanese history and culture more intimately. Some of the early fans mentioned above used anime as a first step toward learning the Japanese language. (Many college students in Japanese language courses today say that anime and manga inspired them to register; tellingly, after several semesters of instruction those same students say that their interests in Japan and its

⁷¹ See Dana Frank, *Buy American: The Untold Story of Economic Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 160-186.

culture have grown more varied and sophisticated.)⁷² In August 1986 a group of thirty California fans from several C/FO chapters organized a trip to Japan, dubbed “Japanimation ’86,” to meet animators, visit production studios, attend the Japanese National Science Fiction Convention, and shop for anime-themed merchandise in Tokyo and Osaka.⁷³ Japanimation ’86 was the first trip of its kind and a rare face-to-face encounter during this period between anime’s Japanese producers and American consumers, and also between Japanese and American fans. The intercultural anime relationship more often took place in the mediated realm of consumption and imagination. Anime tourism like Japanimation ’86 has grown significantly in the last two decades, however, with fans from across the globe flocking to the Akihabara district of Tokyo for total immersion in Japanese anime, manga, and video-game culture.

There are several precedents to anime’s U.S. expansion. It is possible to compare transpacific anime encounters to the European and American *japonisant* artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the American Zen Buddhists of the 1950s. For example, Lafcadio Hearn, the Greek-born American writer who fell in love with Japan in the late nineteenth century, spent the last decade and a half of his life there. Also, beat poet Gary Snyder traveled widely across Japan in the 1950s, absorbed in the

⁷² This was the topic of a panel titled “Anime, Youth Culture, and Identity,” at the 2006 International Conference on Asian Comics, Animation, and Gaming (York University, Toronto, ON, May 18-19, 2006). Two papers particularly spoke to this point: Annie Manion, “Discovering Japan: Anime and Learning Japanese Culture”; and Masako Hamada, “What Anime Can Teach Us about Japanese and American Cultures.” See Ae-Ri Yoon, “Conference Review: The First International Conference on Asian Comics, Animation, and Gaming (ACAG),” *Animation 1* (November 2006): 252-255.

⁷³ Patten, 35-36; David Blume, “David’s Life Story,” <http://home.dlma.com/DavidBlume.html>.

study of Zen Buddhism.⁷⁴ Anime's U.S. boom, though, has become more widespread than these two instances because it has benefited from the global proliferation of inexpensive media technologies, one aspect of Thomas Friedman's provocative argument about the "flattening" of the world that has enabled more people than ever to participate in global cultural and economic activities.⁷⁵ As such the U.S. anime experience has also been a highly mediated phenomenon, and most early U.S. anime fans accepted a mediated Japan through the consumption of anime texts, unlike Hearn or Snyder, who embraced Japaneseness by actually visiting Japan. Indeed, it was possible to be an anime fan and have never met a Japanese person—not an unlikely scenario in the vast spaces between the U.S. coasts. Yet contact with Japan or Japanese has not necessarily implied cultural authenticity; as Edward Said famously demonstrated, traveling to "the East" did not preclude a writer from reproducing the most malevolent strains of Orientalism.⁷⁶

Anime devotees were instead likely the cultural successors to the early twentieth-century middle-class white women whom Mari Yoshihara describes. Such women "embraced the East" by consuming Asian objects, making the women "agents of the culture of Orientalism without their having to physically travel to the Orient."⁷⁷ The consumption of underground anime enabled fans to adopt a representation of Japan at once unmediated by elite ideological structures of Western Orientalism yet mediated

⁷⁴ For this comparison see Susan J. Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 84-90.

⁷⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

⁷⁶ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

⁷⁷ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18.

through a border-crossing technology of cultural representation. Still, if anime's *mukokuseki* style has been influenced by Western racial and gender representations, then American viewers were consuming texts already infused with Orientalist ideology. This complicated and indistinct "Möbius strip" of representation, transmission, and consumption defined how U.S. fans consumed anime's Japaneseness.⁷⁸

Another precedent in the history of U.S.-Japan cultural exchange is baseball. Anime is to the United States what baseball is to Japan—a transplant that has established a foothold in the landscape of a foreign national popular culture. Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu and Thomas W. Zeiler have each chronicled baseball's journey to Japan and around the rest of the globe as one early instance of U.S. cultural globalization.⁷⁹ After more than a century of cultural exchange and adaptation, according to Zeiler, "baseball (rather than sumo) can be considered Japan's national pastime."⁸⁰ Japanese players have excelled so much in recent years that American sports fans regularly cite the names of all-stars like Ichiro Suzuki, Hideki Matsui, and Kosuke Fukudome. Perhaps in time, considering baseball's one-century head start, anime fandom could become a pastime of similar popularity and meaning in the United States.

The anime phenomenon in the United States is also not unique in terms of the local effects of contemporary cultural globalization. Another example is the growing popularity of Bhangra, a colorful and energetic style of Indian music and dance with

⁷⁸ Kelts, 42, suggests the Möbius strip analogy as a way of describing the cross-cultural exchange of ideas and images in the production of animation.

⁷⁹ Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu, "For Love of the Game: Baseball in Early U.S.-Japanese Encounters and the Rise of a Transnational Sporting Fraternity," *Diplomatic History* 28 (November 2004): 637-662; Thomas W. Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁸⁰ Zeiler, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*, 189.

roots in the Punjab region. Indian popular cultural exports like Bollywood films have accumulated increasingly larger audiences in the United States in the last two decades, even among Americans not of South Asian descent. Bhangra dancing, though, is closer in nature to the anime phenomenon in the way that its popularity hinges on active participation in the creation of new transnational cultural identities and communities. As with anime fans, some of the earliest organizing occurred on college campuses. In 1995 the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., hosted a local Bhangra dance competition for college teams. Today the competition has grown into the annual “Bhangra Blowout,” which brings together eight “elite” college teams chosen from more than forty applicants. Though most of the competitors are children or grandchildren of South Asian immigrants, white and African American students also participate.⁸¹

Bhangra dance teams have dealt with some of the same questions of cultural globalization that anime fans have confronted. For example, what makes a global cultural product or practice “authentic”? When young people in the United States first discovered Bhangra in the early nineties, they incorporated it into cultural practices with which they were already familiar, like break dancing and hip hop. As college students started forming dance teams, however, they organized these new communities around the principle of cultural difference, highlighting the non-Americanness of Bhangra and promoting its “traditional” Indian characteristics. Dance teams in the last few years have made it their goal to “dance as authentically and traditionally as possible,” and such

⁸¹ Traditional Folk Dance Modernized,” *Morning Edition*, NPR News, February 20, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=19188862>.

criteria factor into competition judging.⁸² Echoing the fears of early anime fans, one college student lamented, “Bhangra has gotten so much exposure, but we kind of lose what’s authentic.”⁸³

Like anime, the popularity of Bhangra shows that not only has cultural globalization created heterogeneity—the proliferation of cultural difference—but it has been created by the efforts of countless non-elites acting at a local level to pull the global into the United States. Such developments illustrate Charles Bright and Michael Geyer’s point about the heterogeneity of cultural globalization and present an important counternarrative to the story of global cultural homogenization generated by hegemonic capitalist corporations. “Far from fostering a homogenization of the world,” Bright and Geyer write, “globalization has made the production of difference... a much more proximate and intimate affair.”⁸⁴ Bhangra dancers and anime fans in the United States have made the “production of difference” a communal ambition within the domestic space of the very empire so often accused of practicing a homogenizing cultural imperialism abroad.

Historians can use the examples of anime, Bhangra, and other foreign products and practices to draw conclusions about the ways in which cultural globalization has transformed the United States. The story of America’s globalizing moment usually rests on the actions of government, corporate, or nongovernmental organizations; in the cases of anime and Bhangra, however, cultural globalization would not have occurred without

⁸² S. Mitra Kalita, “Dancing Between Cultures and Having a Great Time,” *Washington Post*, April 12, 2004.

⁸³ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Bright and Geyer, “Where in the World Is America?,” 69.

the ambitions and actions of local non-elites disconnected from all three conventional globalizing institutions. The important actors in anime's story were postal clerks, computer technicians, college students, and anonymous middle-class women and men with no professional training in the arts of international relations and communication. Multinational corporations play a central role in the history of globalization in the postwar era, but with anime's global boom cultural globalization was a process driven from below.

The technological tools of contemporary globalization have facilitated Bhangra's popularity as well as the attractiveness of other global products and practices. Without the Internet, many U.S. practitioners of Bhangra would have no access to videos of "authentic" Indian dancing. Without inexpensive media technologies like the VCR, progenitor of the DVD player and YouTube, much of the world would not know of the Hong Kong action cinema of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan or the vibrant worlds of Bollywood film. And without advancements in rapid and inexpensive air transportation, coupled with new refrigeration technologies, cosmopolitans the world over would not feast on sushi, a truly global delicacy.⁸⁵

Finally, anime's border crossing and its popular consequences reveal a different side of life in "Reagan's America." The idea that Ronald Reagan defined both domestic society and foreign relations in the 1980s is a historiographic misconception.⁸⁶ The

⁸⁵ On the globalization of sushi see Sasha Issenberg, *The Sushi Economy: Globalization and the Making of a Modern Delicacy* (New York: Gotham, 2007).

⁸⁶ For example, see Gary Wills, *Reagan's America: Innocents at Home* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005); Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008).

simplistic narrative transition from Jimmy Carter's "malaise" to Reagan's "morning again in America" obscures the complexity of life in an era when Americans were engaging social and cultural developments independent of traditional institutions of state politics and power. Some people looked beyond the culture of the late Cold War, beyond Reagan, and even beyond the borders of the United States to the globalizing of America.

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE – BACK TO THE FUTURE: JAPAN IN GLOBAL AMERICA, 2008

Japan's frustration over its fall from global economic superpowerdom is neatly summed up in a question heard in Japan in the last several years: "How come we weren't the ones who invented the iPod?"¹

The question illustrates a central point of this dissertation: there was a time when Japan provided the world with the consumer goods that changed the way people went about their lives, that pointed toward a future of global cultural and economic connectivity. Today's Apple iPod, a tiny music player with sleek surfaces and a bright, colorful screen, is the apogee of mass consumer chic, famous as much for its habit-altering ability to put thousands of songs in one's hand as it is for its cutting-edge marketing techniques. The iPod (and its newest incarnation, the iPhone) is now the cultural icon of connectedness, an object teens in Tennessee or merchants in Malaysia flaunt as a signifier of cosmopolitanism. For Japanese conscious of their country's meteoric rise from the early 1970s, it is difficult to stomach that thirty years ago the iPod would have been made in Japan.

In a sense the iPod *was* made in Japan nearly thirty years ago. Apple's device is the latest iteration in a line of personal media tools derived from Sony's Walkman, which first became available in 1979. Like Apple, Sony sold the device as more than just another consumer gadget; it was an object that could radically reshape one's daily existence, providing the user with a new way of interacting with the world. One of the

¹ Christian Caryl, "Why Apple Isn't Japanese," *Newsweek*, International edition, December 10, 2007.

first Walkman advertisements emphasized the break with the past: a young blonde woman with a Walkman and headphones roller-skates in front of a Japanese man dressed in the traditional robes of a monk.² He looks bewildered, she sings obliviously, and the past gazes at the future rolling by.

American-based companies like Apple and Google today are lauded for “fusing innovative technology with great marketing, design and distribution to create entirely new product categories.”³ As chapter 5 illustrated, such a business model was virtually the monopoly of Japanese companies like Sony and Matsushita in the early 1980s, whether the Walkman or the VCR was the beneficiary. The VCR’s capabilities, coupled with creative marketing, excited populations across the planet to its transformative potentials. But the very economic and cultural processes that Japanese corporations helped implement—those we today call “globalization”—broke the monopoly of global cultural innovation, encouraged technological creativity beyond Japan, and pushed production into cheap labor markets. The Apple iPod—manufactured in China, “Designed by Apple in California,” as the inscription on each one notes, and distributed with a user manual with no printed language, only instructional images—is an icon of globalization.⁴ It is also a material testament to Japan as a globalizing pioneer.

An elegy for the Walkman, and all of Japan, would be premature, however. Sony still makes its personal music device, though it has increasingly come to mimic the iPod. The Japanese electronics giants of three decades ago continue to sell millions of products

² Image reproduced in Paul Du Gay, et al., eds., *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 9.

³ Caryl, “Why Apple Isn’t Japanese.”

⁴ Petra Goedde alerted me to this characteristic of iPod user manuals. Assembly instructions for furniture sold by the Sweden-based company Ikea also have no written languages.

across the globe, though those products are almost all made outside Japan now. Sony and Nintendo are two of the three giants monopolizing the nearly \$20 billion annual video game industry.⁵ While the U.S. automobile industry only seems to have bad news, Toyota and Honda have grown. In 2007 Toyota overtook General Motors to become the top automobile manufacturer in the world.⁶ The Big Three U.S. companies continue to increase the outsourcing and off-shoring of production beyond U.S. borders, while Toyota, Honda, and Nissan have expanded their operations in the United States—no car company, it now seems, can say it is “more American” than any of the Japanese Big Three. South Korean car companies like Kia and Daewoo have replaced Toyota and Honda in the “cheap foreign car” category. As capitalist production flows like water to locations with plentiful, cheap labor and lax regulations, Chinese- or Indian-made automobiles surely will one day enter that category.

What this all means is that it is more accurate to see Japan’s relative decline as a global economic power not as the consequence of internal failures but as the manifestation of external achievements. Corporations like Sony played the role of both lighthouse and rising tide; it showed other globalizing corporations what global cultural production could look like, and its successes spurred others to develop similar groundbreaking products. The most obvious example is that of the personal computer (PC). In 1984 a computer magazine boldly predicted:

“The Japanese are planning the miracle product. It will come not from their mines, their wells, their fields, or even their seas. It comes instead from their

⁵ Mike Snyder, “Gaming Industry Sales Grow 43% in 2007,” *USA Today*, January 18, 2008.

⁶ Keith Bradsher, “Toyota Tops G.M. in Sales for First Time,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2007.

brains. The miracle product is knowledge, and the Japanese are planning to package and sell it the way other nations package and sell energy, food, or manufactured goods. They're going to give the world the next generation—Fifth Generation—of computers, and those machines are going to be intelligent.”⁷

Unfortunately for Japan, this soothsayer was wrong. American companies like IBM, Microsoft, and Apple benefited most from the PC boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Japanese corporations structured to maximize productivity, efficiency, and distribution in a global marketplace were too hierarchical and inflexible to keep pace with the rapidly innovating, smaller American firms. In short, Japan went global just a few years too soon. Its corporations showed Microsoft, Dell, and others how to make the connections between global commerce and culture before ceding leadership to these U.S.-based powerhouses.

Thus global Japan is nevertheless still present in subtle yet significant ways. To the benefit of harmonious cultural relations between the United States and Japan, the heated rhetoric of the 1988-1992 period dissolved when others started following and profiting from Japan's example. By the late 1990s it meant much less that the world watched televisions emblazoned with Japanese names because the world exchanged information—knowledge—through software made in the United States. The Japanese recession of the early 1990s denied Japanese firms investment in research and development at the moment when they needed it the most to compete with the U.S. technology sector.

⁷ Edward Feigenbaum and Pamela McCorduck, “The Fifth Generation: Japan's Computer Challenge to the World,” *Creative Computing* 10 (August 1984): 103, reproduced at http://www.atarimagazines.com/creative/v10n8/103_The_fifth_generation_Jap.php.

The belligerent discourse is gone and the Japanese corporate presence is muted, but Americans have not abandoned aspects of their fascination with Japan. Images of Japan continue to reproduce the dichotomy between modern Japan, with its rich history and culture contributing to a modern story of democracy, and postmodern Japan, with its future-oriented promises of a global culture. These images efface the Japanese present. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to two U.S. locations where Americans negotiate the meaning of Japanese culture today. To conclude, it examines the persistence of popular discursive representations of Japan in U.S. mainstream media.

An “Identical Copy for Which There Exists No Original”: Epcot’s Japan Pavilion

When French theorist Jean Baudrillard wanted an example to illustrate what he meant by a simulacrum, he chose Disneyland. “Disney is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra,” he wrote, defining a simulacrum as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.”⁸ He believed that “what attracts the crowds the most [to Disneyland] is without a doubt the social microcosm, the *religious*, miniaturized pleasures of America, of its constraints and joys” as they were simulated in themed sections of the park like Frontierland, Adventureland, and Tomorrowland.⁹

Opened in 1955, Disneyland (in southern California), and later Walt Disney World (opened in Florida in 1971), were intended as celebrations and simulations of an idealized American experience. Added to Baudrillard’s, Fredric Jameson’s stylized

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 12, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

definition of a simulacrum as an “identical copy for which no original has ever existed” helps understand the appeal to nostalgia that the Disney parks have had for visitors.¹⁰

Disney’s theme parks have tried to recreate an ideal that never existed to begin with.

For the historian or cultural anthropologist Disney theme parks are fascinating as relics of a bygone era of American self-understanding and attitudes toward the world.

The original Disneyland and the first theme park of Florida’s Walt Disney World, the Magic Kingdom, constructed simulacra around the American experience.¹¹ The parks

reflect an attitude of American-style modernization rooted in the 1950s. Disney

characterizes the American past as one defined by an adventurous and pioneering spirit.

Its representation of the future is highly Americanized and typical of modernization

theory popular at the time: American ingenuity and know-how would change the world, providing science-based, efficient solutions to the modern era’s most pressing problems.

Attractions like the “Carousel of Progress,” first constructed for the New York World’s Fair of 1964, advertise the pioneering spirit of American corporate entrepreneurs of the

past like General Electric and the promises of future domestic consumption. (The

General Electric references have since been removed.)¹² It is significant to note that Walt

Disney, who provided the optimistic tone and spirit for attractions, died in 1966, before

the failure of the war in Vietnam and the institutionalization of global underdevelopment

¹⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 289; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 18.

¹¹ Unless noted, my impressions of Disney World and Epcot specifically are based on two research visits to the park, one in January 2008 and the other in May 2008. Like millions of Americans I had also visited the parks as a tourist several times as a child.

¹² “Pavilions and Attractions – General Electric,” New York World’s Fair 1964/1965, <http://nywf64.com/genele01.shtml>.

signaled the bankruptcy of modernization theory and optimism about American-style “progress.”

The first major expansion of Walt Disney World, EPCOT Center (later renamed simply Epcot) reflects a different national mood and attitude toward the world. Epcot’s tone is rooted in the period in which it was planned and constructed, the late 1970s and early 1980s. Like the Magic Kingdom, it continues to replicate Walt Disney’s interests in the future of humankind, but its tone is decidedly less Americentric (though not completely, as discussed below). The future as Epcot represents is no longer fully Americanized; instead, it is globalized.

Epcot is divided into two sections: Future World and the World Showcase (see Image 7.1). A visitor walking through the front gates enters Future World and encounters Epcot’s most enduring symbol, the 180-foot geosphere that resembles a golf ball and houses the “Spaceship Earth” attraction (see Image 7.2). Beyond Spaceship Earth, Future World spreads out to a number of attractions highlighting achievements in the sciences. The Land, for instance, takes visitors on an indoor boat ride through an actual plant nursery, where Epcot’s botanists try to cultivate new plants for human consumption. Swiss food conglomerate Nestlé pays several million dollars annually as the attraction’s primary corporate sponsor. Other sponsored attractions highlighting future-oriented scientific research include Universe of Energy (Exxon), Test Track (General Motors), and Mission: Space (Hewlett-Packard). Spaceship Earth, originally financed by AT&T, is currently sponsored by German engineering giant Siemens. In Future World’s globalized vision, corporations are equivalent in importance to countries.

Beyond Future World lies the World Showcase, which consists of eleven country pavilions, each one recreating a stereotyped setting from a particular country. The pavilions surround the large man-made lake in the center of Epcot, which has a perimeter of roughly one mile. A visitor who walks around the lake to the left will encounter in order Mexico, Norway, China, Germany Italy, the “American Adventure,” Japan, Morocco, France, United Kingdom, and Canada. The goal of each pavilion is to create a microcosm of authenticity, to provide visitors with a full range of sensory authenticity, with all the attendant sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. During Epcot’s grand opening in 1983, a visitor remarked, “I’ll never get to Europe; this is as close as I’ll get.”¹³ The park gives the impression that countless millions of visitors have expressed similar sentiments in the last quarter-century.



Image 7.1: An overhead view of Epcot’s 300 acres. The visitor enters into Future World (the lower half—the geosphere is the white ball in the lower center of the image). The World Showcase surrounds the lake (upper half). (Image from Google Earth)

¹³ Quoted in Ellen Steese, “EPCOT’s ‘Horizons’ Peers into the Future of the American Home,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 11, 1983: B4.



Image 7.2: Epcot’s most recognizable symbol: the geosphere housing Spaceship Earth.
(Author’s photograph)

Two attractions of the Epcot experience relate particularly to this dissertation: Future World’s Spaceship Earth and the World Showcase’s Japan pavilion. The former provides visitors with a popular Americanized narrative of globalization; the latter presents popular understandings of Japan that conflate history and culture. Together they reflect the discursive process in the United States of marginalizing Japan within the global transformations of the last quarter of the twentieth century. The physical space and the narrative content of Epcot make arguments about both the United States’ and Japan’s roles in a globalizing world.

Spaceship Earth is Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* with the irony and ambiguity sucked out. (Along with Walt Disney, science-fiction author Ray Bradbury, a

close friend of Disney's, was also credited with conceiving of Spaceship Earth.)¹⁴ The very first thing one sees upon entering (besides the giant golf ball overhead) is a large mural depicting the attraction's themes (see Image 7.3). The mural's debt to Kubrick's film is conspicuous: the lower half of the image, like the opening scenes of the film, depicts cave dwellers (more human-like than Kubrick's advanced primates) attempting to communicate on cave walls. The right side of the mural is decorated with small images of ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, and Greeks, as well as one of Columbus' ships and what appear to be Gutenberg and his printing press and a man and woman operating a radio. The largest, boldest objects in the painting, however, are of objects in outer space: the Earth, a couple of satellites, and two astronauts. The mural transmits Spaceship Earth's explicit theme—humankind's struggle for increasing communication—while also representing a linear, conflated narrative of the history of global interconnectedness. Unlike Kubrick's film, however, Spaceship Earth never questions the value of technological "progress."

¹⁴ Ellen Steese, "Walt Disney World Adds Nine New Nations and a City of the Future," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 26, 1982.



Image 7.3: The Spaceship Earth mural at the entrance to the attraction. (Author’s photograph)

The mural is only the prologue to the celebratory globalization narrative that is Spaceship Earth. The visitor walks up into the bottom of the geosphere and sits in one of the “people mover” carts with which every Disney guest becomes well acquainted. The cart ascends through the sphere, moving past scenes of “animatronic” robots depicting humanity’s baby steps toward worldwide communication. The ride begins at the dawn of human history with the cave people of the mural. It then moves through Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Phoenician alphabet, Greek mathematics (the origins of “the high-tech life we enjoy today”), and Rome, which “built the first world wide web” in the form of its system of roads. Rome, of course, collapsed, and its libraries—its stores of data—

burned. Luckily there was the world's "first backup system" in the form of Arab scholars, who copied and preserved the knowledge of the Western tradition. Thus when Gutenberg invented the printing press there was knowledge left to print, and the result was an explosion of knowledge and understanding. The Arab scholars are the last non-Western people to make an appearance in this globalization narrative.¹⁵

The ride leaps dramatically and inexplicably in time from Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel to the advent of the Industrial Revolution, a moment important to the story only for its advancements in the mass production of communications technologies. The phenomena of radio and television follow, and from there communications move into outer space. Recent additions to the attraction include the global communications revolution taking off when a young geek in a garage in California (Steve Jobs or Steve Wozniak?) invents the personal computer. "We had to invent a new language," the narrator tells us.¹⁶

Visitors then move through a tunnel of green data resembling scenes from the film *The Matrix*. The ride concludes with encouragement for visitors to continue "inventing the future one step at a time." "Now it's your turn," the narrator says, and an LCD touchscreen monitor prompts riders to answer several questions about their lifestyle. A program then crops an image of the visitor's face (from a photograph at the beginning of the ride) onto a cartoon figure living a leisurely life in a fully realized technological

¹⁵ All quotations derive from my transcription of the ride's narration. Some fan-made Internet sites claim that Ray Bradbury wrote the original script, but I have not found confirming evidence that he was involved in the project at such a detailed level. The bio on Bradbury's official website claims he "created the interior metaphors" of the attraction. See "About Ray Bradbury," <http://www.raybradbury.com/bio.html>.

¹⁶ Dench only recently recorded a new script for *Spaceship Earth*. Narrating duties were previously performed, in order, by American actor Vic Parrin, television news icon Walter Cronkite, and British actor Jeremy Irons.

utopia in which work can be done while lounging on the beach or riding a surfboard. As visitors step off the ride they enter a sprawling room housing the Siemens-sponsored “Project Tomorrow: Inventing the World of Tomorrow” exhibit, which has a large projection screen hanging near the ceiling. On it is a world map with the photographed faces of the guests just stepping off the ride, their heads connected by pinpoint to the various locations from which they come (see Image 7.4). The east coast of the United States is most represented, but of the thousands of pinpoints there were at least several dozen on each continent, as one should expect of a site of global tourism.



Image 7.4: The world map pinpointing the origins of Epcot’s global attendees. (Author’s photograph)

Spaceship Earth is cognizant of its role as a global tourist attraction and, much more than anything at the older Magic Kingdom, expresses to its global audience a certain globalist attitude. The ride’s narrator (today the British actress Judi Dench, whose voice recently replaced that of Walter Cronkite) repeatedly uses the words “we” and “our” to connect guests with the historical narrative come to life before them. The

writers impress upon visitors that “we” are part of a “truly global community poised to shape the future of this, our Spaceship Earth.” I did not expect Spaceship Earth’s narrative to be anything less than exclusively Western (excepting the Arab “backup system”); not surprisingly, it takes a conspicuously American turn with the Industrial Revolution. But what is revealing is that the producers of this cultural artifact of the early 1980s chose to represent the future as something decidedly global, however Americanized that global future might appear. Certainly the park whitewashes the experiences of the underdeveloped world. (In perhaps the most grotesque example, the whole of sub-Saharan Africa is confined to an “outpost” where guests can fill up on bottled water and Coca-Cola.) Still, the contrast in tone with the Magic Kingdom’s 1960s Tomorrowland is detectable: there, the future is adorned with an American flag planted across the universe by NASA; in Epcot, Americans contribute to a brighter global future by serving as leaders in a global community of peers. Completed in 1982 Epcot’s humility reflects the period in which it was built as much as the Magic Kingdom (or California’s Disneyland) reproduces the promises of modernization in the 1950s and 1960s.

The World Showcase itself is a testament to globalist sentiments and America’s humbled nationalism characteristic of the post-Watergate, post-Vietnam era. There are no illusions about the American experience taking center stage—literally, as the “American Adventure” exhibit sits in the middle of all the pavilions, with five exhibits laid out on either side of it—but the attention paid to the cultural achievements of non-Americans, and even non-Westerners, reveals a cultural relativism lacking in Disney’s older parks. The Magic Kingdom’s older homage to multiculturalism, the It’s a Small

World attraction, with its Palestinian and Israel puppets dancing and singing together in perfect vocal and political harmony, was conspicuously located in that park's Fantasyland section, not in Tomorrowland. The World Showcase emphasizes not the dreamlike utopias of It's a Small World or Epcot's Future World but the contemporary realities of cultural difference and respect.

The Japan pavilion is representative of the Epcot attitude toward cultural difference. Like all popular culture, it reflects common understandings while also working to shape those understandings—in this case, popular representations of Japanese history and culture. Since the mid-1970s U.S. discourse on Japan has continually conflated the Japanese past with a future-oriented contemporary Japan pointing the way toward global culture. The Japan pavilion supports that trend.

Like all the World Showcase pavilions, Japan is visible from virtually anywhere on the mile-long perimeter of Epcot's large man-made lake. The view of Japan from across the lake seems to have two intentions: first, to make clear that one is looking at Japan, an almost unmistakable image for anyone even cursorily familiar with the country's popular iconography; and second, to give the impression of looking into the past (see Image 7.5). None of the half-dozen structures has the post-1950s style that is as common today in Tokyo as in New York, a pattern that all of the World Showcase exhibitions maintain. As a Disney spokesperson said when Epcot opened, "If we were to present the modern side of each nation the differences would be difficult to detect."¹⁷ Instead the architecture generally simulates that of the Tokugawa era from the early seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Walking into the pavilion evokes the

¹⁷ Quoted in Peter Tonge, "Walt Disney's Biggest Dream Comes to Life Oct. 1," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 25, 1982: B10.

Japanese past, while standing in the pavilion and looking through the replica *torii* gate across the lake, with the geosphere dominating the landscape, once again invokes the future (see Image 7.6).



Image 7.5: Looking to the past: the Japan pavilion from across Epcot's man-made lake.
(Author's photograph)



Image 7.6: Looking to the future: the view back across the lake from the Japan pavilion.
(Author's photograph)

Activities in the pavilion reaffirm the invocation of a traditional Japan. At regular intervals several Japanese men emerge to play large Taiko drums for gathering crowds (Image 7.7). The serenity of intricately groomed gardens and koy-filled ponds is interrupted only by the mass of excited humanity eager for a button to press in order to bring to life something animatronic. As with the other pavilions, the environment is meant to summon the sense of existing in some other place frozen even as it defines that particular place. The pavilion's most visible restaurant, the Yakitori House, offers a limited and thoroughly Americanized menu that can pass in the eyes of the inexperienced as authentically Japanese. The booming mass popularity of sushi in the last two decades, however, likely makes the authenticity of the restaurant's "Sushi Tokyo Roll" suspect. For less price-conscious visitors, there are two other restaurants, which serve more upscale, but nevertheless fully Americanized, Japanese food.



Image 7.7: Taiko drummers in the Japan pavilion. (Author's photograph)

Each country pavilion is staffed by immigrants or foreign students. That it is so conspicuous that staffers frequently speak to each other in their native languages in front of visitors likely signals that Disney encourages them to do so in order to foster an atmosphere of authenticity. (Of course, they speak fluent, if heavily inflected, English for guests.) One of the Japanese attendants indirectly confirmed this by acknowledging that management does not prohibit speaking Japanese. The attendants that I saw in the Japan and China pavilions were almost exclusively young women, though I noticed that men staffers were common in other countries. The two Japanese women I spoke with told me that they were studying at universities in Florida. They also seemed uncomfortable talking about themselves, as if this were something the park discourages.

While the external design of the pavilion tries to simulate seventeenth century Japan, all notions of historical authenticity are shattered when one walks into the only building accessible to the public (other than the restaurants). The Mitsukoshi store (“Since 1673,” says the sign above the automatic entrance doors), named after the famous Tokyo department store, thrusts visitors from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century. The sensation is not one of time warp as much as time compression. Outside, Tokugawa simulacra dominate the experience; once inside, *Pokémon* characters, Hello Kitty, and anime assault the senses (see Images 7.8 and 7.9). Contemporary Japanese popular culture, the same anime and manga that have colonized children’s imaginations across the globe in the last decade, is the most conspicuous representative of contemporary Japan, if Epcot’s presentation is to be believed. The front third of the store is jammed with J-pop merchandise. Much of it (like the *Speed Racer* products in Image 7.8) is based on anime or other properties (like Hello Kitty) popular in the United States and not

necessarily in Japan. In fact, a savvy American shopper would not have a problem finding almost any of the J-pop goods in the Mitsukoshi store somewhere else for a far more reasonable price. (A search for “anime” on eBay, for example, turns up nearly 18,000 results.)



Image 7.8 and 7.9: The first sights through the front doors of the Mitsukoshi store.
(Author’s photographs)

Visitors do not come to Epcot and the World Showcase to behave like cost-conscious consumers, though; they come to experience cultural difference in a comfortable, familiar environment. Thus while the people in charge of organizing Epcot's Mitsukoshi believe that anime merchandise should be the first thing customers see, it seemed to me that visitors resist the urge to consume those goods which are generally familiar (especially for parents with young children) in favor of those that are seemingly less accessible. Therefore the middle and the back of the store were much more crowded. The most popular attraction, a pearl-farming station, is in the middle of the store. Several young Japanese women stand behind waist-high aquariums attending to rapt children as they fish oysters out of the water. Together they pry open the oyster and extract a pearl—invariably, the attendants exclaim for each child, “such a beautiful pearl!” Visitors likely flock to this experience for its novelty and not for any direct association between pearls and Japan.

There are, however, plenty of opportunities to consume goods traditionally associated with Japan. Beyond the pearl station lies a range of goods like decorative fans, expensive ceramics, women's clothing, bonsai trees, assorted household decorations, a surprising number of clocks, and an array of packaged foods such as teas, candies, and snacks. It is as if a high-end department store retailer housed a Japanese specialty shop that one finds in many U.S. cities. If a visitor is interested in a kimono or *yukata* (an informal kimono), a helpful attendant in a separate room illustrates the proper way to wear these garments. Some ceramic pieces or a replica katana can cost several hundred dollars. The priciest goods are displayed in glass cases as if in a museum.

Compared to the Magic Kingdom, Epcot's Future World, and several other World Showcase exhibits, there is almost nothing to do in the Japan pavilion except consume. There is no film advertising Japan's history or culture, as there is in China, France, and Canada (though the original plans called for one); there is no boat ride through a simulated Japanese landscape, as there is in Mexico and Norway.¹⁸ One can only consume Japan. This is emblematic of the American encounter with Japan since Epcot's opening. What the pavilion ultimately provides is the opportunity to consume something different, something foreign, in a familiar environment. The visitor encounters goods that are uncommon in the American shopping experience, and those goods are marked with the added exoticism of Japanese language characters. Yet once the visitor decides to consume something foreign, the experience reverts back to the familiar practices of U.S. capitalism. The cash register is where it is supposed to be; the acceptable currency is what it should be; the credit cards work like they do at Wal-Mart; and the value of the transaction is clearly defined. Backing the illusion is the confidence the consumer has in Disney's ability to feign authenticity within limits of comfort.

If the Japan pavilion is a simulacrum, though, then it simulates a time, place, and experience that *never existed* in the first place. That begs the question of authenticity: What makes the representation of Japanese culture in Epcot any less authentic than the representation of Japanese culture in, say, Tokyo? Intellectuals and those with the means to travel to Japan may guffaw at the notion that a visitor to the Japan pavilion experiences anything like authentic Japanese culture. But such a response proceeds from the

¹⁸ See Richard R. Beard, *Walt Disney's EPCOT: Creating the New World of Tomorrow* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1982), 192-193. This promotional book describes a film intended to celebrate the history of Japan, but it never made it into the exhibition.

assumption that there is an authentic “Japanese culture.” Instead, if we accept that Japanese culture is just a signifier for a whole range of practices, ideas, and images that are themselves signifiers for something else—in essence, as Baudrillard argued, a world of free-floating meanings—then we would find it difficult to privilege any particular representation linked to a spatial experience as more authentic than any other. The “culture” one finds stepping off a plane at Narita International is just as representative of something it is not, or perhaps something that never existed at all, as the replica Tokugawa architecture or the shelves of kimono in the World Showcase. Ultimately there is no hierarchy of authenticity in the consumption of all things Japanese. When Japanese culture went global in the 1970s and 1980s, when it disconnected from spatial containment and found its way into American spaces, it showed Americans new ways of relating to Japan—not as a distant foreign other, but as a producer of desirable consumer goods. Epcot’s Japan pavilion demonstrates the shift in Americans’ identity as consumers of Japan.

Full Circle: Otakon 2008

It was an auspicious coincidence that the anime convention I chose for a case study of global Japan’s contemporary U.S. presence was Otakon.¹⁹ Otakon, held annually in Baltimore, is North America’s second largest anime convention (or con in the conventioneer’s parlance); its nearly 23,000 attendees in 2007 ranked only behind Los

¹⁹ The name “Otakon” is a portmanteau of the words “otaku” and “con.” The latter is short for convention. The former is a Japanese word that loosely translates as “obsessed fan.” In Japan the word is used derogatorily and can refer to a person with a pop culture obsession of any sort (pop-music otaku, video-game otaku, anime otaku, and so on). Anime fans in the United States, however, have adopted it as a badge of honor, and the word refers exclusively to anime fans.

Angeles' Anime Expo, which welcomed 44,000 visitors that year.²⁰ Otakon 2008 took place in the Baltimore Convention Center (BCC). Chapter 6 of this dissertation began with an anecdote from the very same location twenty-five years earlier, when a standing-room-only crowd at the 1983 World Science Fiction Convention waited until 1:00 a.m. to view a film from the popular *Yamato* series that no one in the United States had ever seen. As a historian, I had the chance at Otakon 2008 to travel through time precisely one quarter-century into the future from where my historical subjects stood. As a twenty-first-century global space in the heart of one of the oldest U.S. cities, Otakon 2008 represented the globalizing of America come full circle. Anime's popularity in the United States had grown by leaps and bounds in the previous twenty-five years. It was a different beast altogether. Yet here it returned, to a space where it had ignited such curiosity and enthusiasm a quarter-century earlier.²¹

Anyone familiar with the setting and format of conventions for science fiction, comic books, video gaming, or properties like *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* would feel at home at an anime convention like Otakon, which is certainly one of the biggest of its kind but also fairly typical. While U.S. anime fandom borrows its source material from Japan, the practice of organizing conventions to celebrate popular cultural phenomena is American in origin. Large Japanese cons, like Tokyo's Comic Market (Comiket), which

²⁰ Patrick D., "Looking Back on the Anime Conventions of 2007," Anime Convention News, AnimeCons.com, <http://www.animecons.com/news/article.shtml/594>.

²¹ This section is based on observations gathered during my attendance at Otakon 2008, held at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Maryland, on Friday-Sunday, August 8-10, 2008.

ranks among the world's largest pop culture cons, are adaptations of the original American practice.²²

Explaining cons to outsiders is a challenge. Walking outside the BCC on a bustling Saturday night I was stopped by an “outsider” interested in all the anime-related commotion. He wore a t-shirt that read “Iraq War Veteran” and looked the part. “Are you part of the convention?” he asked. “What do you do in there?” Though I wore the neck tag that identified me as a convention attendee, I was not wearing a costume as were the more conspicuous attendees—I was not a “cosplayer,” as those who create and wear costumes based on their favorite characters are called; perhaps that made me more approachable. I tried to explain to him that con-goers were there because of their enthusiasm for Japanese animation, and inside they could attend panels and anime viewings, meet industry professionals, shop, show off their costumes, and generally enjoy the company of other anime fans. “That’s it?” Yes, I guess so, I responded, though I thought that was enough. After a curt “thanks,” he continued down the street, gawking with his friend at costumed con-goers. To an outsider I suppose my answer did seem unfulfilling. But how was I supposed to explain the concept of an anime con as a globalized space where transnational social communities connect around shared cultural interests? After all, only ten feet away a grown man in an oversized diaper was posing for pictures with Darth Vader. (Cosplaying at an anime convention is not confined to anime characters, as the plethora of Joker cosplayers, riding the popularity of the recent blockbuster Batman film, *The Dark Knight*, illustrated.)

²² The World Science Fiction Convention, first held in New York in 1939, was likely the first of its kind in terms of content and scale. See “The Long List of World Science Fiction Conventions (Worldcons),” New England Science Fiction Association, <http://www.nesfa.org/data/LL/TheLongList.html>.

The gawking veteran was not the only outsider in Baltimore to take notice of what was happening that weekend. Official convention activities were confined to the sprawling 1.2-million-square-foot BCC, sitting on two whole blocks of downtown Baltimore, but con-goers were not. The BCC lies within the boundaries of Baltimore's primary tourist area, the Inner Harbor, one of the first U.S. "urban renewal" projects, which David Harvey has called "an institutionalized commercialization of a more or less permanent spectacle."²³ The attractions on the Inner Harbor, like the National Aquarium, the Maryland Science Center, and two sports stadiums, along with the harbor's incorporated shopping complexes, Harborplace and the Gallery, draw millions to the area annually. It would only make sense, then, that on an unseasonably cool August weekend many thousands of non-con-goers also flooded the Inner Harbor area.

The result was an unexpected spectacle of disjuncture. Cosplayers with giant plastic swords and even bigger hair mingled with tourists at local chain restaurants. As they crossed paths in the harbor's plazas, fascinated tourists asked to take the cosplayers' pictures (see Image 7.10). Both inside the BCC and out, cosplayers responded happily to this gesture, proud to show off the fruits of their hard work, smiling cheerily or giving a brooding look if committed to remaining "in character." Thousands of cosplayers on Baltimore's streets drew the attention, and the occasional lewd shouted comment, from passengers in passing cars. The addition of the 25,000 con-goers to an area already congested on a nice summer weekend made for a truly chaotic scene. Simply entering a building or going up an escalator usually meant waiting in line, or pausing to allow

²³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), 90.

someone in a giant panda costume to get through double-doors (see Images 7.11 and 7.12).



Image 7.10: Cosplayers, con-goers, and outsiders converge on the public spaces of downtown Baltimore. (Author's photograph)





Image 7.11 - 7.12: Organized chaos on the first and second floor of the BCC. The people on the left side of the Image 7.12 are looking down on the scene in Image 7.11. (Author's photograph)

Historians might think about an anime con like this: imagine the annual meeting of the American Historical Association meets Mardi Gras. As they do at the AHA meeting, participants organize panels and roundtable discussions on issues of relevance to attendees. Organizers put countless hours into the minutiae of scheduling, room assignments, technological requirements, handling registration, writing and printing guidebooks and programs, and all the other clerical work that such an operation requires. They must balance a budget that exceeds \$1 million, if the math of 25,000 people paying \$65 for three days' attendance is an indication. If there is one aspect in which anime fandom today differs from that of a quarter-century ago, it is in this professionalized aspect.

Add to the con's professional organization the mood of the carnivalesque, in Mikhail Bakhtin's meaning of the word. Bakhtin wrote that the European carnivals of the fourteenth century expressed "the *joyful relativity* of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position." Scholars have applied this temporary subversion of commonly accepted social and cultural norms to everything from anime texts to political protest in communist Eastern Europe.²⁴ Con participants choose to abandon many of the social and cultural rules of American society. Cosplayers regularly break out into a kind of play-acting, particularly if cosplayers dressed like characters from the same series or program encounter one another. I witnessed one instance where a group of cosplayers dressed like villains from the Batman franchise happened upon someone dressed as Bruce Wayne's alter-ego. It did not seem that the group knew this person (and there was no indication that they knew each other before the con), yet an impromptu skit ensued in which the villains chased Batman up a crowded escalator; the caped crusader either disappeared into the shadows or ducked out to the concession stand for a hot dog.

In this atmosphere of playfulness, con-goers experiment with the permeability of gender and racial boundaries. Men dress like women characters and vice versa; white and black attendees cosplay as Japanese characters with no thought to racial "authenticity." (In contrast, it would be hard to imagine a white actor playing the title role of *Othello*, or an African American playing the role of Don Corleone, without stirring up controversy.) Anime as a genre generally encourages these transgressionary

²⁴ Bakhtin quoted in Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Understanding Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 13. See also Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

practices. The typical anime style includes men with characteristics like lean bodies and long hair that Western viewers could interpret as effeminate; also, as discussed in chapter 6, anime artists purposefully draw characters in ways that engender ethnic and racial ambiguity.

That cons take on features of the carnival does not mean that they dispose of hierarchies entirely, however. Instead cons rework them: outside the BCC, the socioeconomic hierarchies of race, class, and gender work to structure the lives of anime fans; inside the center con-goers exchange those categories for ones based on investment in genre knowledge and intensity of engagement with the community. Those at the top of the anime hierarchy have the deepest knowledge of the various aspects of the medium, like the participants who organize and conduct panels. Also atop the hierarchy are the fans that have spent countless hours designing and constructing the most elaborate costumes. In that sense, anime fandom is as much meritocratic as it is democratic.

Panels and roundtables at cons have an amateurish feel to them, especially for an attendee whose only other reference to “convention panel” comes from those held at academic conferences. In an academic panel professionals are expected to speak articulately about a subject on which they have expertise, and the audience is expected to respect that expertise, listen attentively, and ask critical questions that will stimulate thoughtful responses. Neither panel participants nor audience members hold up their ends of the bargain at an anime con. Panels aim not to disseminate new knowledge but to foster audience interaction, to get people talking about the things they like talking about. Participants need no special qualifications to conduct a panel; organizers do not demand much of those proposing panels. One panel, “The Phenomenology of Ikari Shinji”

(named after the oedipal protagonist of the landmark series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*), discussed anime with themes that reflect philosophical debates. The three women who spoke on the panel had bachelor's degrees in philosophy and shared a hobby of dissecting anime for philosophical themes. To be sure, they shared their ideas with the audience, but most of the session was spent moderating comments from audience members, who shared their own thoughts on the subject. It was a surprisingly educated crowd, too—I was struck by the number of people who mentioned writing college-level papers or theses on an anime-related topic. Coming to conclusions about philosophical themes in anime was a communal undertaking, not an authoritarian one.

As someone who writes about the history of anime fans in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, I was most intrigued by the panel titled the “Old Farts Anime Appreciation Panel.” The Otakon guidebook described it as a “discussion panel for the over-30 crowd who remembers the days when 10th-generation Ranma ½ and unsubbed Macross on VHS provided the bulk of anime available.... Do you remember watching The Amazing Three, Gigantor, or Battle of the Planets on a 9-inch analog TV?”²⁵ Here, I thought, was a panel after my researcher's heart, a chance to observe and engage some of the “old school” anime fans about whom I had already written. Alas, the panel did not play out the way I anticipated, though the way it developed did give me the opportunity to see the anime community in a moment of self-definition. The standing-room-only audience was significantly younger than I expected, much younger than the advertised “over-30 crowd,” though a number of older faces peppered the room. Three panelists sat

²⁵ The Otakon guidebook and program were two different things. The former listed the times and places of all con events, with short descriptions of each. It was compact for easy carrying and access. In contrast the program was large with glossy full-color pages filled with the history of Otakon, stories about participants and organizers, and lots of advertisements.

at a table at the front, all of them likely over 50 years old: a white woman, cosplaying as a cat-like character; a white man, uncostumed; and an African American man, also uncostumed, who later told me that he was a longtime member of the Philadelphia Animation Society and was excited to know that a Philadelphia-based historian was writing about his experiences.

The carnival began almost as soon as the panelists called the session to order. “Kids today,” began an older man in the crowd with a detectable speech impediment, who stood up to address the panel, “they don’t know what it was like to have to fight with your sister over the television so you could watch anime on television after school!” Laughter erupted, sprinkled with applause. He had thrown down a gauntlet and drawn a line in the sand between generations. With his declaration, this fan had ruined any chance I had of getting what I wanted from the panel. The Internet/DVD generation greatly outnumbered the UHF/VHS generation, and they wanted a chance to tell their anime origins stories too. The panelists ceded the floor to the audience as a microphone was passed around. The scene quickly devolved into one in which each person would quickly run through the first anime that hooked them on the medium. Hundreds of titles were mentioned; some solicited a communal “ooh” or a “yeah,” others a chorus of laughter, and a few shouts of “that’s not anime!” As younger fans predominated, the anime mentioned was mostly that available commercially in the early and mid-1990s. Even when disagreements arose, the entire affair was conducted in a joyful spirit. And no one but the crotchety historian seemed to care that none of this was the stated purpose of this panel.

As the crowd passed the microphone around, a microcosmic scene played out in the row in front of me. Seated there was an African American family: a middle-aged mother and her son and daughter, both of whom appeared to be in their late teens. As audience members checked off each anime that had led them to the light, the family would turn to each other to negotiate a yea-nay consensus on that anime. The son and daughter seemed to approve of most of the titles mentioned; the mother would wave her hands in the air when somebody brought up an older title. They seemed eager to have a shot at the microphone too. It came first to the son. He stood up: “*Sailor Moon!*” he shouted and waved his hands around in celebration, referencing the popular U.S. after-school adaptation of a well-known mid-1990s anime. That elicited a rousing response from the younger members of the audience. His sister then passed the microphone to his mother: “*Astro Boy!*” she howled in a frenzy equal to her son’s, as she brought up the very first anime to air on television in both the United States and Japan. The older members of the crowd cheered her on. As the microphone left them behind, the family laughed to each other and continued their cheers and jeers.

Although there seemed to be a few anime families scattered about, I had to take this chance to talk to one. I asked the mother if she watches the anime her kids watch. “I get a kick out of it, but I really like the old stuff I watched growing up.” Then she answered my next question before I asked it: “But it’s something we can do together.”

The “Old Farts” panel showed what anime fans really are: a community. The older folks in the crowd had a story to tell about struggling to get their hands on anime twenty-five years ago. Their activities back then, as chapter 6 showed, brought them together as a community and gave them a new cultural identity, that of the “anime fan.”

But the younger generation of fans, who today number in the millions, wanted to be a part of that story too. So what if they had watched *Sailor Moon* on Ted Turner's Cartoon Network instead of on a grainy, subtitled, tenth-generation-copy VHS cassette? Their enthusiasm was no less intense and their sense of community no less sincere. The younger members of the audience wanted their story to be part of the old fart's story of anime's transpacific journey. As they did twenty-five years ago, a cultural community rallied around a Japanese product in this space of global America.

Japan: The Once and Future Superpower

To conclude I need to return to the question of the consumption of Japan over the course of nearly four decades, from just before this study began chronologically up to the present day. (See Image 7.13 at the end of the chapter.) There has always been, it seems, a certain artistry involved in representing Japan on the cover of popular U.S. weekly magazines. However creative, nevertheless, certain themes persist; namely, Americans continue to represent Japan as a premodern-postmodern producer of desirable consumer goods.

The first magazine cover, from the May 10, 1971 issue of *Time*, shows Sony founder and consumer electronics innovator Akio Morita inside of a portable Sony television, accompanied by the headline, "How to Cope with Japan's Business Invasion."²⁶ Of the four covers the oldest one, ironically, resorts the least to cultural essentialism and orientalism. It is also the only cover to show a photograph, albeit a purposefully distorted one, of an actual Japanese. Here was a conspicuous trend: the

²⁶ *Time*, May 10, 1971.

more Japanese economic power became a reality, the more likely Americans resorted to fantastical representations of Japanese culture and commerce. That after the early 1970s publications in the United States were much less likely to publish images of actual Japanese and much more likely to represent them in cartoon or caricatured form suggests an impulse to ignore economic realities in the years of American decline and Japanese ascension. When the Morita image was published, though, Japan was still safely ensconced ideologically within the camp of Western-style liberal capitalist modernity. Its corporations could be represented as business competitors without being represented as a cultural threat. Still, the Morita cover hints at a theme of pre-1945 understandings of Japan when it uses the word “invasion.”

The next two covers (the *Time* cover from 1982 and the *New Yorker* cover from 2002) reveal both changing and unchanging attitudes toward Japan over two decades. The first shows a traditional samurai character—a premodern icon of war, perhaps a reference to the idea of “invasion”—bedecked in the consumer luxuries of contemporary Japan. He holds a camera, calculator, car keys, gold watch, briefcase, and necktie (the last three not iconic products of Japan but references to businessmen).²⁷ The cover mixes images of the premodern with the cutting edge of technology and commerce. It points toward a hypercapitalist future, one in which the grand stories of human liberation inherent in modernity no longer apply and only the acquisition of wealth, driven by primal, uncivilized urges, matters. Japan as the techno-samurai appears alert and poised to strike.

²⁷ *Time*, March 30, 1981.

The *New Yorker* cover also mingles notions of traditional and futuristic Japan, but it defangs the threatening Japan of twenty years earlier.²⁸ Instead of the warlike symbol of masculinity, the samurai, the *New Yorker* uses a symbol of docile femininity, the geisha. She wears a kimono made of Pikachu, the primary “pocket monster” character from the global anime phenomenon, *Pokémon*, who is instantly recognizable to hundreds of millions of children (and their parents). In place of the standard folding fan accessory, she holds several cellular phones. Incorporated into her intricate hair styling are earphones, likely connected to a Walkman (or, by 2002, perhaps an iPod). The geisha is not prepared to attack or invade anything. In contrast to the samurai’s anxious look, she seems content with her role as unthreatening provider of popular consumer goods.

The final cover, from a December 2007 international edition of *Newsweek*, shows a silhouetted, *katana*-wielding samurai connected to—what else?—an Apple iPod.²⁹ In the techno-consumer world it has “lost its groove,” replaced by, as the article explains, U.S. powerhouses like Apple and Google. The silhouetted samurai is ready to strike, but the direction he faces is unclear. The aggressive globalizer of a quarter-century earlier has become, quite literally, a shadow of its former self.

Why do U.S. media continue to represent Japan in such a way? Would an article on, say, BMW’s global success fuse images of Bavarian men clad in lederhosen driving overpriced cars? Would a *Motor Trend* cover story on Jaguar make sense to readers if it showed a family of Puritans packing into a futuristic hybrid vehicle? Both images seem silly. So why do Americans persist in representing another decades-long ally and trading

²⁸ *New Yorker*, March 18, 2002.

²⁹ *Newsweek*, International edition, December 10, 2007.

partner, Japan, in ways that blend dissonant images of a premodern past and a consumerist future while effacing actual Japanese bodies?

The answer lies in the American encounter with Japan in the 1970s and 1980s. While the heated rhetoric and the idea that Japan poses a threat to U.S. economic hegemony are relics of a bygone era, the imagery of the period has been added to the deep well of representations from which Americans draw to portray Japan and the Japanese. The figure of the techno-samurai drained of color, yet still fully “wired,” encapsulates the popular amnesia that has erased many earlier notions of Japan pointing the way toward a globalized future. The result is today’s narrative of international power, one that is a fully de-Japanized vision of the globalizing of America.

What that portends for the future of U.S.-Japan relations or the United States’ role in the world in the twenty-first century is unclear. The narrative of globalization has suffered two dramatic shocks in the last decade. First, the attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, triggered a nationalist response that threatened the institutionalization of a Fortress America. The United States government reasserted the power of the nation-state in dramatic fashion. It identified the increasing irrelevance of borders and the transnationalization of commerce and culture as central causes of U.S. insecurity. The George W. Bush administration strengthened physical borders while violating others, particularly those civil boundaries outlined in the U.S. Constitution. It waged war on “terrorism”—a transnational ideology, a way of looking at the world and a prescription for behaving in it that regards the boundaries human beings draw as

meaningless. The administration found monsters to destroy in the very processes that had transformed the United States and the world in the previous quarter-century.

The second shock to the globalization story came in late 2008 when the globalized economy entered the worst crisis in its existence. It is far too early to tell how the crisis will play out. But the most visible indicators of Americans' consumption of global production, levels of consumer spending, foretell troubled times. "Suddenly, our consumer society is doing a lot less consuming," writes David Leonhardt in the *New York Times*. Drops in consumer spending during the deep but brief recession of the early 1980s affected industries that produced consumer goods throughout the United States. But today, the United States does not produce such things. The goods Americans buy are made primarily in Asia or Latin America. And the stability of production in those regions hinges on U.S. consumer's unchanging appetite to spend. "It would be silly to insist that a few terrible months meant the end of American consumer culture," writes Leonhardt. "But it would be equally silly to assume that culture could never change. It might be changing right now."³⁰ And, because it has never happened before, nobody knows what would happen if the United States stopped buying the things the world makes. The perils and prospects demonstrate the consequences of the globalizing of America.

³⁰ David Leonhardt, "Buying Binge Slams to a Halt," *New York Times*, November 11, 2008.

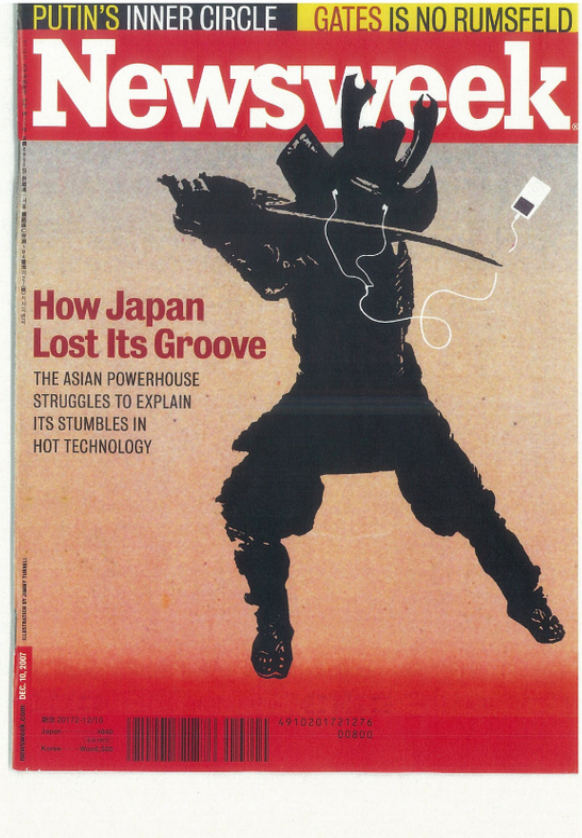


Image 7.13: Consuming Japan, 1971-2007.

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The following people supplied answers to the questionnaire (see Appendix A) I distributed to anime fans from the 1977 to 1989 period. All responses were transmitted via e-mail to the author. All responses are in the author's possession. In chapter 6, I chose to use initials and pseudonyms for respondents, even though nearly all gave me permission to quote them. (Those that did not are listed as "anonymous" below.) The following names are not pseudonyms.

Amos, Walter M., November 15, 2005

Anderson, Eric, November 14, 2005

Anonymous 1
Anonymous 2
Anonymous 3
Beck, Jerry, November 2, 2005
Blasingame, Ted R., November 6, 2005
Blume, David, November 19, 2005
Branley, Maura, November 14, 2005
Carlton, Ardith, November 16, 2005
Crispin, Mark, November 1, 2005
Diedrichs, Marya, November 10, 2005
Dinsmore, Wendy, November 5, 2005
Drazen, Daniel Joseph, November 2, 2005
Ekering, Ted, November 14, 2005
Fenelon, Robert, November 15, 2005
Frierson, Timothy, November 14, 2005
Hall, John, November 2, 2005
Headley Moriarty, Beverley, November 15, 2005
Jonas, Jeffrey, November 16, 2005
Kopetz, Frederick P., November 9, 2005
Malone, Patricia, November 14, 2005
Miller, Bob, November 15, 2005
Moriarty, Gerald M., Jr., November 13, 2005
Napton, Robert Place, November 16, 2005
Oliver, Gloria, November 5, 2005
Paschke, Stephen, November 13, 2005.
Patten, Fred, October 28, 2005
Pearce-Lipari, Carolyn, November 7, 2005
Rice, Douglas E., November 15, 2005
Rohlf, Peter, November 8, 2005
Savage, Lorraine, November 14, 2005
Shambaugh, C. Sue, November 14, 2005
Vismanis, Corky, November 14, 2005
White, Laurine L., November 4, 2005
Worne, Robert Anton, November 14, 2005

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APPENDIX A ANIME QUESTIONNAIRE

The author distributed the following questionnaire electronically to self-identified fans of anime from the 1977 to 1989 period. The bibliography contains a list of respondents. All responses are in the author's possession.

American Anime in the 1980s: Email Questionnaire

Introduction – Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. Your experiences will help a great deal in understanding the nature of the American anime culture of the 1980s. The following is an informal qualitative survey that seeks to gather general impressions about your experiences with anime in the 1980s. I encourage you to write as much or as little as you wish. Please provide as much detail as your memory, as well as your time and interest, allow. Any and all answers are greatly appreciated. You may write your answers directly on this document and return it as an email attachment or you may reply with your answers by email—whatever is most convenient for you. (Don't worry yourself with making it look neat; that's my job.) Kindly remember: the scope of this project is the years 1977-1990. Though I welcome any comments about your experiences before or after this period, I ask that you focus on these years. Thank you again for helping write this exciting history.

Permission to Quote – As a formality before beginning, do I have your permission to quote from and publish your responses? Do you wish to remain anonymous, or may I use your name? If so, please provide your full name for citation purposes.

- 1.** Easy question – Where did you live in the 1980s? If you wish, briefly describe your social and economic environment.
- 2.** Describe your first experience with anime as accurately as possible. When was it and how old were you? Where were you? What did you watch? Who introduced you to it? What medium did you see it on (television, VCR, theater, etc.)? What were your initial impressions?
- 3.** In your first experiences with anime, were you consciously aware that you were watching a Japanese product? If so, what were your impressions of anime as a product of Japan?

- 4.** Describe your interactions with other anime fans. Did you interact with fans elsewhere in the United States? Did you ever interact with fans in Japan? Did you participate in clubs/organizations dedicated to anime? Did you attend science fiction, comic, or anime conventions? Try to be as specific as possible with dates and places.

- 5.** What attracted you most to anime? In other words, why did you become a fan? Also, what genre of anime did you enjoy most? What specific titles?

- 6.** What anime literature, if any, did you read (fanzines, newsletters, fan fiction, etc.)?

- 7.** How would you characterize your political orientation, if you had any, in the 1980s?

- 8.** If there is anything else you wish you add, I encourage you to do so below. Also, if you have any suggestions for other questions I could ask to help me better understand the experiences of anime fans in the 1980s, please don't hesitate to make suggestions. Thanks so much for your time and reminisces.