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Japan-Bashing: Fear of Cultural Erasure and Sexual Violence in the Anti-Japan Panic
1982-1995

by

Shawn Forouraghi

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Lehigh University

8/25/2019

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Thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts in History.

Japan-Bashing: Fear of Cultural Erasure and Sexual Violence in the Anti-Japan Panic
1982-1995
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8/20/2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Tamara Myers, who has continually encouraged me during this project and has patiently indulged my excesses during the writing on this thesis. I would also like to thank John Savage for serving as co-director on this project, as well as the rest of the history faculty at Lehigh I've been instructed by, for continually exposing me to interesting ideas in other fields that indirectly helped spark this project.

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ABSTRACT

During the 1980s and early 1990s, a panic over Japan gripped the country. As economic conditions favored Japanese imports, and more dramatically, the purchase of real estate, Americans interpreted Japanese direct investment in the United States as a form of colonialism and saw the sale of iconic American properties as a kind of cultural warfare. Japan was believed to be in a position to supplant American economic might and conquer the United States after having failed to do so during World War II. This thesis provides an overview of this low point in postwar US-Japan relations and examines some of the themes emerging from the panic of Japanese ascendancy. Americans hoped to rebuild their sense of imagined community through consumption of “Made in the USA” goods and by making Japan into a new kind of enemy. A late 20th century ‘decline of the West’ narrative had the United States rapidly becoming an impoverished country being eclipsed by a Japanese superpower. This thesis focuses in particular on the discourse surrounding ‘Japanification’ and the implicit threat to Western values posed by the rise of Japanese culture globally. This tended to center on a perceived threat to free speech and perceived degrading treatment of women. Media concern over misogyny in Japanese pornographic comic books in particular is shown to be part of a longer history in US-Japan relations of Japanese as a sexual threat and gendering Japan as a threatening hermaphroditic figure.

INTRODUCTION

“Japan is number one...I like the Japanese. They work so hard...the Japanese are...hahaha, like monkeys, you know;...small cocks, short legs, yellow monkeys. Do you understand, Mr. Ohira?”

“...ah, no, hahaha...yeah, I cannot speak English- a little, little.”

- “Snakeman Show,” (1980) ¹

The trade friction with Japan marks a significant moment in the American transition to a postindustrial economy. This transition meant that Americans experienced a sense of decline in global prestige as well as falling standards of living that changed the way of life for millions of working-class Americans. They responded with anger, directing it at foreign competition, particularly from Japan. The cultural dimensions of these changes tended to manifest in speculation on the decline of America in particular, and a decline of the West itself more generally, in the face of Japan’s apparently unshakeable economic ascendancy. The qualities of the anti-Japan panic (1981-1993) suggest it emerged when and how it did in the United States from the intersection of 1970s declension narratives and the social stress created by structural economic transition to offshore industrial labor during the 1970s and 1980s. Some of the content of Japan-bashing was also shaped by the long history of Yellow Peril, revealing remarkable continuities between the early twentieth century and the late twentieth century.

¹ Yellow Magic Orchestra, “Snakeman Show,” *X ∞ Multiplies*. Alfa Records, YMO-1, 1980, LP.

A strain of harsh academic criticism of the Japanese economy and state (so called “revisionism”) was rooted in a critique of the neoliberal policies of Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush;² however, the volatility of US-Japan relations resulting from trade policy produced a climate encouraging popular knee-jerk bashing of Japanese culture and a revival of Yellow Peril discourse. Japan was consequently entangled for over a decade in a bilateral tension that had all-American roots.

This thesis examines some of the Japan panic discourse that has not yet been fully examined in the literature. In this introduction, I will lay out the history of the Japan panic, from the origin of the postwar trade deficit to Japan-bashing. As the quote from the Japanese band Yellow Magic Orchestra that opens this section suggests, the 1980s were a period of high American interest in Japanese culture, but this was concurrent with anti-Japanism, and in some ways the two were mutually reinforcing. This thesis examines some of the ways by which the imagined community of the United States was contrasted with the imagined community of Japan, and the ways the Japan panic communicated the semiotics of production and industry as vital for national strength in the face of neoliberal arguments for free trade and a postindustrial economy.

It will then examine the fear of being overwhelmed by Japanese civilization, stemming from the purchase of symbolic American real estate. Identification of Japanese with sexual perversion and violence indicates strong continuity with the prewar gendering of Japan as bifurcated into a compliant female and a hostile and sexually violent male. The 1980s-1990s is unique, however, in interpreting both genders of the bifurcated Japanese figure as hostile, while America was re-gendered as a compliant or

² M.J. Heale, “Anatomy of a Scare: Yellow Peril Politics in America, 1980-1993,” *Journal of American Studies*, 43, no. 1 (April 2009), 30.

subjugated female in a narrative of American victimization by Japanese out to rape the world.

The Origins of the Pacific (Trade) War

The root of the trade tensions between the US and Japan lies at the end of World War Two. In 1946, few expected Japan to become an economic power. The country had been utterly defeated; its industries lay in ruins and its people were displaced and starving to death, the latter problem exacerbated by the return of millions of Japanese soldiers from foreign theaters of war. The American occupation introduced liberal reforms to Japan, such as women's suffrage and legal equality, protections for labor unions, and a new constitution which contained the famous clause Article 9, which renounced war as a tool of the Japanese state. The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, saw his duty in Japan as remaking the nation into something resembling the American West as it preferred to see itself; liberal and committed to free enterprise. To that end he instituted a land reform policy that eliminated the peerage, and also tried to eliminate the prewar Japanese industrial combines (*zaibatsu*- the most infamous of which is, no doubt, Mitsubishi) as illegal monopolies.³

However, the Truman administration (1945-1953) was eager to see Japan rebuilt as quickly as possible and decided the *zaibatsu* should be left alone. In 1948 a special army review board exempted all banks and weakened nearly all of the dissolution orders

³Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7-18.

issued by SCAP; later that year Truman sent the Detroit banker Joseph Dodge to oversee SCAP. Dodge and SCAP began to crack down on any kind of left-wing Japanese dissent that could lend itself to Communism- that is to say, organized labor. As a result, the prewar Japanese power structure of large industrial capitalists and state bureaucrats remained mostly unchanged by 1949.⁴ The industrial combines provided the template for postwar Japanese business concerns (*keiretsu*) and became the focus of American anger as trade tensions flared some forty years later. The keiretsu structure of interlocked manufacturing concerns, all tied to a central bank that provided loans and kept companies afloat, was designed to prevent the spectacular failure of a Japanese company or industrial sector, as this would be inimical to rapid economic recovery. In April 1949, Dodge and SCAP promoted the Ministry for International Trade (MITI) with the goal of lifting Japan rapidly out of poverty by improving Japanese competitiveness and to further Dodge's vision of Japan as an exporter of low-cost goods. Born out of the state bureaucracies that directed wartime production, MITI favored and strengthened large corporations at the expense of consumers and smaller businesses, like Sony in its infancy.⁵ MITI regulated the importation of foreign technology and patents and would become a source of ambivalence in American trade war rhetoric, its American roots ironically forgotten.

The Truman administrations' desire to quickly rebuild Japan was not only to reduce yearly expenditures on humanitarian aid to Japan, but also to firmly ensconce Japan within the American Cold War camp, first as a buffer against the Soviet Union,

⁴ Schaller, *Altered States*, 17-18

⁵ Simon Partner, *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), 58-60.

then China. The Chinese Civil War (1927-1950) had resulted in Communist control of mainland China, a valuable potential market for Japan to sell goods and acquire needed resources like coal. In order to prevent Japan from becoming an economic hostage of a communist country, the administration ensured Japan could trade with the U.S. without the need to trade with China.⁶

Prior to 1965, Japan had a trade deficit with the United States; this was encouraged by Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, who wanted to continue the policy of preventing Japan from forging ties with China.⁷ For its part, Japan was not pressured by the US to spend on defense and was thus free to develop its civilian economy. Japan benefited tremendously from the opportune timing of the Korean War (1950-1953) and from exploiting its most precious resource- high school girls, who were recruited in large numbers to work in factories assembling consumer electronics.⁸

During the 1950s and 1960s, Japanese transistor electronics became a famous early success story, an unexpected triumph of engineering that found consumer application in miniaturized “pocket” radios. The marvel of Japanese miniaturization was remarked upon in a 1965 episode of *Gilligan’s Island* featuring a “Japanese” holdout who arrives on the island in a “miniaturized” submarine-⁹an early sign that Japan’s postwar technology prowess would, in some sense, never cease to be linked to the country’s past

⁶ Schaller, *Altered States*, 19-30

⁷ Aaron Forsberg, *America and the Japanese Miracle: The Cold War Context of Japan’s Postwar Economic Revival, 1950-1960*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 73-75; Schaller, *Altered States*, 162.

⁸ Simon Partner, “Nimble Fingers: the Story of the Transistor Radio,” in *Assembled in Japan: Electrical Goods and the Making of the Japanese Consumer* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999), 193-224.

⁹ *Gilligan’s Island*, “So Sorry, My Island Now,” directed by Alan Crosland, Jr., CBS, aired January 9th, 1965; the title of the episode of course alludes to Ogden Nash’s 1938 poem “The Japanese” that, if written about the Empire of Japan, seems to more accurately model the feelings of white farmers in early 20th century California about literal Japanese neighbors.

in the Pacific War. After 1965, the trade deficit swung in the other direction. Japan exported more products to the US than it imported.

The Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the two oil crises of the 1970s had dealt a heavy blow to America's prestige at home and abroad, Americans' confidence in their government, science, technology, and modernity itself. The popularity of imported European goods (mainly from West Germany) and Japan were identified by media commentators as a sign of the flagging productivity of the American worker and corporation. American workers were popularly considered to be lazy and poor workers.¹⁰ The large American automotive, symbolic of the nation's postwar economic ascendancy, had become increasingly untenable due to the energy crises. Japanese consumer goods, meanwhile, acquired a reputation as not only well-made, but affordable. Japanese automobiles had better fuel economy and became popular with American drivers.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan took office and promoted an ideology of free trade, with tax cuts and defense spending that increased both the trade and budget deficit.¹¹ He would later be harshly criticized by Japan-bashers for these policies, since they ensured the 1980s was a very favorable decade to Japan. The 1985 Plaza Accord was a move intended to correct the trade deficit by devaluing the dollar against the yen. The accord was supposed to have the effect of making Japanese imports higher in price and thus slow their sales in the US, but the accord had a paradoxical effect however. The strong yen allowed the Japanese to purchase US Treasury bonds as well as American real estate.

¹⁰ Natasha Zaretsky, "The Great Male Cop-out: Productivity and the End of the Family Wage," *In No Direction Home: The American Family and Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2007), 105-142.

¹¹ M.J. Heale, "Anatomy of a Scare," 24.

The origin of the Japan panic as a political issue in the US began with the search by Congressional Democrats for a wedge issue to use against Ronald Reagan.¹² Some of the most obvious expressions of American “economic nationalism” are the Democratic political slogans and comments from the period, such as Richard Gephardt’s now unnerving pledge to “make America first again.”¹³ However, this political rhetoric remained confined to the Beltway until the later 1980s when it became a full-blown panic.¹⁴

Scholars have pointed to Theodore H. White’s 1985 *New York Times* article “The Danger from Japan” as a critical intervention that marked the beginning of a more rabid Japan panic.¹⁵ White suggested that the Japanese export-led strategy for growth was a deliberate effort to drive American manufacturing out of business, describing Japan as an island fortress captained by MITI that was out to dominate the world.¹⁶ White’s article seems to generate many of the various anti-Japanese discourses of the late 1980s and early 1990s, ominously ending with an implicit suggestion to bomb Japan in order to resolve the trade deficit.

The Era of Hurt Feelings

¹² M.J. Heale, “Anatomy of A Scare,” 22-31.

¹³ Robert S. Boyd. “Gephardt tosses first Democratic hat in the ring.” *The Charlotte Observer*, February 28, 1987, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁴ M.J. Heale, “Anatomy of a Scare,” 34.

¹⁵ Michael Schaller, *Altered States*, 5; Narrelle Morris, *Japan-bashing: Anti-Japanese since the 1980s*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 7. White had been living in Chungking, the wartime capital of Nationalist China, during an assault by the Imperial Japanese forces; White wrote a brief recollection of having exchanged fire with Japanese infantry in the article. It seems very likely his traumatic wartime experiences drove this article.

¹⁶ Theodore H. White, “The Danger From Japan,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 1985, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

In 1979, Harvard sociologist Ezra Vogel published *Japan as Number One*, which argued that the Japanese were outpacing the US in many areas: economic productivity, basic educational, public health and welfare, and crime control.¹⁷ Vogel suggested that Americans were too parochial and Eurocentric, and should consider the possibility of learning from the experiences of a non-Western country.¹⁸ Vogel's book seems to have marked the beginning of an intensified American obsession with all things Japanese during the 1980s. While Americans had gained a new appreciation for Japanese culture in the 1960s as the Beat generation took an interest in Zen,¹⁹ in the early 1980s "Oriental" cultures came "in vogue."²⁰ One editorialist in *The Christian Science Monitor* wrote that "suburbia is said to be going mad for Orientalism."²¹ Japanese *kanji* characters were considered desirable for their aesthetic qualities²² and members of the New Wave scene were identified by "Japanese-influenced street garb."²³ The 1980 television adaptation of James Clavell's historical fiction novel *Shōgun* gave NBC the second highest ratings week to that point in history (behind ABC's *Roots* in 1977),²⁴ as 70 million television tuned in to the first episode.²⁵ The violent Japan of samurai and frequent beheadings was

¹⁷ Ezra Vogel, *Japan as Number One: Lessons for America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-8, 225.

¹⁹ Susan Napier, *From Impressionism to Anime: Japan as Fantasy and Fan Cult in the Mind of the West*, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2007), 82-90.

²⁰ Linda Dudley, "Wrapping up Christmas? Be creative." *San-Diego Union Tribune*, December 21, 1983, News Bank: America's News.

²¹ Melvin Maddocks, "The year of Marco Polo chic," *The Christian Science Monitor (Midwestern edition)*, October 20, 1980, News Bank: America's News.

²² Linda Dudley, "Wrapping up Christmas? Be creative." *San-Diego Union Tribune*, December 21, 1983, News Bank: America's News.

²³ Jonathan Takiff, "Ripley's Cutting Edge" *Philadelphia Daily News*, November 16, 1984, News Bank: America's News.

²⁴ Monitor correspondents, ed. by Randy Shipp, "Shogun' pushed NBC to the top last week," *The Christian Science Monitor (Midwestern edition)*, September 24 1980, News Bank: America's News.

²⁵ Monitor correspondents, ed. by Randy Shipp, "Shogun' extravaganza gives NBC rave ratings" *The Christian Science Monitor (Midwestern edition)*, September 18, 1980, News Bank: America's News.

a phenomenal success- even if the plot was “as inscrutable as Orientals,” as one reviewer put it.²⁶ Japanese management techniques were thought to be the cure American industrial malaise, while American popular culture began to be saturated with cliché Japanese words like “bushidō,” “katana,” and “ninja,” through martial arts films such as *The Karate Kid* (1984) and *American Ninja* (1985)-the latter sparking a craze for ninja costumes among children that had bewildered parents asking, “What's a nin-jaw?”²⁷ Japanese television programs made inroads into the United States through transnational communities, such as science-fiction fan communities, Japanese-American television broadcasts and the development and proliferation of home video formats and players between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s.²⁸

A sudden interest in samurai developed from the perception among American businessmen their Japanese counterparts had a samurai mentality. In 1981, sales of the seventeenth century text *The Book of Five Rings*, by the samurai Musashi Miyamoto²⁹ (1584-1645), took off after New York advertiser George Lois declared “the Japanese entrepreneur is not nurtured at an Asian equivalent of the Harvard Business School...instead he studies, lives and works according to an almost mythic tome...the Book of Five Rings.”³⁰ In 1981, a 1974 translation of *The Book of Five Rings* sold

²⁶ Arthur Unger, “‘Shogun’- an Oriental ‘Gone with the Wind’?” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Midwestern edition), September 11, 1980, News Bank: America’s News.

²⁷ Steven de Salvo, “Everybody wants to be a ninja” *The Mercury News*, October 25, 1985, News Bank: America’s News.

²⁸ Fred Patten, “Anime in the United States,” *Animation in Asia and the Pacific* ed. John A. Lent (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; 2001), 58-60.

²⁹ All Japanese names are presented in Western order of first name, family name.

³⁰ “New and Noteworthy: Paperbacks,” *The New York Times* (Late Edition, East Coast), March 14, 1982, A31, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

110,000 hardcover copies in twelve editions and 100,000 paperback copies.³¹

Meanwhile, the disaffected protagonists who fought against states and corporations in William Gibson's science fiction were "street samurai."³² Gibson's fiction helped to reorient the discursive view of futuristic technology as something Western-made to something specifically made in Japan.³³

The Japanophilia of the '80s tended to incorporate a superhuman image of the Japanese, particularly in regards to Japanese education- the vision of Japanese super-schools and intelligence prompted intensified American efforts to reform schooling during the 1980s and 1990s.³⁴ Yet this same superhuman character could be turned into a menace, and Japanophilia was concurrent with Japanophobia.

During the recession of the early Reagan years, many displaced workers did not direct their anger over poor economic conditions and closing industries at American capitalists, but at the Japanese. A round of layoffs in the summer of 1982 by the big three automakers sparked anti-Asian American activity in Detroit. On June 23, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American draftsman, was murdered by two white autoworkers, because they believed him to be a Japanese. Neither killer was jailed; rather, both were sentenced to probation and \$3,000 restitution after pleading guilty to a manslaughter charge.³⁵

³¹Edwin McDowell, "What's New on the Executive Bookshelf: The Japanese Way of Work, Revisited." *The New York Times* (Late Edition, East Coast), November 14, 1982, A25, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

³² William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, (New York: Ace Books, 2000), 30.

³³ Charles Paulk, "Post-National Cool: William Gibson's Japan," *Science Fiction Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011), 479.

³⁴ Marie Thorsten, "America's Superhuman Japan: Rising Sun to globalization rising" In *Superhuman Japan-Knowledge, Nation, and Culture in US-Japan relations*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 32-36.

³⁵ Leon Daniel, "In Detroit, Asians are a symbol," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug 23, 1983, News Bank: America's News.

American sentiment towards Japan became increasingly irrational during the 1980s and early 1990s, beginning in 1987 after Toshiba Machine Corporation and Kongsberg Vaapenfabrikk, a Norwegian state enterprise, were found to have illegally sold submarine components to the Soviet Union. Much like with the Norwegian whaling industry, the Norwegians were let off the hook in the court of public opinion, while members of Congress smashed Toshiba radios and called for sanctions against Toshiba and its related firms.³⁶ A sense of being sabotaged by Japan became more pronounced. One editorialist, concerned about the climate of Japan-bashing, writes “it is no longer ‘interesting’ to learn about how different the Japanese are. Now that Japan is a major economic threat - and some of its greatest weapons are perceived to be cultural traditions like ‘buying Japanese,’ a conspiracy against foreigners, and saving money fanatically- Japanese culture has been transformed into a threat.”³⁷ Japan-bashing was shifting focus from a preoccupation with trade deficit to framing Japanese import restrictions and exports as symptomatic of a Japanese national pathology.

Media commentators cited a growing sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with the Japanese. One source of bad feelings was the grievance of Quasar workers that their Japanese employers seemed to discriminate against them on the basis of national origin,³⁸ a complaint tarnishing several other firms such as Toyota, Honda, Ricoh and Fujitsu.³⁹

³⁶ Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta. “Spreading the Blame Beyond Toshiba.” *The Washington Post*. August 16, 1987, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post.

³⁷ John H. Makin, “Economic Frustration Core of Japan-Bashing,” *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, September 1, 1987, News Bank: America’s News.

³⁸ Thomas Lennon, dir., *Frontline* season 10, episode 3, “Coming from Japan,” aired February 18, 1992 on PBS.

³⁹ Elizabeth Douglas, “Victims in our own ‘sandbox’? Some critics charge bias by Japanese-owned firms.” *The San Diego Union Tribune (Evening Tribune)*, October 21, 1991, News Bank: America’s News.

One bias suit plaintiff seemed to sum up the feelings of many Americans when he said that “We’re going by Japan’s rules in our own sandbox.”⁴⁰

During the intense tension between 1987-1993, several key events occurred. First was the purchase of several pieces of iconic American real estate, such as Rockefeller Center in 1988, Columbia Pictures in 1989, and MCA Universal in 1990. Following this, tensions between the US and Japan flared over the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991), and the emergence of “Buy American” campaigns and laws in many American industrial cities and towns. The climate of Japan-bashing resulted in an uptick in hate crimes against Asian-Americans, especially in southern California.⁴¹ Due to Japanese reliance on the Gulf for its oil supply, the Japanese were bashed mercilessly for refusing to commit combat troops to the American coalition against Iraq-even though war as an instrument of state policy was specifically forbidden by the Japanese constitution.

Japan’s financial contributions to the Gulf War were in fact the strongest measures of support for an American war the postwar Japanese state had yet provided,⁴² but the widespread assessment of Japan’s Gulf War contributions as insufficient⁴³ in the face of its imagined wealth⁴⁴ suggested to Americans that Japan was not ready to be a part of the global ‘New World Order.’ Japan was treated in the media as something of a pariah nation by the United States and Western Europe. Western media accused the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Doobo Shim, “Yellow Peril to Model Minority to Renewed Yellow Peril,” 398.

⁴² Chalmers Johnson, *Japan: Who Governs?* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1995), 299.

⁴³ M.J. Heale, “Anatomy of a Scare,” 41.

⁴⁴ Specifically, international demands for Japanese foreign aid, purchase of American imports, etc. and subsequent anger at ‘stinginess’ of Japanese efforts to comply were predicated on a delusional belief in a much higher Japanese wealth than existed. From: Jon Woronof, *Japan as Anything but Number One*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharp, 1990), 282.

Japanese of having a degrading and sadistic view of women;⁴⁵ the Japanese were racists- “the most racist people on the planet,”⁴⁶ no less; they were economic imperialists in South Asia;⁴⁷ they hunted whales in contravention of law and decency, and worst of all- they liked Ronald Reagan.⁴⁸ A popular talking point was the “free rider” Japan that got rich off postwar American generosity and the blood shed by Americans in Korea and Vietnam creating free markets in Asia- and that Japan needed to remember its place.

Segments of the American public seemed to feel an almost a pathological need for Japanese to be dealt with directly; for years, violent rhetoric invoking images of atom bombs and strategic bombing had been circulated by Japan-bashers.⁴⁹ One response to this rhetoric was the 1987 Japanese film *Twilight of the Cockroaches*, in which a society of Japanese cockroaches are abruptly exterminated by the human they had previously lived with in harmony. The cockroaches had misread the intentions of the human, who had allowed them to survive out of mere indifference, rather than benevolence. Once he has a motivation to do so, he kills them with insecticide, in an unmistakable parallel to the shock and awe of an atomic bombing. Reviewers for the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* did not miss the allegories for global Japan-bashing, as well as the death

⁴⁵ Jim Fallows, “The Japanese are different from you and me.” *The Atlantic*, September 1986.

⁴⁶ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 327.

⁴⁷ Ronald E. Yates, “Japan Tries to Come to Terms with ‘Ugly’ Image-Nation Begins to Re-evaluate Role in Global Family,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 26, 1987, News Bank: America’s News.

⁴⁸ Reagan had a strong working relationship with his Japanese counterpart, Yasuhiro Nakasone, dubbed the “Ron-Yasu” friendship. After he left office, Reagan embarked on an eight-day speaking tour of Japan in October-November of 1989 -for which he was paid \$2 million dollars by the Fuji media conglomerate- and for which he was thoroughly criticized in the American press, who accused Reagan of having sold out America to the Japanese. One letter writer declared Reagan to be “an employee of the Japanese” (John Engelman, letter to the editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 7, 1989, News Bank: America’s News.). In Japan, Reagan was welcomed as “Mr. America” by Fuji’s newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* (People Staff, “Eight Days in Japan Earn Ron and Nancy \$2 Million- Now that’s Reaganomics” *People*, November 6, 1989).

⁴⁹ M.J. Heale, “Anatomy of a Scare,” 41.

and rebirth of Japan after the atomic bombings. However, *The New York Times* seemed to be more distressed by the film's suggestion that the cockroaches will inherit the Earth, eventually.⁵⁰

Twilight of the Cockroaches was just one expression of a feeling on both sides of the Pacific that physical war was on the horizon. In the U.S., a war with Japan seemed inevitable if the Japanese rise to global power was to be halted. The concept of such a war received an academic treatment in George Friedman and Meredith Lebard's *The Coming War with Japan* (1991) and a fictional one in Tom Clancy's *Debt of Honor* (1994), in which the US cripples Japan's economy with sanctions, provoking a shooting war. The speculative necessity of using force to cripple Japanese ascension and thus prevent a Pacific Century seems to point to the extent to which American power was felt to be declining even as it had unparalleled technological mastery over the use of force. No amount of triumphalist post-Desert Storm tank parades down the streets of Washington D.C. would solve the Japan problem.

⁵⁰ Richard Harrington, "'Twilight of the Cockroaches,'" *The Washington Post*, October 6, 1989, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post; Vincent Canby, "How Elitist Roaches See the World," *The New York Times*, May 29, 1991, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

TROPES IN ANTI-JAPANESE DISCOURSES

Anti-Japanese discourse had several strains that could incorporate elements from each other. Techno-nationalists were concerned with national rivalry in high-tech sectors; industrialists and unions who promoted Japan as a threat were fixated on restricting imports and battering down Japanese resistance to American products; some, like Theodore White, saw a carefully coordinated Japanese plan to dominate the planet or decimate American industry as revenge for loss in the Pacific War. Michael Crichton took every discursive thread and put them into a stew of Japan-bashing in his 1992 potboiler *Rising Sun*.

Techno-nationalism

Techno-nationalist discourses highlighted the need for retaining American control of high technology in order for the country to maintain its grip on the latest terrifying weaponry and economically dominate emerging high-tech sectors. Japanese firms were the only serious competitors in the field of silicon chips, most famously demonstrated by so-called ‘chip famines;’ in 1986, the federal government caused one such shortage by curtailing Japanese chip production while US producers were unable to make up the difference.⁵¹ Along these lines were the “revisionists,” a group of academics who critiqued the Japanese economy as state-directed and advocated harsh treatment of Japan by the American state, endorsed strong protectionist policy, and recommended the

⁵¹ Andrew Pollack, “Chip pact falls short of goals,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1988, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

American federal government direct economic production through a national industrial policy. This academic contestation of the role of the state in guiding the Japanese economy was at root a referendum on Reaganesque policy; revisionists' harsh stances on Japan were a challenge to the neoliberal orthodoxy. However, these economists' work was appropriated by others for vulgar Japan-bashing, something they could not quite distance themselves from successfully. Historian M.J. Heale attributes the popular growth of Japan-bashing to the "book war" involving these academics.⁵²

Japan-bashing

There still is not a clear, commonly accepted word to describe anti-Japanese sentiment in the 1980s-1990s. At the time, the images of Americans bashing Japanese autos and electronics with sledgehammers seemed to give a visual heft to the term "Japan-bashing," which was used to describe a range of positions and people of varying standing, from academic criticism of the Japanese economy to blatant racism. The term 'Japan-bashing' is thus almost synonymous with the bundle of discourse and behaviors that produced acts of literal bashing, but what precisely those discourses are is not so clear. Scholar Narrelle Morris writes that "there is no one accepted interpretation of what the label 'Japan-bashing' meant,"⁵³ resulting in a difficulty in pinning down its use and meaning. Prominent Americans tried to distance themselves from the term 'Japan-bashing' and its linkage with racism. For example, in 1991 economist Pat Choate and Chrysler executive Lee Iacocca, both considered at the time preeminent "Japan-

⁵² M.J. Heale, "Anatomy of a Scare," 34.

⁵³ Narrelle Morris, *Japan-bashing*, 7.

bashers,” were falsely attributed as authors of “The Second Pearl Harbor,” a book Choate and Iacocca considered to be so racist that it was damaging to their reputation, and used legal power to halt its publication.⁵⁴

One of the recurring themes of the Japan panic is the singling out of Japanese for criticism while ignoring similar activity from members of the West, such as the high amount of British foreign investment in the United States or the Norwegian complicity in the Toshiba scandal. A paranoia around Japanese motives and Japanese culture seems to be a key feature of Japan-bashing, closely linking the term with racism and Yellow Peril tropes.

Is business war?

To butcher a phrase from Clausewitz, Japan-bashers viewed Japanese businesses as ‘the continuation of war by other means.’ Whatever a Japanese corporation did was often described as the will of the state of Japan, and that will tended to be domination of a strategic technological sector or even global domination for its own sake. For example, in 1989 *M*A*S*H** creator Larry Gelbart wrote in *The New York Times* that Sony purchase of Columbia Pictures was an attempt “to gain worldwide supremacy through economic rather than military means.”⁵⁵ It was frequently asserted that, to the Japanese, “business

⁵⁴ N.A. “Iacocca Suit Bans Anti-Japan Book” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 10, 1991, News Bank: America’s News.

⁵⁵ Larry Gelbart, “Japan Buys a Used President,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 1989, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

is war”⁵⁶ and Americans had to recognize the necessity of responding with a patriotic, collective effort to drive the Japanese invaders out of the American market. The failure of the American state to recognize and respond to Japanese aggression was a recurring theme, such as the weak penalties imposed by the federal government after Matsushita Electric Industrial Co. was found guilty of dumping televisions.⁵⁷

A legacy of the revisionists’ “Japan, Inc.” term (to refer to the relationship between Japanese businesses and the state), popular media tended to reduce actions by Japanese businesses to simply “the Japanese.” For example, *Newsweek* described the purchase of MCA Universal by Matsushita with headline “Japan closes in on its biggest U.S. prize.”⁵⁸ Ordinary business transactions were now a national security threat.

Scholars have described the tendency of anti-Japanese sentiment to mirror traditional anti-Semitism through the tropes of Japanese ‘inscrutability;’ a Japanese inability to ‘properly belong’ to the global community; a supposed control of the global financial system, the identification of the Japanese with modernity, and a fear of ‘stealthy’ infiltration by Japanese.⁵⁹ The close association of the Japanese with machines is evocative of a linkage between Jews and “the machine” in prewar Western Europe.⁶⁰ The essence of this irrational form of Japan panic was the belief that the Japanese, as a result of their culture and history, were not fit to be part of the global community-in the same way Jews were not fit to be a part of “the West” because they were ‘inassimilable.’

⁵⁶ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf: 1992), 192; Steven Schlossinger, *Trade War*. (NY: Congdon & Weed: 1984), 13.

⁵⁷ Lennon, “Coming from Japan;” David Schwartzman, *The Japanese Television Cartel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 198.

⁵⁸ N.A. “Japan closes in on its biggest U.S. prize.” *Newsweek*, 116 no. 23, December 30, 1990, 43.

⁵⁹ David Morley and Kevin Robins, “Techno-Orientalism,” In *Spaces of Identity: Global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*, (New York, Routledge 1995), 156-159.

⁶⁰ For a discussion of the linkage between Jews and machines, see: Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holsim in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

A Japanese history of isolationism, imperialism and ‘sneakiness’ were indicators of a Japanese national pathology. In 1991, PBS reported some of the contents of a CIA-sponsored report on Japan, prepared by the Rochester Institute of Technology, as follows: “The Japanese firmly believe might is right. The fundamental amorality of the Japanese is in direct conflict with Western moral imperatives. Japan is preparing an economic sneak attack from which our country may not recover.”⁶¹ The report’s statements echo the anti-Semitic aspects in its anti-Japanese sentiment; the Japanese are different, inassimilable into the New World Order, and are silently infiltrating the nation in order to cause damage. The aspect of ‘stealth’ as a Japanese weapon also seems to allude to the World War II fears of a Japanese-American fifth column that had been used to justify their internment. These statements also point to Japanese culture itself as the problem.

Yellow Peril

The Yellow Peril discourse focused on a perceived Asian menace arose in the late 19th century. Originally a creation of the penny press, this discourse exploited white American frustration with perceived economic competition from Chinese immigrants.⁶² The “unassimilable” quality of Chinese was used to justify lynchings and evictions of Chinese immigrants, and several discriminatory laws were passed- most famously the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Yellow Peril attributed a subhuman quality to Asians, evoking images of “hordes” of identical, animal-like beings that threatened to overwhelm

⁶¹ Alex Gibney, dir., *The Pacific Century*, “Pacific Century: The Future of the Pacific Basin.” Aired December 17, 1992, on PBS.

⁶² Doobo Shim. “From Yellow Peril to Model Minority to Renewed Yellow Peril.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 22:4 (1998), 387.

Western civilization with their numbers. Aspects of Yellow Peril are mirrored in trade war discourse.

In the postwar decades, Japan unleashed ‘hordes’ of goods on American shores to overrun American goods; the American press made “dumping” of consumer electronics a primary concern. Thus, the lack of American jobs related to television manufacture was assigned to unfair Japanese competition,⁶³ rather than American executives who moved manufacturing to Singapore, South Korea, or Taiwan. Japan was also seen leading the rest of Asia towards a total eclipse of the US and Europe. Just as Americans reacted with surprise and awe to Japan’s rise to prominence after its victory in the Russo-Japanese war at the turn of the 20th century, Americans reacted with similar surprise to Japan’s rise from complete ruin at the end of the Pacific War to the world’s second largest economy. Americans expected and feared that the fast approaching 21st century would be a Pacific Century dominated politically, culturally, and economically by Japan, closely followed by the Four Asian Tigers: Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong. The rise of a non-Western modernity was presumed to shatter the foundations of the West, and repattern the West on the East. Money One commentator writes: “if the Japanese are called upon to create a New World Order, they know what is needed: Japan writ large.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Lennon, “Coming from Japan.”

⁶⁴ Eamonn Fingleton, *Blindside: Why Japan Is Still on Track to Overtake the U.S. By the Year 2000* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 342.

Decline of the Anti-Japan Panic

Recent scholars working on this period have placed the end date for the Japan panic at 1993;⁶⁵ however, I suggest moving the date ahead to an endpoint of 1995. Undoubtedly, 1993 marks the beginning of a decline. In August 1994, *The Economist* claimed Japanophobia was on the decline in the U.S. as Clinton's proposed healthcare reform occupied lawmakers and American chipmaker Intel had finally eclipsed Japanese silicon chip production.⁶⁶ In November of that year, an opinion piece in Columbia, S.C. paper *The State* bemoaned that Japanese "heels" in pro-wrestling were merely "what we're left with"⁶⁷ after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, evidence suggests the panic was fading but remained a powerful intellectual current for making sense of economic change.

The Clinton administration's hardline position on Japan in 1995, as well as hardline newspaper editorials, continued to foster a climate of Japanese threat from above, while letters to the editor show continued anti-Japan sentiment from below. There is no difference in terms of content of the rhetoric between 1995 and the Bush years; the Japanese had "gall,"⁶⁸ sanctions on Japan were "costly but essential,"⁶⁹ "Japan has

⁶⁵ M.J. Heale, "Anatomy of a Scare," 46; Narrelle Morris, *Japan-bashing*; 62.

⁶⁶ The Economist. "Japanophobia fades as an issue with Americans." *The San Diego Union Tribune*, August 14, 1994, News Bank: America's News.

⁶⁷ Dave, Moniz. "Where are the villains? First the Berlin Wall Fell, then the Soviet Union unraveled. Now we don't have the Communists (or anyone else) to kick around." *The State*, November 13, 1994, News Bank: America's News.

⁶⁸ Lawrence M. Bowerman, letter to the editor. *The Flint Journal*, May 14, 1995, News Bank: America's News

⁶⁹ Herald Staff. "The War in the Pacific" *Miami Herald*, May 18, 1995, America's News, News Bank: America's News

dictated policy to us for long enough.”⁷⁰ The intensity was not as high as the Persian Gulf War crisis period, but the sentiment seems unchanged at its core. In 1995 Eamonn Fingleton, an editor for the magazine *Euromoney*, published *Blindside*, which in its byline declared Japan was still on track to eclipse the US as the unipolar superpower by 2000- though it also implies Fingleton knew his work was cut out for him. *The New York Times* approvingly reviewed both *Blindside* and Chalmers Johnson’s *Japan: Who Governs?* (1994), writing that developing Asian countries will most certainly adopt the “Japan, Inc.” model of state-directed growth and “get more arrogant about dictating trade terms -and caning American teen-agers.”⁷¹ Therefore, I suggest 1995 as a more definitive last year for the curious period of “Japan as a threat” in American thought, after which the issue passed.

⁷⁰ Community Pulse. “Last week’s question: Should the US impose sanctions on Japan’s auto industry in response to the trade deficit?” *The Flint Journal*, May 23, 1995, News Bank: America’s News.

⁷¹ Adam Smith, “Japan, Inc. Still in Business,” *The New York Times*, March 19, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES IN NEW ECONOMIES

“Bobby, this is the last TV made in America. If I let this TV die, it’d be like letting a piece of America die.”

*-King of the Hill (1998)*⁷²

For Americans who believed the root of the problem with American industry was Japanese competition, the consumption of goods became imbued with moral values that communicated a stance on major issues at the time- deindustrialization, the role of the state in the economy, and the sense of a fraying American social fabric. Commentators on the trade friction revealed concern over a sense of an atomized national community and the need for greater community spirit. The “Buy American” laws and campaigns were not only expressions of anti-Japanese sentiment, but an attempt to rebuild the national community, perceived as continually fraying at the seams after the social and political turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Moral Equivalent of War

Trade friction discourses expressed a tension around consumerism, reflecting both new patriotic and unpatriotic ways to practice consumerism, as well as an older tradition of denigrating consumption as morally inferior to production. Frequently derided as environmentally wasteful, a form of social control,⁷³ vapid, ‘inauthentic,’ and feminine,⁷⁴

⁷² Jeff Myers, dir., *King of the Hill*, season 2, episode 12, “Meet the Manger Babies,” aired January 11, 1998, on FOX.

⁷³ For example: Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, 1969.

consumerism has a history as an unsavory character in American thought. The decline of American industrial production would mean an end to its blue collar way of life as well as an end to the moral values of production: hard, honest work, and pride in a tangible product that came from physical labor. It also threatened to re-gender the country from masculine to feminine.

The transition of shedding most industrial sectors created a moral crisis, as the masculine work of industrial manufacturing crumpled in the face of the feminine consumption of Japanese goods. The rugged masculinity of blue collar work was enervated, soon to be replaced by feminine jobs in retail, fast food and white collar work for those with an appropriate education, removing the interpersonal conflict allowed by unions and mandating so-called “soft skills” rather than physical strength and endurance. The growth of finance and Wall Street in the 1980s was met with resistance based on the morality of how wealth was generated. This was reflected in popular fiction. Michael Crichton wrote:

America has become a land without substance...When you manufacture products, you add value to raw materials, and you literally create wealth. But America has stopped doing that. Americans make money now by paper manipulation, which the Japanese say is bound to catch up to us because paper profits don't reflect real wealth.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Sally Robinson, “The Real Deal: Fighting the Feminizations of Consumer Culture,” in *Authenticity Guaranteed: Masculinity and the Rhetoric of Anti-Consumerism in American Culture*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 133-164

⁷⁵ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 200.

In 1985, RCA chairman Thornton F. Bradshaw was “deeply worried- about America as an industrial community where both work ethic and practice have decayed.”⁷⁶ In one of his regular appearances as a guest expert for PBS, Clyde Prestowitz remarked: “A nation that doesn’t make anything has a pretty poor spirit.”⁷⁷ The decline of the American industrial economy, the moral values and class culture bundled with it, seemed to be heralding an indolent, atomized society of individuals who play (consume) rather than work (produce); a society without social bonds and lacking the moral values to build and sustain a community.

Video games provided one example of the growing consumer republic at play.

Frontline fumed:

At Nintendo headquarters in Redmond, Washington, most jobs aren’t exactly high tech. There are no manufacturing jobs. All Nintendo games are made in Japan...Nintendo of America does have an R&D group. Only they don’t develop games, they play them. Most of the R&D is done in Japan.⁷⁸

Frontline followed this with footage of the Nintendo of America call center that hired adult video game players to answer questions from callers on how to beat the Japanese-made games. The subtext is clear; the future of American consumption of Japanese goods was one in which Americans knew only how to consume and play. Like the Eloi of H.G. Wells’ *The Time Traveler*, the hedonistic game playing American consumers of the

⁷⁶ White, “The Danger From Japan.”

⁷⁷ Martin Koughan and David Ewing, dir., *Frontline*, season 9, episode 10, “Losing the War with Japan,” aired November 19, 1991 on PBS.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

21st century would be consumed by the Japanese Morlocks that worked the hidden industrial machines in Oriental secrecy. The 1989 film *Black Rain* seems to externalize criticism of postindustrial economy through a Japanese character who says the U.S. is only good for “music and movies” while the Japanese “make the machines [and] build the future.”⁷⁹ The rhetoric around the themes of mighty industrial Japan and enervated industrial America reflect the trade warriors’ resistance to neoliberal rhetoric on comparative advantage and the New Economy.

One way to prosecute the trade war was to accept the revisionist advocacy for a national industrial policy, a heretical idea to the orthodox economists that had sanctified the Cold War as a jihad against Soviet planned economies. There was isolated interest from Democrats in an “industrial policy” through which the US government would strategically direct critical sectors of the economy (which it almost certainly did already by nurturing aerospace and agriculture through subsidies).⁸⁰ The other was for consumers to do their duty to the nation and not buy Japanese goods.

These American voices speak to a need for a collective sense of national identity and mutual aid through patriotic consumption of goods. A 31-year old electrician in Tuttle, Oklahoma, worried thusly: “We need to stick together. If everyone goes out and buys a Japanese phone, I’m out of work.” A New Haven, Connecticut resident wrote: “Japan is not ... home. I first have got to take care of home.”⁸¹ Theodore White put the threat of indolent consumerism into focus: “No nation that thinks of itself as an

⁷⁹ Ridley Scott, dir., *Black Rain*, (1989; Hollywood, CA, Paramount Pictures, 2017), DVD.

⁸⁰ David Yoffe and Joseph Badaracco, “The Industrial Non-Policy of Atari Democrats” *Providence Journal*, Oct. 17, 1982, News Bank: America’s News; Howard Means, “Industrial Policy Does Vanishing Act but its Ideas Stick Around,” *Orlando Sentinel*, June 4, 1985, News Bank: America’s News.

⁸¹ “Japanese top target for U.S. consumers.” *USA Today*, March 9, 1992, News Bank: America’s News.

assemblage of consumers can withstand Japanese penetration. But a nation that thinks of itself as a community has a reason for alarm.”⁸² Lee Iacocca’s Japan-bashing rhetorically repositioned Chrysler from a multinational corporation into an *American* corporation, one that was embedded in its local community and took care of its own. The placement of Toyota auto plants in non-union southern states was interpreted in the press as evidence of Japanese racism against African-Americans.⁸³

This seems to be a reaction against the culture of glamorous consumption and displays of wealth by prominent figures like the Reagans and the characters on prime time soap operas like *Dallas* (1978-1991) and *Dynasty* (1981-1989). The social irresponsibility of consuming Japanese goods was one thread in a narrative of Reagan’s America as a frenzy of irresponsible consumerism, especially by the federal government and Wall Street. The selfishness and narcissism of the 1970s’ Me-Generation, and the new generation of Reaganite yuppies who were popularly painted as prioritizing conspicuous consumption of luxury brand name goods at a human cost.

American consumers were recast as the front line infantry in the “trade war” with Japan and, like the nation itself, had lost their way in the world and their sense of purpose. One letter writer comments that “American consumers have seemingly lost their pride in the USA. And, as the ‘soldiers’ of this country - in a ‘global’ economy - they have surrendered their economic power and are selling out their futures.”⁸⁴ Consumption became the moral equivalent of war. And it seemed Americans were surrendering en

⁸² White, “The Danger From Japan.”

⁸³ John Jacobs, “Racism in Japan,” *The National Chronicle* (printed as *Metro Chronicle*), October 6, 1988, Readex: African American Newspapers, Series 1.

⁸⁴ Ernie Dynda, letter to the editor, *Daily News of Los Angeles*, May 27, 1995, News Bank: America’s News.

masse to the Japanese shock troops Sony, Toyota, Honda, Hitachi and Sanyo. Michael Crichton's prescription was simple: "don't sell" America to the Japanese.⁸⁵ Citing the need for a collective effort, one commentator writes: "Sputnik. Marshall Plan. Pearl Harbor... America needs a rallying cry."⁸⁶ Al Pace, an Ohio auto parts supplier, told *Frontline*: "We need a Desert Storm for American industry."⁸⁷ A collective effort was needed, and sought, by Americans involved in Buy America campaigns to change consumer behavior to be more moral. Who was benefitting from the American dollars spent on cameras, calculators, electric fans, televisions, video game computers, videocassette recorders and stereo HiFis at K-Mart? People in one's own community or nation, or unknown and maybe unpleasant people on an island nation an ocean away?

The Consumer Republic Versus the Nation-State Collective

The trade deficit panic reveals the some of the nuance in how the concept of Japan was sometimes used as a referendum on America. Some Americans interpreted Japan as a model nation-state that fostered community and a kinder, gentler capitalism underwritten by a collectivist social responsibility. The *San Jose Mercury News* reported that unemployment in Japan was low because the Japanese "general economy is in reality a vast social fabric."⁸⁸ American financial journalist Michael Lewis wrote: "Everybody has a niche... there is an abundance of mom-and-pop stores of the type long ago

⁸⁵ Michael Crichton. *Rising Sun*, 343.

⁸⁶ Steven Schlosstein, *Trade War*, 232.

⁸⁷ Koughan and Ewing, "Losing the War with Japan."

⁸⁸ Franz Schurman, "But in Japan, everyone has a job-or two," *The San Jose Mercury News*, July 18, 1991, News Bank: America's News.

dispatched in America by supermarkets; two bit noodle shops that have been in business for 40 years occupy the ground floors of the newest skyscrapers.”⁸⁹

Japan seemed to be the incarnation of conservative American values and ideals. With a perceived ancient culture patterning behavior, a low divorce rate, and a highly communitarian ethos, high-tech Japan ironically perhaps seemed not modern but rather the opposite. In contrast, “the mainstream of American culture is teetering on the edge of bankruptcy...it continues to produce far too many high school graduates who have difficulty reading, writing, and doing arithmetic, while they tend to believe the government owes them a living.”⁹⁰ The indolence of American youth was a recurring theme in Japan panic literature. Unlike Japanese kids, American kids were not pursuing science due to the Reaganesque culture: “all the kids want to dress like Charlie Sheen and make a million dollars before they’re twenty-eight. The only way you can make that kind of money is...places where the game is paper profits, something for nothing.”⁹¹ It is not the older generation of Japanese from which the antagonist in the 1988 Ridley Scott film *Black Rain* comes, but rather the “Americanized” modern Japanese youth that, in adopting the greed of Reagan’s America, have lost their place and culture.⁹²

Prior to taking office as Secretary of Labor for Bill Clinton, Robert Reich wrote in 1992 that the fear underlying the anti-Japan panic was

⁸⁹ Michael Lewis. *Pacific Rift*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 39.

⁹⁰ Boyle de Mente, *The Japanese Influence on America: The Impact, Challenge and Opportunity*, (Lincolnwood, IL: Passport Books, 1989), 14.

⁹¹ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 179.

⁹² Jane Chi Hyun Park. *Yellow Future: Oriental Style in Hollywood cinema*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2010), 117.

...an America that no longer coheres. Japan's extreme homogeneity-racial, cultural, linguistic-intensifies, by contrast, our feared loss of identity. They do join together; they do seem tightly bound to one another. They know who they are. But who are we?...⁹³

The 1993 film *Rising Sun* put it more crudely through the words of Sean Connery's character: "We may come from a fragmented MTV rap video culture, but they do not."⁹⁴

The presumed collective spirit of Japanese people in their consumption of national goods was invoked as one Japanese weapon that could be used to restore America. One letter to *The Daily News of Los Angeles* writes "the Japanese are showing us the true meaning of patriotism and discipline. They know that by buying Japanese they have been able to pull off the greatest economic miracle in recent history."⁹⁵ The letter writer reveals the binding together of patriotism and citizenship with consumption of the national goods, concluding with the prescription to buy American.

The delineation of the boundaries of the patriotic consumer republic excluded Asian goods and the Asians who assembled them. When Mazda opened a plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, one resident remarked: "I have nothing against the Japs, if they stay home."⁹⁶ This extended to Asian Americans, who were lumped together with Asians.

⁹³ Robert B. Reich, "Is Japan Really Out to Get Us?" *New York Times Book Review*, February 9, 1992.

⁹⁴ Philip Kaufman, dir., *Rising Sun*, (1993, Los Angeles C.A.: 20th Century Fox, 2002) DVD.

⁹⁵ Paul Wasserman, letter to the editor, *Daily News of Los Angeles*, May 27, 1995, News Bank: America's News.

⁹⁶ Marc Levin, dir., *The Pacific Century*. "Pacific Century: The Future of the Pacific Basin." Aired December 17, 1992, on PBS.

One Asian-American man interviewed by PBS in 1992 complained that Asian Americans had become the Yellow Peril again in the 1990s.⁹⁷

A curious conflation of Asian bodies and Asian goods seemed to exist in the minds of some Americans. A car salesman at a Japanese auto dealership related that his Chinese-American colleague was believed to be a Japanese because the cars were Japanese. When the salesman told a customer he was in fact Chinese, she allegedly replied “then these must be Chinese cars.”⁹⁸ The 1982 murder of Vincent Chin has been described as an attempt by the killers to recover their masculinity and identity as workers by disassembling a “factory machine.”⁹⁹ Images of uniform-wearing Japanese workers diligently, deftly, silently working on assembly lines created a simultaneously superhuman and subhuman image; superhuman in the productivity achieved, while still something not human. By signifying Chin as a Japanese, his killers associated him with the superhuman productivity of a robot, and a robot’s subhuman status.

In the 1983 music video for “Mr. Roboto” by Styx, the face of the titular android Mr. Roboto resembles a crude stereotype of a Japanese face, with upturned eyefolds and a menacing grin. The face is vaguely human but predominantly non-human in its lack of articulation like a mannequin, and its silver metallic sheen. The Japanese quality of Mr. Roboto is reinforced by the robots’ obsequious bowing, though the robots are joint Japanese-American products in an authoritarian, futuristic United States. Like the samurai made out of computer parts that fights with the hero of Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil*

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ R.H. Growald, “The dust doesn’t even have time to settle in the car showroom,” *San Diego Union Tribune*, April 19, 1986, News Bank: America’s News.

⁹⁹ David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, “Technologizing Orientalism,” In *Techno-Orientalism- Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History and Media*. Ed. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, & Greta A. Niu. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 11.

(1986), Styx's video connects a perceived Japanese technological prowess to enabling "Oriental" despotism in Western states, as well as connecting technology to Japanese bodies themselves.

Fear of a Japanese Planet

Americans angry about the trade deficit with Japan tended to remark that American exports into Japan mirrored colonial trade patterns of sending raw materials to the imperial metropole in order to receive finished goods in return trade. In the 1987 film *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas' Gordon Gecko declared the US to be "a second rate power;" a year later Clyde Prestowitz described the USA as becoming not merely a third world, but "a kind of fourth-world country."¹⁰⁰ A 1991 column in the *National Chronicle* wrote: "the U.S. exports scrap iron to Japan and imports finished manufactured goods: the definition of a fourth-rate, unindustrialized, poor nation."¹⁰¹ In 1992, Lee Iacocca framed the U.S.-Japan trade this way: "We ship them food and chemicals and raw materials - just like a colony. They ship us value-added cars and machine tools and electronics - just like a mother country."¹⁰² A 1995 letter to the editor of the *Mobile Alabama Press-Register* wrote that the export of wood chips to Japan "reminds me so much of the 1930s...at that time we were shipping junk (metal), and I can remember my father telling me, 'Son, that will be coming back to you in a few years in a different

¹⁰⁰ Clyde Prestowitz, *Trading Places: How We Allowed Japan to Take the Lead* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1988), 305.

¹⁰¹ Tony Brown, "America's Leadership: Scheming Politicians," *The National Chronicle*, May 3, 1991, Readex: African American Newspapers, Series 1.

¹⁰² Lynda Hurst, "Bashing Japan," *The Toronto Star*, February 8, 1992, News Bank: America's News.

form'...Today, the exports are no threat to us physically, but economically.”¹⁰³ The “colonial trade” with Japan was a powerful metaphor for national decline. The perceived status of the U.S. as a “rich” country was tied to what it exported; if it exported primarily crop commodities, it would be in the same class of country “as an Indonesia or a Brazil. It’s the Japanese who are supposed to be underdeveloped.”¹⁰⁴

An example of comical irrationality surrounding perceived national status can be found in angry American reportage on Japanese tourists who were taking advantage of the strong yen to visit the United States. In 1991, *Frontline* tried to equate the crowds of camera-toting Japanese tourists in Washington D.C. with the Japanese investors in multimillion-dollar American real estate, and fumed that these tourists had the temerity to buy foreign luxury goods like Louis Vuitton handbags while in D.C. and not American branded goods!¹⁰⁵ The sense of national decline can be found in a Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel* article which writes the strong yen and weak dollar “has made the United States as much a bargain for the Japanese as Mexico once was for Americans.”¹⁰⁶ The presence of Japanese tourists in America seemed to be indicative of a world turned upside down. In 1986, the Bangles sang “All the Japanese with their yen” in “Walk like an Egyptian,” highlighting the discursive connection between Japanese people and stacks of cash. In order to communicate the apparent lofty place in the world of the Japanese, a character in

¹⁰³ R.A. Harper, Sr., “letter to the editor,” *Mobile Alabama Press-Register*, December 31, 1995, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁰⁴ Steven Schlosstein, *Trade War*, (NY: Congdon & Weed, 1984), 12.

¹⁰⁵ Koughan and Ewing, “Losing the War with Japan.”

¹⁰⁶ Wire report, “Japanese Have a Yen to Shop in L.A.,” *The Sun-Sentinel*, February 14, 1988, News Bank: America’s News.

Rising Sun remarks “The Japanese corporations in America feel the way we would feel doing business in Nigeria: they think they’re surrounded by savages.”¹⁰⁷

The ‘world turned upside down’ vision of Japan allowed for Americans to indulge in a conceptualization of their country as a kind of Third World zone. A trope of cyberpunk science fiction pictured a quasi-Third World United States, often comically Balkanized into new absurd polities or metropolitan conglomerations. William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), the TV series *Max Headroom* (1988), Neil Stephenson’s *Snow Crash* (1992), and the film *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) all presented a vision of a collapsed federal state and ultra-neoliberal lawlessness in which Japanese organized crime syndicates and corporations operated in the former USA with impunity.

Commenting on the wealth of the Japanese, one author describes the Japanese as “the new Romans.”¹⁰⁸ In reality, the Japanese were the new Arabs. Much like the Arab sheiks who were reviled for holding America hostage with oil embargoes and their displays of conspicuous wealth, the Japanese fulfilled a similar role of an ‘Oriental’ foreigner that, through some accident of history, now threatened the independence and economic prosperity of the United States. Even more so than the Ray Ban wearing sheiks in Cadillacs, the Japanese were a greater threat for their supposed refusal to consume American goods- and the possibility economic ascendancy in Asia would contain the West.

The Gulf War restored American faith in the use of force to resolve conflict and the American grip on high-technology seemed assured. When Japanese nationalist

¹⁰⁷ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 185.

¹⁰⁸ Boyle De Mente, *The Japanese Influence on America: the Impact, Challenge and Opportunity*, (Lincolnwood: Passport Books, 1989), 1.

Shintaro Ishihara tried to rain on America's Gulf War parades by pointing out the American missile guidance systems relied on Japanese semiconductors, *Newsweek* simply bashed him as trying to "take credit" for the American victory.¹⁰⁹ Still, the staff of PBS's *Frontline* news program were not so sanguine. Its November 9, 1991 episode opened with footage of a Desert Storm victory parade in Ohio only to declare the war with Japan "lost."¹¹⁰

After Ronald Reagan went on a speaking tour of Japan in 1989, an angry letter to the editor in *The San Francisco Chronicle* summed up American fears of a Japanese planet:

"Perhaps we had all better learn to appeal to the Japanese. Twenty years from now most of us will work for Japanese-owned companies. We will need to learn Japanese in order to talk to our supervisors. Few of us will be able to afford houses so we will rent tiny apartments from Japanese landlords. Automobiles will be too expensive to buy, but when we need one for a special occasion we will rent a Japanese car from a Japanese rental agency. Fortunately, these cars will be assembled in the United States. This is because Japanese companies will continue to move their manufacturing to this country in order to take advantage of all the cheap, non-union labor."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bill Powell, "A Japan That Can Take Credit," *Newsweek*, July 15, 1991, News Bank: America's News.

¹¹⁰ Koughan and Ewing, *Losing the War with Japan*."

¹¹¹ John Engelman, "Letters to the editor," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 7, 1989, News Bank: America's News.

Intermingled with issues of trade and American class conflict is a fear of living like a Japanese in a “rabbit hutch,”¹¹² speaking Japanese instead English, and beholden to Japanese capitalists in all aspects of life, in a colonial relationship between Japan and the US. This letter writer was not the only American to fear speaking Japanese. PBS’ *Frontline* staff did too. At the fifty minute mark of “How We Lost the War With Japan,” footage of American children speaking Japanese, bowing and wearing casual kimonos (*yukata*) is intercut with dire commentary from Pat Choate that “today we’re seeing the largest unilateral transfer of wealth in history, from the United States to Japan...it means a declining standard of living for our children, if not for ourselves.”¹¹³ By using Choate’s commentary in this manner, *Frontline* created an additional meaning beyond the economic. Japan’s economic victory was also becoming a complete cultural victory. What is perceived to be at risk encompassed everything from the privilege of one’s mother tongue as global lingua franca to a shift in American cultural values in order to “appeal” to the Japanese.

Fear of living in a Japanese planet meant that concerns over Japanese purchases of American movie studios indicated Japanese culture could be possibly disseminated globally, and in so doing, displace Western values. Pornographic Japanese comics seemed to reveal a sadistic psychosexual id of the Japanese nation, an interpretation that slotted into a pre-existing history of fear of Japanese sexual predators. Would American women have to become geishas in order to appeal to misogynistic Japanese men?

¹¹² As one European Community official infamously described Japanese dwellings. Cited in Jon Woronoff, *Japan as anything but Number One*, (Armonk: M.E. Sharp, 1990), 243.

¹¹³ Koughan and Ewing, “Losing the War with Japan.”

VISIONS OF INVASION AND RAPE

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the United States viewed Asia as its colonial prerogative, taking the Philippines from Spain in the Spanish American War (1898) and then fighting a bloody war against Filipino nationalists from 1899-1902 to secure control of the islands and their inhabitants. A few years after the U.S. secured control of the Philippines, the Empire of Japan demonstrated the impressive results of Japanese industrialization by defeating the Russian Empire at sea in the Battle of Tsushima and on land in a bid for control over the strategic Port Arthur (Dalian) in northern China during the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905).

The prosecution of the war presaged the horrors of the First World War, showcasing the use of railroads, telephones, rapid fire rifles, Maxim gun nests, trenches, barbed wire, heavy artillery barrages, and human wave tactics. The appalling numbers of men killed to take seemingly pointless objectives, like the infamous Battle of Hill 203, contributed to a Western fascination with the spectacle of war and a view of the Japanese troops as akin to social insects or clockwork automata. The victory of the Japanese over the Russians produced Western adulation, but also fear. In the United States, the Japanese mastery of high technology threatened to destabilize racial segregation, as African-American papers and intellectuals like W.E.B. DuBois celebrated the Japanese victory as a blow against white hegemony.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Hough, "Demon Courage and Dread Engines," In *Techno-Orientalism-Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History and Media*, ed. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang and Greta A. Niu (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 28-33.

Fear of Japanese invasion was particularly acute on the West Coast in the wake of the Russo-Japanese war. In 1906, San Francisco passed a law prohibiting Japanese children from enrolling in white schools; in response to anger at the law in Japan, President Roosevelt secured a “Gentleman’s Agreement” from Japan to limit Japanese migration to the United States. Japanese immigrants were still despised as unfair economic competitors that harmed white Californian farmers and were caught in the imperial tension between the Empire of Japan and the United States. When a first generation Japanese immigrant (*Issei*) company arranged to purchase land in the Baja California near Magdalena Bay in 1911, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge invoked the Monroe Doctrine to prevent the purchase on national security grounds;¹¹⁵ presaging fears later in the century of Japanese ownership of American property. In 1920, a Japanese-American company in San Francisco seeking to purchase an apartment complex was charged by the Real Estate Board with being part of a conspiracy to transfer control of housing to the Japanese.¹¹⁶ White Americans made no differentiation between Japanese migration, the business transactions of Issei, and the actions of the Japanese state.

Shortly after the Russo-Japanese War, several American films were produced depicting simulated invasions of the West Coast by the Imperial army.¹¹⁷ In 1909, Homer Lee’s *The Valor of Innocence* suggested an invasion of California by the Imperial forces

¹¹⁵ Eiichiro Azuma, “Japanese Immigrant Settler Colonialism in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and the US Racial-Imperialist Politics of the Hemispheric ‘Yellow Peril,’” *Pacific Historical Review*, 83:2 (May 2014), 267.

¹¹⁶ Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the transformation of urban California*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 28.

¹¹⁷ Kenneth Hough, “Demon Courage and Dread Engines,” 28-33.

was looming on the horizon; Lee hoped the supposed martial spirit of the Japanese would rejuvenate white America through a racially charged conflict.¹¹⁸

The military success, and possible threat, of the Empire of Japan introduced a problem for Orientalist interpretation of the Japanese. Edward Said describes the Orientalist discourse as a process of ‘feminizing’ Oriental men, thus signifying them as less than Western men: compliant, and compatible with colonization.¹¹⁹ Chinese men were interpreted as effeminate, frail, sensitive and asexual, such as in the film *Broken Blossoms* (1919).¹²⁰ The Japanese victories in the Russo-Japanese war shook the Western view of the Orient as the “eternal feminine;” thus rather than feminine, the Japanese were interpreted as sexually depraved.¹²¹ The American understanding of the Japanese in the early 20th century is described by Nick Browne as a “dialectical” composite of the female and male,¹²² symbolized first by the image of the patient Japanese woman, as presented in *Madame Butterfly* (1896); and the Japanese man as a killer- a somewhat newer image that appeared in American cinema in the years after the Russo-Japanese war.

Despite the anxiety over the Japanese, American interest in traditional Japanese culture remained high. Among American bourgeois households, there was interest in acquiring Japanese artifacts as a means of demonstrating taste. Documentary films were a

¹¹⁸ John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific*, (New York: Pantheon Books: 1986), 113-114.

¹¹⁹ Chizuko Ueno, “In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism.” *US-Japan Women’s Journal English Supplement*. No. 13 (1997), 3-4.

¹²⁰ Doobo Shim, “Yellow Peril”, 390.

¹²¹ Sumiko Higashi, “Touring the Orient” in *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 331.

¹²² Nick Browne, “The Undoing of the Other Woman: Madame Butterfly in the Discourse of American Orientalism” in *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 241.

popular genre, communicating the culture and the scenery of Japan to an American audience. Japan and Japanese people featured in over one hundred films released in the US between 1909 and 1915, some of them imported from Japan and some were Japanese-American co-productions.¹²³

However, unhappy Japanese-American relationships were a common theme in fictional treatments of Japan, reflecting the fear of miscegenation. For example, *Katana, Oath of the Sword* (1914) and *A Relic of Old Japan* (1915) featured Japanese men who killed others as a result of turmoil produced by interracial romance. The Japanese or white woman at the center of the story died, whether by suicide or by the hand of the Japanese man. A case in point is the career of Japanese-born actor Sessue Hayakawa. Hayakawa appeared in several films, a remarkable case of early Asian-American stardom during the nadir of American race relations. Hayakawa's breakout role was as the antagonist in the 1915 film *The Cheat*.

In *The Cheat*, Hayakawa portrayed Hisuru Tori, a Japanese businessman who sold Japanese artifacts to wealthy Americans; the socialite Edith Hardy borrows a sum of money from Tori to make up for money she embezzled from the Red Cross. Tori expects to be repaid with sex and refuses to accept her check repaying the loan, then brands Edith with his personal seal. This event is interpreted by the film's characters as a figurative rape, and the film ends with angry Americans frightening Tori out of town in a figurative lynching. Several scholars have extensively analyzed the significance of the themes in *The Cheat*, ranging from racial boundaries to social class and white consumption of

¹²³ Ibid, 228.

Japanese culture.¹²⁴ *The Cheat*'s Japanese rapist character affirmed the superiority of Anglo-Saxon American civilization through the impossibility of Japanese to assimilate into American culture.¹²⁵ As white women symbolized Western civilization, women thus provided the ability to enter it by providing or conversely, denying, access to their bodies. Attacks on the sanctity of white women's bodies were symbolic affronts to Western civilization. Japanese men could not enter Western civilization without brutal force.

The symbolic rape of Edith has also been interpreted by scholars as the playing out of a masochistic sexual fantasy for white women. Hayakawa, like Caucasian heartthrobs Rudolph Valentino and Erich von Stroheim, was an exotic sex symbol known for playing characters that were both brutal and civilized.¹²⁶ Hayakawa's roles made him a "center of violence- murder or figurative rape against white women."¹²⁷ For example, in his roles in *The Typhoon* (1914) and *A Relic of Old Japan* (1915), his character killed the white women he was sexually involved with and who had wronged him. Japanese male bodies thus existed in a liminal state between desirable and undesirable; the condemnation of interracial intercourse could be reconciled with desire only through the image of rape.

The rapidity and success of the early Japanese offensives in the Pacific War (1941-1945) re-evoked Yellow Peril imagery, particularly the image of Japanese

¹²⁴ Gabrielle Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1993); *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*. ed. Daniel Bernardi (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent cinema and transnational stardom*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹²⁵ Gabrielle Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1993), 18-21.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 21.

¹²⁷ Nick Browne, "Madame Butterfly," 228- 229.

rapists.¹²⁸ As in the Progressive era, the threat to the dignity of white women signified the threat to Western civilization, which saw its colonial future in Asia jeopardized. In a 1943 letter to Gen. MacArthur, Gen. Kenney remarked the Imperial army gave Japanese men a chance to indulge their “Mongol liking for looting, arson, massacre, and rape.”¹²⁹ Several Hollywood films introduced the menace of rape by Japanese soldiers, such as *Wake Island* (1942), *The Purple Heart* (1944) and *Objective Burma*.¹³⁰ *Life* magazine’s *This is the Enemy* poster, for example, depicted an Imperial soldier carrying a white woman slung over his shoulder. Rape by Japanese men was considered more of a bestial expression of sexual perversion, rather than an act of violence.¹³¹ Similar images could be found in postwar films concerning the Pacific theater, such as *Three Came Home* (1949).¹³² However, as the war went on the image of rapists was superseded by images relegating Japanese to increasingly subhuman forms, such as little yellow monkeys or insects.

The Japan of the Korea and Vietnam wars was coded as feminine and submissive¹³³ due to its role as a haven for US servicemen. In the 1950s, films depicting relationships between geisha and American servicemen, such as *Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *Sayonara* (1957), popularized a non-threatening, female-gendered Japan. As the Japanese became despised economic competitors again in the 1980s, the supposed libertine character of “the Orient” would play a role in Japan-bashing, helping

¹²⁸ John D. Chappell, *Before the Bomb: How America Approached the End of the Pacific War*. (Lexington, University of Kentucky, 1997), 34.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 166.

¹³⁰ Allen Woll and Randall Miller, *Ethnic and racial images in American film and television*. (New York: Garland, 1987), 192.

¹³¹ Bernard F. Dick, *The Star Spangled Screen*. (University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 179-182.

¹³² Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa*, 271.

¹³³ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, 186.

to distinguish the Orient as distinct, and distinctively inferior, to the West. The image of Japan became bifurcated into female and male again; geisha were repurposed to serve an understanding of Japan as premodern and xenophobic,¹³⁴ and the modern Japanese businessman was (again) interpreted as a sexual deviant.

In the 1989 Charles Bronson film *Kinjite: Forbidden Subjects*, a Japanese businessman witnesses the grope of a Japanese woman on a Tokyo train. She does not cry out and silently, involuntarily orgasms while being groped, which fascinates him enough to attempt it on a Caucasian girl (Charles Bronson's daughter) after he arrives in the United States for work. The film communicates a fear that bad behavior of Japanese at home would follow them to the U.S. as their 'economic colonization' continued apace. The language of sexual deviancy and rape could be found in the description of Japanese companies; Japan was guilty of "economic rape;"¹³⁵ Sony had "stalked"¹³⁶ Columbia (whose namesake and logo is Columbia, the personification of America). Michael Crichton wrote: "there's a reason the Japanese love Reagan...he spread our legs real wide."¹³⁷ American and Japanese economic relations were interpreted in terms of degrading intercourse; the white woman at the center of Japanese sexual violence had finally become the nation itself.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 187.

¹³⁵ Ronald E. Yates, "Japan Tries to Come to Terms with 'Ugly' Image-Nation Begins to Re-evaluate Role in Global Family," *Dallas Morning News*, November 26, 1987.

¹³⁶ David E. Sanger, "Why Sony stalked Columbia-Demand for Entertainment Soars," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 28, 1989.

¹³⁷ Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun*, 203.

INFORMATION ECONOMY WARFARE

*“Japan's Sanrio Co., Ltd. finds it's harder to export culture than cars or videorecorders.”*¹³⁸

If the American manufacturing sector was taking a beating from Japanese firms, the one area America assumed it had uncontested supremacy was in cultural products. Consequently, American intellectual property had to be protected from Japanese technological threats. In 1983, MCA-Universal Pictures sued Sony Corporation to prevent the sale of Betamax tape recorders in the United States, claiming that Sony was promoting intellectual piracy. While the true motives of Universal was most likely to attempt to smother competition for its own yet-to-be released home video format of DiscoVision,¹³⁹ Jack Valenti had this to say in his rhetoric: “The American movie is the one thing the Japanese with all their skills cannot clone...Japanese machines do not create entertainment. The American motion picture industry does.”¹⁴⁰ The Japanese were assumed to be masters of the ‘uncreative’ production of hardware like the Sony Walkman, but would never be able to compete with the American music embedded in the ‘Made in Japan’ cassette tapes. Even the anti-technology song “Mr. Roboto” contained

¹³⁸ Marc Beauchamp and Katayama Hiroko, “Mickey Mouse, meet Hello Kitty,” *Forbes*, May 18, 1987, News Bank: America's News.

¹³⁹ James Lardner. *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese, and the onslaught of the VCR*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) 1987, 28.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 263.

this dichotomy, as Mr. Roboto's "parts [are] made in Japan" and his "brain [is by] IBM."¹⁴¹

Americans frequently defined themselves against the Japanese by emphasizing American individualism against Japanese collectivism and denigrating the Japanese ability to be creative and be inventive. According to PBS, one of America's comparative advantages was in creativity and free expression, manifesting in such bastions of free thought as Microsoft Corporation, the symbol selected by PBS to reflect American software supremacy.¹⁴² Yet, PBS' narrative of American software supremacy declined to mention that in 1988 Microsoft had lobbied the federal government to take action against a Japanese software competing with MS-DOS.¹⁴³ The importation of hip hop culture into Japan was offered as further proof that Japanese culture could not offer young Japanese free expression; only American culture could provide that.¹⁴⁴ Music and movies was the prime example of something, anything, Americans could do better.

In response to rumors of a purchase of MCA Universal by Sony, *The Daily News of Los Angeles* reported in 1989: "Industry veterans think the Japanese will be stymied in a business in which creativity is key."¹⁴⁵ Bob Rheme, the co-chairman of New World Entertainment, said "the Japanese have mastered automotive, they've mastered high tech, steel, and ship building, but [entertainment] is one thing they haven't mastered."¹⁴⁶ According to one financial analyst, the entertainment industry was "one of the few areas

¹⁴¹ Styx, "Mr. Roboto," *Kilroy was Here*, A&M CD-3734, 1984, CD.

¹⁴² Levin, "The Pacific Century: The Future of the Pacific Basin."

¹⁴³ Amy Borrus and Geoff Lewis, "An Open System that Makes the U.S. Feel Shut Out --- Japan's TRON standard is raising hackles at Commerce," *Business Week*, November, 28, 1988.

¹⁴⁴ Levin, "The Pacific Century: The Future of the Pacific Basin."

¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Pendleton, "The Foreignization of Hollywood," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, April 9, 1989, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

where the U.S. can compete internationally.”¹⁴⁷ The perception of American supremacy in “software” rested on a fragile foundation however.

Once Sony bought Columbia Pictures from its all-American owner, Coca-Cola Corporation, *Newsweek* lamented that Sony had bought a “piece of America’s soul”¹⁴⁸ in an issue whose cover illustration replaced the Statue of Liberty with a geisha. According to PBS, *The Terminator* was now an “all-American movie owned by Japan.”¹⁴⁹ After the purchase, rumors circulated that Sony’s co-founder and chairman Akio Morita was even planning to build a “Sonyland” to compete with Disneyland.¹⁵⁰ The purchase seemed to demonstrate to a fearful public that America’s grip on global popular culture was not as unassailable as it had perhaps thought.

Further, the propaganda value of Hollywood as an American asset was tacitly acknowledged in the press; the hand-wringing over Hollywood’s “foreign ownership” was the potential of allowing an adversarial foreign power to dictate American discourse and inculcate propaganda to its benefit. Immediately after the purchase, the question on reporters’ minds was whether Akio Morita would permit production of a film critical of the late Emperor Hirohito.¹⁵¹ Yet it was Columbia’s former owner, Coca-Cola, which had actually tampered with the content of Columbia films by inserting dialogue into films promoting the Coke family of products.¹⁵² Sony’s bitter rival Matsushita moved to

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ John Schwartz, “Japan Goes Hollywood.” *Newsweek*, October 9, 1989, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁴⁹ Levin, “The Pacific Century: The Future of the Pacific Basin.”

¹⁵⁰ Yarden Arar and John Froom, “Sony toys with plan for park- amusement center theme in development,” *Daily News of Los Angeles*, January 9, 1991, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁵¹ Michael Berger, “Sony boss slaps buyout reaction,” *The San Francisco Chronicle*, October 4, 1989, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁵² John Froom, “Columbia and Sony: The Japanese Giant’s First Full Year of Ownership has Brought Changes at its Hollywood Studio,” *Daily News of Los Angeles*, December 2, 1990, News Bank: America’s News.

purchase a movie studio of their own, and purchased MCA Universal in 1990. While Morita had assuaged concerns by declaring he would not object to criticism of Hirohito, though the state of Japan might- Matsushita foundered in the press after company president Akio Tanii seemed to dodge the question of whether he'd allow MCA to make a movie critical of Hirohito. Tanii was also asked if he would allow MCA to produce a "Japan bashing" film, to which Tanii responded Matsushita's purchase "will improve U.S.-Japan relations, so I don't think that a Japan-bashing movie would come out of MCA,"¹⁵³ which provided opportunity for attack. One editorialist wrote that Japan would now be able to publish "historical revisions such as those already reported in new history texts for Japanese youngsters" and suggests a possible Matsushita film concerning an American holdout "rescued by Japanese tourists who convince him the fighting is over and give him a pizza. The Japanese tourists play a good-natured game and let the American derelict guess who won the war."¹⁵⁴

For PBS' *Frontline* program, Japan scholar Chalmers Johnson stated there was "no question" Japanese ownership of American firms "abridged free speech," though he qualified that in terms of financial interests, rather than a specificity of Japanese culture.¹⁵⁵ Reports in 1992 that a Hollywood adaptation of Michael Crichton's Japan-bashing potboiler *Rising Sun* did not draw offers from Columbia and Universal led to speculation that the studios had passed due to directives from Tokyo and Osaka, or that

¹⁵³ Paul Farhi, "Matsushita purchases MCA for 7.5 Billion," *The Washington Post*, November 27, 1990, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁵⁴ Leonard Larsen, "Rewriting WWII," *Tulsa World*, December 8, 1990, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁵⁵ Koughan and Ewing, "Losing the War with Japan."

the studies may be “practicing self-censorship” on the subject of Japan.¹⁵⁶ Only the Australian-owned 20th Century Fox bid on *Rising Sun*, a situation described as “very unusual considering the book's promise.”¹⁵⁷ Sony had been praised in the media by Columbia insiders for its hands-off approach to running Columbia,¹⁵⁸ but that didn’t stop speculation that the Japanese connection had somehow had a chilling effect.

The experience of Japanese ownership tapped into the fear that America was losing its grip on its own culture. The country might be “turning Japanese.” The imagined spread of Sonylands and hordes of Japanese brands, music and media might overrun American mass culture, perhaps the last industry left “made in America.” When the Mitsubishi Group of Zero fighter infamy purchased Rockefeller Center in 1989, Rep. Helen Bentley of Maryland asked, “Will the Rockettes become geishas?”¹⁵⁹ The hybridized Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* (1982), in which geisha peered down at the city from enormous electronic billboards, seemed like it was already coming to pass by the end of the decade, all around the country.

Sony and Matsushita’s purchases provoked a fear that forthcoming films would be catering to the Japanese taste and not American. In his review of the Japanese film *Robot Carnival*, a disgusted American critic wrote: “If you've wondered at all what effect Japanese tastes may have on those American movie studios that have been selling out to

¹⁵⁶ Michael Hirsch, “Japan-Owned Studios Skip Bidding for Crichton Book,” *Daily News of Los Angeles*, April 6, 1992, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ John Froom, “Columbia and Sony: The Japanese Giant’s First Full Year of Ownership has Brought Changes at its Hollywood Studio” *Daily News of Los Angeles*, December 2, 1990, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁵⁹ Alex Gibney, dir., *The Pacific Century*, “Inside Japan, Inc.,” aired November 19, 1992, on PBS.

Japanese firms recently, 'Robot Carnival' gives you something to think about."¹⁶⁰ In contrast, when Ronald Reagan was asked to comment on Sony's purchase of Columbia, he remarked "I think that probably we might see some improvements...I'm not too proud of Hollywood these days, with the immorality that is shown in pictures, and the vulgarity."¹⁶¹ Critics responded by bashing Japanese media on grounds of indecency.

The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the *Yukan Fuji*, a tabloid (though identified as a "newspaper" by the *Chronicle*) owned by the Fujisankei Communications Group media conglomerate (that paid Reagan \$2 million for a speaking tour of Japan), "publishes photographs of naked women, cartoon drawings of sexual violence and columns of pornography...."¹⁶² Yet, that doesn't sound too different from *The Sun* and its "Page 3 girls" in Great Britain. Reagan made his comments while being interviewed for a program on Fuji Television, "a channel that, it should be noted, has frequently featured pornographic video clips on its all-night variety show."¹⁶³ The article frames Reagan as clueless about the true, unsavory nature of his business partners. This article is the crux of Japan-bashing; the villains are not simply the Japanese, but the American leadership that is blind to the threat posed to the country.

Further, through its focus on commercial Orientalized sexuality, this article demonstrates the durability of Orientalist discourse and the adaptability of the Yellow Peril narrative to late 20th century conditions. The paper goes on to list various other shameful indecencies of Japan, such as "the male fetish for the schoolgirl's sailor suit,"

¹⁶⁰ David Klinghoffer, "Robot Carnival offers violence without wit," *The Washington Times*, February 21, 1991, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁶¹ Karl Schoenberger, "Reagan's praise for Japanese decency overlooks pornography," *Houston Chronicle*, November 1, 1989, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

which most certainly has a Western analog that is conveniently forgotten. However, the message is clear- Japanese ownership could mean exposure to sexually depraved media beyond the pale of Western morality.

THE YELLOW COMIC BOOK PERIL

The American media tended to portray all Japanese media as saturated with sexuality, but a considerable amount of attention was given to comic books (*manga*). Reports on the salacious content of Japanese comic books were frequently accompanied by an assertion that this questionable content was a “national mania” of the people who made America’s home electronics and autos, and were going to presumably run the country eventually.¹⁶⁴ The picture painted of Japanese media was lurid; it cast doubt on the probity and sanity of Japanese society. Japanese comic books provided sensational content to bash the Japanese with. What were those people reading when they came overseas to supervise Americans?

Several news outlets expressed concern that Japan was unsafe for girls and women. In 1986, James Fallows’ article in *The Atlantic*, provocatively titled “The Japanese are different from you and me,” described the prevalence of sailor-suited girls in pornographic manga as evidence of a “low grade pedophilia...Japanese masculinity consists of pining for a cute little thing about fifteen years old.”¹⁶⁵ In 1987, an Associated Press article described Japanese comics as “notorious for their level of violence, particularly toward women.”¹⁶⁶ The following year the American state broadcaster PBS reported on manga as one of a series of Japanese paradoxes- why did Japan have a low rate of rape when “millions of youths read comic books that are filled with violent rapes

¹⁶⁴ Janice Fuhrman, “Japan’s adult comic books: an ill literacy?,” *The Orlando Sentinel*, September 29, 1987, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁶⁵ James Fallows, “The Japanese are different from you and me,” *The Atlantic*, September 1986, 37, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁶⁶ Fuhrman, “Japan’s adult comic books: an ill literacy?”

and torture of women?”¹⁶⁷ In February of 1989, CBS Sunday Morning followed up its coverage of the funeral of Emperor Hirohito with a report from critic John Leonard on Japanese comics allegedly containing child pornography.¹⁶⁸ Newspapers further wrote that Japan’s obscenity laws were “bizarre”¹⁶⁹ and an “embarrassment”¹⁷⁰ as “comic books that dwell on sexual perversion and violence”¹⁷¹ proliferated; “they place no legal constraints on graphic scenes of sexual violence, including child rape and bestiality.”¹⁷² The alarmism implicit in the presentation of Japanese comics as a wasteland promoting deviant behavior may have become more urgent as the comics proliferated in the U.S. at a time when mass media was heavily scrutinized as responsible for antisocial attitudes and criminal behavior.

A brief *USA Today* article relating the findings of a 1992 Japanese National Police Agency report on child abuse felt it important to remind readers that “pornographic comic books and videos depicting the rape of young girls, often wearing school uniform, are common and highly popular in Japan.”¹⁷³ In most cases, reporters felt no obligation to provide statistics at all, as is the case in *USA Today*, or they provided statistics on the popularity of Japanese comics as a whole, *not* for specific titles with explicit content. This masterful sleight of hand produces an image of a Japanese public

¹⁶⁷ Phil Kloer, “PBS Series ‘Japan’ reveals paradoxes,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, April 4, 1988, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁶⁸ Ken Tucker. “This Week, Even the News is Imported from Japan.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. February 22, 1989, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁶⁹ Baltimore Sun, “Japan’s obscenity standard becomes an embarrassment: serious artist’s work is affected, while comic books that dwell on sexual perversion and violence are springing up like weeds,” *Orlando Sentinel*, July 7, 1991, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Reuters, “A Cover-Up: Japan Censors Musical” *Orlando Sentinel*, February 24, 1993, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁷³ David Landis and Darren Summers, “Child Abuse in Japan,” *USA Today*, August 12, 1992, News Bank: America’s News.

of average men and women, boys and girls, who enjoyed the concept of female degradation and child pornography in their light reading.

The common image depicting the depraved character of Japan incorporated the kind of Japanese that was the front-line troop of Japanese colonization: the (stereotypically middle-aged) businessman. *The New York Times* writes: “Some of the same blue-suited businessmen who have made Japan into an economic superpower commute to work on the subways reading comic books, some as thick as telephone books and many sexually explicit.”¹⁷⁴ Tom Clancy used this image in *Debt of Honor* (1994), in which he writes the following:

Then, there was the way they treated women. Here, on crowded trains, the standing and sitting salarymen read comic books, called *manga*, the local versions of novels, which were genuinely disturbing. Recently, a favorite of the eighties had been revived, called *Rin-Tin-Tin*. Not the friendly dog from 1950s American television, but a dog with a female mistress, to whom he talked, and with whom he had...sexual relations. It was not an idea that appealed to him, but there, sitting on his bench seat, was a middle aged executive, eyes locked on the pages with rapt attention, while a Japanese woman stood right next to him and stared out the train’s windows, maybe noticing, maybe not.¹⁷⁵

While the name of the manga is incorrect, this is clearly a reference to *Kennel Tokorozawa*, a 1989 manga by Ootsubo Maki. The dog in this manga is a German

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Pollack, “Japan: A Superpower among Superheroes.” *New York Times* (Late edition), September 17, 1995, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

¹⁷⁵ Tom Clancy, *Debt of Honor* (NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons: 1994), 101.

Shepherd named Rin Tin Tin. It is not explicitly pornographic, but it is bawdy, making jokes out of the dog's desire to hump his mistress. In introducing this kernel of reality, the memory of a wholesome, nostalgic American property is perverted through its sexually deviant, presumably explicit, re-use by an alien society in this passage.

The discursive image being created through media discussion of Japanese manga is one of Japanese men who routinely victimize Japanese women at home. In so doing, the Japanese men are constructed as menacing, particularly in terms of potential threat to American women- their presence in the US enabled by the threat of the Japanese economic juggernaut and the Japanization of American culture. Indeed, sexual threat and the Japanese are closely intertwined in Clancy's thriller as the Japanese prime minister kidnaps an American woman to keep as a sex slave. Tom Clancy writes in *Debt of Honor*: "There are people over there who like women with fair hair and round eyes...the nearest country with a supply of such females happens to be us."¹⁷⁶ (One might ask what had happened to Australia in Clancy's geography.) Likewise in *Rising Sun*, a Japanese underworld in Los Angeles is explored by the LAPD protagonists, who find a harem of white women being kept for use by Japanese businessmen in a brothel run by a Japanese organized crime syndicate (*yakuza*).

Westerners reporting on Japanese comics tended to zero in on an apparent incongruity between the epicanthal folds of Asian faces and the manga-style characters in comic books, animations and video games. Adjectives like "saucer-sized," "doe-eyed," and "wide-eyed" point to the special attention given to the eye. The Western cultural reading of manga character eyes led Westerners to believe they were looking at

¹⁷⁶Ibid, 99.

Caucasians, especially young girls. One reviewer for the San Francisco Chronicle noted “the characters, strangely enough, have more Caucasian than Asian features.”¹⁷⁷ The evidently Caucasian race of manga women and girls seemed to be evidence for a Japanese predilection for white women and girls.

Rapeman’s Strange American Life

*“Imagine yourself at home somewhere in the suburbs of Japan. It's dinnertime. You're busy cooking and helping your school-age child with homework; the younger one is playing Nintendo. Hubby, in the meantime, is waiting for the bus or tram reading his latest issue of Rapeman...I definitely wouldn't want to be the little woman this guy comes home to.”*¹⁷⁸

In 1985, a pornographic comic called *The Rapeman* appeared in Japan, being periodically released until it was axed in 1992. The titular Rapeman is, essentially, a hired gun who received contracts from clients to rape a particular woman; the comic incorporates parodic elements of the assassin and superhero genre. Sometimes women even hired Rapeman to rape themselves. In 1987, the American band Big Black featured a section of a pornographic manga image as the cover art for the album *Songs about Fucking*, most likely from *Rapeman*. That same year Big Black band member Steve Albini formed another band, called Rapeman, due to his obsession with the character.¹⁷⁹ When questioned about the name, Albini responded: “There's a whole genre of comics in

¹⁷⁷ John Stanley, “Japanimation Splashing Onto U.S. Screens,” *San Francisco Chronicle (Sunday edition)*, August 6, 1989, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁷⁸ Trisha Flynn, “Japan’s ‘Rapeman’ is a blot on male dominated society,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 25, 1990, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁷⁹ Adam Dolgins. *Rock Names-From ABBA to ZZ Top: How Rock Bands Got Their Names*. 3rd ed. (Seacacus: Carol Publishing Group, 1998), 27.

Japan, rape stories where women are raped in really graphic detail for whatever reason, and it's an amazing thing that this is just an accepted part of their sort of normal popular culture.”¹⁸⁰

The use of the name Rapeman was an expression of Albini and his bandmate Ray Washam's fascination with the supposed social acceptance of rape by the Japanese, something Albini repeatedly described as “amazing.”¹⁸¹ In addition to suiting Albini's transgressive aesthetic sensibilities as a musician,¹⁸² the use of the Rapeman name was thus a kind of soft Japan-bashing. Feminist groups dogged Albini over the name, forming picket lines at concert venues¹⁸³ - a source of consternation to Albini as they were “precisely the kind of people that we would have like at the gig”¹⁸⁴ due to political affinity. Ultimately, Albini disbanded Rapeman in 1989.

Albini was not alone in declaring *Rapeman* to be “popular.”¹⁸⁵ When the subject of Japanese media came up, *Rapeman* was cited in the American press as an example of “how far Japan has to go”¹⁸⁶ to catch up with the United States in morality. As the trope depicted in the 1989 film *Kinjite* illustrates, Americans interpreted Japanese women as hopelessly oppressed and submissive, perhaps even complicit in their own oppression. The existence of *Rapeman* served to affirm the moral superiority of the otherwise apparently ‘declining’ United States and the need for an American civilizing mission:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 27.

¹⁸¹ Adam Dolgins. *Rock Names*, 27.

¹⁸² For example, Rapeman's first EP was named after R. Budd Dwyer, the Pennsylvania State Treasurer who committed suicide on air in 1987.

¹⁸³ “Rock band's name protested” *Richmond-Times Dispatch*, September 28, 1988, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁸⁴ Adam Dolgins. *Rock Names*, 28, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁸⁵ Yarden Arar, “Entertaining Thoughts-Well there he goes again: Reagan turns film critic” *Daily News of Los Angeles (Valley edition)*, October 29, 1989, News Bank: America's News.

¹⁸⁶ Edward Epstein. “World insider,” *San Francisco Chronicle (Final Edition)*, January 2, 1990, News Bank: America's News.

“What Japanese women need now is a dose, a large dose, of good 'ol American feminism.”¹⁸⁷ One letter to the editor of *The Rocky Mountain News* suggested that American comic books were the solution to Japan’s manga problem: “Will someone in the comic book industry please produce a comic book titled, "Kind, Compassionate, Respectful Man" for export to Japan?...After reading about how their men admire Rapeman so much, I'm sure this comic book would be every Japanese woman's fondest fantasy.”¹⁸⁸ The suggestions of women’s lives in Japan as miserable, and as the victim of patriarchal monsters, helped cast doubt on the character of Japanese men. Through *Rapeman*, the comic-devouring Japanese businessman was able to be painted as a sexual predator run amok, directing his sexual energy into plundering (a feminized) America and abusing Japanese women.

In reality, *Rapeman* was quite offensive in Japan. The *Rapeman* comic was very upsetting to many Japanese women (though not all, apparently; a woman wrote the some of the scenarios in *Rapeman*¹⁸⁹) and feminist groups in that country successfully lobbied for it to be cancelled.¹⁹⁰ The patriarchal logic of “fixing” an “unpleasant” women through the violence of forced intercourse is highly distressing, but it is hardly one unique to Japan. Not all Japanese women saw their lot as particularly bad either; the ability of Japanese women to control their husband’s finances and spend that money on their own self-improvement was cited by Japanese sociologist Sumiko Iwao as one of the ways

¹⁸⁷ Trisha Flynn, “Japan’s ‘Rapeman’ is a blot on male dominated society,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 25, 1990, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁸⁸ Scott Williams, “Letter to the editor,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 8, 1990, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁸⁹ Fuhrman, “Japan’s adult comic books: an ill literacy?”

¹⁹⁰ Pollack, “Japan: A Superpower among Superheroes.”

Japanese women exercised power that Western women did not have.¹⁹¹ One Japanese *hostess* (emotional companion for hire) remarked to journalist Michael Lewis that she thought American women were victims of patriarchy since they did not control their husband's finances.¹⁹²

The Western presumption was that the submission of women, epitomized by geisha, were what Japanese men thought was sexy.¹⁹³ Indeed, geisha seemed to be nearly the only representation of Japanese women in American media, framed ambivalently as feminine but also alien and somehow threatening in *Blade Runner* (1982), a Nasdaq commercial,¹⁹⁴ and *Rising Sun* (1993). The pre-modern images of Japanese that were circulated in the media of geisha and samurai suggested an underlying of social 'retardation;' Japanese social and sexual relations remained in a 'lower' stage of development. One *Newsweek* contributor wrote that "violent, medieval forces [were] still seething in the Japanese psyche."¹⁹⁵ While Japanese women in the Western imagination were thought of as compliant geisha, the recurring motif of "the geisha" bore little resemblance to the actual geisha of Japan. The Western geisha was a caricature, a vision of a woman held in bondage to an archaic, savage Oriental patriarchy that ironically produced the West's ideal of womanhood.¹⁹⁶

Rapeman remained an enduring synecdoche in America for Japanese media after it was cancelled in Japan. In the wake of the Columbine massacre in 1999, *Die Hard*

¹⁹¹ Sumiko Iwao, *The Japanese Woman*, (Toronto: The Free Press, 1993), 4.

¹⁹² Michael Lewis, *Pacific Rift*, 75.

¹⁹³ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*, 178.

¹⁹⁴ Nasdaq, "Vintage Nasdaq commercial: Japan and Nasdaq," YouTube video, 0:30, Jun 17, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rba7Lv41do>

¹⁹⁵ Joshua Hammer, "The Rise from Rice to Riches" *Newsweek*, October 19, 1992, 78.

¹⁹⁶ Yoko Kawaguchi. *Butterfly's Sisters – the Geisha in Western Culture*. (New haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 5.

screenwriter Steven De Souza declared “The most popular comic book in Japan is called Rapeman... Meanwhile, they do not have the violence that we do here.”¹⁹⁷ In Rapeman’s strange American afterlife, Rapeman was now useful for getting American media off the hook in the ongoing discussion of violence in media. *Rapeman* also appeared in an episode of *Law and Order: SVU* that year, in which a prosecutor introduced the comic as evidence suggesting the comic’s owner condoned rape.¹⁹⁸ *Rapeman* continued to serve the purpose of suggesting that it is product of a culture that tolerates or celebrates rape.

Yet, for all the American suspicion of Japanese rapemen in the 1990s, President Clinton would be forced to apologize to the Japanese Diet after three American servicemen kidnapped, beat, and raped a twelve year old Okinawan girl on September 4, 1995.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Gary Dretzka, “Writers panel discusses film violence- An industry gathering debates responsibility for violence in society, with no real consensus,” *The Orange County Register*, June 13, 1999, News Bank: America’s News.

¹⁹⁸ Rick Rosenthal, dir., *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* season 1, episode 3, “...Or Just Look Like One,” aired October 4, 1999 on NBC.

¹⁹⁹ William Neikirk, “Clinton Apologizes to Japan for Rape by US servicemen,” *The Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1996, News Bank: America’s News.

The case sparked massive protests in Okinawa against the US military bases there; Japanese public anger was so great that the US Navy agreed to give Japanese authorities early custody of the suspects before they were formally charged. The case brought differences in American and Japanese criminal justice to media attention, and some family members of the accused initially alleged the charges were racially motivated as all three suspects were black. (Teresa Watanabe, “Wife Pleads Marine’s Case in Okinawa Rape Trial” *The New York Times*, Dec 5, 1995, ProQuest: The New York Times.)

This case came a little over two years after the 1993 acquittal of a Baton Rouge homeowner of manslaughter charges after he fatally shot a Japanese exchange student, Yoshihiro Hattori on October 17, 1992- an inflammatory verdict in Japan that reinforced perception of the US as dangerous and hostile to Japanese. (William Booth, “Man Acquitted of Killing Japanese Exchange Student,” *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1993, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post.)

CONCLUSION: TRADE WAR AS CASTRATION ANXIETY

A 1999 episode of South Park, “Chimpokomon,” satirized both the Pokemon craze and the anti-Japanese hysteria of the decade. The plot of the episode involves a conspiracy by Japanese ultranationalists to brainwash American kids into attacking Pearl Harbor through subliminal messages in the Chimpokomon toys, video game and cartoon, culminating with indoctrination camps where the kids are given fighter jets with which to carry out the attack. It was only because the Japan-bashing panic had subsided by this point that the episode’s plot could be understood as satire and not an earnest belief on the part of Matt Stone and Trey Parker. This episode of South Park is highly significant and well-constructed for several reasons.

First, it indicates by decade’s end the American recognition of both Japanese hard and soft power, its “hard” power in the form of its exports of tangible goods and its soft power in its intangible cultural products. The children of South Park begin speaking Japanese fluently instead of English, to the consternation of the town’s authority figures; their faces even imitate some of the stylistic flourishes of anime, with changes in the shape of their eyes that suggest both a cultural and physical transformation. The language of children was literally a foreign language now. For the time being, it seemed that American products and their associated culture had lost out. In an attempt to stem the tide the town’s parents and authority figures turn to the local market research facility to find an American toy that will win back the children.

The sum of two decades worth of trade friction over industries ranging from autos to computer games were summed up by the analogy of South Park’s market research

group's hilariously poorly-conceived toys like the 'Alabama Man' action figure, whose 'skill' is drinking and beating his wife. While Michael Crichton and Pat Choate had begun the decade by offering morality lessons in "not selling America out," Trey Parker and Matt Stone closed the decade by delivering the verdict that Americans could not make a product that would sell. In so doing, Parker and Stone confirmed the ideological victory of free trade and the postindustrial economy over the economic nationalists. It also signaled American consternation at the transition of Japan from industrial to postindustrial competitor, perhaps as "the world's leader in the promotion of (immoral) global consumer ideology."²⁰⁰ The threat from Japanese autos and silicon chips had fully given way to the threat to parents' wallets from *Power Rangers*, *Pokémon*, and *Sailor Moon*.

Finally, special attention should be paid to the discussion of penises throughout this episode. Hirohito, the president of the Chimpokomon company, and his assistant Mr. Ohta regularly elide American complaints about the Chimpokomon toys²⁰¹ by complimenting the penises of American men and reminding them of the 'inferiority' of Japanese penis size. At the Chimpokomon headquarters a gaggle of Japanese women even appears to marvel at the size of American penises. As the Japanese invasion is ready to begin, 'President Clinton' appears on national television to reassure the nation his penis is quite large and there will be no problem as Hirohito has assured him that Hirohito lacks the requisite manhood to invade the United States. [The unnervingly Trumpian undertones of Clinton's speech make watching this scene a surreal experience.]

²⁰⁰Matthew Allen, "South Park does Japan: Going Global with Chimpokomon" in *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, ed. Allen and Sakamoto (*New York: Routledge, 2006), 37.

²⁰¹ Specifically, that they tend to unpredictably spout Japanese ultranationalist slogans!

The important truth revealed here is the centrality of the phallus throughout the discourse on trade between Japan and the United States.

As M.J. Heale writes, America at the end of the 20th century was no longer the self-reliant country it was in 1945.²⁰² The enervation of American strength was a major theme of the 1970s to 1990s; from its energy held hostage by Arab sheiks; its ability to wage total war and project power held hostage by Japanese imports that “hollowed out” American industry and Japanese keiretsu that controlled the supply of silicon chips for missile control systems and sold submarine components to the Soviet Union. The manhood of its working class and organized labor was jeopardized by the “little yellow people” with lesser genitalia and deviant sexual habits. The ability of American men to protect American women and children was in jeopardy.

Today, one does not have to reach far to find Japanese influence in contemporary America. Marie Kondo is the probably the best-known Japanese in America since the death of Hirohito; her book on tidying the home has sold 8 million copies.²⁰³ Perhaps most remarkably, her “quirky” appeal seems to come from her practice of traditional Japanese animism (Shinto), encouraging Americans to likewise respect the souls of objects in their homes.²⁰⁴ American interpretations of Zen Buddhism have never gone out style; perhaps animism will be the newest addition to the spiritual American’s eclectic cabinet.

²⁰² M.J. Heale. *Contemporary America: Power Dependency, and Globalization since 1980* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2-3.

²⁰³ Constance Grady, “Marie Kondo and the fantasy of a tidy life, explained,” Vox.com, last modified Jan 14, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/1/11/18175683/marie-kondo-tidying-up-netflix-life-changing-magic-konmari-explained>.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

One cannot peruse American media without finding a reference to such imports as “bento boxes” and Japanese aesthetics, ranging from minimalism to *bokeh*, a stylistic lens blur in photography. Pulp manga, including bawdy manga, sit on the shelves of Barnes and Noble, as if daring a moral backlash that never seems to come. Japanese video games and video game console computers have an established presence in the American market, despite Japanese firms having long since lost the market dominance enjoyed during the 1980s and early 1990s. Microsoft is the sole American challenger to the computers of Nintendo and Sony. In some sense, the “Japanification” of America that was feared thirty years ago has already occurred, and seems likely to continue until Americans feel that Japan no longer provides useful concepts for adoption or appropriation.

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