'Geist' in the Shell: The Erasure of Japanese Identity in select Hollywood Films

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Abstract: Hollywood Cinema forms the core of American soft power. It is the expression of America's political, ideological, and cultural aims. It is also a medium of propagation of the ideas of American Orientalism which shaped the perception of Eastern culture and identity. This paper discusses the myriad elements of American Orientalist ideas about Japan in Hollywood Cinema, and the various techniques used to erase Japanese representation, particularly in the movie, 'Ghost in the Shell'.

American Orientalism is far too often seen as a supposedly 'positive' set of ideas about the identity and culture of the East, which though a bit shallow and stereotypical doesn't do much damage other than a slight Western appropriation of Eastern cultures. Americans accepting and embracing yoga, belly dancing, bonsai trees or even the celebration of immigrant success is considered a type of 'benign' racism. However, Orientalism is a double-edged sword that imposes ideas, standards and expectations onto the East. Unless they can prove themselves to be true to the Western idea of the East they become 'undesirable'. These ideas, standards and expectations are propagated mostly through Hollywood Cinema, which is an effective tool to shape global perception. Japan was one of the major Asian countries whose culture was appropriated to serve Western interests. America utilised both hard power and soft power to bring down Japan and eliminate any and all of its potential as a threat to their global standing.

America, after the Second World War, took careful steps to prevent the re-emergence of the Japanese Empire. Between 1945 and 1952, the US led the Allies into the occupation and rehabilitation of Japan and enacted a widespread reformation of it's political, economic, social and most importantly military sectors. They essentially made an entirely

new constitution. The most extensive changes made were; they lowered the Emperor's status to a mere figurehead with zero political control, placed more power to the parliamentary system, gave greater rights to women, but most importantly the Allied advisors completely renounced Japan's right to wage war, thereby eliminating its non-defensive armed forces and negating its war potential.Present day Japanese consider their forces to be 'jeitai', a self defense force rather than a military force, i.e. they consider themselves defenders or helpers rather than warriors which is a striking difference from the Japan of the past.However, in the recent years, Shinzo Abe has pushed Japan into holding more responsibilities regarding its Self Defense Forces. He wants to revise Japan's pacifist constitution, whereby Japan is reliant on America for its defense,and instead possess a military force capable of coming to the aid of its allies when necessary.

Globalization was another tool America used to perpetuate convenient interpretations of foreign cultures and their identities through powerful mass media like the Internet. Ideas of American Orientalism are spread via the Internet and Hollywood which shaped global perception of Asians, their cultures and identities. Japan was also on the receiving end of the prejudices and stereotypes perpetuated by the United States through Hollywood Cinema. America presented Japan to be the land of geishas, samurais, robots and tentacle porn. During the early nineteenth century they were thought of as an undeveloped country with primitive beliefs and traditions. However, this image got entwined with robots and the extensive technological progressiveness that now characterizes it.

Academics perceive these two distinct images through two models; Traditional orientalism and Techno-orientalism, to understand the Western perception and interpretation of Japan. As Said states, Orientalism is a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". (Said 11) Through traditional perspectives, the West perceives Japan in two ways; a country with aesthetic, elegant qualities associated with images of the kimono, tea ceremony, geisha, Zen etc. making them exotic; and another, a martial country that is ruthless, impassive, and cold-blooded associated with images of a katana, ninja, samurai and seppuku etc. This stereotypical framework projects an image of a country that is both aesthetic and menacing, however it conceals the American agenda of dominating and determining the identity of Japan. Hollywood Cinema is used as a medium of propagation of the ideas of American Orientalism which shaped the perception of Eastern culture and identity. It forms the core of American soft power. Considering the fact that Hollywood Cinema has such an enormous global audience,America had the power to pass judgements on what is beautiful and what is dangerous about Japan and the audience took those words to be the truth. In addition, America is considered to possess the most seductive

culture as seen in the huge success of American products like Coco-Cola, Levis, Apple etc. worldwide. Thus, even though present-day Japan has developed into its current state of technological superiority, it is considered to be an absorption of the West. Though America has shown instances of Japonism, i.e. the imitation of Japanese aesthetics, it is rarely mentioned, while the Japanese reinterpretation of anything Western is immediately publicized. For instance; in the novel and movie, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Golden,1997; Marshall 2001), Hollywood projects the image of a traditional Japan that meets the expectations of the general public. The movie is also a typical example of the erasure of Japanese identity as a Chinese actor plays the role of Sayuri. *The Last Samurai* (2003), by Edward Zwick patronizingly portrays an undeveloped Japan being modernized by a Westerner. The recent movie, *The Wolverine* (2013) by James Mangold is scattered with images of a traditional orientalist Japan consisting of temples and Japanese gardens. The movie shows a beautiful Japanese girl, Mariko, who is the heir to her dying father's company. But instead of showing her competency as a leader or a businesswoman she is depicted as a damsel in distress saved by the American, Logan. It also displays Japan as sort of a crime capital overrun by Yakuzas.

In the 1980s Japan rose in economic power so much so that it was catching up to America and Europe in terms of technology. Now, America could no longer manipulate the public into believing Japan to be a primitive undeveloped land. Japan instead started to get associated with robots, artificial intelligence and cybernetics. Academicians coined the term Techno-orientalism to describe this discourse. But this discourse was not based on some new-found respect, instead it had a resentful, racist side. The West portrayed Japan to be obsessed with robots and artificial intelligence so as to dehumanize them and label them as a cold society, where the citizens are soulless machines living under an authoritarian, bureaucratic culture. Japan became the image of the dystopian future of capitalism. Instances of a techno-orientalist Japan can be seen in the movie *Blade Runner* (1982) by Ridley Scott, and in the novel *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson. An infamous conception of this techno-orientalist view of Japan is the hit song *Mr. Roboto* by the band Styx. The key part of the song is the chorus where there is an electronically produced phrase "domo arigato, Mr. Roboto" (Mr. Roboto), meaning 'thank you very much, Mr. Roboto'. This iconic chorus became a catchphrase in the eighties. The song criticizes Japan for being a dehumanized society. The lyrics of the song are so, "you're wondering who I am, machine or mannequin, with parts made in Japan, I am the modern man" (Mr. Roboto).

But there existed another dimension to Japan that couldn't be understood through the existing models, the country's supposed weirdness. Many Western articles and channels in YouTube posted information with the captions 'WTF Japan' to discuss the country's strange traditions and myths, for instance; cuddle cafes and panty vending machines. General public never understood the fact that America was establishing standards of normalcy by branding Japanese popular culture as weird or 'wacky'. Thus, a third model was created named Wacky orientalism to understand the agenda behind labelling Japan and everything Japanese as weird by the US. The Wacky orientalist view of Japan fuels the idea that Japanese customs and popular culture is weird. It showcased festivals like the Shinto fertility festival, named Kanamara Matsuri or the Festival of the Steel Phallus, where the creation of life is celebrated. However, since the festival includes cross-dressing, penis-shaped lollipops,and giant phalluses on moving shrines, images of it cemented the belief that Japanese customs are 'wacky'. It is also important to note that this wacky orientalist perspective is fluid. During the 1980s, Japanese men were considered hypersexual, while today they are regarded as hypo-sexual. For example, BBC2 aired a documentary named *No Sex Please, We're Japanese* on October 2013 to explore Japan's declining population. But they interview only two men, who are well below pension age. They also criticize Japanese men's interest in virtual girls and dating simulator games and purport it to be the cause of their population decline.

The Kawaii culture is another cultural aspect of Japan that America deemed odd. Japan's obsession with everything cute or 'kawaii' looks weird to non-Japanese cultures as it is embraced not only by the younger female population but instead is a part of a Japanese person's everyday life. Kawaii has many guises in Japan. There is the old-school Hello Kitty kawaii and also the high-brow cute as seen in Takashi Murakami's cartoon-apocalyptic canvases which are sold for millions at art auctions. One may think, how exactly did Japan start integrating cute culture into almost every aspect of its daily life? It began as a consumer culture, starting from Sanrio's Hello Kitty, a white bobcat with a red bow, and later embedded itself into other cultural aspects like fashion, music and even the food industry in Japan. Hello Kitty went on to become a world-famous Japanese icon and generated over 80 billion in sales. It shows that matter your preferences, you can't help but be drawn to anything cute on display. In Japan, the use of kawaii ranges from Hello Kitty stickers on constructional vans and street-corner police boxes shaped as gingerbread houses to Self Defense Forces recruitment ads as three cute cartoon soldiers calling people to arms. They have even managed to add an element of cuteness to tsunami warnings, where waves are drawn with teeth making it look menacing yet adorable. This would raise the question, do the Japanese have to go so far? The non-Japanese fails to understand why this peculiar

culture is so important to Japan. Kawaii exists to soften the rigid social hierarchies present in the Japanese society. It helps people transcend its stratified nature. For instance, Former Opposition Party Leader, Yukio Hatoyama who had distinctive facial features, used the nickname 'Alien' and distributed toys shaped like an extraterrestrial being with his resemblance to increase his popularity. Kawaii culture forms a bridge that connects the younger and the elder population that otherwise has no commonality. The West,however, perceives this preoccupation as societal infantilization. Watching authority figures put on displays of cuteness to reach the masses and female pop stars dress half their age and sing in pre-adolescent voices further strengthens this belief. While this cute culture was merely a commodity to the rest of the world, the Japanese embraced it as part of their daily lives. The West reasons the psychology behind the relevance of this culture in two ways ; as a result of the surplus parental instincts in the Japanese that is without an outlet due to their low birth rates, and as a reflection of their deep nostalgia for childhood and a reaction to the emotional restraint expected in their intensely regimented lives. Japan is a country that values youth. The aging population cannot help but want to appear youthful. Added to that, their adult lives are laden with expectations to conform to strict social norms and as people who work long hours every day, they feel enormous social pressure as well. This leads to a need to go back to one's childhood, particularly since children are considered precious in Japan. Thus,contrary to the Western perception that Japanese are obsessed with acting half their age, Kawaii culture is something that soothes the Japanese and helps them escape the harsh realities of their lives.

Japanese anime and manga are other commodities that are just as popular and successful as cute culture. In fact, both aren't mutually exclusive. They were used as a vehicle to propagate Japan's idea of 'cute'. However, there is an element of fetishization that surrounds the consumption of these commodities.East Asian women in particular have been fetishized and objectified as a result of anime and manga consumption. We must understand that to non- Asians, all Asians looks the same. They do not make differences between the Chinese, the Korean, the Japanese etc. Thus, the consumption of these Japanese contents resulted in the fetishization of East Asian women in particular.In addition to that. America normalised the casual racism and harassment against these women that exists particularly in the online communities. It goes beyond looking at pre-adolescent female characters and finding them cute. There seems to be an obsession towards East Asian women, imagining them to be the submissive yet promiscuous, which is quite similar to the yellow fever that existed during the Second World War and the Vietnam War. This issue isn't something to be brushed off as a case of Asian women being sensitive. There have been many cases in the US and UK, where Asian women were stalked

and killed. "Fetishization dehumanizes, hurts, rapes, and kills. It creates a culture that starts with lewd comments under a drawing of a 12-year-old wearing cat ears and a maid uniform. And continues with yelling random Japanese words at any unsuspecting East Asian woman or girl on the street. And it ends with bloody violence against Asian women. As reported by the National Network to End Domestic Violence, 41% to 61% of Asian women experience sexual and physical violence from their intimate partners." (Seah)

Another misconception that is a result of the overconsumption and obsession towards Japanese culture is the expectation of seeing Lolita dresses and Gyaru get-ups along the streets of Tokyo. They instead reveal what is known as the Genderless Kei. It is essentially a move towards style that goes beyond the gender binary, challenging traditional ideas of gendered clothing. We see young slim bodied men with cute faces and dyed hair wearing make-up, contact lenses, nail polish and accessories, which are traditionally considered feminine. This should not be confused with cross-dressing or transvestism. These aren't men trying to look like women but are young men trying to create a new genderless standard for beauty. Although Japan isn't a country that promotes a gender-progressive attitude, homophobic and transphobic abuse is still very much a prevalent issue and although same-sex marriage has been legalised in Tokyo, when it comes to sexuality and gender identity people exercise a don't-ask don't-tell attitude. This raises the question as to how the Genderless Kei gained such traction in the Japanese media. It was the result of two things; the increasing influence of South Korean boy bands and the obsession with feminine men or 'bishonen' in mangas. The Neo Ikemen or the Genderless Danshi aren't trying to look like anime characters, who have marked Western facial features. Nor do they identify themselves as gay or transgender.They are simply youngmen who are moving towards an unfettered androgynous standard of beauty. It is an evolution in fashion where they can unreservedly express themselves whatever their sexual or gender identity. This radical step towards blurring the lines of masculinity and femininity in appearance is one that challenges the traditional norms of gender expression.

Hollywood cinema is one of the most influential platforms when it comes to propagating stereotypes. Similarly, stereotypes regarding Japanese identity and culture are spread through films to meet the audiences' expectations of what Japan is. For instance; the ninja has been commodified by America through Hollywood films to be a mysterious and cool warrior, while in truth they were essentially spies who were taught to avoid confrontations at all costs."Most people imagine the ninja flew through the sky and disappeared, like Superman, waving ninja swords around, sneaking into the enemy ranks and assassinating generals…. This is a mistaken image of the ninja introduced by movies and comic books".

(What is Ninja?) There are countless American movies that depicts ninjas. One of them is *Ninja Assassin* (2009) by James McTeigue, starring Rain (Jung Jihoon), a Korean actor. Thus, the idea of a ninja that is now widely known is the American perception rather than based on Japanese culture. These stereotypes do not fully express the truth behind the ninja culture, instead they are embellished to fit the Japanese exotic image.

Karate Kid (1984) by Robert Mark Karmen is about a 16-year-old boy who takes up an interest in Karate as a way to deal with a high school bully and he is taught by an old Japanese handyman names Mr. Miyagi. The movie encourages the false belief that all Japanese men are well versed in martial arts. This movie was later remade by The Sony in 2010 starring Jaden Smith and Jackie Chan. It was an instant hit in the box office sweeping in 56 million dollars during the opening week.Jackie Chan's casting in the remake adds to the authenticity of the plot. The actor is well known for his incredible martial arts skills. In fact, Jackie Chan's presence in Hollywood movies has been almost exclusively used for characters who are well versed in martial arts. He is used as a medium to portray the Western perception of Asians as Kung Fu masters. Other successful films were;*The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), where Japanese women are hypersexualized and are presented as submissive and voiceless;and *Big Hero* 6 (2014), where the protagonist Hiro is a biracial character (half- Japanese and half- Caucasian) who is the stereotype of an Asian male who is a geek.The popular American TV show *Supernatural* (2005-2020) in an episode from season 5, shows the main characters Dean and Sam finding themselves in a Japanese variety show. In that particular segment, the characters are part of a quiz show where the loser is hit in the crotch with a huge plastic hammer. The scene is directed as if the two characters are the only 'normal' elements while everything else that goes on in the background is simply absurd.

Existing orientalist theories help reveal the problematic racial and cultural representations present in Hollywood films. *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) is one such movie where there can be seen a blatant Americanization of what was originally Japanese. It is an American film directed by Rupert Sanders, starring Scarlett Johansson, who plays the main character Major Mira Killian, also called Motoko Kusanagi; 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano as Chief Daisuke Aramaki; Michael Carmen Pitt as Kuze, also called Hideo; Pilou Asbaek as Batou; and Chin Han as Togusa. The film is based on a Japanese animated movie series of the same name, which is based on a Japanese manga by Masamune Shirow. It generated much publicity as the manga and the anime series is considered a classic among fans. Its fan base stretches from Japan to the rest of the world. It would be right to say that thousands were anticipating the release of this movie.

The original manga earned its classic status because of the mangaka's, i.e. the manga artist Shirow's peculiar approach towards the theme of finding the meanings of humanity, and the portrayal of the complex dynamics that exist between humans and technology. For instance, he explores the intricate and convoluted relationship between humans, cyborgs, and cybernetics. His unique perspective of humanity was influenced by the work *The Ghost in the Machine* by the German Philosopher Arthur Koestler. Koestler doesn't use the word 'Ghost' in its literal English meaning of spectre or phantom. Instead it is connected to the philosophical ideology from the German term 'Geist'. In Hegel's work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Geist is described as an inclusive term that can be given different meanings like spirit, ghost, and mind. Koestler uses the term with this particular definition in mind and Shirow, inspired by Koestler uses it with similar meaning.

The marked difference between the anime and the movie is the depth of identity exploration. The plot of the original manga is very Japanese in its soul. The confusion and dilemma faced by the main character is not merely a dichotomy between a person's real self and their persona as shown in the movie. It is a lot more profound. Kusanagi faces the dilemma of understanding her true identity as she is part machine and part human. She wants to understand where her human self begins and where her machine counterpart ends. This identity crisis is very much Japanese. As discussed before, Japan and its people are considered robotic by non-Japanese people. In present day Japan AI is part of a person's everyday life. Human-machine interaction is a lot higher in Japan than in other countries. Added to that, the people of Japan live a strictly regimented life in a rigidly stratified society. Like the machines around them, the Japanese are mostly stoic people from whom a great amount of emotional restraint is expected. This suppression of their human side pushes them to identify themselves with the robots that are everywhere in Japan. Without a proper understanding of Japan's social order and the psychologies of people of that country, the plot of this story cannot be given justice. This failure to understand a Japanese person's soul deep dilemma regarding their human identity is what marks the movie as a mere cyberpunk story rather than an exploration of what it means to be human. The original work portrays the postmodern woes of existential crisis.In addition, a cyborg lead character is capable of bringing about debates of racial identity, as cyborgs do not have a race. Audiences are shown that race is a social construct and has nothing to do with an individual's capabilities. This breaks down the foundation on which Western supremacy is built. Thus, Mira Killian from the movie and Motoko Kusanagi from the manga feel like entirely different characters. Whereas Killian has issues regarding her persona, Kusanagi is scrambling to hold onto her human self and not lose herself to her robotic side.

The movie is set in a futuristic world, no specific location is shown, where people enhance themselves with the help of cybernetic innovations like networking, vision, intelligence, strength, etc. However, the technological advancement leads to serious cyber terrorism and internet crimes. Mira Killian (Scarlett Johannsson), is the sole survivor of her family who were attacked by cyber-terrorists. Hanka Robotics, one of the top technology corporations design an anti-terrorism project to the counter the cyber-terrorist force. Killian's body is damaged beyond repair during the attack except for her brain and Hanka Robotics decides to use her as a part of the counter-terrorism force by making her into a cyborg. Later she becomes the Major of the Section 9 anti-terrorist bureau, where she works with Batou (Pilou Asbaek), and Togusa (Chin Han) under the command of Chief Daisuke Aramaki ('Beat' Takeshi Kitano). While discharged from her duties, she meets Kuze (Carmen Pitt) who is another one of Hanka Robotics' projects. Her interactions with Kuze leads to her realizing that her memory is not her own and that the corporation implanted one in her. This results in the entire Section 9 learning the truth that they have been deceived by Hanka Robotics. The main question propounded by the movie is, 'what is humanity?', which is the cardinal theme of the original manga. It also gives significance to Killian's journey in finding her identity (Ghost) as Motoko Kusanagi inside her cyborg body.

One of the major controversies surrounding the movie even before its release was its casting. The source of the film shows that many of the characters are Japanese. Hence the casting of non- Japanese and even non-Asian actors drew a lot of attention and criticism from fans around the world. This was also noted by people who weren't even aware of the original work. Scarlett Johansson being casted as Motoko Kusanagi received large scale criticisms from fans, there were even petitions for a recasting. The producer Steven Paul reacted to the complaints saying, "There [are] all sorts of people and nationalities in the world shown in The Ghost in the Shell… I don't think it was just a Japanese story. Ghost in the Shell is a very international story, and it wasn't just focused on Japanese; it was supposed to be the entire world" (Berman). While the director of the original animation film, Mamoru Oshii commented that, "The Major is a cyborg and her physical form is an assumed one. The name 'Motoko Kusanagi' and her current body are not her original name and body, so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her" (Original Ghost in the Shell). The producer's argument is hardly an answer because the original manga is very specifically set in Tokyo and the essence of the story is directly connected to Japanese people and their culture. In addition, except for the lead and other main characters including the villain they used Asian features to present 'evil robots. The director's defense on the casting issues is based on the fact that the Major's shell is a cyborg

and thus the audience wouldn't be able to distinguish her racial identity since her physical form concealed her true self. But Oshii's comment makes one wonder whether the Japanese are resigned to the fact that to make a successful film they need to cast white actors. The controversies surrounding the casting was not without basis since Hollywood has a history of whitewashing and using yellow faces to portray Asians. A similar whitewashing controversy had surrounded another American adaptation of a Japanese manga series named *Death Note* in 2017.

The theme of Japanese identity is predominant in the original manga *of Ghost in the Shell*. Shirow's manga portrays a story where the experiences, the relationship between humans and technology, and culture is inherently and uniquely Japanese. Though the setting of the Hollywood movie gives off vibes similar to that of *The Matrix* and other cyberpunk films, the original setting is more of a representation of our modern day even with its technological advancements. The Japan shown in the original *Ghost in the Shell* is a country that is reckoning with its own national identity, which is why the white casting becomes a huge issue. Even though Kusanagi's inner identity conflict has its universality, it is more of a Japanese experience. She is a woman who possesses Japanese features, but she feels even more alienated because of those features. This crisis is very much relatable to the Japanese population. Her interactions with her non-augmented partners and her fights against foreigners remind her of her humanity and her Japanese identity. However, Johansson being a Caucasian woman is unable to bring out that inherent duality in Kusanagi. Since Johansson is non-Japanese, Kusanagi becomes a foreigner in a foreign land and the character's inner conflict transforms into one that is caused by her nationality. Whereas in the original work, the main question was that even though ethnically she is one with her peers, what is the extent to which she is connected to them. Thus, Johansson's Kusanagi removes the uncertainty that forms the core of the character. The movie also fails to represent the political and social dimensions of the original work.

When researching live action adaptations and remakes of Japanese manga or animation films, it is important to consider the visual features of the medium of the original text. Even while accusations of whitewashing were increasing in number, there were arguments commenting that many Japanese characters from anime and manga have Western oriented features. Consider the popular anime and manga series *Sailor Moon*; the main character Tsukino Usagi has long blond hair, big blue eyes and 'white' skin. Mamoru Oshii explained this leaning towards the Western saying that the anime is a product by modern Japanese and they often try to evade the fact that they're Japanese. Popular film director Hayao Miyazaki once said the same through a provocative statement, "the Japanese hate their own

faces" (Napier 25). Susan J. Napier, a Professor of Japanese Studies, argues that Japanese anime is "stateless" (Napier 24). She comments that though Japanese anime is an exotic Japanese commodity exported to the West, it does not embody Japanese culture and this can be seen in how non-Japanese the characters from anime looks like. According to her, the reason behind the popularity of anime in Japan is the flexibility, creativity, and freedom of the medium. She continues this hypothesis saying, "it is not just Japanese audiences who search for more and varied forms of electronic entertainment, who long for an 'anywhere', or who are tired of their own faces" (Napier 26). However, one must wonder whether decades of prejudice and racism have resulted in the Japanese hating their own ethnic features that they consciously depict their very Japanese characters through non-Japanese representations. But it is debatable that Napier's argument could be extended to the American audience in the case of *Ghost in the Shell*, as international fans wanted an all Asian cast very arduously. The casting of a Caucasian female actor reinforces the need for a white actor, i.e. Western aesthetics, for the possible success of a film. Napier also argued that," the anime medium - precisely because it often highlights characters and settings that are neither Western nor clearly Japanese – offers a space for identity exploration in which the audience can revel in a safe from of Otherness unmatched by any other contemporary medium" (Napier 27). But Napier's argument of Mukokuseki or 'stateless' aspects of representations is not applicable in cases of Western adaptations of Japanese anime and manga like *Ghost in the Shell* since it was made and released in Hollywood while being played by a mostly non-Japanese cast because these adaptations merely strengthen Western aesthetic representation and doesn't properly depict Japanese culture.

Another factor regarding the Hollywood adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* to be considered is the Japanese response towards the movie. Many Japanese viewers were content with the Hollywood adaptation and this shows the cultural differences between Japanese and American audiences in the comprehension of issues like whitewashing. The foremost issue that caused displeasure among the American audience, i.e. the casting of Scarlett Johansson, was received with positive feedback among the Japanese audience. Their opinion was that since Johansson isn't Japanese, she would look more anime-ish than an actor from their nationality. They were only concerned with her similarity in looks with the character from the original anime. Most Japanese viewers had no issues with the racial identities of the cast. Some did not even know why it generated so much criticism in the West. However, the continued debate over the whitewashing resulted in murmurs among the Japanese over the need for a Japanese actress. Many are aware of America's economic influence in Hollywood and so they believe the casting of a white actor is much more profitable. One even commented, "it's just the way things are because it's Hollywood"

(That Japanese Man Yuta 00:04:23-24). Many Japanese believe that mangakas are often fascinated by the white people and their Western physical features. Some even argue that the anime world is an imaginary world separate from reality. But art is always representative of real-life experiences, so it could be that even while depicting Japanese stories and Japanese cultures, they are unable to disentangle themselves from the expectations imposed by the West. The American and Japanese responses about casting issues as seen in movies like *Ghost in the Shell* and *Death Note* also points towards the differences in the perception of race and racial identities between them. Whitewashing is an inexcusable issue concerning racial discrimination to other viewers, since it not only takes away job opportunities but also perpetuates racial stereotypes. This difference in responses can be attributed to the fact that the Japanese actually prefer Caucasian actors as discussed above. However, what received negative criticism about the film was its treatment of the theme of the original movie. The core of the movie is the coexistence of machines and humans, it is about identity and soul. Issues of whitewashing are directly related to identity. The ghost, i.e. the soul or the consciousness inhabiting the 'shell', is what differentiates a machine from a human. The original anime version shows an exploration of the concept of a soul and identity of a person, which the adaptation completely ignores.

Decades of conditioning have made the Japanese think that they must aspire to become like their Western counterparts, which is reflected in their art. Reiji Kobayashi, in his work, *The Toy Industry*, comments that, "This portrait of [Western oriented visual feature] is a condensation of the dreams Japanese have held towards Western culture since the end of World War II" (Kobayashi 63). Even while possessing their own distinct cultures and traditions, the Japanese started to get heavily influenced by the Western culture, almost as if they were seeking validation from the West. This fascination towards the West set standards and expectations on the Japanese. Therefore, we must consider the fact the East wasn't at all free from the all-pervading effects of American orientalism, in fact the ideologies perpetuated by the West were subconsciously practiced by the East, which can be seen in the Japanese belief that Caucasian is white perfection. Japanese responses towards the film suggest the cultural gap between the Japanese and the Americans in terms of race. Japan, unlike America, is a racially homogenous country and thus it can be considered natural that they aren't as sensitive as the West when it comes to discussions of the race. On the other hand, America is an amalgam of different races, which leads to sensitivity in topics like racism. Eliza Berman in her The Hollywood Reporter's interview with members of Japanese movie industry and fans of the original work noted that:

Many applauded Johansson as the right choice for the role based on her suitability for the movie's cyberpunk vibe. Others expressed resignation that a white movie star seems to be a prerequisite for getting a Japanese property successfully distributed to an international audience. Some were disappointed, but not as much as with the past instances of substituting one ethnic identity for another, as with the casting of Zhang Ziyi, a Chinese actor, as a Japanese character in the 2005 drama *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

Unlike in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, where a Chinese actor played a lead Japanese character, the film *Ghost in the Shell* doesn't clarify Major's true racial identity as Japanese and thus the controversy surrounding it wasn't as intense. And as discussed above the controversy issues about casting decisions were more intense among Americans rather than in Japan.

Research into the history of Japanese immigrants and the tension between the two countries in the past will reveal the key notions behind such misrepresentation of Japanese culture and identity, which includes Yellow Peril, Orientalism, the model minority, yellowface and racial stereotypes. In order to satisfy audience expectations, moulded through Hollywood films, and to serve America's personal interests, the big screens continue to present Westernized representations of Japanese identity and culture. Ever since the Second World War, America has actively tried to brand the Japanese as savage or villainous. They have continued to place Japan as the 'Other' by making clear distinctions between the two cultures, America is superior. America continues to establish what is 'normal' by placing Japan and other Asian countries as 'abnormal'. Even worse is the fact that American hegemony over Japanese identity is rooted so deep that even the Japanese are influenced by it. A change would mean educating the global population, especially the Asian population and among them the Japanese in particular, thereby sensitizing them towards racial issues.Hollywood cinema showcases Japan's supposed inferiority and primitivity by picking out certain aspects of Japanese culture, exaggerating them and juxtaposing them against American culture. America seems to be trying to own this particular narrative. As to why America feels the need to control global perception of Asian cultures, it is to maintain their position as a hegemonic power. After all,hegemonic power is essentially cyclic in nature, i.e., one power will be ultimately replaced by another as uneven economic growth fundamentally transforms power relations between states.

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