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MUTUAL IMAGES

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JAPAN AND ASIA: REPRESENTATIONS OF SELFNESS AND OTHERNESS

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Spaces of sympathy: The role of Asia in contemporary Japanese popular cinema

Seán Hudson (Kyūshū University, Japan)

ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of two discourses in the study of Japanese popular film, while also bringing the two into conversation with one another in relation to their constructions of "Japan" and "Asia" as conceptual spaces. The discourse known as "victims' history" is discussed first, drawing on a few relevant films as examples of how the war period is articulated in terms of Japanese suffering. The contemporary political implications of this apparatus within Japanese film are explored. For example, films such as Grave of the Fireflies *(1988,* Hotaru no Haka*) have been internationally lauded for their pacifist stance, despite the fact that this pacifism is, I argue, constituted by the same victims' narrative that sustains feelings of distrust towards Japan's East Asian neighbours. In other words, we must consider these films not only in terms of passive victimisation, but also in terms of active erasure. The second discourse considered is that of "New Asianism", or the modern boom in representations of Asia in popular films. Various commentators have forcibly challenged the idea that the internationalization of Japanese cinema (from the late 1980s to the present), both in terms of industry and narrative representation, has had a decolonizing effect on the Japanese cultural sphere. On the contrary, these films are accused of the exoticisation and Othering of Asia, and I argue they are therefore similar to victims' history films in their positioning of Asia "outside" of the space of subjectivity.*

Introduction: Asia Erased or Asia Othered

One way of conceptualising popular cinema is as a systematic process of reproducing enclosed spaces of sympathy. Consumers invest time and money to be allowed into the process and gain access to its manufactured spaces, and then to dwell within their borders for around one and a half hours before returning to a world where the limits of sympathy are less clear. In this paper the effects of exposure to these enclosed spaces, while highly relevant, is less my focus than the identification of the borders themselves – that is to say, the politically-sensitive enclosures that are erected with the aim of channelling an audience's sympathy towards this or that area, or this or that group of people.

In this instance, the borders are those which separate "Japan" and "Asia" into two conceptual spaces, with the latter expanding and contracting to variously include North East Asian and South East Asian countries, but always outlined to exclude Japan.

Following this line of thought, there are two discourses in the study of Japanese cinema which I aim to bring together: that which takes as its object "victims' history", recognising a significant body of films in which the Second Sino-Japanese War is articulated primarily in terms of Japanese suffering (Orr, 2001); and that which takes as its object "New Asianism" in film, recognising that non-Japanese East Asians have in recent years gained a higher level of representation in Japanese films, and aiming to understand the manner and the effects of their representation (Ko, 2010). What these two discourses clearly have in common is their critique of Japanese cinema's conceptual positioning of "Asia" in relation to "Japan". Beyond this, both touch on the political implications of a body of Japanese films, and identify how certain political ideologies are reflected, reinforced, or resisted in these films. Through bringing these two discourses together I hope to build on their current investigations into the political role, and potential, of the films which constitute the object of their focus.

Therefore, the films I will be considering as examples are those which have already become involved, to greater or lesser extents, in these debates. While I will mention earlier films to give context, my focus is on modern films from the 1990s to the present day, a time period in which Japan's relationship with its neighbouring countries has undergone significant political and cultural transformation. During this time, numerous popular films that are relevant to the relation between Japanese nationalism and its history with the Asian continent have been produced, including some which clearly promote an overtly militaristic nationalism (Gerow, 2006). However, to keep my focus narrow, I will only be considering those films which I believe can be categorised as either victims' history or New Asianist films.

A preliminary friction should be highlighted regarding the words "othering" and "erasure". When it comes to victims' history, the usual trope is not that Asia has been represented problematically, but rather that it has not been represented at all. By removing it from the viewer's frame of reference, the Asian experience and victims of the war are said to be culturally erased (Lo 2014, 208). On the other hand, the approach dealing with New Asianism focuses on the problematic ways in which Asians have been represented in film, for example as exoticised objects of consumption, alternately gendered

feminine and alluring or masculine and threatening in relation to a subjectivity figured as Japanese (in the form of protagonist characters or the viewers themselves) (Lo 2014, 215). While the term "other" is more appropriate following this line of critique, it would be misleading to ignore the large overlap between the practices of erasure and othering. For example, Kwai-Cheung Lo's essay, which I will discuss below, is entitled "Erasing China in Japan's 'Hong Kong Films'", despite the fact that he discusses the representation of China at least as much as he does its absence (2014). This is understandable when we consider that erasure is not distinct from but a distinct form of othering. To put it another way, if Asia does not appear in a Japanese film about the War, we can consider this a representation of its absence, rather than an absence of its representation. These representations intersect with other forms of power, such as the narrative which frames the main conflict of the War as a clash between Japan and the United States (Napier 2001, 162), or that which denies the victimhood of East Asian countries under Japanese colonialist rule. Presence/absence often maps neatly onto the distinction between Self/Other, for the Other is always seen as something absent or at a distance from the Self. Thus, while the terms "erasure" and "othering" are not interchangeable, the concepts they denote here are closely enough aligned to be critiqued in tandem with one another: both hinge on a border drawn between "Asia" and "Japan", whether that border is at the edge of the cinematic experience (as in most victims' history films), or whether it cuts through a film's narrative (as in New Asianist films).[1]

Victimhood: I Still Want to Be a Shellfish

Before its film versions, *I Wish I Was a Shellfish* (*Watashi wa Kai ni Naritai*) began as a novel and was then adapted into a television drama in 1958 – the same year that the Japanese cinema industry reached its financial peak (Richie 2005, 161). Indeed, the drama was so successful it can be seen as a key contributor to the cementing of television as a popular medium and the subsequent decline of cinema in Japan (Richie 2005, 177). The story is about a soldier first forced to kill American prisoners of war during the war period, and then, after the war has finished, executed for doing so. The soldier is so disillusioned by the cruelty of humanity that he wishes that, should he be reborn, it should be as a shellfish

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[1] Some films have something of both positions, as can be seen from Lo's analysis of the role of China as a conceptual space in *Hong Kong Night Club* (*Hon Kon dai yasokai: Tatchi & Magi*, 1997), which I will discuss at the end of the paper.

rather than a human. The narrative, remade into a film the following year, is a classic example of what scholars have dubbed victims' history: the audience is made to feel compassion for a soldier who has clearly been caught up in events beyond his control, oppressed by both his military superiors and a foreign occupying force, and has never been shown to intentionally cause harm in any way (Orr 2001). That such a narrative would be so popular in the late 50s makes sense, given the ongoing suffering of Japanese people as a result of the War and the Occupation, and the need to find ways to dramatise and memorialise these events that would satisfy people's emotional needs, as well as propagating the aims of the state. At this time, in order to better control and make use of defeated Japan, the Occupation forces chose to maintain the Emperor system and direct war guilt at only a few military "bad apples", said to have misled both the Emperor and the Japanese people – it was emphasised that the populace were first and foremost victims (Sakai 2010, 246; Tanaka 2017, n.p.). However, top-down political schemes or government conspiracies do not account for national identity formation simply by virtue of existing – it is the successful dissemination of this victim ideology at a popular level, through simple and relatable stories like *I Wish I Was a Shellfish*, that allowed such ideology to achieve hegemonic status.

This particular story is also notable for its revival in recent years – firstly as a television drama in 1994, and then once again as a film in 2008 (Schilling 2008). Strikingly, the victims' history element of the story remains unaltered even in 2008 – not only the uncomplicated sympathy for the protagonist, but also the nonexistence of other Asian countries or people in a film that aims to depict the moral dilemma of existing as a Japanese soldier during the War period. To exclude Asia as a physical or conceptual space in such a film is a way of reinscribing the War within Japan's borders, of fixing it as an old wound in the national body, and of reaffirming the War as a "tit-for-tat" confrontation between Japan and the United States. While the explicit reason for reviving *I Wish I Was a Shellfish* in 2008 was to mark the 50th anniversary since the original series was released (Schilling 2008), the resurgence of right-wing nationalism and the modern fears of a rising China provide a contemporary climate in which viewers are more likely to embrace such a narrative, as they did in the past.

In order to make sense of victims' history as a persistent cultural phenomenon, we need to understand the historical context from which it emerged as an ideological tool. In Susan Napier's definition, Japan's victims' history

> ... is partly due to the collaborative American-Japanese efforts under the Occupa-
> tion to create an image of a postwar democratic Japan that would free the Japanese
> from an inescapable fascist and militarist past. By shifting the burden of responsi-
> bility for a devastating war onto the military and the government, it was felt that
> the slate could be wiped clean and Japan could undertake the task of rebuilding,
> liberated from the dark shadows of war guilt and recrimination. Consequently,
> both official and cultural versions of the war have played down citizens' involve-
> ment with the actual machinery of combat and aggression to the point that they
> ignore or elide Japan's aggression against China, which began in 1931. Instead, of-
> ficial vehicles, such as textbooks and government ceremonies as well as popular
> and elite culture, emphasize the period from Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima, which, in
> Carol Gluck's neat phrase, "set a balanced moral calculus" essentially allowing the
> atomic bombing to cancel out responsibility for Pearl Harbor and simply glossing
> over the colonization of Korea and the previous ten years of aggression against
> China. (Napier 2001, 162)

Napier then goes on to explain how this history is embodied by Studio Ghibli's film *The Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*, 1988), listing both narrative and cinematic techniques. For example, in terms of narrative she mentions how the focus on children as victims of war results in "an unproblematic response of heartfelt sympathy on the part of the viewers" (2001, 163), and in terms of cinematography she discusses the spatial tension between horizontal lines and "defiant" vertical lines (2001, 164), in which the horizontal lines are formed by aerial bombers and the vertical are formed by the children's bodies, until bombs begin to rain down, and a series of downward move-ments dominates/eliminates the children's spatial autonomy. These, and other tech-niques, contribute to a "nightmarish vision of passivity and despair" (2001, 163). The war is thus embodied as "relentlessly oppressive" towards innocent Japanese children, and this relentlessness "shuts out the possibility for action" (2001, 165).

Napier stops short of highlighting the political implications of the aesthetic she lu-cidly describes. From the perspective of international film criticism, the despondency and passivity of *The Grave of the Fireflies* need not be problematic, indeed we can say that by exposing the horrors of war using a cinematic language of helplessness and hopelessness, the film's political leaning is profoundly anti-war. However, from the perspective of cultural politics, we must consider *The Grave of the Fireflies* as part of an interrelated network of domestic cultural media, in which anti-war sensibility is built upon a sense of Japanese victimhood, rather than, for example, Japanese wartime ag-gression, or other countries' victimhood. By following this trend, *The Grave of the Fire-flies* can be seen to have a political leaning towards a problematic cultural status quo, in which its version of pacifism, constituted as it is by victimhood, serves a nationalistic

agenda in the context of East Asian relations. Also of note is another similarity with *I Wish I Was a Shellfish*: commemorative remakes, once as a live-action television drama in 2005 (the 60th anniversary of the end of the war), and then again as a live-action film in 2008. Once again, we are witness to the re-inscribing of these iconographic mythologies in the contemporary cultural sphere.

These retellings do not preclude new narratives of victims' history being produced. Let us consider a more recent Studio Ghibli film which has also designated a space of wartime victimhood to be occupied solely by Japanese citizens, albeit in a different way from *Grave of the Fireflies*. Unlike most victims' history films, Miyazaki Hayao's *The Wind Rises* (*Kaze Tachinu*, 2013) to some extent deals with ideas of the complicity and culpability of its Japanese hero in relation to the war effort. The film is based on the real-life story of Horikoshi Jiro, the designer of one of Japan's most successful warplanes. In his analysis of the film, Matthew Penney mostly understands it within the pacifist context that chimes with director Miyazaki's own stated feelings (2013, n.p.). When describing how Horikoshi reacts to his inventions being used as part of the war effort, Penney argues against any nationalist sentiment being expressed in the film, writing that "Horikoshi's face at this moment strikes me as being partway between confusion and loss but there is certainly no trace of triumph, of justified sacrifice" (2013, n.p.). However, while a "triumphant" brand of nationalism is not represented, it can be argued that a self-victimising nationalism is articulated via the affect of this scene: by means of the narrative as well as cinematic techniques such as close-up, the viewer is encouraged to feel sympathy for this Japanese inventor, for whom the intrusion of war into his engineering aspirations is saddening and confusing. While Horikoshi is not a victim in the same way that the two siblings are in *Grave of the Fireflies*, nonetheless he occupies the space of sympathy that the film offers its viewers. Penney also writes that "[t]he tragedy of engineers who married their design ambitions to military production is at the heart of *Kaze Tachinu*" (2013, n.p.). This is not a criticism, but Penney's descriptive analysis of the film's aesthetic, or "heart". While the film is undoubtedly successful in exploring this tragedy of Japanese engineers, the tragedy of non-Japanese people in the war is once again excluded from the allowed limits of sympathetic response.

Interestingly, Penney does identify a type of nationalism in *The Wind Rises*: what he calls "technological nationalism" (Penney 2013, n.p.). He points not only to the fetishisation of planes in the film, but also to extra-textual materials – for example, a "triumphantly" nationalist story on Horikoshi's planes in a magazine capitalising on the

wave of interest generated by Studio Ghibli's film (Penney 2013, n.p.). This example is instructive because we see how victims' history not only exists across a body of differing texts, but also spreads in unpredictable ways beyond the individual films that promote it. For this reason, we cannot take films such as those discussed above in isolation from the cultural and political climates in which they circulate. It is usually the case that taken outside of their contemporary domestic context, these films seem quite unproblematic, or even progressive. After all, self-victimisation is certainly not unique to Japanese narratives, and victim consciousness in Japan is historically linked to progressive movements (Orr 2001). James Orr goes as far as to say that

> the strongest impetus for victim consciousness can be found in scholar-activist Yasui Kaoru's efforts to expand the anti-nuclear peace movement from a Communist and Socialist project into a bona fide nonpartisan national movement after the Lucky Dragon Incident of 1954. (Orr 2001, 8)

However, it is this very nationalising of victimhood which results in "Japan" and "the Japanese" being enshrined in the space of sympathy that popular films offer, establishing their role in an ideological apparatus that has yet to meaningfully grant other Asian nations access to these filmic spaces.

It is important to emphasise that the individual films discussed here are not necessarily flawed or at fault for their position within the discourse of victims' history, but rather that they are material components in a network of cultural objects that makes up a problematic milieu out of which national identities are formed. The idea that these films could be "fixed" simply by including representations of Asia is not to be assumed as a facile solution to the problematic nature of a widespread cultural narrative. Indeed, even when Asia is represented in Japanese popular cinema, its depiction is often determined in part by the same nationalist framework that excludes "Asia" from a space of sympathy in victims' history films, as we shall see.

New Asianism: Decolonisation and Cosmetic Multiculturalism

Naoki Sakai tells us that while the decolonisation of Japanese territories took place immediately after the War, the decolonisation of Japanese identity – which is to say its working through of its colonial relationship with its neighbouring countries – was postponed, as a result of the US-Japan agreement or "transpacific complicity" mentioned above, until the start of the 1990s (2010, 252). Various events, such as the comfort

women issue, are therefore framed as the re-conceptualisation of Japan's role in the War within the mindsets of ordinary citizens (2010, 252). In popular culture, we can see acknowledgment and questioning of Japan's attitude towards East Asian countries regarding its colonial period. The end of the 80s saw such events as the nationalist craze over the death of the Shōwa Emperor and the enactment of a law demanding public schools make a show of respect towards national symbols (such as the flag and the anthem), and later an increase in vocal historical revisionists that denied the atrocities of the Japanese army committed against Asia in the War (Ko 2010, 18). At the same time as this surge in right-wing nationalism, a multiculturalist discourse began to take hold of popular media. As director Ōshima Nagisa notes, since the early 90s there has been a large increase in the number of Japanese films made about foreigners and minorities in Japan (quoted in Ko 2010, 2). Asia has become present not just through its depiction in Japanese cultural products, but also through new interest in foreign works, for example the rise of Hong Kong cinema's popularity in Japan (Lo 2014, 212). Mika Ko tells us that since the mid-80s, the discourse of internationalisation or *kokusai-ka*

> …and what [Gavan] McCormack calls the 'New Asianism' have been vigorously promoted, giving the impression that Japan is positioning itself in broader Asian regional or global networks rather than being narrowly caught in the 'national' border. (2010, 20)

To the extent that this multiculturalism is a reaction against or pulling away from rightwing nationalism, it might be considered as part of a wider decolonisation of the Japanese identity as well. Films such as *Swallowtail* (*Suwarōteiru*, 1996), with their focus on immigrants and the various languages they employ (Japanese, English, Mandarin, and Cantonese in the case of *Swallowtail*), can be understood as material artefacts that embody a second phase of decolonisation in Japan (if the first was territorial).

However, it would be wrong to think of the New Asianism as simple proof of decolonisation, when in many ways it shows the opposite. For example, Ko points out that famed conservative Ishihara Shintaro's 1994 book *The Asia That Says 'No'* (*'No' to ieru Ajia*) "praises the racial hybridity of the Japanese" to promote Japanese uniqueness in such a way that it resonates both with the discourse of *nihonjinron* and the pre-war and wartime discourse of a pan-Asian hierarchy led by Japan (2010, 178). For all its linguistic diversity, Kwai-Cheung Lo argues that *Swallowtail* creates a hierarchy of languages

in which English is a civilised Other to Japanese, and Chinese is an Orientalised or eroticised Other to Japanese (2014, 219). Lo also briefly mentions the Japanese-Hong Kong coproduction *Christ of Nanjing* (*Nankin no kurisuto*, 1995), which I will describe in more detail here as it is an under-analysed film that nonetheless powerfully illustrates the tropes and affective force of New Asianism.

The straightforward plot depicts a Japanese writer who suffers from migraines and travels to Nanjing for "relief", meeting and falling in love with a Chinese prostitute, whose life ends in tragedy after he abandons her. Interestingly, the film is an adaptation of a 1920s story by Akutagawa Ryunosuke, classified by Nishihara Daisuke as belonging to the popular "*shinashumi*" genre of the 1920s (2000). Nishihara defines *shinashumi* as "a taste for China and things Chinese" (2000, 19), and, drawing on Said's *Orientalism* (1979), he tells us that the stories in this genre "treated China as Western writers treated the Islamic world. There was always a sexual side to it" (2000, 23). We can see that in this case from the prewar period, the Japanese interest in representing China is linked to a colonialist gaze, and so we should not dismiss lightly that the same narrative is resurrected in a film in 1995. Indeed, the film uses various techniques to evoke China as a lively erotic space to be contrasted with a domestic and static Japan, such as colour filters which tint many of the Japanese scenes in the same hue. In one moment of dialogue, the writer compares himself to the fixed and unmoving cherry blossoms painted on a screen in his Japanese home: in this case, the symbol both for Japan and the transience of nature is appropriated to refer to his fleeting love affair in China, and to add a further irony, now that he is back in Japan the love remains permanently etched on his body, refusing to pass or fade in the natural way that cherry blossoms are expected to. In the same moment that it subverts nationalist imagery, the allusion to cherry blossoms paints China as a space of blossoming, active love, and Japan as a space of paralysed, listless longing.[2] *Christ of Nanjing* had a positive critical reception in Japan, being nominated for three awards at the Tokyo International Film Festival (Tokyo Grand Prix, Best Actress, and Best Artistic Contribution), and winning two out of those three (Best Actress and Best Artistic Contribution) (Tokyo International Film Festival, n.p.).

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[2] This reading is complicated by the fact that the Japanese writer is played by a Chinese actor, and the Chinese prostitute is played by a Japanese actor. Beyond the narrative, the ways in which audiences may interact with colonialist gazes and so on is far from clear – what is clear is that the line of distinction between a Japanese world and a Chinese one is drawn, even though the othering in this case is unusually opaque in denoting a subject and its object.

Christ of Nanjing is a clear example of the gendered dynamic in onscreen represen-
tations between Japan and China identified by various scholars, including Griseldis
Kirsch who gives several convincing examples of "Chinese women as saviours to Japa-
nese men" in film and television from the 1990s and early 2000s (2015, 99-106). Dis-
cussing "Hong Kong films" primarily financed and coproduced by Japan (i.e. intended
first and foremost for a Japanese audience) Kwai-Cheung Lo says that "Chinese-Japa-
nese relations are always represented in terms of a Japanese masculine self in an am-
biguous connection with a Hong Kong Chinese feminine other. More Chinese females
than males are cast in Japanese films" (Lo 2014, 215). This gendered dynamic in the
representation of Asia onscreen is once again evocative of the discourse of Orientalism
outlined by Edward Said (1979). Lo echoes Tessa Morris-Suzuki's assertion that Japan
has developed a discourse of "cosmetic multiculturalism" (2002, 171) in which cultural
and ethnic homogeneity is unchallenged, and other cultures are commodified for their
consumption by the host culture. In Lo's words:

> A fetishized but displaced Asian other (in the forms of ethnic and linguistic diver-
> sity) has been repackaged into an object of consumption to suit the tourist's exot-
> icism and to reinforce the reemergence of Japanese nationalist discourses that are
> understood to be reactions to the perceived threat of a rising China. (2014, 217)

Given these examples, it seems that one must ask to what extent re-engagement with Asia
can be called a mode of decolonisation, and if the discursive or ideological effects of these
films differ greatly from those of the films that exclude Asia categorised as victims' history.

Sinophobia: Distinguishing Old Asia from New Asia

In the financial and artistic coproductions between Hong Kong and Japan, we see
another type of ideological complicity taking shape in the portrayal of China, such as
the one depicted in *Christ of Nanjing* or *Hong Kong Night Club* (*Hon Kon dai yasokai:
Tatchi & Magi*, 1997), a slapstick comedy beset by an atmosphere of foreboding, with a
narrative that takes place in Hong Kong months before the handover from British to
Chinese rule. Characters seek foreign passports to leave the city, a main character fears
she will have to become a prostitute because the nightclub she works at is about to
become a karaoke bar, and various other symbols of qualitative change ensue.
Throughout all this, "China goes unmentioned, as if it never existed" (Lo 2014, 209).

Paraphrasing Koyasu Nobukini, Lo asserts that modern Japanese identity "is based on its erasure of China from its frame of reference" (Lo 2014, 209), and that the apparently multiculturalist Hong Kong coproductions since the late 80s "attempt to play up ethnic Asian factors in order to play down Chinese ones" (Lo 2014, 221). In other words, a sinophobic censorial ideology still exerts itself within the Japanese filmmaking industry. While it may stem from different sources, it certainly overlaps with and benefits from the kind of "amnesiac" erasure seen in victims' history films.

Nonetheless, going by Lo's analysis, China clearly *is* represented in *Hong Kong Night Club*: as an impending force of change, as the unmentioned source of the characters' fears, and as an off-screen threat. China is othered and objictified just as much as it is "erased". Lo's analysis of an exoticism of "Asia" linked to the "perceived threat of a rising China" speaks to the political climate in both Japan and Hong Kong. What this suggests is not so much that "Asia" is being erased, but that a sinophobic climate plays a significant role in the objectifying or Orientalising of an "old Asia" in contrast to a modern, multicultural (as in *Swallowtail*), subjective (as in *Christ of Nanjing*) Asia, of which Japan is a part.

Marked and Unmarked Asia in Japanese Cinema

When Iwabuchi Koichi describes Japan's Self-Other relationship with the West, he writes that "Japan does not have to mark its position in relation to the non-West, because it is absolutely certain about its superiority", and that in relation to the "West versus the rest" dichotomy, "'The rest' has changed from the 'marked' inferior [as seen in Orientalism] to the 'unmarked' inferior [as seen in the turn away from Asia]" (Iwabuchi 1994, n.p.). This analysis fits the discourse of victims' history and an erased Asia well, but does not account for New Asianist films in which Asian countries are clearly 'marked'. In the same essay, Iwabuchi discusses the film *A Memorial Travel on Graduation: I came from Nihon* (*Sotsugyo Ryoko: Nihon kara Kimashita*, 1993), about

> a male university student who becomes a pop star in a fictional Asian country. He travels to the country where people are immersed in a "*Nihon* boom" and is scouted as a pop singer. The film is described as 'cultural gap comedy' [...] However, in this film, the object of exploitation of Japanese otherness is Asia, not the West. It suggests Japanese hegemony over Asia... (Iwabuchi 1994, n.p.)

In this case too, Asia is clearly "marked" in distinction to Japan – but does this contradict or contrast its position as an unmarked (or erased) inferior?

When discussing erasure, it is important not to overlook the signifiers (which Iwabuchi himself describes) associated with Asian representation in Japanese film. Kirsch describes the findings of an extensive content analysis project on representations of Asia in Japanese media, which found that Japanese and non-Japanese Asian characters tended to have distinct roles: while Japanese characters were "individualist and modern", Asian characters were "family-oriented" and "traditional" (2015, 30). Furthermore,

> The Asian characters – who possess the energy to overcome difficulties and achieve success – are constructed as role models for the Japanese. In this context, they often become saviours to the lethargic and unmotivated Japanese. They are thus being appropriated to provide a vital impulse for the development of the Japanese characters. (2015, 30-31)

Kirsch follows Iwabuchi in asserting that "Asia is used as a field of projection for Japan's own needs – the alleged need to reacquire the energy lost after the completion of modernization" (2015, 30).

What seems clear is that whether Asia goes unmarked, as in victims' history films, or marked, as in New Asianist films, in both cases it suffers from a type of exclusion. Even though the New Asianist films discussed all encourage their audiences to sympathise with non-Japanese characters, that they accomplish this through objectification or Orientalism reinforces the dichotomy of Self and Other, establishing a border between the viewer and Asia just as the victims' history films do. Othering and erasure in Japanese popular cinema can therefore be seen as two techniques that are complicit in a general aim of relegating Asia outside of viewer subjectivity, if not always beyond the limits of sympathetic response.

At least on one level, the emergence of a "cosmetic multiculturalism" in Japanese popular film may also be read as a positive development in the history of the country's cinema. Not only does this emergence provide some of the groundwork on which a non-hierarchal multiculturalism may eventually be built, but also, especially when compared to the structuring of victims' history films, it reveals that the enclosed spaces of sympathy that all films offer have malleable borders when it comes to the depiction of Asia and Japan.

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