

ANIMATION AND “OTHERNESS”:  
THE POLITICS OF GENDER, RACIAL, AND ETHNIC IDENTITY  
IN THE WORLD OF JAPANESE *ANIME*

by

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## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary mass-mediated and boundary-crossing world, fictional narratives provide us with resources for articulating cultural identities and individuals' worldviews. Animated film provides viewers with an imaginary sphere which reflects complex notions of "self" and "other," and should not be considered an apolitical medium.

This dissertation looks at representations in the fantasy world of Japanese animation, known as *anime*, and conceptualizes how media representations contribute both visually and narratively to articulating or re-articulating cultural "otherness" to establish one's own subjectivity. In so doing, this study combines textual and discourse analyses, taking perspectives of cultural studies, gender theory, and postcolonial theory, which allow us to unpack complex mechanisms of gender, racial/ethnic, and national identity constructions.

I analyze tropes for identity articulation in a select group of Disney folktale-saga style animations, and compare them with those in *anime* directed by Miyazaki Hayao. While many critics argue that the fantasy world of animation recapitulates the Western anglo-phallogocentric construction of the "other," as is often encouraged by mainstream Hollywood films, my analyses reveal more complex mechanisms that put Disney animation in a different light.

Miyazaki's texts and their symbolic ambiguities challenge normalized gender and race/ethnic/nationality representations, and undermine the Western Orientalist image of the "Asian Other." His *anime* also destabilize the West-East binary, by manifesting what Homi Bhabha calls a space "in-between"—a disturbance of the dominant system of identity categorizations. This suggests that media representation acts not only as an ideological tool that emphasizes conventional binaries (e.g. "Western"=masculine, "Oriental"=feminine), but also as a powerful tool for the "other" to proclaim an alternative identity and potentially subvert dominant power structures.

Miyazaki's *anime* also reveal the process of Japan's construction of both the West and the rest of Asia as "others," based on the West-Japan-Asia power dynamic. I argue that this reflects Japan's experience of being both colonizer and colonized, at different points in history, and that Japan also articulates "other" through *anime* to secure its national identity. My dissertation will contribute to the understanding of mechanisms of subjectivity construction in relation to visual culture.

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## **NOTE TO READERS**

I would like to note that despite my attempts, I was not able to obtain permission to use pictures whose copyrights are held by The Walt Disney Company and by Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd. As you read through this dissertation, you will notice that pictures that are supposed to aid readers are unfortunately removed and replaced by squares with their descriptions. It is my hope that you will find these descriptions reasonable substitutes.

## Introduction

*It [the past] is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning.*<sup>1</sup>

—Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”

*Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself...*<sup>2</sup>

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

The expression of a duality of the self and the other, as Simone de Beauvoir claims in *The Second Sex*, is as primordial as consciousness itself, and is regarded as a primary category of human thought.<sup>3</sup> Theorists from various fields, including phenomenology, psychoanalysis, gender studies, and postcolonialism, have revealed a dialectical process of identity formation involving interaction with the outside world and other people. In other words, the world around us is made meaningful through our relations with others. Hence, as both quotations above suggest, “self” is constituted intersubjectively through attraction and repulsion, where one’s identity keeps changing according to socio-cultural and historical conditions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty rightly encapsulates this rapport between self and other, stating: “There is no inner man; man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: A. Knopf, 1953), p. xxiii.

<sup>3</sup> Beauvoir, p. xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962), p. xi.

What needs to be stressed is that one's recognition of "Self" through interaction with others is carried out based on the construction of the imaginary "Other," which often derives from power differentiations. In this mechanism, our perceptions—even our history and memories—are socially constructed. And it is, as Stuart Hall claims, through fantasy and myth that such a mechanism operates effectively to generate narratives that favor the dominant group in society. These fantasies are constantly produced and maintained through production and consumption of popular media products that represent certain identities as privileged over others.

This conceptualization is practiced typically in Orientalist discourse, in which the West represents the East as "a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences,"<sup>5</sup> through media representations including novels, poems, and films. In this fashion, Orientalists place and maintain Western subjectivity as dominant over the East, creating a dichotomous, unequal power relationship through which the Western "Self" and the Eastern "Other" are fixed. In an age of globalization, when "more persons throughout the world see their lives through the prism of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms,"<sup>6</sup> encounters with distant others become commonplace, and more and more media products, producers, and ideas flow across national/cultural boundaries. Technological development has also allowed us to experience "otherness" on theater and television screens. It is, however, important to stress that under these circumstances identifying specific cultural identities becomes more difficult; on the other hand, this phenomenon of boundary-crossing has also lead to a trend towards cultural protectionism.

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<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 53-54.



Walt Disney, one of the leading purveyors of globally consumed media in the form of animation, has often been criticized for media imperialism, coined “Disneyfication.” Though small in number, some of Disney’s animated features have nonetheless significantly contributed to re-making both “history” and the present with the result of securing the position of the “rational West.” The production and worldwide consumption of fantasies based on storytelling encourage an unceasing desire and fascination for the “Other”—a longing for what the white order has lost, and thereby animation plays a significant role in the construction of both central and marginal identities. In this respect, following the notion of Althusser’s notion of “ideological state apparatuses,”<sup>7</sup> it can be argued that popular media, including Disney animation and Hollywood films, function as one of these apparatuses that potentially prescribe ideologies beneficial to groups in power, which work as a vehicle to articulate other individuals’ subjectivities as well. Exploiting the system of media representations by the stereotyping, exclusion, and degrading of “other” people and cultures, the white male subject can pervade the narrative of “normal” perceptions.

Simultaneously, these dominant perceptions and stereotypes can also be subverted by media representations, through exaggeration of stereotyped images or the overturning of presumed roles in society. Amid increasing cultural globalization coupled with technological advances, the success of popular media created in Asia or by female producers has enabled previously marginal groups to become prominent, even capable of challenging Anglo-male-centered aesthetic standards. This subversion of the dominant is plausible partly because of viewers’ increasingly critical examination of previously unquestioned popular texts, and partly via the voice of academic criticism. It also stems

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<sup>7</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

from the limitation of dominant meaning, since the same text can be interpreted differently by viewers from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>8</sup>

With this knowledge, a key question is how exactly narratives created in fictional reality, reflecting and constructing our worldly reality, corroborate the (re)articulation of “differences,” in the process of constructing selfhood vis-à-vis otherness. Answers to this question should aid in better understanding the complexities of identity politics and power dynamics that are reflected in popular media, based on the premise that identity is not an autonomous configuration but defined through a socially interactive process.

Various media are engaged in the issue of identity politics. Film, particularly animated film, offers a contested site for identity formation, by means of its techniques to create “reality,” and its form of expression—story telling—which provides wide audiences with the resources for narrative-creation that can foster collective identities, for persons and groups attempt to relate to other people or integrate ideas partly taken from media in order to articulate their own identities. For this reason, this study is concerned with a better understanding of the mechanisms linking intended meaning in animated texts and articulation of cultural identities.

Animation has long been associated with Disney, yet for the last twenty to thirty years, other studios in North America and Asia have emerged on the global scene. *Anime*, Japanese animation, has become a particularly strong rival to Disney, and has emerged as a potential challenge to dominant Western aesthetics and ideologies. In order to explicate different aspects of identity articulation through *anime*, I analyze specific works by

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<sup>8</sup> See Stuart Hall, “Presentation and Media.” Lecture at The University of Westminster, videotaped by Sut Jhally (The Meida Education Foundation, 1997); Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London: Methuen, 1985); David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: British Film Institute, 1980); Tamar Liebes & Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Reading of Dallas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

Miyazaki Hayao, who consciously responds to trends in Western animation, and compare these works with those of Walt Disney. Both producers are renowned in the global market, and present different narrative and visual representations that can either reinforce or manipulate viewers' preconceived notions of cultural identities.

In order to lay the foundation of my study, Chapter 1 maps out a theoretical framework to provide a deeper understanding of the construction of "selfhood" and "otherness," with attention to issues of genderization and racialization involved in media representations. Discussions in this chapter focus on works that analyze representations of the Orient, and the notions of "Asianness," or more specifically, "yellowness." Also cited are classical postcolonial works, such as those of Edward Said and Frantz Fanon,<sup>9</sup> specifically tying their arguments to popular visual culture. Although Said's concept of Orientalism may seem somewhat dated for describing contemporary circumstances, it provides an important starting point for approaching the structure of fantasy and power dynamics in the creation of animation. The discussion of self/other further incorporates a postcolonial feminist perspective to introduce the gendered representation of race and racialized representation of gender. Theories discussed in the following chapter explicate the ways that people use narratives in the process of articulating their own subjectivities. These allow us to speculate that media narratives would have a significant effect on the way viewers/readers understand themselves and others. This provides a vital tool for discussions in later chapters.

In addition, the integration of a phenomenological perspective on the animation viewing experience provides a more comprehensive understanding of the interrelation

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<sup>9</sup> Said, *Orientalism*. Also see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

between animators, text and viewer. This view derives from Vivian Sobchack's idea that one's subjectivity is constructed not necessarily through the unconscious but rather in a conscious, self-reflective manner through film experience.

Among various film works, animation is particularly important in the discussion of identity politics, though it has rarely been taken seriously, and is often written off as only meant for children and therefore too transparent to be studied in a scholarly way. This view is rooted in a close association of animation with the traditional notion of "childhood" in the West as a sphere dissociated from politics. On the contrary, however, the notion of "childhood" is itself a socio-political construct, and therefore even children's media can be heavily influenced by the intentions of cultural producers and authorities. Hence, whether it is touted as targeting children or not, animation should be understood as a medium of expression that projects adults' political, economic and moral concerns, while playing with the notion of "childhood."<sup>10</sup> As Henry Giroux describes, animation is "a sphere where entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial, and class positions."<sup>11</sup> This suggests that animation is a form of ideologically-loaded text that influences and is influenced by people's worldviews, and that therefore it is often associated with cultural imperialism or cultural resistance. The idea of animation as an ideological apparatus that reinforces

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<sup>10</sup> I characterize animation as a "medium" rather than a genre, because of its distinctive characteristics in terms of codes, grammar, and ways of generating messages, as described by Paul Wells in *Understanding Animation* (London: Routledge, 1998); Thomas Lamarre in "From Animation to *Anime*: Drawing Movements and Moving Drawings," in *Japan Forum* 14: 2 (2002); and Joanna Bouldin in "Bodacious Bodies and the Voluptuous Gaze: A Phenomenology of Animation Spectatorship," in *Animation Journal* 8:2 (Spring 2000). I will explain the distinction between medium and genre, as well as between animation and *anime* as different media in Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Giroux, in "Animating Youth: the Disnification of Children's Culture," says this in regard to children's culture in general, but the statement is applied to animation because of its association with children's culture. (see this article at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/Giroux/Giroux2.html>) (accessed on September 20, 2006) Likewise, consideration of children's culture as an adult institution and as a means of pursuing adult politics is discussed intensively in Stephen Kline's "The Making of Children's Culture" in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

dominant perceptions has been addressed in a multitude of critical analyses of Disney animation since Dorfman and Mattelart's *How to Read Donald Duck* in 1975, which claimed that Disney's animation industry manifests the dissemination of American ethnocentric ideology.<sup>12</sup>

Chapter 2 first discusses more specific characteristics of animation which facilitate its function as an ideological apparatus: animation's myth-making and its morphotic nature, both of which contribute to the articulation of cultural identities. As Dorfman and Mattelart, as well as others suggest, with its narrative and visual representations, Disney's myth-making has contributed significantly to maintaining unequal power relationships between Anglo-America and the rest of the world. In addition, meanings and perceptions provided through animation narratives also potentially influence the global audience both in front of and away from the screen, through the synergetic business model which, initiated by Disney, extends animated fantasy to such products as stationery, T-shirts and mugs. Through this breakdown of the divisions between entertainment and material consumption, Disney has contributed to disseminating pleasure as well as ideologies through the animation industry.

Another characteristic that makes animation a more effective vehicle for ideology production lies in its form of expression—its “morphotic” quality that is clearly distinct from that of live-action films. This quality essentially distances the animated world from physical reality, which challenges perceived views of space and time, creating a

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<sup>12</sup> Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, trans. David Kunzle (New York: International General, 1975). I acknowledge that there are many other aspects to animation beyond its function as an ideological conveyor, and others have examined this cultural form in different lights. However, in this dissertation my discussion of animation focuses on its function as a vehicle that is capable of transmitting ideologies to a significant degree, ideologies that potentially influence viewers' perceptions of the world around them.

“metaphysical reality,”<sup>13</sup> and thus allows creators to express their ideas and intentions more flexibly than through live-action films or conventional photography. The flexibility allows creators to project their intentions effectively, and translates to a greater potential to destabilize ideological orthodoxies. This makes it possible to practice either manner of media representation: reinforcing dominant ideologies or subverting them—myth-making or demythologizing.

On the basis of these observations, the chapter then moves to discussions of the characteristics and development of *anime*, which shares the abovementioned qualities of animation, but shows differences in its role as a vehicle for cultural identity configuration. The historical trajectory of *anime* is outlined, including technological developments influenced by Western sources and other art forms from different cultures, which have been appropriated into the Japanese context, showing the hybridized nature of *anime*.<sup>14</sup> In the process of its development, *anime* has been often positioned in relation to its Western counterparts, particularly Disney productions, in terms of representations, aesthetics, or position in the global market.

While Disney’s animation studio has faltered lately, *anime* has emerged on the global stage with remarkable success to rival the Disney Empire. The potential of *anime*’s success was anticipated as early as 1953 by Imamura Taihei, a leading Japanese motion picture critic:

The animated cartoon has made little progress except in America, but the popularity of Disney films....gives reason to hope that there will be a world-wide development in the field of animation.... Whether we like it or not, traditional art must be the foundation of a truly Japanese animated

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hoffer identifies live-action film as presenting physical reality, and animation as metaphysical reality in *Animation: A Reference Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> John A. Lent, “Introduction,” in *Illustrating Asia: Comics, Humor, Magazines and Picture Books*, ed. John A. Lent (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), p. 5.

cartoon. ...It has been pointed out by S. M. Eisenstein that ancient Japanese art has characteristics closely related to those of the animated cartoon and employs similar methods.<sup>15</sup>

Japan's first animation was released in 1917, but the industry really began to come into its own with the establishment of Toei Animation Studio in 1956, followed by Japan's first feature length color animation: *Hakujaden (Panda and the Magic Serpent)* in 1958,<sup>16</sup> and since the 1980s *anime* has been one of Japan's most important cultural exports. In this study, *anime* is understood to mean more than simply "Japanese animation," referring specifically to Japanese animations that have been distributed to theatres and TV stations worldwide, especially since the 1980s and 1990s. *Anime* has provided a significant influence on the global cultural arena in artistic, economic, and political terms. It manifests the complexities of Japan, particularly in relation to the West and other Asian countries in the midst of globalization, and therefore it is a major site for identity articulation. These aspects indicate that *anime* needs to be studied as a medium distinct from animation. Some critics even distinguish *anime* from a similar term, Japanimation, which was mainly used to refer to earlier Japanese animation that was exported abroad until around the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

As mentioned above, because of similarities and differences between them, Japanese animation has often been viewed as influenced by, contrasted with, or resistant to its Western counterpart. Walt Disney was born at the right moment to explore the potential

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<sup>15</sup> Imamura Taihei, "Japanese Art and the Animated Cartoon," trans. Fuyuichi Tsuruoka, in *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television* 7:2 (1953), p. 217. This article is to appear as chapter in Imamura's *Manga eiga-ron* (Theory of Animated Film) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> *Hakujaden*, produced by Yabushita Yasushi, was the inspiration for the well-known Japanese animator Miyazaki Hayao to become an animator. This is one of the first works of Japanese animation exported abroad. See Miyazaki Hayao, *Shuppatsuten (Starting Point)* (Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1996), p. 44. This *anime* is inspired by a Chinese folktale where a young Chinese boy falls in love with a beautiful girl who possesses strange and mysterious powers. It is therefore interesting to note that early *anime* was already representing the Asian "other" fifty years ago.

<sup>17</sup> See Ôtsuka Eiji and Ôsawa Nobuaki, *Japanimēshon wa naze yabureruka* (Why Japanimation Will Fail) (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2005), p. 8.

of media technologies and business models, as well as to expand the genre of animation, and he essentially laid the groundwork for his followers, including the two biggest *anime* creators in Japan: Tezuka Osamu (1928–89) and Miyazaki Hayao (1941– ).

In particular, *anime* works by Miyazaki, sometimes referred to as the “Walt Disney of Japan,” provide intriguing insights because of their similarities and differences with those of Disney.<sup>18</sup> Miyazaki’s animated films have been critically renowned since the mid 1980s, and serve as an alternative to Disney in the world of animation, as well as providing a new subgenre distinguished from other types of *anime* (such as cyberpunk science fiction, mecha *anime*, and so on). The popularity of Miyazaki’s *anime* has been phenomenal both inside and outside Japan, as demonstrated by his receiving the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film in 2003, followed by the Golden Lion Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2005. What is perhaps the most marked aspect of Miyazaki’s recent works, besides their popularity, is their sense of ambiguity that serves as a resource for viewers’ identity work, or their particular configuration of “self” and “other,” especially in representations of gender and ethnicity. A close examination of Miyazaki’s works therefore demonstrates how *anime* can subvert the dominant Western discourse, specifically the Orientalist worldview, which has been and still is influencing ways that *anime* is produced and how it aids in forming cultural identities. While there have been more and more studies in the field of *anime* recently, many of them analyze it as a product, providing descriptions of genres of *anime*, or the overall characteristics of this medium. While these are useful, such analyses are not sufficient to understand the mechanism of identity construction

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that the focus of my analyses is animated films, not TV animation. Also, I am focusing here on animated products aimed at and marketed to children. Therefore, animations such as *The Simpsons* and *South Park* produced in North America will not be discussed in my study.



through representation in *anime*. There has not been much close analysis of the texts of specific *anime*, certainly not to the extent that Disney animations have been studied.

While there are a number of animation studios and directors in both Japan and North America, as well as a variety of subgenres, the present dissertation focuses on a particular group of works produced by Miyazaki Hayao and Walt Disney (through Walt's successors), in order to explicate how Miyazaki influences the way his studio creates "identity" in its animated works, as well as the linkage between identities circulated in *anime* narratives and the articulation of cultural identities.<sup>19</sup> Auteurs such as Miyazaki and Disney have the role of privileged storyteller, thereby making this linkage particularly effective. In this respect, both Miyazaki and Disney set out to produce an "animated folklore" using cinematic animation as the primary form, in order to provide the viewer with resources for articulating cultural identities: stories that explore explicitly what it means to be "American" in Disney's and "Japanese" in Miyazaki's productions.

For this purpose, among a great range of styles, techniques, and subgenres, my study examines animated features that employ saga storytelling, because this subgenre explicitly manifests cultural identities through narrative and visual representations. My analyses look specifically at animated films produced from the 1980s to the early 2000s, a period of intensive cultural globalization that has brought about difficulty in defining cultural/group identity. They attempt to show how representations of "otherness" (in gender and ethnicity) have changed or remained the same in Disney's animated folklore since Dorfman and Mattelart's study in the 1970s, and how Miyazaki's work in the same subgenre contributes

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<sup>19</sup> While acknowledging that the Disney animations examined in the following chapters were produced in the 1990s under the supervision of Michael Eisner, who holds different political visions from Walt Disney, I argue that there exist strong continuities between the early animated works of Disney and their successors of the last decade.

to the construction of “otherness.” Disney animations have certainly developed a more empowering representation of “otherness,” for example, by using sarcasm that potentially challenges dominant ideologies or by using different cultures as the subject of narrative. My analyses also attempt to show how “otherness” is represented by Miyazaki’s animated folklore as well.

In order to lay bare the complex mechanisms of cultural identity articulation, I closely analyze specific animated films from both Disney and Miyazaki in an attempt to answer the question of how representations in animated fantasy of this subgenre contribute to the construction of notions of “self” and “other.” The animation texts analyzed in the case studies are ones that demonstrate gendered/sexualized or racialized “otherness”: Disney’s *Aladdin*, *Mulan* and *Pocahontas*, and Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, *Porco Rosso*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*, all of which are globally distributed. I also take into account the historical and social aspects of their production, as well as critiques and reviews of these films, which also contribute to the discourse of the fantasy world.

My analysis is also specifically concerned with two kinds of cultural identities: gender and ethnicity/nationality. I build my argument upon existing theories and studies on the construction of “self” and “other,” with approaches from feminist film theory, postcolonial theory and cultural studies.<sup>20</sup> These theories share the premise that “self” and

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<sup>20</sup> My sources include psychoanalytic analyses such as Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” *Screen* 26: 3 (1975); Mary Ann Doane’s “Dark Continents: Epistemologies of Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema,” in *Femmes Fatales* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Ann Kaplan’s *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983); postcolonial and cultural studies such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978); bell hooks’ “Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” in *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992); Trinh T. Minh-ha’s *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); Rey Chow’s *Writing Diaspora* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Richard Dyer’s

“other” are constantly shifting concepts, and that the construction of “otherness” involves “the complex processes and channels through which representations flow in different directions,”<sup>21</sup> which includes both physical and psychological aspects of human consciousness.

In Chapter 3 I introduce the philosophies of fantasy creation and worldviews of Miyazaki Hayao and other popular *anime* directors, comparing them with those of Walt Disney and his Disney Corporation. Knowing how these globally recognized animation directors see the world will help better understand their representations of “difference” and “otherness” in the texts that will be discussed in the subsequent case study chapters.

Following the discussion of the directors’ views of animation, in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I analyze specific animation texts, along with their production contexts. These chapters examine in greater detail how “otherness” is constructed by Disney and Miyazaki animations in different contexts, particularly focusing on the genderization and racialization of the “other.” Chapter 4 is concerned with analysis of the Saidian Orientalist representation of the “Oriental other” constructed by Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992), in comparison with how the East constructs the “West” or “occidentalizes” it, by analyzing Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) and *Porco Rosso* (1992). In Chapter 5, I focus on how the “Other” is constructed within a country by playing with its national history. For this purpose, I examine Disney’s *Pocahontas* (1995) and Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* (1997). In Chapter 6, I provide insights into the construction of “Asia” by both the West and Japan. The chapter demonstrates a Western (re)construction of the Eastern

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*The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Stuart Hall’s “New Ethnicities,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Hallam & Brian V. Street, *Cultural Encounters: Representing ‘otherness’* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 6.

“Other” in Disney’s *Mulan* (1998) (which supposedly attempts to defy Orientalist stereotypes but ends up re-inscribing them), and juxtaposes this with an examination of Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* (2001), which reveals the Orient “othering” another “Orient.” I analyze *Spirited Away* not only as subverting the Orientalist discourse, but also as a manifestation of a hybridized and ambiguous space, which destabilizes the concept of “identity” itself much more obviously than other works by Miyazaki. In addition, all the protagonists but Chihiro (*Spirited Away*) in these works are categorized as “princesses,”<sup>22</sup> albeit with significantly different depictions of their “princess-ness.”

It is neither my intention to demonize Walt Disney or Disney animation, as many critics have, nor to judge Miyazaki’s works entirely in a positive light. Instead of simply polarizing Disney and Miyazaki’s animations based on differences between them, the goal of this study is to enrich our understanding of how these auteurs are creating narratives that frame collective identities. Although I acknowledge that viewers do not necessarily identify with the identities produced, I also integrate theorists who have analyzed the ways that people use narratives in the process of understanding their identities, in order to suggest how animation fantasy can influence the way viewers understand themselves, their world, and their others. My analysis is thus based on the premise that meanings or tropes in media texts reflect creators’ intentions, but at the same time they are produced and interpreted in social discourse.

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<sup>22</sup> *Mulan* in animation is not strictly a princess, but she is included as one of the “Disney Princesses,” which include Ariel, Aurora, Belle, Cinderella, Jasmine, *Mulan*, Pocahontas, and Snow White (Disney Princess Official Website at [http://disney.go.com/princess/html/main\\_iframe.html](http://disney.go.com/princess/html/main_iframe.html)) (accessed on March 16, 2005).

## **Chapter 1: Identity Articulation in Media Fantasy**

*Representation does not occur after an event, but it is part of the event.  
Reality does not exist outside the process of representation.<sup>1</sup>*  
—Stuart Hall, “Presentation and Media”

*... there is no doubt that imaginative geography and history help the mind to  
intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference  
between what is close to it and what is far away.<sup>2</sup>*  
—Edward Said, *Orientalism*

The above quotes by Stuart Hall and Edward Said suggest that media representations provide a powerful imaginary space that offers resources for creating “reality,” a space that projects images that may work toward articulating cultural identities—identities structured around notions of “self” and “other.” This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of my work: how people use visual and narrative representations in the process of understanding their own identities and others, contributing to the articulation of cultural identities; and how those media representations are often influenced by dominant ideologies and may sometimes subvert those dominant ideologies. It should be stressed that this dissertation identifies film viewers as being subjected to the text, while also acknowledging the possibility of viewers consciously acting to build their own perceptions and identity articulation through the viewing experience, and assumes that this idea is universally applicable.

While the relationship between representation and national/cultural/ethnic/gender identity has been studied extensively in the context of live-action film, in the field of animation studies this issue has not been studied adequately, except for some studies on

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<sup>1</sup> Stuart Hall, “Representation and the Media.”

<sup>2</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 55.

the works of major U.S. studios such as the Walt Disney Company. Moreover, on the issue of racial representation in particular, many film studies attempt to analyze white people's perceptions of non-white races as depicted in Hollywood film; few studies, however, discuss how non-whites represent whites, or how a non-white race represents and perceives itself or other non-white races. Even among studies of racial representations, (East) Asians (the "yellow") have been given much less attention—whether as depicted in film or as creators of filmic depictions—than blacks or whites. And in the subfield of animated films, the scholarly neglect of (East) Asians is even more evident.

Another purpose of this chapter is to lay out previous theoretizations of the ways sex/gender is intertwined with ethnicity/race/nationality in media representations, and how these complex mechanisms of representations affect articulation of identity. In this dissertation I take a postcolonial and feminist critical stance, so it is necessary to first lay out the relevant critical tools in postcolonial and feminist studies and the connections between them.

This project proceeds from the assumption that narratives—including the fantasy narratives of animation—influence the way that the consumers of those narratives see the world, even if we do not fully understand yet the mechanisms behind that influence. I am far from alone in this assumption, and will trace in the following sections some of the previous scholarship that has theorized the mechanisms of media influence on consumers. Film scholar Herald Stadler gives a pithy description of the close relationship between reality and fantasy, stating that

“perception, imagination, fantasy, dreams, and memory are simply different modes of experience, all of which constitute a sense of reality.”<sup>3</sup>

This suggests that in the postindustrial, postmodern context, we live in a world where the boundary between the real and the fictional has virtually disappeared. Even if viewers know that things they see on the screen are not directly connected with their real lives, these things “induce some emotions in the subject and thus constitute a part of the subject’s life experience.”<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, a sense of personal or group identity is no longer conceived of as based solely on genetics and/or childhood influences, but instead it is believed that aspects of identity are articulated significantly, and continue to be articulated throughout life, to a significant extent, by the fictional “realities” that people consume.

## 1.1. Identity Articulation through Media Narratives: reinforcing the dominant view

### 1.1.1. The subject as susceptible to the ideological apparatus of visual representation

The practice of reinforcing dominant ideologies through media is discussed in Bill Nichols’ study of the ideological function of visual media, focusing on classical narrative film. He explains how the ideologies disseminated through film shape the viewers as subjects. Taking Louis Althusser’s concept of “interpellation”—the self as called into

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<sup>3</sup> Herald Stadler, “Film as Experience: Phenomenological Concepts in Cinema and Television Studies,” in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 12: 3 (1990), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Mirosław Filiciak, “Hyperidentities: Postmodern Identity Patterns in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games,” in *The Video Game: Theory Reader* eds. Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 96-98. Filiciak, along with other postmodernists, such as Jean Baudrillard, stresses the fluidity of postmodern individual identity, by using the term, “hyperidentity.”

being as a subject by ideological institutions—Nichols uses the term “self-as-subject,”<sup>5</sup> arguing that the fabrication of visual representations “subjects” us to a specific way of seeing, by masking the conditions that underlie the surface appearance. The sense of “self-as-subject,” according to Nichols, is often shaped by the visual codes that the dominant discourse provides for viewers. Nichols goes on to argue that “[s]ince images bear an analogous or iconic relationship to their referent, it is easy to confuse the realms of the image and the physical world by treating the image as a transparent window.”<sup>6</sup> Although it would be too simplistic to believe that viewers are completely trapped by these images, Nichols’ argument partly explains why it can be difficult for viewers to distance themselves from what is on the screen: because of its visual proximity to their real lives.

Nichols’ view of the influence of images on viewers is rather obvious, but what is less obvious about the power of fantasy is that even if images do not precisely mirror our material reality exactly, they can affect viewers to a similar extent, if not more. The power and effectiveness of these fictional realities are emphasized by Michael Riffaterre’s concept of “fictional truth.”<sup>7</sup> Riffaterre argues that fiction seems true *because* it is fictional, and therefore can be more meaningful to a reader than a direct imitation of reality. That is, truth in fiction is predicated on “a verisimilitude, a system of representations that appears to reflect a reality external to the text, but only because it conforms to [the rules of] grammar” of representation, which establishes narrative truth.<sup>8</sup> It follows that the “reality” or “verisimilitude” in media fantasy does not necessarily

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Nichols, *Ideology & the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Nichols, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Riffaterre, p. xiii-xiv.



require verification against our worldly reality, and that it can be powerful enough to leave the viewer susceptible to ideological messages, whether they reinforce the dominant view or challenge it.<sup>9</sup> Riffaterre's view of the system of "reality" in fiction is an important aspect to be considered in examining the animated world, which has its own visual grammar different from that of live-action film, but still conforms closely enough to the visual grammar to which viewers are accustomed to give a convincing sense of narrative truth. I will discuss how the narrative grammar of animation is used in later chapters with reference to specific animated works.

It can be concluded from both Nichols' and Riffaterre's arguments that image-makers play a key role in influencing people's perceptual habits, by disseminating and reiterating particular visual codes and systems of signification. As people learn to read particular visual codes and signification systems, they become familiar with them, and come to expect them. Considering that every visual code or signification system embodies particular ideologies, and that people who benefit from dominant ideologies are likely to be those who are in the position of power to create and disseminate images, it is reasonable to assume that ideologies carried through widely and repeatedly circulated images would be largely dominant ones, and are capable of influencing people's worldviews or perceptual habits.

This idea is strengthened by the correlation between perception, recognition, and pleasure. According to Nichols, the reason that we are continually drawn to the codes that have formed our habits of perception lies in a sense of "recognition," an identification with things that we have previously encountered. Moreover, we derive pleasure from

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<sup>9</sup> This idea also concurs with Louis Althusser's concept of media as an ideological apparatus, or a process of establishing a consensus in a (naturalized) power structure.

recognizing these familiar codes, and this process contributes to a sense of stability in our relationship to the world. Thus, the sense of familiarity that is built upon learned codes brings us-as-viewers pleasure, and as long as we-as-viewers agree to position ourselves as subjects, according to the implicit definitions of the dominant ideologies, our viewing pleasure continues because the perceptual codes we have learned turn sensory impressions into organized and meaningful concepts.<sup>10</sup>

It is hard to imagine that viewers of films would seek to disrupt their viewing pleasure in the midst of pleasure to analyze a film's sources and consequences. Since codes and conventions for signification tend to be influenced by dominant ideologies, as mentioned above, viewers' pleasure of recognition potentially makes them susceptible to these ideologies, which may subsequently obscure their own active role in perception. This is what Nichols calls "the grand deceit of ideology," a system that "fixes us in an imaginary . . . relationship to the real conditions of existence."<sup>11</sup> In this respect, as viewers we are free, but may be free to be "subjected" to/by ideologies. Following this viewpoint, it can be argued that media representation may confine and exploit viewers' perceptions to a significant extent.<sup>12</sup>

This aspect of Nichols' view echoes Roland Barthes' notion of "myth," or the secondary "connotative" meaning created by images and signs, which masks antithesis such that the dominant power and its perceptions can significantly influence our way of

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<sup>10</sup> I acknowledge that accepting the dominant or intended reading is not the only way that viewers can obtain pleasure from media texts, and certainly, the dissemination of ideological messages is not the only function of media such as film. Nonetheless, my dissertation focuses on the ideological aspect of the media, and on the importance of understanding mechanisms by which "intended audiences" subjected to media potentially articulate cultural identities, in order to figure out how these identities can be also subverted.

<sup>11</sup> Nichols, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that I accept the idea that viewers' perceptions are entirely controlled by media products and trapped in their representations, as the viewers are subjected to them. However, in order to examine the subversive power of media representations, we need to understand perceptions subjected to the dominant view, and how dominant ideologies operate through media texts.

viewing the world.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, a “myth” is analogous to an ideology that promotes the interests of the dominant groups. According to Barthes, no image/representation is free of attendant “myths,” and therefore we can see how visual representations might have a powerful and complex influence on media consumers in the process of understanding their own identities. To sum up: media representations, which may seem neutral, are significantly loaded with ideologies that are often supported by those who created these representations, and their viewers are subjected to/by those representations because they can derive the pleasure of recognition from them effectively if they consent to view them from the position implicitly defined as “subject” by the dominant.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.1.2. Construction of the racial “Other”: Edward Said**

The meaning-production system of Barthes’ “myth-making” is also taken up by Edward Said in explication of the way “race” is represented or articulated through media. Said’s notion of “Orientalism” describes Western representation of the racialized East as “mythic discourse” which ignores or obscures the West’s own origins as well as those of the “Orient” it represents.<sup>15</sup> In the discourse of Orientalism, media texts created in the

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972). To explain this structure of “myth,” Barthes uses a picture on the cover of a French magazine of a black African soldier saluting the French flag. Barthes argues that this image promotes an idea of racial harmony in France, such that even the formerly colonized subjects feel French patriotism. But this “myth” of French racial harmony and colonial success covers over the remaining schisms and tensions between races and between the former colonizer and colonized in France.

<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to deny the possibility of viewers conceiving their own critical interpretations when viewing film. It is certain that some viewers do “read against the grain” of the ideologies put forward implicitly by the text. The point of the arguments here is that such critical viewing requires conscious effort and may be hard to sustain even by those who intend to remain resistant to the text’s implicit positioning of viewers.

<sup>15</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 321. In this dissertation I will at times use the word “Oriental” to refer to the people of Asia. “Oriental” is often taken to refer to East Asians—Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans—but because Said’s original definition of “Orientalism” referred primarily to European depictions of the Near and Middle East and North Africa, it could be argued that “Oriental” applies to anyone living anywhere on the Asian continent. My reason for using the outdated and somewhat pejorative terms “Orient” and “Oriental” is

West draw on connotative meanings that are associated with its fantasized perception of the East.

One of the chief perceptions associated with Orientalism is organized around a binary relationship—the West is figured as rational, knowledgeable, modern (and masculine), and the East as emotional, ignorant (or, in a positive spin, as possessing ancient “wisdom” rather than Western science), not modernized (and feminine). Through the paradigmatic figure of the veiled woman, who came to stand for “the Orient” in the cultural products Said analyzes, the East is also figured as enigmatic and unknowable—except by those Westerners (“Orientalists”) who have lived there or studied it. In the classic discourse of Orientalism, even those people who live in the “Orient” cannot fully know themselves or their culture until it is “rationally” explained to them by the Orientalist. Said’s *Orientalism* is provocative in theorizing the concept of racial “otherness” as it is influenced by media representations, particularly those in novels, paintings, and in academic monographs, and in showing how the construction of the racialized East was really for the purpose of sustaining the hegemony of Western discourse. Said’s conceptualization of the Orientalist view thus underscores the power dynamics involved in the discursive construction of the Western “Self” and the (Middle) Eastern “Other.” His view is relevant to the contemporary relationship between America and Asia, and may even hold important insights that can be transferred to the consideration of other unequal power relations.<sup>16</sup>

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precisely to underscore the fact that I am talking about depictions of or concepts about Asians that were created in the West, but have also influenced Asian people’s own self-identities, as I discuss further below.

<sup>16</sup> In the years since *Orientalism* first appeared, Said’s basic arguments have been refined, updated, and enriched by a number of scholarly responses, several of which I will refer to in later chapters where I talk about specific textual issues involving Orientalism. The simple overview here is intended to lay out only the basic ideas from which my arguments proceed.

Among Said's three types of Orientalism—academic, imaginative and historical—it is the imaginative definition that is most closely tied to the way cultural identities are articulated in media fantasies, which may affect the way the people who consume those fantasies understand themselves and others. In this regard, Said argues that media spaces, which may offer distorted images of peoples and cultures, serve as imaginative geographies and histories, underlining the epistemological distinction between the Oriental “other” and the Occidental “self.” Said states that: “[w]e must not forget that the Orientalist's presence is enabled by the Orient's effective absence,” or by the Orientalist remaining outside the Orient.<sup>17</sup> In this discourse, the “Orient” is a Western creation, which is built upon the desire and fear of the West toward the “enigmatic” East. The creation of the Western image of the Oriental “Other” amounts to a manifestation of Western dominance over access to representation and the ideology embedded in it, which subsequently limits the autonomy of the represented object (the Orient in this case). One facet of Orientalism, therefore, holds that “the Orient” is an unenlightened entity which can improve only by practicing a Western-value-based worldview.

While some scholars may critique Said's notion of Orientalism as outdated or too specific in region—as mentioned above, he concentrates on the nineteenth and twentieth century European view of the Middle East, the Arab world, and Islam—I argue that it is still entirely pertinent in the age of globalization, where people are still often positioned as either “Westerners” or “Easterners.” (As we will see in later chapters, Japanese filmmakers and cultural critics certainly believe that Orientalism continues as an important aspect of global discourse—both popular and academic—and their own creative and scholarly work is predicated on that belief.)

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<sup>17</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 208 and p. 222.

It is also important to emphasize that Said neither intends to claim the existence of the/a *real* Orient, nor does he suggest that the Orient can be understood only by the Orient. Rather, he highlights the idea of “the Orient” as an engendered entity, one which is maintained by both the West and the Orient itself.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, he attributes part of the triumph of Orientalism to the system of global consumerism, in which the Orient is captured in Western popular culture markets. Among his examples are “Arabs,” who have come to regard themselves as “Arabs”-as-portrayed-in-Hollywood-films.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Orientalism is a product both of Western Orientalizing practices and the Orient’s self-Orientalizing practices suggests the complexity of current relationships between the West and Asia. Self-Orientalizing aids in the “colonization of the imagination,”<sup>20</sup> in which the “other” ultimately is deprived of any expectation of having control over its own subjectivity through fantasies.

In addition, the imaginary “Orient” may bring people in the West a sense of “freedom,” as a means of escape from their own reality. Stressing this idea in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism, V.G. Kierman explains the exotic fascination of Oriental fantasy in the West as follows:

... to Western fantasy this Orient was one of freedom, where man could expand beyond all common limits, with the unlimited power that Napoleon

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<sup>18</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 322.

<sup>19</sup> In *Orientalism*, Said points out Orientalizing through myths made in the Orient itself, which is happening among Japanese, Indians, and other Orientals. (See p. 322) Also, in the “Afterword” of *Orientalism*, he emphasizes that Orientalism did not end with the end of institutionalized colonialism, but continues up to the present (1994, when his book was published) in new modes and forms that echo old colonialist practices. (See p. 348).

<sup>20</sup> Jessica Hagedorn states: “Colonization of the imagination is a two-way street. And being enshrined on that pedestal as someone’s Pearl of the Oriental fantasy doesn’t seem so demeaning, at first; who wouldn’t want to be worshipped? Perhaps that’s why Asian women are the ultimate wet dream in most Hollywood movies; it’s no secret how well we’ve been taught to play the role; to take care of our men.” (see, “Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No Luck,” in *Ms.* (Jan/Feb, 1994), pp. 77-78.

dreamed of there, unlimited luxury, a palace and princess, magic and adventure; all those inordinate things that orderly modern man had to renounce ...<sup>21</sup>

Just as Said argues that Orientalism has continued beyond the time of institutionalized colonialism, I would argue that Kiernan's point also remains valid in the postcolonial context. (We will see examples to support this idea in the case study chapters later in the dissertation.)

Said's exposition of the complex interrelation among power, knowledge, and imagination (pleasure) revealed in Orientalist discourse, as well as his vision of the "Other" as "alter ego" that aids in separating "them" from "us," are foundations for discussion of the ways that Self/Other conceptualizations operate in the process of cultural (and other) identity articulations in animated fantasies, and I will therefore return to his ideas in later chapters.

### **1.1.3. The politics of vision and the articulation of "Self" and "Other"**

Nichols contends that fantasy created through visual media brings forth the consistency of "self-as-subject," which "compels us as subjects to seek positive identification with, or antagonistic opposition to, the other."<sup>22</sup> In this context, the establishment of "self"/"other" binaries necessitates a discussion of vision. Nichols draws on Jacques Lacan's concept of the "Mirror Stage"—the (mis)recognition of self, which describes the subject's setting of an imaginary boundary between self and other—in order to provide a theoretical understanding of how visual media contribute to identity

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<sup>21</sup> Victor Gordon Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire* (Boston: Little Brown Co., 1969), p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Nichols, p. 32.

formation.<sup>23</sup> For Nichols, the relationship between images on the screen and the viewer parallels the way the “Mirror-Stage” operates, in the sense that both show the necessity of an Other in the (mis)recognition of the Self. That is, the “self” is not an autonomously existing entity, but is socially constructed in relation to others as well as visual signs around it. The concept of the Mirror-Stage is useful in examining how the imaginary “Self” and “Other” play a role in the fictional world of film (including animation) for viewers’ identity work.

Based on the concept of Orientalism and the Lacanian notion of the imaginary (or misconception of) “self” and “other,” hereafter I use “Other”/“Self” and “other”/“self” differently, in the context of gender and racial identity articulations. I use “Other” and “Self” to refer to the imaginary or symbolic entities that are conceptualized or stereotyped in the subject’s mind, specific images with which the subject mistakenly yet firmly identifies, in order to articulate its own subjectivity. Thus, the “Other” in the racial context, for example, suggests singularity: each race (or ethnicity) is designated as having its attributes as the “Other.” In contrast, the “other” and the “self” are grounded in real life, but because the concept of “identity” itself is socially constructed, I place these terms in quotation marks. It is therefore appropriate to say that after one’s experience of the “other,” s/he establishes the “Other.”

Sharalyn Orbaugh affirms the significance of the mechanism of vision—how we are seen by others—as a major source in the construction of subjectivity. She draws on

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<sup>23</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Some Reflections on the Ego,” in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 34 (1953), pp. 11-17. In the “Mirror-Stage,” an infant establishes the “imaginary self” (the ego) in responding to an external image of its body reflected in a mirror (or through responding to the image of its primary caregiver). Since the image of the unified body that the infant mis-recognizes as “self” does not correspond to its actual physical body, this image serves as an ideal “I.” It is important to note that although this model of construction of the “self” is conceived by Lacan as a permanent characteristic of the individual, it is reasonable to think that the ego keeps being re-formed through his or her adult life, through the encounters that occur in normal social relations.



Lacan's concept of the "gaze"—a discursively articulated vision that should be distinguished from a "look," because the former refers to an act of vision that is powerful and defines its object.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the "gaze" always generates and reflects unequal power relations between its subject and object (for example, in the context of genderization and racialization). On the contrary, a "look" is "not powerful, is associated with time and mortality, and is only minimally capable of defining or reifying its object."<sup>25</sup> In the context of visual media, "the gaze" is similar to a camera in film, exerting a strong power that can define and penetrate its object, which cannot access "an alternate epistemic configuration."<sup>26</sup> This distinction between "gazing" and "looking" plays an important role in my discussions of the relationship between vision and power dynamics among different races or genders in later case studies chapters.

With regard to the link between the logic of visibility and power relations, Rey Chow provides useful insight into "the technologies of visibility" that she claims place "subjects" (spectators) and "objects" (spectacles) in uneven positions due to hierarchically distributed energy between the two. She argues that, with the development of modern technologies such as film that expand our concept of vision beyond the physical dimension, the visual realm reveals an "epistemological mechanism" that magnifies social difference, particularly differences of class, gender, and race.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in this context, "the spectacle" refers to a person or people, who are depicted as "helpless." In other words, where film (technology) is inseparable from the perception of the spectacle, the mechanism of visibility contributes considerably to the formation of the power hierarchy

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<sup>24</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation*, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> Chow, pp. 50-60.

between an onlooker (as the “self”) and the spectacle (the “other”)—such as women, the third world and so on—which leads to the perception of the “Other.”

What makes film technology influential is that it can emphasize the “automatized” body of the “other” who is subjected to exploitation exercised by the dominant group. According to Chow, the “aesthetic” power of the spectacle (or the “automatized other”) is accentuated based on the degree of its awkwardness or helplessness projected on the screen, and this also aids in demarcating the “self” from the “other.” This logic of visibility therefore works as a foundation for the West’s construction of its “Other,” by unequally placing the former as spectator and the spectacle: the non-Western “other” functions in film as a source of “the spectacle” for the consumption and entertainment of the Western “subject.” Film is the major site that manifests this mechanism of visibility and the operation of the self/other binary explicitly and repetitively, until it permeates the viewer’s unconscious mind.

The case study chapters that come later in this study examine how the visual paradigms such as those described above are practiced through comical depictions of Asian figures and cultures in films such as Disney’s *Mulan*.

#### **1.1.4. Stereotyping: a strategy for creating raced and gendered “others”**

Chow’s idea of the “other” as spectacle can be understood through the concrete example of the heavy stereotyping of marginal groups and cultures that are still featured in many mainstream films. Walter Lippmann, who coined the term “stereotype,” emphasizes its ideological implications and its function of demarcating “self” and “other,” for the explicit purpose of strengthening the self’s sense of comfort and stability. He describes the term as follows:

A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral... It is not merely a short cut.... It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy.<sup>28</sup>

Based on Lippmann's definition, the motive behind stereotyping lies in a dichotomous view of "our" value, which needs to be demarcated and protected from others outside "our" group or our society. This viewpoint concurs with Julia Kristeva's concept of "abjection," which refers to the social and psychical logic that conceptualizes the "self"/"other" separation. According to Kristeva's concept of "abjection," subjective and group identities are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's personal or the group's boundaries.<sup>29</sup> The process of abjection typically indicates a repression or rejection of "otherness" for the purpose of group formation, based on factors such as race, ethnicity, age, and gender. Hence, a discussion of the role of stereotypes needs to extend Lippmann's definition and to point out that the problem is not necessarily the existence of stereotypes per se, but resides in who controls them and what interests they serve for whom.<sup>30</sup>

#### **1.1.5. The gendering/sexualizing of race and the construction of "yellowness"**

As many scholars argue, we cannot talk about the racialized "Other" in visual narrative without referring to the issue of how gender or sexuality is represented, because race and gender/sex are frequently intertwined. It is, for example, crucial to look at the

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay of Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Richard Dyer mentions this point in *The Matter of Images*.

interplay of race and gender/sexuality in discussing the way Asia and Asians are typically figured: despite the recent economic power of some parts of Asia, the region and its people are still often “feminized” in relation to the “masculine” West through media.

In his study of Asian-American film, Jun Xing argues that “sexual aggression against white women” by non-white (male) characters signifies a threat posed to the white victim by non-white races, and serves as a strategy to emphasize racial “otherness,” and secure white subjectivity.<sup>31</sup> In the history of the American film industry, the sexualization of race was institutionalized when the Motion Picture Production Code, which prohibited the filming of interracial sex or marital scenes, was implemented from 1934 to the middle of the 1950s. This was certainly based on the racist views of interracial relationships as a threat or as “unclean.” What is striking is the fact that, despite this code, “white males [were] shown to easily transgress interracial sexual prohibitions on-screen,”<sup>32</sup> which turns the body of non-white (women) into a sexual object. This is a typical example of the sexualization of non-white races through media representation.

Similarly, the depiction of non-white males also contributes to accentuating racial “otherness.” In this regard, Xing argues that the dominant regimes of Hollywood films have corroborated the essentialization of the racial identity of Asian Americans. Representations of Asians as the “yellow” in mainstream films have not been studied as much as the mainstream representations of the “black,”<sup>33</sup> though representations of “yellowness” and “blackness” share many aspects.

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<sup>31</sup> Jun Xing, *Asian American Through the Lens: History, Representations and Identity* (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Xing, p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> The case of black male characters has been extensively studied. For example, Gail Dines addresses the image of black men as demonized “others,” or outsiders to the “normal” realm of white masculinity in Hollywood films. Using films such as *King Kong*, which depicts a sexually obsessed black man—a “black menace”—who, lacking human qualities, has a voracious appetite for a white woman, Dines demonstrates

Xing's observation of the discourse of Hollywood master-narratives reveals that people from any part of Asia are represented as "Orientals" according to a transhistorical set of fixed racial categories. In this sense, "Asian American" is not a natural or pre-given identity, but a political invention for the benefit of the hegemonic discourse, in which mainstream films co-opt Asian Americans through the "institutional racism" that privileges white subjectivity.<sup>34</sup>

Xing's categorization of representations of Asians in Hollywood into three formulaic archetypes is worth citing here: 1) the yellow peril formula, 2) Madame Butterfly narratives, and 3) the Charlie Chan genre.<sup>35</sup> Xing explains each of these three categories. The "yellow peril formula" represents Asians as the aggressive or canny "other." For instance, they are represented as sexually aggressive figures against white women, in roles such as gangsters and rapists. Xing states that a hypersexualized Asian (male) image has become a "metaphor for the racial threat posed to Western culture by the 'other'."<sup>36</sup> This formula was more prevalent in the 1930s and 40s, when the rapid modernization of several East Asian nations threatened "white" economic and political hegemony, but more recently, too, a significant number of Hollywood films, such as *Year of The Dragon* (1985), *Gung Ho* (1985), and *Rising Sun* (1993), have made use of images and tropes that recall the "yellow peril" pattern of representation.

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that a political or social threat by other races is always synonymous with a sexual threat. The sexual overpresence of the black significantly marks racial difference, and reinforces a binary opposition between the non-white "other" and the white "self." See Gail Dines, "King Kong and the White Woman: Hustler Magazine and the Demonization of Black Masculinity," in *Gender, Race and Class in Media: A Text-Reader*, eds. Gail Dane et al. (London: Sage, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> In this regard, Xing argues that through a long-standing practice of "role segregation" in Hollywood film, Asians are placed as sidekicks, and Caucasians play major Asian roles, using "racist cosmetology" such as "yellow facing" to produce their exaggerated Asian features. See Xing, p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Xing, pp. 54-63.

<sup>36</sup> Xing, p. 55.

“Madame Butterfly” narratives manifest an archetype of Oriental femininity, which underpins Orientalist discourse. In these narratives Asian women’s bodies are fetishized for the purpose of sexual seduction. “Madame Butterfly” narratives emphasize the devotion of Asian women to white men, who in turn downplay or deny the women’s subjectivity. Based on the original *Madame Butterfly* story, narratives of this type have long contributed to the conceptualization of Japan as “feminine” (represented by the lovely young Butterfly) in relation to the United States, which is represented as masculine and white through association with Pinkerton. Furthermore, the image of Asians as the feminine “Other” is reinforced by the third category, the “Charlie Chan type” or what Xing calls “cinematic castration,” which uses the representation of emasculated Asian males to perpetuate a vision of Western masculinity. In every case these archetypes are mobilized with the intention of implicitly ensuring white male American subjectivity.

Xing’s argument resonates with other critical studies on Orientalism in visual media from the 1980s and 1990s, such as Darrel Hamamoto’s *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*, which investigates the symbolic subordination of Asian Americans in U.S. media.<sup>37</sup> These studies underscore the notion of a white gaze that dehumanizes the Orientals who do not have the ability to claim their own subjectivities or a means for doing it. The effectiveness of the construction of a consistent vision of “yellowness” is also seen in the fact that, despite changes in historical and social circumstances over the past seventy years, Japan has been consistently represented as a peril or a silent victim in Hollywood films.

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<sup>37</sup> Darrel Hamamoto, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

In particular, the image of Japan as a peril has been constantly fed by historical events throughout the twentieth century—its victory in the Russo-Japan War in 1905, the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, and the dramatic economic growth that made the country competitive with the United States from the 1960s onward. These historical events are continuously linked to the present. For instance, the sense of fear toward Japan generated by white Americans has been hinted at in recent Hollywood films such as *Kill Bill* (2003).

It is intriguing that while “yellow” Asians are represented as peril, they are at the same time feminized, whether they are female or male. In this sense, both Asian men and women discursively play a “female role” in relation to the white “masculine” West. The construction of “yellowness” in media manifests the West’s complex attitude toward the East Asian “Other,” which is a mix of fear and desire. These observations also demonstrate that while people and cultural products have been traveling intensively across national boundaries in the age of globalization, the image industry ceaselessly exerts ideological power, which encourages the continued demarcation of “self” and “other.”

## 1.2. The Subversive Power of Media Representations

*Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.*

—Michel Foucault<sup>38</sup>

The previous section of this chapter demonstrates how media can create an “imaginary reality,” often closely linked to dominant ideologies, which intended viewers use for their cultural, ethnic/racial, and gender identity articulation. Some postcolonial

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<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 95.

scholars deny the possibility of the subaltern's access to a means of representation to articulate its own subjectivity: the subaltern cannot speak.<sup>39</sup> But if dominant media representations and the ideologies attached to them are so powerful, how can one conceptualize the subversion of those representations, or the expression of alternative understandings of cultural, ethnic, racial or gender identity?

### **1.2.1. Subversion by the "other": power and resistance in liminal space**

Let me emphasize that in this study the word "identities" does not refer to something given or fixed, but instead refers to "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."<sup>40</sup> This view not only reveals the power of media representation to reinforce dominant ideologies or stereotypical images of the "other," but also indicates the potential to subvert those very same images. This viewpoint is partly based on Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony." Unlike Althusser's view of ideology, which does not assume the existence of ideologies in conflict with the dominant one, Gramsci's hegemony presupposes the co-existence of various ideologies where marginal views could also emerge. Coupled with Michel Foucault's quote above, this suggests that the hegemonic view is never stable, and is always contested, because it constantly faces a battle against subordinate forces that emerge within the same discourse.

It is naïve to assume that the socio-politically constructed "other" holds a permanently fixed position. In the same line of thought, in *Culture and Imperialism* Said

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<sup>39</sup> Specifically, Gayatri C. Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313. Those who believe in the possibility of resistance against the dominant include Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

<sup>40</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation," in *Framework* 36 (1989), p. 69.



also acknowledges the rise of oppositional indigenous voices among the literatures of former colonies, while identifying Western fiction as a weapon of domination.<sup>41</sup> He claims that media provide a potential tool for cultural resistance, a tool that can challenge the West, and be a means of resurrecting local literature and languages to (re)articulate their identities of these former colonies.<sup>42</sup> This sheds light on a potentially subversive mechanism of media representation, a mechanism that highlights conflicting ideologies.

The idea of a stable dominant discourse can be undermined by different interpretations of media representations. This section seeks theoretical explanations of how cultural identities articulated in the dominant discourse may also be re-articulated or de-articulated. It further introduces a potential subversive space, where the “other” may emerge to give rise to a counter-hegemonic discourse through media representations.

### **(1) The Reversed Gaze**

The first section of this chapter discusses the politics of vision, which plays a significant role in fixing the position of the white “self” and non-white “other.” In the case of whites and blacks, this “visual” relationship perpetuates a false concept of white subjectivity in relation to black “others” who seemingly cannot “look” or assert their subjectivity. Bell hooks identifies three misconceptions created among whites in white supremacist society: 1) whites are invisible to blacks because of whites’ control over the gaze, and therefore blacks are unable to cultivate their subjectivity, so that 2) blacks become invisible to whites, because it is safer to avoid being seen, except in the limited

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Said’s argument for cultural resistance among the previous colonies, or the “other,” correlates to Antonio Gramsci’s concept of “hegemony,” which refers to conflicts between different ideologies.

role of a pair of hands on a serving tray; and 3) whiteness is perceived by blacks in the way whites want to appear: as good.<sup>43</sup>

Questioning this (mis)conception of the positionality of white and black, hooks points out that while there have been a number of studies of the white's view of blacks in North American discourse, there has been little interest in representations of whiteness in the black imagination, representations which may countervail stereotypical perceptions of blacks. Hooks goes on to argue that blacks have access to an active look at whites as a target of imitation; moreover, contrary to the white belief that they are perceived by blacks as personifying goodness, whiteness is seen as an epitome of fear and terror rather than goodness. She contends that blacks, by calling on an alternate collective memory, potentially draw on an alternative, black subject position, different from the one that is endorsed by the dominant system. Hook's explanation of the way collective memory works can be seen as a practice of Foucault's notion of "counter-memory" as a site of resistance.<sup>44</sup> By highlighting marginalized memory, hooks questions the seemingly stable memory of white supremacy and its subjectivity, which has prevailed through daily practices and fantasies over time.

If we accept hooks' proposition that the dominant discourse sustained by prevailing memories can be de-hegemonized, then we could argue that media representations may function as a vehicle for dismantling these memories, so that it becomes possible for the "other" to assert subjectivity. This shift in the notion of memory, as well as recognition of the subordinate's agency in possessing a reversed gaze, acts to challenge white (mis)conceptions. This mechanism may operate similarly in relationships

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<sup>43</sup> hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," p. 340.

<sup>44</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977).

between whites and other races, although most studies on this issue heretofore have focused on black/white relations. For instance, an analysis of whiteness in the yellow person's imagination can also destabilize the image of whites as civilized saviors who enlighten the yellow "other" if we bring in a "counter-memory" that constitutes a new relationship between yellows and whites—an alternative to the hegemonic collective memory. The non-white's imagination of its white "Other" through visual media will be pursued more specifically in the case study chapters.

## **(2) Strategic essentialism: the "other's" articulation of identity**

Another theoretical explanation of how the dominant discourse may be challenged in the process of identity articulation draws on the concept of "strategic essentialism" introduced by Gayatri Spivak. Essentialism/essentializing normally refers to an act similar to stereotyping: labeling a nation or people (or any other group) as being "essentially" comprised of a specific set of characteristics, thus ignoring variation within the group as well as changes in a group's characteristics over time. Essentializing the "other" is a common tool of dominant discourse. But Spivak has proposed "strategic essentialism" as a tool of the oppressed. "Strategic essentialism" refers to the practice of a group's members defining themselves in postivist and generalizing terms.<sup>45</sup> As Spivak maintains, this strategy may work as a powerful political tool for "others" to have control over narratives about their own identities, because, unlike regular essentialism, it allows disempowered groups to define their essential attributes, rather than having them defined by more powerful others. The disempowered groups who make use of "strategic

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<sup>45</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 13-14.

essentialism” *consciously* construct and articulate the identity they think most useful for political purposes—this is what makes it “*strategic* essentialism” rather than just self-essentialism, which is also a common practice among both dominant and marginal groups, often to serve to the dominant.

While Spivak focuses on feminist debates about the gendered subject, this concept is also useful in discussing the formation of the racialized subject as well. Simply pointing out that racial identities are articulated by Orientalist or white-centered views does not undermine the foundation of the dominant power. When marginal groups use strategic essentialism, however, new terms are added to the discussion, possibly leading to changes in the way the dominant groups conceptualize the marginal. Despite its failure to address differences within the group,<sup>46</sup> strategic essentialism provides a potential for marginalized groups to access an expressive tool—even if only temporarily—to claim a collective identity. Similar to the notion of “counter-memory,” this concept names one possible approach that allows the “other” to take charge of articulating their own alternative narrative of identity.

Using this concept in the field of film, Xing provides an example of strategic essentialism on the part of “Asian Americans” during the 1960s’ civil rights movement. According to him, the strategic development of this ethnic label, based on (somewhat) shared historical experiences, was in order to create an important device—a recognizable group identity—to elicit and protect the political interests of diverse groups who embrace an “Asian American” identity against the white hegemony. Xing identifies the existence of an Asian American aesthetic in filmmaking, which is characterized by the incorporation

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Xing acknowledges limitations of this strategy using “Asian American,” and the difficulty of actually accomplishing solidarity or meaningful identification among diverse groups.

of “materials collected from their communities in the United States, from Asia, and even the Asian diaspora,” instead of relying on “white norms and practices.”<sup>47</sup> This strategy allows Asian American filmmakers to counteract dominant white, androcentric representations, and to articulate an identity for their own benefit.

More specifically, Xing asserts that one of the stylistic elements of film with which Asian American filmmakers can assert their departure from white norms is the use of a non-linear narrative structure, which formally and conceptually challenges the Western worldview and the idea of stable subjectivity. In Western thought, the chronological, unidirectional flow of time is a critical notion, logically leading to the labeling of “others” as backward. This concept is reflected in the narrative structure of film. Linear narrative is seen in many (probably most) American mainstream films, typically beginning with equilibrium, followed by the introduction of opposing forces and disruptive events, and returning to a new (and usually “better”) equilibrium at the end.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, some Asian American films that Xing presents utilize unique structures, with no solution, open-ended conclusions, or temporal ambiguity.<sup>49</sup> This aspect of film construction is further discussed—particularly in the field of animation—in later chapters.

As an example of strategic essentialism conceptually practiced by a racial “other,” Japan has asserted its “unique” national identity at various times in the modern period (from roughly 1850 to the present), in relation to both an imaginary “West” and an

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<sup>47</sup> Xing, p. 81.

<sup>48</sup> The term “equilibrium” is based on Tzvetan Todorov’s literary theory of “equilibrium.” He identifies five stages of conventional narrative structure: 1) a state of equilibrium, 2) a disruption of the equilibrium by some action, 3) a recognition of the disruption, 4) an attempt to repair the disruption, and 5) a reinstatement of equilibrium. (See Tzvetan Todorov, “The Grammar of Narrative,” in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 111).

<sup>49</sup> See, Xing, p. 48.

imaginary “Asia,”<sup>50</sup> In other words, Japan has continued to articulate its collective identity by Orientalizing itself vis-à-vis the West, as well as Orientalizing other parts of Asia.

For example, after the Meiji Emperor was restored to power as the result of a brief civil war in the 1860s, the Japanese people were persuaded to support the nation’s rapid modernization through slogans such as *datsua nyūō* (escape from Asia, enter the West). Throughout the Meiji period Japan presented an image of itself to the outside world that stressed its similarity to the already modernized, “white” West, as opposed to its “backward” Asian neighbors. This strategically essentialist self-positioning succeeded to a large extent, culminating in the Japanese people being declared “honorary Aryans” by Germany and South Africa in the years leading up to World War II.<sup>51</sup>

Others among the already modernized nations were harder to convince, however. After fighting on the side of the victor nations in World War I, in 1920 Japan was invited to join the League of Nations as a founding member, seemingly indicating Japan’s achievement of the status of “fully modern nation.” When the Japanese delegate proposed a statement of basic racial equality for the founding charter, however, the other member states refused to consider it. Whiteness and superiority were still inextricably linked in the Anglo-European discourse of modernity.

It is not surprising, therefore, to recall that Japan also employed another, opposite strategy of essentialism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, characterized by the “*daitōa kyōeiken*” (Greater East Co-prosperity Sphere). This was an appeal to the rest of Asia to

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<sup>50</sup> Here I describe Japan as the “other” in the sense that Japan has been struggling with obtaining recognition of its subjectivity over history, due to its non-white race.

<sup>51</sup> See John W. Downer, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999).

join with Japan as one large and powerful group, united by a common “Asian” cultural background. This pan-Asian rhetoric was strategically used to essentialize “Asianness” in opposition to the West, in order to invoke a united front against the West.

Bound up in this complicated, self-essentializing rhetoric is Japan’s anomalous position in modern history, as perhaps the only nation to have intensively experienced being both colonizer and colonized. Japan’s experience as colonizer is obvious: from the establishment of its first imperial colony, Taiwan, in 1895, until the end of World War Two, Japan aggressively and successfully colonized significant areas of China, the Korean peninsula, Indonesia, the South Sea Islands, and other parts of Asia.

Japan’s position as colonized is less clear, but also undeniable. Beginning in the Meiji era, when Japan rapidly adopted a wide range of Western institutions and discourses in order to avoid being colonized itself (as China and other Asian nations already were), the country experienced what we might call “cultural colonization.” While this may have been “voluntary” in the sense that it was a policy decision of Meiji intellectuals and government officials, it was coerced in the sense that acceptance of this cultural colonization was the only option for maintaining some level of sovereignty. Then, after the defeat of the Axis Powers at the end of World War Two, Japan was literally occupied by a coalition of Western forces (dominated by the policies of the United States) during the seven-year Occupation, 1945-1952. Even after the end of the Occupation, Japan has maintained “unequal treaties” (one of the hallmarks of the nineteenth century colonialism) with the U.S. in terms of providing bases for the American military.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> For more explanation about Japan’s position as colonized and colonizer, see Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation*, pp. 76-77.

Moreover, because of the absolute power wielded by the Occupation forces, and with some influence from the subsequent presence of significant numbers of American military personnel on Japanese soil, we can again argue that Japan has “voluntarily” (but actually with little choice) adopted many American (and more broadly Western) hegemonic practices and values. Certainly Japan has existed from at least the nineteenth century until the present as a part of the West’s (especially the U.S.’s) imagined “Orient.”

Contemporary Japan uses a strategy similar to the one pursued during World War II, and this system is well explained by Kōichi Iwabuchi, who describes it as “the complicity between Western Orientalism and Japan’s self-Orientalism [which] effectively works only when Japanese cultural power in Asia is subsumed under Japan’s cultural subordination to the West.”<sup>53</sup> Differently put, Japan’s attempts to articulate its own narratives of identity using the tactics of strategic essentialism have operated in an environment where the West plays the role of the modernized “Other,” and “Asia” embodies Japan’s past of backwardness and tradition.<sup>54</sup> After the defeat in World War II in particular, when Japan was forced to shift its position from colonizer to colonized under American cultural and political domination, the strategy of essentializing the rest of “Asia” as backward helped to stabilize Japan’s postwar identity. While this has often been a strategy that demeans and discursively oppresses other Asian nations for Japan’s benefit, it has sometimes resulted in a challenge to Western essentialized visions of Asia (as we shall see in subsequent chapters).

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<sup>53</sup> Kōichi Iwabuchi, *Re-centering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 7-8.

<sup>54</sup> However, Iwabuchi questions the appropriateness of using the “Japan-Asia-the West” triad model from the 1990s onward, because of the dramatic development in Asia, which has led to the emergence of several “fully modernized” (rather than backward) nations.



### (3) The carnival mode of representation

Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophical project also argues for the case of the "other," which sheds light on cultural resistance by means of visual media. In particular, his concept of "carnival" explains that resistance against authority is realized by the physicality of obscenity and transgression that marks the festival mode.<sup>55</sup> In other words, "carnival" signifies a liminal space that, though provisional, brings about an inversion in the hegemonic social system. The liminal space created through media representation may therefore be disordered and liberating, where one can experience having his or her subject position (temporarily) overturned.

The practice of the "carnival" mode in the field of visual media is introduced in John Fisk's study of American sitcoms, such as *Married ...with Children* and *The Simpsons*.<sup>56</sup> These texts are carnivalesque in that they destabilize dominant social norms and identity categories by mocking assumed authority. In these shows, patriarchal gender structures are undermined either by exaggerating female sexuality, or by representing emasculated male characters. Fisk contends that in *Married... with Children* Peggy's exaggerated acts "expose to mocking laughter the patriarchal control over feminine bodies and behavior."<sup>57</sup> In this way, the media text subverts the "normal" hierarchy of gendered subject positioning.

Similarly, media representations may also function as a carnivalesque space for cultural resistance by the racial "other" against racist assumptions though there have not been substantial studies on this subject. This perhaps means that the racial hierarchy is

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<sup>55</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Comics: Ideology, Power & Critics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

<sup>56</sup> John Fisk, "Audiencing: A Cultural Studies Approach to Watching Television," in *Poetics* 21 (1992), p. 348.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

harder to overturn, or that dominant social narratives about the racial body are more resistant to deconstruction through media representations. One is hard pressed to find visual exaggeration of a non-white body to mock white supremacy in film. It is rather more common to see a strategy of “passing,” by which non-whites act as “white” to be accepted by the dominant system instead of resisting it. It may follow that in the racial domain, the concept of “carnival” may be harder to implement through transgressive visual representation (or exaggeration), unlike observed in *Married ...with Children* in the gender domain.

The concept of “carnival” does not imply a drastic or permanent social change, but only a temporary revel, which still offers social “others” a sense of empowerment. It is, on the other hand, also considered a way for the authority to keep subordinate groups under control and to maintain the status quo, by allowing them to “let off steam” for a limited duration of time, which then makes them more willing to return to their normal subordination. In this sense, both strategic essentialism and carnivalesque modes of representation can be potentially problematic, because of the possibility that in the end they just reinforce the hegemonic discourse.

#### **(4) Hybridity: an “in-between” space for resistance**

Concepts of strategic essentialism and the reversed gaze are both subversive in the sense that they reverse existing hierarchies. However, they do not deconstruct the idea of categorization itself. In this respect, Xing suggests that being obsessed with creating positive images of those considered “other” is not necessarily an adequate counter-hegemonic approach to representation, because it may in turn essentialize identity categorizations such as East and West. Homi Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity,” however,

possibly provides a way out of the binary system and essentialized categorizations.

Bhabha attempts to complicate identity categorization and move beyond simple pigeonholing.

Bhabha's "hybridity" derives from his concept of "mimicry"—an act of imitation and appropriation of the colonizer's culture by the colonized—the result of which is that the latter creates a third culture that is similar to but still distinctive from the colonizer's. This process indicates that, by being forced to imitate the colonizer, the colonized "other" consequently becomes a threat to the former as its "double"—a "subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite"<sup>58</sup>—which then disturbs colonial discourse and helps reclaim the voices and identities devalued by the colonizer.

Hence, the practice of "mimicry" exposes the ambivalent and unstable nature of colonial rule; while the difference erased by mimicry works to suppress the subjectivity of the colonial subject, it also allows the colonial subject to occupy "a 'partial' presence" within the dominant discourse,<sup>59</sup> and this may empower the "other" to create an alternative culture and identity. Thus, Bhabha describes this condition of mimicry as "the sign of the inappropriate," through which "a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, eventually poses "an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers."<sup>60</sup> Based on this concept, it is not so much the fixed identities of the (colonialist) "self" and the (colonized) "other" as the disruptive distance or "difference" between them that maintains the hegemonic cultural power, as well as establishing the position of the "other" as a threat.

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<sup>58</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

The ambivalence inherent to the dominant culture, which is revealed by the concept of mimicry, allows us to posit the possibility that “other” cultures may “contaminate” the dominant discourse, in what Bhabha describes as a liminal space of “hybridization.” In the practice of “hybridization,” the “other” capitalizes on the “difference” from the dominant culture, and undermines the concept of a singular, unified identity. For instance, people who are born of parents of different races inhabit in-between categories, or a hybridized space. This condition of hybridity undermines the concept of binary oppositions in identity categorizations, such as “self” and “other,” white and non-white, and East and West.

In contemporary society we recognize many people who transgress presumed categories, such as transsexuals, diasporic people or people of mixed race. This kind of hybridized or “in-between” identity/location provides the marginalized “other” with a space for cultural resistance, through reforming the dominant discourse. This also underscores the contingency of postmodern cultural subjectivity characterized as “temporality of indeterminate and undecidable”—an arbitrary closure of “self” and “other.”<sup>61</sup> Thus, creating an “in-between” space through media—where the “other,” appropriating the dominant cultural text, establishes a third culture—would not only subvert the dominant cultural narrative, but would also deconstruct the view of identity categories as stable and transparent. Bhabha’s theorization of subjectivity provides an optimistic vision of cultural resistance through media representations, by which the racial or gendered “other” emerges as a subject.

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<sup>61</sup> Homi Bhabha, “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: the Question of Agency,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 202.

While Bhabha's "mimicry" and "hybridity" are concerned with the relationship between the colonizer and the colonial subject, they can also explain Japan's identity in relation to American hegemony in the political and cultural domains. Particularly, applying these concepts in the context of visual media representations, the "other's" strategies may play with existing cultural assumptions and stereotypes through the text, and challenge the dominant discourse. Discussions in later chapters employ this concept to examine Miyazaki Hayao's work as a form of Disney's (the West's) "double" which is intentionally "almost the same, but not quite."

#### **(5) The tactic**

The production of a "third culture" derived from within the dominant culture is also suggested by Michel de Certeau's concept of the "tactic,"<sup>62</sup> which refers to the subordinate appropriating elements of the dominant discourse to integrate into his or her own practice. De Certeau's concept resembles Bhabha's "hybridization," in that both shed light on the agency of the subordinate who appropriates the culture of authority to disturb it, and suggests that media texts might provide one context in which marginalized groups could set their own agenda.

These ideas highlight the potential subjectivity of "others" who are often considered incapable of controlling narratives that define their own identities, the subjectivity that enables "others" to utilize media representations, or other forms of expression. Miyazaki, for example, may be considered to be one of the "others" (as a non-Western director) who has been exposed to Western literature as well as Disney

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<sup>62</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. xvi-xvii.

animations since childhood, and his auteuric creativity through media texts now provides an alternative narrative for viewers to articulate their cultural identities.

### 1.3. Conscious Perception and the Embodied Experience of Visual Media

Lastly, to provide a different perspective on the limits of the ideological influence of mainstream films on identity articulation, it may be worth briefly discussing the viewer's conscious participation in building perception, in order to avoid the deterministic view of the text as an apparatus that single-handedly controls the viewing experience. Despite this dissertation's heavy focus on texts, I do not mean to present the viewer as a passive victim. Some film analyses (e.g. some psychoanalytic analyses) assume that the structure of the text determines the viewer's consciousness, and results in the saturating of his/her unconscious with ideologies through the text. Differing from this view, my project takes into account the idea that watching film is a form of viewers' conscious action of understanding themselves. The film experience should be regarded as a sense-making circuit consisting of the text, the producers and the viewer, rather than simply a matter of the consumption of the text by the viewer. While active audience theory has been discussed by different scholars,<sup>63</sup> this section introduces a phenomenological perspective, which understands knowledge as deriving from consciousness.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of "perception" supports the idea of viewers' conscious involvement in building their worldviews through media representation.<sup>64</sup> Merleau-Ponty assumes that we actively create meanings from the world through a unity

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<sup>63</sup> Such studies include studies based on surveys, such as David Morley's *Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (mentioned in Introduction), Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Birmingham: Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1973).

<sup>64</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

of subject-object, rather than simply through a given discourse. In his view, “perception” is formed through our embodied experience, and therefore the self is understood as a conscious being. In other words, it is the structure of the subject’s conscious experience that creates understanding of ourselves and others, though this does not necessarily mean dismissing the unconscious. Merleau-Ponty’s “perception” thus undercuts the assumption of the subject’s absolute susceptibility to ideological systems.

Based on this notion of “perception,” Vivian Sobchack’s examination of the phenomenon of vision, incorporating a semiotic phenomenological approach, brings to light the possibility of human choice and expressive freedom in the film experience along with historical and cultural constraints (or specificity). Her approach is premised on the idea that “the structures of being determine the structures of language,”<sup>65</sup> in contrast to a Lacanian psychoanalytic approach, which assumes that the latter determines the former. This perspective on cinema spectatorship serves as an intriguing, comprehensive, conceptual angle to theorize how subjectivity is potentially informed through the (animated) film viewing experience.

In *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Sobchack explicates the nature of the film experience as a set of intersubjective relations among the text, producers, and the viewer, and also describes film viewing as “performative” vision.<sup>66</sup> This concept of “performative” vision conjures up the idea that the human body is an expressive space as well as a medium to perceive the world. In other words, as we watch the projection of other people’s (producers’) ways of seeing on the screen, we too express our perceptive experience. This view, as well as identifying subjectivity

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<sup>65</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

formation as based on an intersubjective production of meaning, also destabilizes the binary relationship between object and subject, and recognizes “dialogue” in the viewing context. In this respect, the film experience is “an act of seeing that makes itself seen,” because a film organizes and presents the producers’ (or director’s, camera person’s, or writer’s) vision of the world through a set of visual signs that is seen by the viewer. It is therefore an embodied act that makes watching film “reflexively felt and understood,”<sup>67</sup> and provides both the producers and viewers with a space where they articulate their own perception and identities.

Sobchack’s account of film experience may also be applied to animation, which should be likewise acknowledged as a site that allows the viewer to access the world of others, and through which the viewer dialectically constructs his or her subjectivity. In this regard, Wendy Hsu’s study is inspiring, putting forward the idea of “performative” viewing of *anime* (Japanese animation). As a non-Japanese, Hsu examines the spectatorship of this transnational media text. Her observation rests on Sobchack’s view of film watching as an embodied experience in specific social and cultural contexts, and embraces the idea of active spectatorship.<sup>68</sup> Similar to Sobchack’s perspective, Hsu’s “performative” mode of viewing emphasizes a self-reflective process of viewer perception, through recognition of what is familiar and unfamiliar (uncanny) to one’s cultural home: a reflexive dialogue between the viewer and the text. As Hsu contends, citing Susan Napier, watching animation (*anime* in particular) gives rise to “a heightened self-consciousness”

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<sup>67</sup> Sobchack, pp. 3–4.

<sup>68</sup> Wendy Hsu, “Misreading the Random: A Translational Reading of the Japanese *Anime* Cowboy Bebop.” Unpublished MA thesis (University of Virginia, 2004). While Hsu’s research addressed only a TV *anime*, the same logic works with theatrical animated works.



among American fans,<sup>69</sup> through the defamiliarization evoked by the text. If animation itself is considered as creating “another world,” this reflexivity could potentially operate among Japanese viewers of *anime* as well.

Moreover, Hsu’s observation suggests that the *anime* viewer “performs,” while acting and reacting to what is happening on the screen. This indicates that the viewer’s subjectivity is articulated by his or her conscious interaction with the world (of “others”) projected on the screen, not only by the viewer’s reception of text at the unconscious level. It also highlights the self-other dialogue that is centered upon neither the subject (the viewer self) nor the object (the text), but the space in-between. The activeness of animation spectatorship, more so than live-action film, is encapsulated by the term “migrant gaze”<sup>70</sup>—a reflexive viewing of the text, which allows the viewer’s gaze at the text to reflect back on his or her self.

The above conceptualizations emphasize the idea of articulating subjectivity through the film experience as a conscious and participatory action. It is also suggested, coupled with Sobchack’s view, that dialogic film viewing may produce a perception that differs from that established by presumed coding that could gain access to the viewer’s unconscious.

In the contemporary globalizing, mass-mediated world characterized by rampant cultural boundary crossing, fantasy is central in identity politics. This chapter has mapped out a theoretical framework regarding mechanisms of identity (de)articulation through fantasy, mainly the fantasy created by/in film. Later chapters examine a particular genre

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<sup>69</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), p. 242.

<sup>70</sup> Hsu, p. 30. About a migrant’s gaze, also see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

of film: animation. Animated fantasy plays a significant role in articulating individual and collective identities, and operates similarly with live-action film in some aspects and differently in others. The theoretical discussions in this chapter are offered as methodological tools for analyzing specific animated texts.

This dissertation does not involve audience analysis based on interviews or surveys. While I acknowledge the value of such direct methods of researching audience response, research based on interviews with sample audience members is always susceptible to being skewed in economic, cultural, or other terms, which can drastically limit its value. What I would like to pursue in the chapters that follow, without falling into a deterministic view of texts, is an explanation of the *linkage* between creators' intention, text, and intended viewers, a linkage that potentially brings about a significant degree of influence on the production of cultural identities.

## **Chapter 2: Studies of Animation and *Anime***

Animation is an intriguing medium of expression through which to investigate the relationship between media representations and the articulation of cultural identities, not simply because of the scarcity of previous research on this medium, but also because of its unique nature. Thus, while animation shares many qualities with live-action films, it is important to study animation independently. In this chapter I sketch out the development of animation in the West that influenced animation production in Asia, particularly in Japan (in terms both of techniques and narratives/text). I also introduce the medium's "morphotic" and "myth-making" characteristics, which facilitate the conveying of creators' ideas and accelerate the function of animation as an ideological apparatus. I focus on particular characteristics rather than providing an all-inclusive observation of this medium. Because of its long-term status as a leading player that laid the foundation in the industry, and its innovation of genres, styles, and business models, I pay particular attention to Disney animation as a model of animation in the West (particularly the U.S.) in this and the following chapter.

Based on these observations, my core discussion evolves around the development and characteristics of *anime* which make it a distinctive medium, and which are influenced by the West and Asia, as well as in turn influencing them. I also discuss and demonstrate some similarities and differences in issues of gender and racial/national representations in both Western animation and *anime*, as these are significant factors in articulating viewers' cultural identities.

It is also imperative to note here that some define animation as a genre of film instead of a medium, considering a “medium” as a “technical form” or physical transmission device by which the means of communication are actualized (i.e., radio, TV, books, photographs, and films). However, in this dissertation I characterize animation as a “medium,” using the term in a broad sense that refers to a means to convey messages, which is similar to the way that acting and facial expressions may also be considered to be media of expression. I also define animation broadly in the sense that it encompasses multiple modes of delivery, such as film, TV, and video games. That is, I consider a medium as “an intermediate agency that enables communication to take place,” and that transmits codes to convey messages.<sup>1</sup> Animation has its own grammar, codes, and techniques to convey messages, which differ significantly from those of live-action films, as well as other media. (As Paul Wells points out, for example, movements of animation are not directly recorded in the conventional photographic sense, unlike live-action film.)

The view of animation as a distinctive medium of expression is also suggested by Jayne Pilling, who recognizes animation as “a medium that spans a far wider range of films than that of cartoons only for children.”<sup>2</sup> Others who see animation in the same light include Paul Wells, John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin, and Charles Solomon.

Likewise, I identify *anime* as a “medium,” not a genre of animation, since *anime*, rather than being limited by its theme, encompasses various genres. As Susan Napier and other *anime* critics such as Christopher Bolton and Thomas Lamarre emphasize, *anime*

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<sup>1</sup> In this regard, see *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, eds. Tim O’Sullivan, et al. (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 176-77.

<sup>2</sup> Pilling, “Introduction,” in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling (London: John Libbey & Company Pty Ltd, 1997), p. ix. Also see Wells in *Understanding Animation*, p. 6, John A. Walker and Sarah Chaplin in *Visual Culture: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 33; Charles Solomon in “Animation: Notes on a Definition,” in *The Art of the Animated Image: An Anthology*, ed. Charles Solomon (Los Angeles: American Film Institute, 1987), p. 12.

creates a distinctive aesthetic world that works with “distinctive visual elements” that are combined with “an array of generic, thematic, and philosophical structures” and different sets of codes.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it should not be studied simply as a category of animation.

## 2.1. The Development of Animation and Some of Its Characteristics

### 2.1.1. Definition of animation

Paul Wells states that “the animated film has the capacity to redefine the orthodoxies of live-action narratives and images, and address the human condition with as much authority and insight as any live-action film.”<sup>4</sup> This not only indicates that animation and live-action film share an equal level of sophistication, but also underlines the significant differences between the two forms of media. Before moving to more complex discussions of animation, it is imperative to define this medium. Wells defines animation as follows:

To animate, and the related words, animation, animated and animator, all derive from the [L]atin verb, *animare*, which means ‘to give life to,’ and within the context of the animated film, this largely means the artificial creation of the illusion of movement in inanimate lines and forms.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Norman McLaren, an eminent British animator, describes animation as “the art of manipulating the invisible interstices between frames” to create a narrative.<sup>6</sup> These

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), p. 10. Also, see Christopher A. Bolton, “From Wooden Cyborgs to Celluloid Souls: Mechanical Bodies in Anime and Japanese Puppet Theater,” in *Positions* 10: 3 (2002), p. 737.

<sup>4</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Solomon, “Animation: Notes on a Definition,” p. 11. Scholars and film critics in Japan also understand a general technical definition of the medium in the same way. See Tsugata Nobuyuki, *Animēshon-gaku nyūmon* (An Introduction to Study of Animation) (Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 2005); Imamura Taihei, *Manga eiga-ron* (Theory of Animated Film) (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1992), p. 16.

definitions suggest that the creators of animation can manipulate reality according to their intentions, producing through animation what Wells calls a “subjective reality.”<sup>7</sup>

The creation of illusion in animation is done conventionally in a two-dimensional space, which is distinguished from the fictional world of live-action film that entails a higher degree of conformity with the laws of physics.<sup>8</sup> The two-dimensionality of animation allows an illusionary world to be illustrated more effectively than in three-dimensional live-action films, because of animation’s greater distance from physical reality. Animation allows creators to flexibly manipulate the existing assumptions of “reality” in order to project their own ideas. Donald Crafton describes animators’ relation to their texts as “self-figuration,”<sup>9</sup> highlighting the animators’ injection of themselves into their texts, more so than in any other type of film.

Wells strongly believes that flexibility is one of the major features that distinguish animation from live-action film.<sup>10</sup> Even granting the increasing overlap between animation and live-action film due to technological advancement (e.g. computer graphics and editing devices), he argues that animation remains relatively more flexible than live-action. Wells calls animation’s freedom of depiction and flexibility “morphotic.” It is because of the morphotic nature of animated images, Wells argues, that animation can subvert our

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<sup>7</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship* (London: Wallflower, 2002), p. 15. In recent years animators have experimented with techniques that produce a sense of three-dimensionality, in computer-generated films such as *Shrek* (2001). None of the films I address in this study is in this mode, however, and, in any case, even apparently “three-dimensional” animation is distanced from physical reality in the sense that what it depicts never had a material, three-dimensional existence in the “real world.”

<sup>9</sup> Donald Crafton, *Before Mickey: The Animated Film 1896-1928* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> This point is affirmed by other scholars as well. See Philip Kelly Denslow, “What is animation and who needs to know?” in *A Reader in Animation Studies*, pp. 1-4; Solomon, p. 9.

accepted notion of reality and challenge the orthodox understanding of our existence and surroundings.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, in terms of the persuasive power of the “reality” created by media, different media affect viewers and elicit involvement in the meaning-making process to different degrees. In this regard, Marshall McLuhan categorizes media into “hot” and “cool,” based on the degree of the viewer’s engagement with that media’s texts. A “hot” medium, such as live-action film, explicitly presents a significant amount of information (through raw materials), so that it does not require much work on the part of viewers to make sense of it. In contrast, “cool” media, such as comics and animation, are composed of simplified signs, which entail a more active role for viewers in meaning-making.<sup>12</sup> It can be argued that the more actively viewers are involved in the interpretation process, the less likely it is that they will be affected by the ideological messages embedded in the text. In this sense, I would argue that animation, as a medium that requires the viewer’s active participation in meaning making, has a greater potential to challenge stereotypes than live-action film; and that is a strong motivation to study the ideological messages in animated works.

Based on the above observations, in this dissertation, I define animation as a medium that generates an illusionary “reality” that reflects creators’ worldviews, and through which creators provide narratives and tropes for viewers to articulate cultural (national, gender, racial) identities. The animated world is therefore a socially and culturally constructed one, reflecting both creators’ backgrounds and the discourses in

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<sup>11</sup> See Wells, *Understanding Animation*.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964).

which they are situated. It is a sphere that should not be mistaken for an innocent form of production, but should be recognized as one of the sites for identity struggle.

### **2.1.2. The development of animation in the West**

Twenty-five thousand years ago, in the caves of southwestern Europe, Cro-Magnon man made astounding drawings of the animals he hunted. His representations are not only accurate and beautifully drawn, but many seem to have an inner life combined with a suggestion of movement. Since that time, we have been inundated with artists' attempts to shape something in clay or stone or paint that has a life of its own.<sup>13</sup>

– Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston

Human beings have always had an urge to create representations of non-living things that seem animate. This urge was concretely materialized in the form of the flipbook in the sixteenth century, which operated based on the persistence of vision, a fundamental cognitive mechanism on which contemporary animation also relies.<sup>14</sup> It is unfortunate that, despite its invention prior to live-action film production, animation has been overshadowed in the research, theory and criticism of visual media.

The history of animation has paralleled the development of visual technologies in the West: moving images, film technologies, sound, and color. In France, Emile Reynaud invented the praxinoscope in 1876, based on a previous moving-image toy, the zoetrope, which was invented by British mathematician William George Horner in 1834. The praxinoscope allowed the viewer to watch moving images projected in a mirror. Reynaud gradually improved the technology of his machine, and eventually in 1892 introduced the

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<sup>13</sup> Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Walt Disney Production, 1981), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Imamura, *Eiga mangaron*, p. 7. According to Imamura and Wells, the theory of persistence of vision, which explains how humans perceive movement, had emerged as early as 65 B.C.E.



Theater Optique, wherein he sequentially projected images from hand-painted glass plates, each of which was a little different from the next, producing an effect of continuous movement. As an early type of animation, this technique is also considered to be a big step toward the current concept of film-making more generally. These inventions were incorporated in Thomas Alva Edison's invention of the kinetoscope in 1891, which was followed by the Lumiere Brothers' cinematographe (essentially the modern film projector) in 1895 in France.<sup>15</sup>

The first book specializing in animation was *Animated Cartoons*, published in London in 1920, just about ten years after the invention of conventional film animation.<sup>16</sup> The Disney Studio later made animation prominent in visual culture, but nonetheless the medium has experienced decades of relative critical neglect.

As the twentieth century progressed, animation began to appear in an increasingly wide range of venues—from films, computer games, web sites, and TV commercials to ATM bank machine screens. Against this background, the previously marginalized medium of animation began to be acknowledged in cultural, economic, and political spheres, and began to draw attention in academic circles as well.

After World War II, animation began to be treated as a distinctive medium by organized scholarly bodies, such as the International Association of Animated Film (founded in 1960), the Society for Animation Studies (SAS, founded in 1989), and Women in Animation (founded in 1993), and the study of animation has increasingly grown to be a recognized research field. In addition, the success of animated feature films such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *Wallace & Gromit*, and *Akira*, along with the

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<sup>15</sup> See Wells, *Understanding Animation*; Tsugata, *Animation-gaku*.

<sup>16</sup> This book contains the explanation of visual technologies that contributed to the invention of animation and of the technical description of the production process. See Tsugata, *Animation-gaku*, p. 109.

increasing popularity of animation among adult audiences, started bringing more scholarly attention to the medium.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, while film studies have significantly developed since the 1960s in various aspects, animation studies—including the medium’s history, theory and criticism—have remained marginal, because of the conventional belief that animation is a transparent and “innocent” form of entertainment for children. This view has been perpetuated alongside the concept of “innocent childhood” in North American society, which has been taken for granted in part due to the pervasiveness of the aesthetic of Disney animation since 1928.<sup>18</sup> These conceptualizations mask the fact that “innocent childhood” is a fairly recent social construct which allows the dominant discourse to permeate society, supported by adult producers’ and authorities’ interests rather than children’s preferences or needs. In recent years the view of animation as an “innocent” cultural form has begun to be questioned, and in this study I emphasize that this medium should be understood as a manifestation of political and ideological conflicts.

Eric Smoodin provides a useful understanding of the way that “norms” that are founded on dominant ideologies are constructed through Hollywood cartoons and

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<sup>17</sup> See Jayne Pilling’s emphasis on a recognition of animation as a field of study in her “Introduction” to *A Reader in Animation Studies*, ed. Jayne Pilling (London: John Libbey & Company Pty Ltd, 1997), pp. ix-xii; Eric Smoodin, *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons from the Sound Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p. 1. *A Reader in Animation* maps out the diversity of contemporary animation studies. In the introductory chapter Jayne Pilling lists the main disciplines in which papers have been presented at SAS conferences in the 1990s, including cultural studies, sociology, film history, and feminist studies. Along with this variety of disciplines, the recent topics dealt with are also certainly diverse, ranging from ethnicity and diversity, the globalization of animation in the industrial context, modes of production, and canon formations, to gender theory. The book encompasses a variety of topics; however, the fact that this “international” scholarly organization and yet it focuses mainly on studies of European and American animated works indicates room for further progress in this field of study. See Pilling, “Introduction,” pp. xiv-xv.

<sup>18</sup> With regard to the concept (or the myth) of “innocent childhood,” see Neil Postman’s *Disappearing Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982). There is a fine line between “innocent childhood” and “children as hope for the future,” and I will discuss Miyazaki Hayao’s view’s on children as audience in Chapter 3.

government involvement in the industry from 1928 to 1960.<sup>19</sup> From his analysis, he concludes that cultural products act to impose norms and regulations on viewers through their production and consumption. Lynn Spigel verifies this view, emphasizing the commodification and politicization of childhood, and identifying children's media as a vehicle for colonizing the world through image-making that represents American jingoisms.<sup>20</sup> Julianne Burton-Carvajal concurs:

[p]recisely because of their assumed innocence and innocuousness, their inherent ability... to defy all conventions of realistic representation, animated cartoons offer up a fascinating zone within which to examine how a dominant culture constructs its subordinates.<sup>21</sup>

All of these critics underscore the constructed "innocence" of animation, which potentially allows the dominant ideas to insinuate into the viewer's mind conveniently and effectively.

Many studies have been done on Disney animation, including Walt Disney as an auteur, the studio's history, its political impact, and so on.<sup>22</sup> To many people, "animation" is synonymous with Disney, and largely for this reason, other animated works (non-Disney productions) inside or outside the United States have been significantly neglected,<sup>23</sup> despite their increasing growth and the significant roles that they play.

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<sup>19</sup> See Smoodin, *Animating Culture*, and also studies on Disney as a key player in the construction of dominant ideologies can go back at least as early as Richard Schickel's *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968).

<sup>20</sup> Lynn Spigel, "Innocence Abroad: The Geopolitics of Childhood in Postwar Kid Strips," in *Kid's Media Culture*, ed. Marsha Kinder (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>21</sup> Julianne Burton-Carvajal, "Surprise Package: Looking southward with Disney," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed. Eric Smoodin (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 139.

<sup>22</sup> Studies on Disney animations include: Paul Wells, *Animation and America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Smoodin, *Animating Culture*; articles in *Disney Discourse*, ed. Eric Smoodin; and *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that there are no studies of animation outside the Disney Studios. Significant works in this field include: Paul Wells, "Animation: Forms and Meanings", in *An Introduction to Film Studies* ed. Jill

### 2.1.3. Animation as a myth-making tool

Some scholars argue that one of the main reasons that animation travels with little difficulty across national boundaries lies in its low level of “cultural discount,” or its “culturally odorless” quality.<sup>24</sup> “Culturally odorless” refers to products whose cultural specificity and distinctiveness are negligible, so that they can be easily accepted by a global audience. This view of animation is reinforced by well-known film critic Sergei Eisenstein’s naïve yet influential vision of the medium as ideologically neutral because of its engagement with only the “surface of the phenomenon.” In Eisenstein’s view, the animated form itself resists “looking beneath to the origins, at the reasons and causes, at the conditions and pre-conditions.”<sup>25</sup> He seems in turn to emphasize the apparent pleasure (form/style) of the animated media text over its implications (content/message).

These observations have a certain truth; however, they neglect the complexity of animated texts, failing to take into account the messages embedded in and generated around specific animated narratives: it is important to remember that animation is a content-based medium, which, as Wells suggests, “can carry important meanings and engage with social issues.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, animation, composed of both visual and narrative textual elements, is a communication vehicle, purveying narratives or giving instructions. Although animation embraces various functions, its storytelling or narrative

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Nelmes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Wells, *Understanding Animation*; Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002); Jayne Pilling, *A Reader in Animation Studies*; and Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> The term “cultural discount” is mentioned in Stuart McFadyen, Colin Hoskins, and Adam Finn, *Global Television and Film: An Introduction to the Economics of the Business* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 32-33; “Culturally odorless” is mentioned in Iwabuchi, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney* ed. Jay Leyda (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986), p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 4. This idea is verified by his brief discussion of a scene from *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955). In the film, there is a scene where a teacher uses an animation to get delinquent boys engaged in his class, and the animation inspires them to raise questions about the images on the screen.

creation is one of the main characteristics of this medium. Thus, through the viewing of animated texts, viewers are acquiring or exchanging ideas or ideologies with the texts' creators, and through the production and consumption process, narratives pertaining to national, gender, or class identities can be established—a process of myth-making—in both producing and recipient countries. As discussed in Chapter 1, consumers also assist in the production of meanings and narratives when viewing animation. I discuss the elements of narrative creation in animated film which aid in maintaining dominant ideologies below.

### **(1) Linear narrativization**

One of the strategies for creating myths that tie to identity politics and our perception of the world is linear narrativization. Linear narrative refers to a plot that proceeds from beginning to end without deviation, whose organization is preconceived to allow writers to guide the reader/viewer to their prescribed reading.<sup>27</sup> This narrative style assumes that readers gain pleasure not from having a choice of how to read, but from being led. Animated texts in the West often adhere to a linear narrative structure<sup>28</sup>: a typical problem-solution-happy ending/moralization plot from one of Disney's "princess stories" (from the classic *Snow White* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950) to the more recent *Mulan* (1998)), for example. This can reinforce dominant ideologies regarding gender

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<sup>27</sup> For a more detailed explanation of linear narrative, see Jennifer Fraser, *Visualizing a Hypertext Narrative* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1999), p.7, and also Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *Critical Inquiry* 7: 1 (1980), pp. 5-27.

<sup>28</sup> This point is suggested in studies such as Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Disney Spell," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), and Henry A. Giroux, "Memory and Pedagogy in the 'Wonderful World of Disney': Beyond the Politics of Innocence," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

and/or racial identities: such narratives allow little scope for imagining alternate interpretations or alternate gender identity articulations.

Linear narrativization also operates to create a narrative coherence between different media or between fantasy and reality, which even allows for adding “conventional plots to inherently plotless materials.”<sup>29</sup> In the case of Disney’s project, for example, linear narrativization helps to establish a narrative coherence between the animated film or TV show, theme parks, and merchandise: the Wonderful World of Disney. In this World, the viewing of an animation may be followed by a visit to one of several theme parks, where visitors are guided in a programmed direction. The purchase of synergetic merchandise completes the “Disney narrative.” In other words, a narrative coherence maintained by images and plot, as well as products in daily life, suppresses possible (mis)readings of a text, and subsequently contributes to the uniform perception of issues around us, such as identity politics or the view of “self” and “other.” Linear narratives make viewers susceptible and subservient to those in a position of power in society, through ideologies that are produced, reproduced, and internalized in the viewer’s mind.

## **(2) Escapism: Sugar-coating unpleasant reality**

Components such as linear narrativization often work to conceal the cruel aspects and realities of historical events, sanitizing and simplifying cultural problems such as racism. This approach is related to a desire for escapism, an important element for pleasure in the fantasy world. According to Tim O’Sullivan, escapism is a “process which

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<sup>29</sup> David M. Johnson, “Disney World as Structure and Symbol: Re-Creation of the American Experience,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 15: 1 (1981), p. 162.

enables the individual to withdraw from unpleasant or threatening situations by recourse to preferred symbolic or imaginative states.”<sup>30</sup> The narrative simplification pertaining to conflicting histories or perceptions of “enemies” practiced by Disney animations explicitly creates an ideal, simplistic space for escapism, and instead establishes the “friendly neighbor of the U.S. Latin America” (*Three Caballeros*, 1944) or “the devious Middle East” (*Aladdin*, 1992), for example.

Disney narratives representing specific cultures or peoples, such as *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998), tend to wipe out complex politics and unpleasant realities to guide viewers to a “make-believe” world where everything is peaceful and transparent. Henry Giroux stresses this aspect of Disney narratives, describing them as vehicles for rationalizing the authoritarian, normalizing tendencies of dominant culture.<sup>31</sup> With this strategy, histories of oppression such as colonialism or inter-cultural, racial or sexual conflicts can be effectively purged. In this respect, Disney animation does not necessarily offer the audience realistic ways of living in society, but often provides only the compensatory pleasures of a fantasy world. The implications of this will be discussed more closely in the next chapter.

### **(3) Essentialist representation: gender and racial/national identities**

According to Said, the myth of the “Other” is constructed by “imaginative geography and history,” which “help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far

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<sup>30</sup> *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, eds. Tim O’Sullivan, et al. (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> Giroux, “Memory and Pedagogy in the ‘Wonderful World of Disney,” p. 46.

away.”<sup>32</sup> The same argument can be made about animated fantasy, which is capable of creating an “imaginative geography and history” through the dramatization of “distance and difference.” To make myths that “dramatize the distance” between “self” and “other” is to over-emphasize or to essentialize the difference between the two. Articulating the essentialist mode in which the Western (post)colonial discourse of the “Other” operates through the sexualization of race in live-action films, Ella Shohat notes:

The gender and colonial discursive intersection is revealed in the ways that Hollywood exploited the Orient, Africa, and Latin America as a pretext for eroticized images, especially from 1934 through the mid-fifties when the restrictive production code forbade depicting “scenes of passion” in all but the most puerile terms,.... Exoticising and eroticizing the Third World allowed the imperial imaginary to play out its own fantasies of sexual domination.<sup>33</sup>

Stereotypical representations of races have often been seen in animation in the United States and other Western countries, providing a sense of security to white subjectivity.<sup>34</sup> The racial/ethnic representations in many Hollywood animations (such as those produced by Disney, the Fleischer Brothers Studio, Warner Bros., and MGM) provide good examples of the type of myth-making that resorts to the essentialization of certain groups. This mode of representation of the Orient is manifested in, for example, Disney’s *Aladdin*, which is closely investigated in Chapter 4. Similarly, in Chapter 6, I discuss at length the national, racial and gender images that constitute Disney’s *Mulan* (1998), which at first glance appears to challenge gender and ethnic stereotypes, but actually reinforces them in a variety of ways.

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<sup>32</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Ella Shohat, “Gender and the Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema,” in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 13:1-3 (1991), pp. 68-69.

<sup>34</sup> This is not to suggest that non-white nations do not also produce stereotyped or essentialized depictions of race or ethnicity. Racial representation strategies practiced by non-white “others” are discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5.



It is important to note that, according to studies of Hollywood animations, a significant number of animated narratives continuously redefine the way in which gender and race/ethnicity are represented, and this becomes especially noticeable in times of national identity crises or conflicts in foreign affairs.<sup>35</sup> A specific example is introduced by Wells, who examines American animated works that present Nazi Germany and Japan during the Second World War, in which antagonistic codes are used to portray “other” races, in order to establish American national narratives of heroism and to secure “masculine identity.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, dominant modes of representation continually shift in the socio-political context. In the age of globalization, decolonization and the de-centralization in the world system have heightened identity crises and a sense of insecurity and anxiety within the power center, resulting, in some cases, in new instances of racial/ethnic or gender stereotyping.

As we have seen in Chapter 1, it is a mistake to believe that power relationships of dominance and oppression are simple, or that they are necessarily stable over time. Nonetheless, inequality between nations or between racial/ethnic groups within nations remains surprisingly persistent, resulting in long-term unbalance in the ways or degrees to which some groups may be represented in discourse. Since the 1940s, increasing public resistance to stereotyping in the United States has put pressure on filmmakers to address

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<sup>35</sup> See Burton-Carvajal, and Smoodin's, *Animating Culture*.

<sup>36</sup> To illustrate the racial representation in animation, Wells uses one episode of the *Superman* series, “Jungle Drums” (1943), in which an Allied spy plane is shot down by Nazis, as well as briefly mentioning “Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips” (1944, Warner Bros.), in which Bugs fights against very stereotypically depicted Japanese soldiers, demonstrating violence and antagonism towards the Japanese. (See Wells, *Understanding Animation*, pp. 193-95). In this Bugs Bunny episode, Japanese soldiers have buckteeth and speak language (or mere noise) that is not Japanese, and act violently in a barbaric manner with swords. A Japanese woman with *kimono* (Bugs Bunny in disguise) is depicted as seductive and manipulative. Also, in *Animating Culture* Smoodin discusses “mythologised stereotypical American values” brought into play through representations of Mickey Mouse's masculine characteristics. (See, pp. 64-67). Both studies indicate how closely gendered representations intersect with racial or national narratives in animated texts, particularly in the 1930s and the 1940s.

the issue of unequal representation in film of African Americans, Hispanics, and women, to name just a few examples. Despite the pressure brought by interest groups, which has resulted in diminished racist imagery, “positive images did not increase” until the 1970s, as Maureen Furniss points out.<sup>37</sup>

Essentialized representations of gender are also plentiful in North American animation. Wells points out the existence of a male-dominant code of representation in Disney productions, as well as in animated versions of *Superman* (1941, the Fleischer Brothers Studio) and *Popeye* (1932, the Fleischer Brothers Studio). This, Wells explains, derives from the fact that the animation industry in the West is overall “pathologically male, run by men in the spirit of expressing the interests of men, creating patriarchal hierarchies in major studios.”<sup>38</sup> In these works, male characters are defined by their physical actions, whereas female characters are defined by signifiers of conventional “feminine” appearance (Mickey Mouse vs. Minnie Mouse; Popeye vs. Olive Oyl) and portrayed as “difference,” in comparison to their male counterparts. This emphasis on “difference” serves to reinforce the polarization of the gender binary. According to Wells, these depictions of female characters accelerate the infantilizing or sexualizing of women. In this respect, the animated body is a crucial site for the (re)inscribing of masculinity and femininity, in the ways that gender (and/or race) is embodied through characters’ appearance, behaviors, or physical movements.

Since the 1980s, the academic world has been more and more critical of essentialist aspects of Disney animations, largely because of their problematic representations of certain groups of people and cultures. The issue of representation is an

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<sup>37</sup> Furniss, p. 232.

<sup>38</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 187. Although I do not address this issue in detail in this study, Japanese animation studios are similarly male-dominated and patriarchal.

issue of power politics, and therefore, the discussion of animation texts in relation to cultural identity articulation should address the question of who represents whom and with what intention, which is the main focus in my case studies in later chapters.

#### **2.1.4. Subversive characteristics of animation: examples in the West**

##### **(1) The deconstruction of myths of “gender identity”**

Wells regards animation as a potential tool to be used to resist the patriarchal discourse of media representations, which cannot be accomplished as easily through live-action film. He states that:

[i]f men, in general, have used animation to echo and extend the premises and concerns of men in live-action film-making, then women have used animation to create a specific feminine aesthetic which resists the inherently masculine language of the live-action arena, and the most dominant codes of orthodox hyper-realist animation which also use its vocabulary.<sup>39</sup>

In his study, Wells reveals in the works of several female animators a “feminine aesthetic” which deconstructs the concept of masculinity that has been privileged in many live-action films and in orthodox Disney animation. According to him, the feminine aesthetic has the following attributes:

- 1) Women’s animation recognizes the shift from the representation of woman as object, to the representation of woman as subject. This seeks to move away from traditions in which women are merely erotic spectacles or of marginal narrational interest.
- 2) The feminine aesthetic mistrusts language, perceiving it as the agent of masculine expression, preferring to express itself in predominantly visual terms, using a variety of forms, and reclaiming and revising various traditions.
- 3) In order to construct a feminine aesthetic, it is necessary to abandon conservative forms, and create radical texts which may demand greater participation from the viewing audience.

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<sup>39</sup> Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 198.

- 4) The feminine aesthetic seeks to reveal a woman's relationship to her own body; her interaction with men and other women; her perception of her private and public role; her social and political identity within the domestic and professional space, as determined by law; and also, the relationship between female sexuality, desire, and creativity.<sup>40</sup>

Defined by these characteristics, the "feminine aesthetic" in animation is a key element of subversive visual and narrative representations, which work either to expose the instability of gender identity categorizations or to create representations that transform the female "other" into the female-as-subject. (This account of the feminine aesthetic and its potential leaves open the question of whether male animators can also employ it to make subversive animation texts.)

Furthermore, animation's nature of being free from physical laws, a logical consequence of its two-dimensionality, also aids in challenging dominant or presumed codes of depiction, a process that Thomas Lamarre describes as "metamorphosis"<sup>41</sup>—a rejection of fixed forms of expression or a resistance to realistic illustration. That is, the mutability presented through the animated body constantly in flux effectively illustrates the instability of identities (such as gender and race), and this mutable body can therefore deconstruct essentialist categorizations. Animation characters are effective in this respect, because their bodies can morph into a different sex or even a different species, unlike live-

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<sup>40</sup> As an example of the "feminine aesthetic" in animation, Wells introduces the work of animator Faith Hubley, who employs subjective expression, and eliminates the hard-cel and the hard line in order to challenge a male-dominated orthodox animation style and the phallogentric aspects of the language of animation. Similar practices can be seen in the work of other animators, such as Joanna Quinn's *Girl's Night Out* (1986). Wells' list also includes Emily Hubley, who addresses sexual confusion, rape, pregnancy and social alienation in *The Emergence of Eunice* (1980), Alison De Vere, who addresses how a woman becomes more conscious of herself as a woman by interrogating the roles that have been imposed upon her in *The Black Dog* (1987). See Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 199-200.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Lamarre, "From Animation to *Anime*: Drawing Movements and Moving Drawings," p. 338. Eisenstein also expresses this characteristic of animation with the term "plasmaticness," the mutability of images that rejects fixed forms of expression. Although plasmaticness, a resistance to realistic illustration, is a characteristic of animation in general, the concept of realism in animation is relative. For example, Disney animations after *Silly Symphonies* focused more on verisimilitude in characters. See *Eisenstein on Disney*.

action characters who, generally speaking, can change their gender only through changes in their outer appearance (costume, hair, behavior). In this way, playing with the sex/gender of the morphotic animated body allows “viewers to both identify with...different kinds of bodies, and create [a] space for polymorphously perverse spectatorial experiences.”<sup>42</sup> This means that viewers can relatively easily experience identities other than their biological sex by means of the animated body, and that these animated bodies also draw viewers’ attention to the constructed-ness of identity categorizations, such as race or gender/sex, which we usually take for granted.

Joanna Bouldin draws on one of the *Loony Tunes* episodes in which Bugs Bunny performs in “drag” to illustrate this point. In this episode, Bugs changes not just superficially, but fully: his body changes shape to become entirely feminine, something that would be impossible for a live actor. This mutability of sex/gender is accepted by the viewer as plausible because, although animation is highly imaginary, the animated body still resonates with our image of a real physical body.

With Bugs Bunny, changes in actual body shape allow the character to perform in a way that live-actors could not, to potentially subvert conventions of gender representation. Examples of live actors enacting gender changes include Robin Williams in *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) and Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie* (1982), where the real bodies of the actors can be covered in ways that make them look like women, but their bodies’ real shapes do not change. Unlike Bugs Bunny, for example, the waist size of male actors in drag cannot be reduced to enhance the illusion of femininity. As Bouldin argues, the animated body offers the viewer a liminal space where he or she transcends corporeality, and at the same time the relatively “realistic” depictions of people in animation make it

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<sup>42</sup> Bouldin, “Bodacious Bodies and the Voluptuous Gaze,” p. 63.

possible for real people to identify with the animated characters. “Identity,” in the case of the animated body is, therefore, contingent on continuous (re)articulation. Observing this process in the context of animated narratives may make the notion of constructed-ness of gender identity—even in real life—more compelling.

From these observations, it can be argued that the stereotypical representations of the race/ethnicity or gender of characters’ bodies in orthodox animation such as Disney’s works tend to confine viewers’ corporeal experience of animation. On the other hand, the representation of subversive corporeal performances by animated bodies may help in emancipating marginalized subjects in society: by watching bodies mutate, those in marginal groups may be encouraged to think about the constructed nature of typically assumed identity categories. At the same time, the recognition of this nature may make those in dominant groups more accepting of “others” that they formerly ignored or despised. Although these subversive narratives often tend to target niche markets, they have been increasing in number. Animated works that disturb gender/sexual identity categorization include *Girls Night Out* (1987), in which a scantily-clad, muscle-bound stripper’s naked body positions female viewers as capable of using the gaze for their own voyeuristic pleasure—a reverse of the way that female bodies are typically fragmented and eroticized for gaze of male viewers in the dominant media discourse.

## **(2) The destabilization of the concept of “racial/ethnic identity”**

The abovementioned approach, by which “femininity” and “masculinity” are re-defined, may also be relevant to the question of racial representation.<sup>43</sup> However, while a number of animated works highlight the constructed nature of gender identity, the racial

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<sup>43</sup> See Wells, *Understanding Animation*, p. 188.

body seems to remain more often stereotypically depicted. Nor have there been many studies that identify Western animated works that challenge an essentialist view of racial identities by means of the animated body. This may be because, compared to gender and sexuality, the representation of race is more difficult to overturn through characters' bodies. Or it may be that racial "others" have so far used animation less often as a vehicle to expose and subvert conventions of racial stereotyping.

It must be noted that discussions of representation in animation have been focused on Western animated works, particularly those created by Disney. Wells' studies also concentrate heavily on North American and European animated works. A better understanding of mechanisms that link representations in animated texts and potential articulation of cultural identities entails the theoretical exploration of works from Asia—Japan in particular—to which I turn next.

## 2.2. What is *Anime*?

Only it [*anime*] can counterbalance the hegemony of American animation in Asia and the world, showing that globalization of popular culture does not necessarily imply homogenization or Americanization.<sup>44</sup>

—Wai-Ming Ng

In the field of animation, the United States (Disney in particular) has dominated the global market. However, the phenomenon of this one-way flow from the United States to peripheral countries began to change from the late 1980s and 1990s, and that change included the tremendous growth of Japanese animation, as Wai-Ming Ng's quote (above) suggests. This recent change in the animation industry scene may be interpreted

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<sup>44</sup> Wai-Ming Ng, "Japanese Animation in Singapore: An Historical and Comparative Study," in *Animation Journal* 9 (2001), p. 47.

as a sign of increasing resistance to American cultural hegemony. Supporting this view, Wells describes “a whole range of animation from across the six continents” as “the fullest example of the appeal of animation to express personal, socio-cultural and national concerns that bear no relation to the American context at all.”<sup>45</sup> This suggests that the “resistance” to American hegemony was not necessarily intentional—it is just that more countries have the means and the desire to produce animation, and thus North American products automatically become less central. As a result of this, these countries are given a means through which they may countervail the hegemony. This statement indicates that in an age of globalization, animation produced in previously (or currently) marginalized countries plays a significant role in (re)establishing national identity through the imaginary, and in turn undercutting American-centered ideologies and aesthetics.

*Anime* (contemporary Japanese animation) is a national cultural form that has grown increasingly popular—both at home and abroad—since the 1980s and 1990s. *Anime* frequently evokes Japan’s problematic national identity in relation to the concept of “otherness,” which, as we shall see, is often intertwined with issues of gender and sexuality.

### **2.2.1. The history of *anime* and *anime* research**

The term *anime* in this study refers not to the entire slate of animation made in Japan from the first animated cartoon in 1917,<sup>46</sup> but to contemporary animation produced

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<sup>45</sup> Wells, *Animation: Genre and Authorship*, p. 3

<sup>46</sup> Japan’s first animated film shown at a theater was made by Shimokawa Bokoten. This short-length animation was made by drawing with ink directly on the film stock. See Yamaguchi Yasuo, *Nihon no anime zenshi* (The Entire History of Japanese *Anime*) (Tokyo: Ten Books, 2004), pp. 44–46.



after the 1960s and 1970s. The history of *anime* therefore spans only the last thirty to forty years.

It was not until after the Second World War that Japan started to be recognized as a significant animated film production center. Film critic Imamura Taihei designates 1958, when Japan's first feature-length color animation *Hakujaden* (*The Legend of the White Serpent*) was produced, as the moment when Japanese animation reached an acceptable level of achievement.<sup>47</sup> *Hakujaden* was produced by the first large-scale animation studio, Tōei Dōga (Toei Motion Picture).

The early 1960s was time of rapid economic growth for Japan, and this allowed many families to purchase television sets for their homes. Soon TV animated cartoons targeting children sparked a boom in Japan's animation industry. Animation at that time was known as “*manga eiga*” (comic book film) or “*terebi manga*” (TV comic book) in Japan.<sup>48</sup>

It was from the late 1970s and early 1980s that *anime* began to cater to older age groups, and this became a major characteristic of contemporary *anime*. This is also when *anime* started to become recognized worldwide as one of the most appealing visual media of Japan. The 1980s and the 1990s witnessed the global *anime* boom, a phenomenon that has shown steady growth for the last few decades. What is especially noteworthy during this period is the fact that *anime* began to demonstrate a distinctive “Japaneseness,” or what Susan Pointon calls “uncompromising ‘otherness’” manifested in its narrative and

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<sup>47</sup> Imamura, *Manga eiga*, p. 204.

<sup>48</sup> As I discuss later in this chapter, there is a close relationship between *anime* and *manga*, with developments in *manga* usually preceding those in *anime*.

visual styles.<sup>49</sup> This distinguishes *anime* works from animations made in the 1960s and the 1970s, which avoided reflecting specificities of Japanese culture or customs.

As for research on *anime*, the first animation study in Japan began in 1934, about fifteen years after *Animated Cartoons* was published in London, yet there was no monograph published on animation in Japan until Imamura Taihei's *Manga Eiga ron (The Theory of Animated Film)* in 1941. This book discusses expressive methods characteristic to Japanese animation, especially those drawn from *manga* (Japanese comic books) and from Japanese arts and music. Even in the 1950s, the majority of books on animation were nothing more than impressionistic studies of specific animated works. It was only gradually that critics learned how to review animation by reading European or American critical essays. From the 1960s to the 1970s, we witness development in the publication of critical essays and studies of animation, yet these studies mostly deal with animation made in the United States. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that a significant number of critical essays and books specializing in *anime* appeared.<sup>50</sup>

### **2.2.2. Characteristics and types of *anime***

#### **(1) *Anime* as a distinctive medium**

Tsugata Nobuyuki defines *anime* as characterized by the following three main features: 1) the use of cel animation, 2) the use of cost effective strategies (i.e. fewer pictures for the depiction of a scene), called limited animation, and 3) a tendency to have stories not simply of good vs evil, but of complicated human relationships and

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<sup>49</sup> Susan Pointon, "Transcultural Orgasm as Apocalypse: *Urotsukidōji*: The Legend of the Overfiend," in *Wide Angle* 19: 3 (1997), p. 45.

<sup>50</sup> The first magazine specializing in *anime* was *OUT*, published in 1977 followed by *Animage* published in 1987, *Animec* in 1978, *The Anime* in 1979, *My Anime* in 1979, *Animedia* in 1981, and *New Type* in 1985. (See Tsugata, *Animēshon-gaku*, pp. 109-111.)

worldviews.<sup>51</sup> With regard to the visual aesthetics of *anime*, world-renowned contemporary artist Murakami Takashi argues that *anime* draws its distinctive visual style from an aesthetic he calls “superflat,” an aesthetic that characterizes traditional art, and continues to be prevalent in a variety of contemporary visual forms. Murakami goes so far as to call the superflat aesthetic “the DNA that formed Japanese culture.”<sup>52</sup> As the name suggests, superflat refers to a cultural preference for two-dimensional visual presentations, rather than the rounded, three-dimensional, depth-filled presentation that results from the one-point perspectivalism championed in Western visual art after the Renaissance. In *anime*, one typical evocation of the superflat aesthetic is the use of a single, static, flat-looking background scene, against which the main characters move. While some film historians link this technique with the low budgets and high-pressure production schedules of early TV *anime*, others argue along with Murakami that this visual characteristic expresses a Japanese cultural preference for two-dimensional, flat visual presentations.<sup>53</sup>

But, as Tsugata suggests above, the definition of *anime* should not only refer to stylistic aspects. As Lamarre comments, “to reduce the complexity of *anime* is to ignore the complexity of Japan.”<sup>54</sup> By the same token, Susan Napier states that “[t]o define *anime* simply as ‘Japanese cartoons’ gives no sense of the depth and variety that make up the medium.”<sup>55</sup> Both statements emphasize the need to differentiate “*anime*” from

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<sup>51</sup> Tsugata Nobuyuki, *Nihon animēshon no chikara* (The Power of Japanese Animation) (Tokyo: NTT Shuppan, 2004), p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Murakami Takashi, “A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art,” in *Superflat* ed. Murakami Takashi (Tokyo: MADRA Publishing, 2000), p. 25. No translator listed.

<sup>53</sup> Lamarre, p. 338.

<sup>54</sup> Lamarre, p. 336.

<sup>55</sup> Napier, p. 6.

animation made in other countries, and the importance of examining *anime* as a distinctive medium.

One of the major features that distinguishes *anime* from any other medium as well as from its American counterparts is its wide range of genres or themes—from romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, and science fiction, to pornography—making it possible for virtually everyone, from young children to the elderly, to find *anime* that appeal to their tastes.<sup>56</sup> This originates in the similar diversity of *manga*, on which *anime* are often based.<sup>57</sup>

According to Napier, another point that distinguishes *anime* from animation is its function as both a globalizing and a localizing force, reflecting Japan's problematic identity in relation to the world.<sup>58</sup> That is, *anime* as a distinctive cultural form maintains its Japanese roots; while hybridization or reciprocal influences of other (Asian and Western) cultures on *anime* seem to be very much a part of the development of both its narrative forms and techniques, they would not lead to a total convergence. Napier goes on to investigate Japan's national identity configuration through *anime* as a national

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<sup>56</sup> Napier, pp. 30-34. She further categorizes *anime* into three main modes of expression—apocalyptic, festival (carnival), and elegiac—which go beyond any nation-specific site and elucidate issues common among a global audience. The apocalyptic mode of *anime*, characterized by works such as *Evangelion* (TV *anime*, 1995, by Anno Hideaki), expresses social pessimism. The festival mode, similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "carnival," demonstrates the privileging of transgression and carnivalesque themes and narrative structures. This mode includes works such as *Ranma 1/2* (TV *anime*, 1989-1992, by Mochizuki Tomomitsu) and *Urusei Yatsura* (TV *anime*, 1981-1986, by Oshii Mamoru & Yamazaki Kazuo), both of which exemplify a festive transgression of gender and sexuality. The elegiac mode refers to lamentation and melancholy mixed with nostalgia, which links with the long lyric tradition in premodern Japanese culture, celebrating the beauty of transience. Napier points out that these modes are familiar to audiences around the world, but outside Japan are more usually found in the fields of literature or live-action films, rather than animation. Also see Frederik Schodt's *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (New York: Kodansha International, 1986).

<sup>57</sup> A large percentage of narratives that are made into *anime* begin as *manga*. The most typical process is for a *manga* series that has proved popular to be made into a TV *anime* series, and then sometimes to be repackaged into feature-length animated or sometimes even live-action films. Many popular narratives in Japan exist simultaneously as on-going serialized *manga*, on-going serialized TV *anime*, and annually released animated feature films.

<sup>58</sup> Napier, p. 27.

cultural form, drawing on Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's question about the relationship between the global circulation of images and regional boundaries: does *anime* reinforce national specificity, or are globally circulated images simply subsumed by globalization, effectively losing all national specificity? I will return later to the relationship between national identities and the characteristics—both form and content—of *anime*.

## **(2) *Anime* as a national cultural form**

Like its Western counterpart, *anime* is a storytelling medium, and its narratives provide viewers with resources for their identity articulation. This section discusses the “Japaneseness” of *anime*, and the ways its cultural specificity (or the lack thereof) influences the kinds of messages provided by creators about gendered, racial, or national identities.

The view of *anime* as both a global and a local force is related to the creation of national narrative, and is also associated with what “*anime*” signifies in the global arena. As Tsugata mentions, the term *anime* has been used outside Japan since around the 1990s.<sup>59</sup> This indicates that phenomena originating outside Japan contribute to the perception of *anime*, as well as to the image of Japan itself: *anime* is now an international concept and an international product, a complex phenomenon that should not be viewed as emerging from or existing within a purely Japanese context.

Some critics argue, however, that *anime*'s popularity abroad should not necessarily be celebrated. For instance, Darrel Hamamoto attributes *anime*'s overseas popularity to

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<sup>59</sup> Tsugata, *Nihon animēshon no chikara*, p. 21.

“Asiaphilia,” a kind of fetishism for Asia that is just another side of “Asiaphobia.”<sup>60</sup> A verification of this argument would require close investigation of who represents whose identity for what purpose, as well as examining how things are represented in *anime*, all of which may contribute to understanding the contemporary construction of the image of Japan. While such an examination is beyond the scope of this chapter, later chapters will contribute to a verification of Hamamoto’s thesis.

Hamamoto’s view of *anime* becomes compelling when we look at the discourse that links *anime* to “Japaneseness,” closely tied to cultural nationalism, where positioning *anime* as a unique or “different” medium from animation creates an image of Japan as a powerful “Other” to the Western world. This image is eagerly promoted by the Japanese government as a tactic to survive in a time of rampant globalization, especially after the “bursting” of Japan’s bubble economy in the 1990s. The use of *anime* as a national policy has become evident in the last five years, in government strategy papers.<sup>61</sup> One of the most representative cases is the launch of the Tokyo International *Anime* Fair in 2002, chaired by Ishihara Shintarō, the governor of Tokyo Prefecture. The executive committee of the event remarked in *The Japan Times* that this fair was “started to publicize Japan’s animation to the rest of the world and promote the animation industry in Tokyo.”<sup>62</sup>

Ishihara is introduced in the article as a ferocious nationalist who stresses the superior

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<sup>60</sup> Darrel Hamamoto, “Introduction: On Asian American Film and Criticism,” in *Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism*, eds. Darrel Hamamoto and Sandra Liu (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Another governmental strategy for promoting *anime* as a national force can be seen in the new Education Ministry’s curriculum guidelines implemented in 2002. In the new guidelines, “visual media,” such as *manga* and *anime*, was introduced as a new subject in arts for improving students’ ability in the area of visual communication, which is seen as necessary for the purpose of “internationalization” (*kokusaika*), a goal the government has been emphasizing for the past fifteen years. See Ōtsuka and Ōsawa, pp. 193–4; also, the current curriculum guidelines by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

<sup>62</sup> Akemi Nakamura, “Curtain Rises on Tokyo International *Anime* Fair,” in *The Japan Times*, March 17, 2006: Weekend Scene 1.

“essence” of Japan, and, combined with the executive’s comment above, we get a glimpse of the government’s political intention to generate Japan’s national identity in relation to its “others.” Phenomena such as this highlight the close link between *anime* and cultural, economic (trade revenue), and political (cultural nationalism) domains.

Ishihara claims that “Japanese are inherently skilled at visual expression and detailed work,” and suggests that *anime* can work to push “Japan to stand up to the United States and assert its intrinsic superiority,”<sup>63</sup> explicitly highlighting his intention of positioning Japan in relation to the United States. Thus, while encouraging *anime* to appeal to a global audience, Ishihara’s view of “*kokusaika*” (internationalization) generates a polarization between Japan and the United States (the “West”), and assumes that Japan is recognized and demarcated only in opposition to, or based on recognition by, the United States. In this respect, *anime* as a cultural product contributes to Marilyn Ivy’s description of Japan’s “internationalization”—paradoxically a nationalistic project—which aims at “domestication of the foreign and dissemination of Japanese culture throughout the world.”<sup>64</sup>

In the meantime, this project is criticized by some who do not believe that the success of *anime* abroad can be attributed to Japan’s powerful “authentic” traditions. *Manga* critics Ōtsuka Eiji and Ōsawa Nobuaki, finding it dangerous to view *anime* as a reflection of “Japaneseness,” make the rather radical claim that *anime* is a mere

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<sup>63</sup> Virginia Heffernan, “The Award for Best Satanic Rabbit Goes...,” in *The New York Times*, April 2, 2006: Television 1.

<sup>64</sup> Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3. It should be noted, however, that the government’s policies on *anime* do not necessarily agree with those of actual creators of this medium. For example, an article in *The New York Times* on 2006’s Tokyo International *Anime* Fair mentions the attitude of *anime* creators, such as Sato Dai, who are indifferent to or critical of the government’s use of *anime* for Japan’s global expansion. (See Heffernan, “The Award for Best Satanic Rabbit Goes...”)

transformation or extension of Disney animation, and has no real Japanese roots.<sup>65</sup>

According to this perspective, it is not the Japanese aesthetic values embedded in *anime* that have been appreciated by a global audience, but rather the American aesthetic values in them. Taking a different tack, animator Takahata Isao repudiates the idea of *anime* as having purely Western origins, and insists that it has roots in twelfth-century Japanese picture scrolls.<sup>66</sup> Both observations are compelling to a certain degree; however, the origins of *anime* are too complex to attribute to a single source. As I will discuss further, all cultural forms are always already hybrid.

### **(3) *Anime* as text: issues of representation**

It is imperative, as mentioned above, to examine *anime* as a textual product capable of representing ideologically different kinds of narratives: those that reinforce dominant ideologies (in a manner similar to the Disney narratives mentioned above); and those that subvert dominant ideologies. Potential subversiveness can be observed in many *anime* products, effected mainly through parodic or otherwise “twisted” representations of gender/sex/sexuality, race, and nation. This is where this medium makes a great contrast to the ideologically “reassuring” tone of Hollywood or Disney conventions; as mentioned above, Napier calls *anime* a medium of “de-assurance.”<sup>67</sup> As she further argues, *anime* is the perfect vehicle to portray “the shifting nature of identity in a constantly changing society.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, a significant number of *anime* texts are equipped to potentially

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<sup>65</sup> Ōtsuka and Ōsawa, p. 8, p. 176. Similarly, Iwabuchi argues that what other Asian recipient countries experience through Japanese products like *anime* is “a highly materialistic Japanese version of the American original.” See Iwabuchi, p. 35.

<sup>66</sup> Takahata Isao, *Jūni-seiki no animēshon* (Animation of the Twelfth Century) (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1999), p. 54.

<sup>67</sup> Napier, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> Napier, p. 12.



destabilize the presumed concept of identity itself—especially in terms of the fixed categorization of racial/ethnic/national, and gender/sexual identities.

### 2.2.3. *Anime* and the (re)articulation of national/racial identity

Animation in general, and *anime* in particular, has embodied a greater potential for portraying “alternative” identities than many other nations that produce animation, partly because of Japan’s post-colonial positionality.

Cultural categorization becomes blurred in the *anime* space. Napier contends that *anime*’s distinctiveness prevents it from being “subsumed into global culture,”<sup>69</sup> but she also stresses the existence of “non-Japanesque,” non-culturally specific features of *anime* which typically appear in the science fiction genre. *Anime* characterized by a lack of cultural specificity is described by some critics with the term “*mukokuseki*” (statelessness),<sup>70</sup> which refers to the context-free space created within some *anime*, and is sometimes applied as well as to animators who seem unable to find national or ethnic roots (*furusato*) for themselves. According to Napier, the stateless fantasy space of this type of *anime* provides viewers with an experience of “postethnic identities.”<sup>71</sup> Napier’s concept of the “statelessness” of *anime* is applied mainly to the science fiction genre, because the setting of this genre is often in future cities that are impossible to identify as any specific nation or culture. I would like to add another aspect to Napier’s “postethnic”

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<sup>69</sup> Napier, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> Napier, p. 24. Kusanagi Satoshi is another critic who has commented on the “non-Japanesque” features of some *anime*, although he discusses primarily examples of Japanese animations in the 1960s (e.g. *Mad Monster Party* (1967), *Little Drummer Boy* (1968)), which were supposedly “co-productions” with an American company (Rankin-Bass Production) but practically Japanese animation studios worked under the American company’s control in the production process. See Kusanagi Satoshi, *America de nihon no anime wa dōmiraretekitaka?* (How has Japanese *Anime* been Seen in America?) (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten), pp. 90-97.

<sup>71</sup> Napier, p. 26.

nature of *anime*: culture boundary-crossing and hybridization of culture, which also make it impossible for viewers—both Japanese and non-Japanese—to locate the *anime* text within a specific culture or nation.<sup>72</sup> That is, what makes *anime* stateless is also how “race” is represented. In this respect, *anime* (of this kind) destabilizes the concept of cultural identity itself, although, as discussed later, *anime*’s statelessness also reveals a dark side that can draw on the opposite effect—creating an essentialist view of identity—through an Orientalist perspective.

Napier’s vision of stateless *anime* also reminds us of Kōichi Iwabuchi’s description of *anime* as a “culturally odorless” Japanese export, which therefore travels well, along with consumer electronics and computer games. I agree with Iwabuchi’s idea of *anime* as “odorless,” containing minimal bodily and racial specificities of Japan, to the extent that many *anime*, especially visually, depict people whose race/ethnicity is hard to identify. However, it is questionable to apply this idea to all *anime* works without analyzing messages pertaining to cultural identities in different genres of *anime* texts. While Iwabuchi’s study explicates the relationship between cultural globalization and national identity formation through media products, he neither elaborates what constitutes the “cultural odor” of contemporary Japan, nor provides insights into the messages potentially generated in actual *anime* texts. Since there are certainly many *anime* that present distinctively Japanese referents, it is crucial to examine actual texts in order to discuss how *anime* relates to the issue of cultural identity.

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<sup>72</sup> For example, in *Sailor Moon*, the protagonist has a Japanese name in the original Japanese version—a name that is a cultural reference that only makes sense to those who know Japanese culture, Tsukino Usagi—and clearly goes to a Japanese high school, wearing a typical-looking uniform as worn by many Japanese high school girls. But because she seems to have blond hair and generically Caucasian features, she is easily accepted outside Japan as being “white.” Many Western viewers are shocked when told that she is Japanese and lives in Japan. At the same time, Japanese viewers are so accustomed to seeing characters who are clearly meant to be Japanese depicted with blond or red or even green hair, and non-Asian facial features, that they have no trouble accepting that *Sailor Moon* is Japanese despite her appearance.

Another reason for the need for close textual analyses is the fact that “statelessness” is more complicated than merely the absence of ethnic/national boundaries. That is, while some aspects of “stateless” *anime* may offer a “postethnic” experience, as Napier proposes, other aspects may simultaneously re-inscribe national/cultural boundaries. Ueno Toshiya and Oshii Mamoru stress this side of the statelessness of *anime*, which they believe gives rise to a phenomenon known as “techno-Orientalism”<sup>73</sup>—another way of Orientalizing or othering Japan. The term “techno-Orientalism” was initially used by David Morley and Kevin Robins to explain that:

[t]he association of technology and Japaneseness now serves to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world.<sup>74</sup>

Oshii and Ueno apply this concept of “techno-Orientalism” to the reception of *anime* outside Japan, arguing that a number of works in the science fiction genre, such as *Akira*, *Ghost in the Shell*; *Innocence*; and *Evangelion*, are understood by non-Japanese viewers to depict Japan as a technological wonderland, or, more negatively, to depict Japanese people as emotionless Japanoid automata. *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence*, in particular, are not only set in context-free futuristic cities, but also present most of their characters as humanoid or cyborg (for instance, scenes showing the expressionless face of a human-looking character whose stomach is cut open to reveal machinery inside). While non-Japanese viewers may ostensibly celebrate Japan’s technological progress, the discourse

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<sup>73</sup> The concept of “techno-Orientalism” was introduced by David Morley and Kevin Robins in *Spaces of Identity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 169. Ueno applies this concept mainly to *anime*. See Toshiya Ueno, “Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism,” in *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture*, ed. Bruce Grenville (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), pp. 227-29.

<sup>74</sup> David Morley and Kevin Robins, p. 169.

of techno-Orientalism actually serves to “other” Japan and the Japanese, so that the West may construct a view of itself as embodying the (positive) qualities that Japan lacks.

A further significant point in Oshii and Ueno’s argument is that techno-Orientalism operates as a mirror stage, wherein the West not only constructs a fantasized Japan for its own purposes of self-definition, but the Japanese also misunderstand themselves and begin to believe in the fantasy.<sup>75</sup> In other words, as in the case of classic (Saidian) Orientalism, those produced as “Japanoid Other” in techno-Orientalist readings of *anime*—the Japanese—may begin to understand themselves through that definition, leading in turn to further self-Orientalizing. In this respect, Japan, even after its dramatic modernization and technological development, is still caught in the Orientalist mirror through both the Western Orientalization of Japan and Japan’s self-Orientalization based on the Western definition. This should not be misunderstood as an argument for the existence of a “real” Japan, but rather indicates again that how the Japanese identify themselves depends on the West’s perception of Japan.

In opposition to the critics who see *anime* as creating a non-Japanese fantasy space are many others (discussed in detail below and in later chapters) who see *anime* as reflecting a distinctive Japaneseness, and the existence of the disagreement between these two groups manifests Japan’s ambiguous and problematic national identity.

Due to many and complex factors involved in cultural identity formation sketched above, it is necessary to unpack the mechanisms of the articulation of cultural identities through this medium. This is accomplished by close examination of specific ways that national/ethnic identity is represented in specific *anime* narrative texts. This is a large part of my focus in later chapters.

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<sup>75</sup> Ueno, “Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism,” p. 229.

#### **2.2.4. The role of the “shōjo” in gender/sexual identity articulation and its evolution**

The issue of the (mis)representation of gender, often linked with representations of specific nationalities or races/ethnicities, has been studied considerably in the context of Disney animation, but *anime* has not yet been analyzed much in this light.

As introduced earlier in this chapter, the normative (mythologized) concepts of gender/sex can be interestingly subverted through visual representations that involve physical metamorphoses, which are more easily and effectively accomplished in animation than in any other visual medium. Physical metamorphosis is taken to the limit in the representation of characters' bodies in *anime* such as *Ranma ½* (*manga*: 1987-1996; TV: 1987-1996; film: 1991). The protagonist in this narrative, a boy named Ranma, is cursed when he falls into a magical spring in China. Thereafter, whenever his body is touched by cold water he transforms into a female, and whenever his body is touched by warm water, he turns back into a male. (His father, suffering from a similar curse, changes into a panda bear when touched by cold water, and reverts to human shape with warm water.) Ranma's constant transformations between male and female are sometimes inadvertent and embarrassing, and sometimes intentional, as Ranma uses his transformative abilities to further his own ends, such as spying on the girls in whom he is romantically interested. This *anime* poses a challenge to normative concepts of sex/gender in a number of ways (while also reinscribing some aspects of those normative concepts). For one thing, Ranma is frequently made to realize the ways in which girls are treated differently from boys solely because of social convention, rather than because of character or abilities. Viewers are therefore forced to consider the ramifications of their own embodiments in ways they might not otherwise have done, and to imagine what

alternative embodiments would be like. The target audience for (female *manga* artist) Takahashi Rumiko's original *Ranma 1/2 manga* was young adolescents, from about eight to thirteen years old. Both in Japan and abroad, however, the *anime* version of this narrative was particularly popular among boys, despite (or because of) the fact that it provides ideological "de-assurance" rather than Disney-esque reassurance regarding the stability and normalcy of sex/gender identities and social roles.<sup>76</sup>

There have been many popular Japanese *manga* and *anime* narratives that similarly challenged the monolithic nature of sex and social/cultural gender through characters' bodies, such as Tezuka Osamu's *Ribon no kishi* (*Princess Knight*, *manga* serialized in 1954-1968; TV *anime* in 1967), discussed below, Yamauchi Naomi's *Za Chenji* (*The Change*, *manga* serialized from 1986), *Sutoppu!! Hibari-kun* (*Stop!! Hibari*, *manga* serialized from 1981, also made into a TV *anime* series), Naka Tomoko's *Guriin bōi II* (*Green Boy II*, *manga* serialized from 1990), as well as countless others.<sup>77</sup>

Another characteristic of gender representation in *anime* can be observed in a shift in (re)presentations of the "shōjo" (literally, a young girl), corresponding to shifts in social expectations and perceptions over time. According to the *Sanseidō Japanese Dictionary*, "shōjo" are defined as young girls from around ten to sixteen or seventeen years old; however, this term signifies far more than its literal definition. "Shōjo" is a cultural construct. It emerged in the early twentieth century along with the establishment of girls' boarding schools, magazines and other media targeted explicitly at girls, and other

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<sup>76</sup> Film scholar Robin Wood calls the dominant tone of most Hollywood films a cinema of "reassurance." Robin Wood, "Papering the Cracks: Fantasy and Ideology in the Regan Era," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 206; Also for more on the liminality seen for instance in the transgender theme of *Ranma 1/2*, see Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, p. 13 and p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> For more information about the exact nature of the sex/gender subversion in each of these narratives, see Yukari Fujimoto, "Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynies," trans. Linda Flores and Kazumi Nagaike in *The U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 27 (2004), pp. 76-117.

innovations, almost all of which were for the purpose of producing “good wives and wise mothers” for the benefit of the state. In other words, the idea of “shōjo” was originally conceptualized as part of a constellation of efforts to confine female sexuality and to emphasize the conservative gender demarcation between “feminine” and “masculine.” The “shōjo” culture created at that time reflected a new understanding of the typical life stages for females, simultaneously recognizing and giving rise to “a period in life when a female was neither naïve child nor sexually active woman.”<sup>78</sup> In contemporary society, “shōjo” symbolizes “a state of being that is socially unanchored, free of responsibility and self-absorbed—the opposite of the ideal Japanese adult.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, the term “shōjo” has mutated over time to reflect current social expectations.

Coupled with the dramatic growth of Japanese popular culture and consumerism since the 1980s, the image of the “shōjo” presented through media representations has been used to associate women with “emptiness,”<sup>80</sup> or to eroticize them as the object of male sexual desire. This image of the “shōjo” symbolizes as an innocent, pure, but passive and “toy-like being.”<sup>81</sup> Such representations are constructed within a phallogentric discourse, and feature images of “shōjo” who cannot speak for themselves and make no claims to true subjectivity.

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<sup>78</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Shōjo,” in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, ed. Sandra Buckley (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 458-59. About the birth of the “shōjo,” see Horikiri Naoto, “Onna wa dokyō, shōjo wa aikyō” (Courage for Women, Charm for Girls), in *Shōjoron* (Theory of Shōjo), eds. Honda Masuko et al. (Tokyo: Aoyumisha, 1991), p. 109. For more on the development of the concept of “shōjo,” see Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin Babes: the Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture,” in *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, eds. Norman Bryson, Maribeth Graybill and Joshua Mostow (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), pp. 200-228.

<sup>79</sup> Orbaugh, “Shōjo,” in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Japanese Culture*, pp. 458-59.

<sup>80</sup> John W. Treat, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: The Shōjo in Japanese Popular Culture,” in *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, ed. John W. Treat (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), p. 301.

<sup>81</sup> This phrase is used by Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, and which is quoted by Iizawa Kōtarō’s article, “Shashin, shōjo, korekushon” (Photos, Shōjo, Collection), in *Shōjoron*, pp. 40-41.

Hence, the concept of the “shōjo” draws on the established notion of girlhood in which she transitions into a woman who meets the patriarchal social expectation of “a good wife and wise mother”—a notion that continues to have force even today. Yet, at the same time, postwar popular visual media such as *manga* and *anime* play with the concept of the “shōjo” through unusual visual and narrative representations, deconstructing the patriarchal perception of gender/sexual identity and providing resources for alternative identity articulation models. What follows sketches out the evolution of one subversive stream of *anime* from the 1960s to the 1990s, which uses depictions of “shōjo” or “shōjo-ness” to gradually alter traditional gender models. Deeper discussions of the depictions of “shōjo” and their implications for the way girls (and boys) form a gender identity partly through their consumption of popular culture can be found in later chapters.

*Anime* intended specifically for girls, known as “shōjo *anime*,” originated in the late 1960s and 1970s. In its early years shōjo *anime* was created mostly by men, and despite some tinkering with traditional gender rules, it generally presented gender according to patriarchal models. Even in Tezuka Osamu’s playful *Ribbon no kishi* (*Ribbon Knight*), in which the shōjo protagonist dresses as a boy, fights to defend her kingdom, and has both a female and male “heart,” the narrative ends with the protagonist giving up her male persona to enjoy happiness in the traditional role of wife and mother.

From about the 1980s, and especially as more women became active as writers of the *manga* on which many *anime* are based, the representation of the “shōjo” began to change dramatically, playing a key role in the subversion of conventional concepts of gender/sexual identity. This change is indicative of conscious attempts to deconstruct the patriarchal, heteronormative discourse of gender/sex through popular visual texts.



# **(1) The 1960s and the 1970s: Carnival 1~ the birth of female heroes<sup>82</sup>**

Educated, middle-class daughters of Japan's upwardly mobile urban families initiated what many Japanese women describe as the "radical" or "revolutionary" phase of the women's movement from 1970 to 1977. ...women's groups in this period analyzed the inadequacy of Marxist analysis for feminist revolution, published critiques of the "myth of motherhood," and published radical essays.<sup>83</sup>

In 1966, the first girls' *anime*, *Mahōtsukai Sally* (*Little Witch Sally*), debuted on Japanese TV. Until then, the protagonists in *anime* had always been male, and female viewers had no choice but to identify with the passive female figures who were always secondary to the main narrative, or to identify with the active male protagonists, if they wished to access power. In the 1960s and 70s, female heroes increasingly appeared on screen, especially in the form of magical girls—the aforementioned *Mahōtsukai Sally*, followed by *Himitsu no Akko-chan* (*Little Secret Girl Akko*) in 1969, and *Majokko Megu* (*Witch Meg*) in 1974.

ほうきに乘って やってきた ちょっとおちゃめな お姫さま  
サリー サリー 魔法の言葉をとなえると 愛と希望が とびだすの  
サリー サリー 魔法使いサリー

She is a charming princess riding on a magic broom.  
Sally Sally, Once she says a magic word, love and hope emerge  
Sally Sally, little witch Sally (from the theme song of *Little Witch Sally* in 1966, my translation)

シンデレラ姫が現われた ツンツンツン それはだあれ  
それはひみつ ひみつ ひみつ ひみつのアッコちゃん

Princess Cinderella has appeared. Who is she?  
She is a little secret girl, Akko.  
(from the theme song of *Little Secret Girl Akko* in 1969, my translation)

<sup>82</sup> I use the term "carnival," borrowing Bakhtin's concept, to signify the early hints of subversiveness shown by some female heroes.

<sup>83</sup> Sharon Sievers, "Women in China, Japan, and Korea," in *Women in Asia: Restoring Women to History*, eds. Barbara N. Ramusack and Sharon Sievers (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 230.

ふたつのむねのふくらみは なんでもできるしょうこなの  
おけしょうなんかはしなくても あなたはわたしにもうむちゅう  
しんじゅのなみだをうかべたら 男の子なんていちころよ  
My breasts make anything I want possible.  
Without make-up, you are crazy for me.  
My tears can make boys instantly crazy for me.  
(from the theme song of *Witch Meg* in 1974, my translation)

Eleven-year-old Sally and fifteen-year-old Meg are princesses in magical kingdoms who, by order of their fathers, descend to the human world where they not only learn about magic but also gain maturity through human interactions in daily life. While there are slight differences in the scenarios of *Sally*, *Akko*, and *Meg*, the magic that the protagonists use in each is inherently or accidentally given, and they can solve problems with their magic, just as simply as *Sally*'s theme song implies: "once she says the magic words, love and hope emerge." These three girls show how "shōjo" can be protagonists—at least as long as they have charm and magical power, as implied in the lyrics of each theme song.

The image of "shōjo" represented by these girls still adheres to conventional gender categorizations. In terms of both narrative and visual depictions, Sally, Akko, and Meg exhibit the epitome of traditional femininity, as quintessentially represented in the "Cinderella" story. For instance, all of them have big starry eyes and girlishly innocent voices, and care about how they look to others. The depiction of Meg's body, particularly her breasts and frequently shown underwear, present her as a sexualized object. At the same time, the theme song (Meg says: "My breasts make anything I want possible") indicates her intention of accessing power through her sexuality, not just through her magic. While this could be interpreted as a young woman proactively using male desire to promote her own goals, and therefore could be seen as (third-wave) feminist, it could just

as readily be argued that Meg is simply representative of the trend of presenting sexualized female bodies to be consumed by a male gaze—whether it is the gaze of the creators, the characters on the screen, or the viewers.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, within each narrative, the father exists as the absolute authority who keeps the magical girls under control. Hence, the magical girls in this phase generally articulate a passive image of the “shōjo,” still constrained within the phallogentric code of sexuality and patriarchal social systems.

## **(2) The 1980s: Carnival 2~ the birth of androgynous female warriors**

By the 1980s, many universities and colleges in Japan were offering courses in Women’s Studies, resulting in a boom in published academic research on women as well.<sup>85</sup> At the same time, gender representation in *anime* underwent a significant change with the emergence of the “flying shōjo heroes” found in many of the films of Miyazaki Hayao. Miyazaki’s shōjo heroes attest to the fact that girls can become not only protagonists but also warriors who fight for justice on a large scale, and they do so without inherited magical power. This type of shōjo protagonist is exemplified by “princess” Nausicaä in Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (manga serialized in 1982-1994, animated film in 1984) and “princess” San (in *Princess Mononoke*, 1997), with their adeptness at piloting flying machines (in the case of the former) and ruthlessness in killing enemies (in both works). They signify a new image of “shōjo” that embodies conventional “masculine” attributes.

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<sup>84</sup> This view is taken from Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). He identifies three sources which form these looks in cinema, which are mainly male’s: the instrument projecting the images (creators), the characters who shape part of the imagery, and spectators who watch the images.

<sup>85</sup> Mioko Fujieda and Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, “Women’s Studies: An Overview,” in *Japanese women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow and Atsuko Kameda (New York: The Feminist Press, 1995), pp. 155-73.

Moreover, some critics see the way these female heroes are depicted as asexual and/or androgynous: their bodies are far from being depicted as objects of sexual desire,<sup>86</sup> and their primary charm does not arise from their “femininity,” unlike the magical girls in the previous phase. For example, Kiki (in *Kiki’s Delivery Service*) can be seen as a young female figure who is free from “sexual darkness”; Kiki’s power and her ability to fly are acquired through perseverance and increasing self-confidence, and the notion of girls’ power as magic that has to be hidden is defamiliarized and demystified. I will discuss Miyazaki’s depiction of shōjo protagonists at greater length in subsequent chapters.

### **(3) The 1990s onward: Carnival 3~ the possibility of sexual and heroic girls**

The long-legged teenager [Sailor Moon] is the first female to become a cartoon superhero in her own right--in contrast to ...*Supergirl* or the female *Morphin Rangers*, who were copied from male stars. In Japan and all over the world, women are assuming more and more positions of power in society. They don’t want to be discriminated against as soft or gentle...Sailor Moon is a role model for that type of girl.<sup>87</sup>

*Sailor Moon* was very popular through the 1990s in both Japan and internationally. This is a story about a 14-year-old girl named Tsukino Usagi (literally Moon Rabbit; Serena in the English version); she is given magical tools and power, with which she transforms into the sailor-suited soldier called Sailor Moon, to fight evil forces with three other female “sailor scouts.” This *anime*, introducing a girls-only fighting team, illustrates girls’ double longing to be desired and to become powerful, which is signified by the title *Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon* (Beautiful Girl Soldier Sailor Moon). In the previous phase,

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<sup>86</sup> Murase Hiromi, *Feminizumu sabukaruchā hihyō sengen* (Feminism Subculture Critic Manifesto) (Tokyo: Shunjyūsha, 2000), pp. 53-58

<sup>87</sup> T.R. Reid, “Move Over, Morphins, Sailor Moon is Coming,” in *Washington Post* (July 22, 1995): A16. It must be acknowledged that there are a significant number of previous female superheroes in Japanese popular culture.

princess Nausicaä was able to become a warrior, but to do so she had to suppress her sexuality because a warrior cannot manifest a sexual body. That is, in Nausicaä the association of masculinity with a heroic warrior and femininity with a passive princess is still maintained. In contrast, *Sailor Moon* challenges the mutual exclusiveness between masculinity and femininity, and posits a female character who can fight without giving up the liberation of her (hetero)sexuality. Some viewers of *Sailor Moon* might argue that she is still presented as an object of desire for the heterosexual male gaze, especially given her suggested/suggestive nakedness in the transformation sequences, and the frequent views of her underwear, and in fact, *Sailor Moon* figurines and other “character goods” are popular among male buyers in Japan. But other viewers would no doubt argue that the female writer who created *Sailor Moon*, Takeuchi Naoko, intended to present a liberated shōjo protagonist who can be both strong and have romantic/sexual love.

Another radical change in gender representation can be seen in *Cardcaptor Sakura* (TV *anime*: 1996-2000; animated film: 1998). This show was created by a group of four female animators who go by the name of CLAMP. Sakura, the show’s nine-year-old girl protagonist, represents one aspect of traditional “femininity”—signified by her romantic interest in a high school boy as well as her “girlish” costumes. However, traditional models of “femininity” are constantly mocked in this show through the characterization of Tomoyo, a friend of Sakura’s, who presents exaggerated ultra-feminine body movements and over-polite speech.

*Cardcaptor Sakura* features a more radical subversion of the “normative” gender/sexual representation through destabilizing the conventional notion of the female body as the object of male desire and the male gaze. Instead of male characters gazing lustfully at Sakura, it is Tomoyo who acts as if she were a stalker, obsessed romantically

and erotically with Sakura; she videotapes all of Sakura's actions, and enjoys watching Sakura on-screen afterward. Tomoyo also takes pleasure in sewing Lolita-like fantasy costumes for Sakura, and watching Sakura putting them on. In this respect, Sakura is Tomoyo's *kisekae ningyo* (dress-up doll)—the object of desire and the object of her consuming gaze. Tomoyo's behavior overthrows the convention of a male as the looker and the female as the looked-at. This depiction of "shōjo" destabilizes the typical male-dominant power dynamic and problematizes the mechanism of heteronormativity.<sup>88</sup>

Sailor Moon and Sakura embody the idea that female sexuality does not have to be repressed or imposed by males. Differently put, the "shōjo" as represented by these female heroes provides an alternative for female identity, an alternative that does not require girls to identify with passivity. They represent "femininities" instead of "femininity," and play a significant role in female empowerment by undermining some aspects of the hegemonic concept of gender and sexuality.

### **Princess Mononoke: a wild princess**

As discussed above, the notion of "princess" gradually changed after the 1970s, and *Princess Mononoke* (1997) furthers changes into what I call a "wild princess," a term that sounds like an oxymoron. In this film, the protagonist San—a "princess" raised by a wolf—completely contradicts the traditional (Disneyesque) notion of "princess," and instead provides a new model of "shōjo-ness," a girl who can become violent and even turn against others jumping from rooftop to rooftop carrying a dagger intended for her archenemy. Another challenge to a typical "princess story" is that the evident love

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<sup>88</sup> In addition, the unconventionality of this show is further highlighted by the fact that it is broadcast by NHK, which is otherwise known as the most conservative national TV station in terms of programming content.

between San and the male co-protagonist Ashitaka does not result in their marriage in the end; the usual “happily ever after” Disney ending. Instead, the two go off to live in separate worlds—Ashitaka in the world of humans and San in the world of the forest. Chapter 5 further discusses the way gender is interestingly represented in this *anime*.

### **Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040: female heroes in mecha-suits**

In *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (TV *anime* in 1998-1999, directed by Hayashi Hiroki), female characters occupy positions of power. What is novel about this *anime* is that the female heroes wear mecha-suits, conventionally considered symbols of “masculinity” in earlier *anime*.<sup>89</sup> While the female characters in the show are older than the “shōjo” introduced above, this new model of female heroes also contributed to a significant change in female representation in *anime* from the 1990s and onward. This science fiction subgenre, characterized by females in robotic suits, became markedly popular in this phase in examples such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*manga* serialized from 1994 by Sadamoto Yoshiyuki, TV *anime* in 1995 by Gainax) and *Appleseed* (*manga* series in 1985 by Masamune Shiro, the film in 2004 directed by Aramaki Shinji). Just as in the case of *Sailor Moon*, it is still open to debate whether the female depictions in *Bubblegum* indicate women’s empowerment or disempowerment, considering that the mecha-suits and other aspects of their depiction accentuate their body lines, and therefore they may act as a sexualizing spectacle for males. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that

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<sup>89</sup> Mecha-suits, typically appearing in SF and cyborg genres of *anime*, are human-shaped powered armor suits, which were pioneered by the *Gundam* series in 1970s where human pilots (typically men) in a huge robot fights interstellar battles. These suits are usually worn as vehicles or weapons by the protagonists to fight battles. In *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, unlike a robot-type seen in *Gundam*, mecha-suits are fitting, and worn by female protagonists. See Napier, *Anime from Akira*, p. xv, and Ueno Toshiya, *Kurenai no metarusutsu* (Mataisuits, the Red: Wars in Animation) (Tokyo: Kinokuniya shoten, 1998), p. 15 and p. 125.

female heroes in this subgenre shed light on the possibility of conceptualizing women as being as powerful and technologically savvy as men.

### 2.3. *Anime* as an “Other(’s)” Cultural Form

As discussed above, animation is by nature a subversive medium of expression that potentially aids in questioning essentialist identity categorizations maintained in the dominant discourse of the West. Nonetheless, white phallogocentric myths sustained by the powerful Disney Empire and others without doubt consistently prevail among a global audience.

Based on the observations in this chapter, the elements that make *anime* distinct from animation do not lie simply in style: *anime*’s increasing global popularity arises also from its unraveling of time-honored archetypal Western conventions of animation aesthetics, particularly in terms of gender and national representations. I examine specific aspects of gender and national representation in later chapters, in the context of specific *anime* texts. Also important is the fact that *anime*, allegedly a hybrid of Western and Japanese (or other Asian) media forms, has become recognized as a mature cultural form in its own right, and as a medium “other” to its American counterpart, despite some similarities between them. As a cultural form that is produced in Japan, a country considered an “Other” by and to the West, *anime* also plays a key role in challenging the still persistent American cultural hegemony that reigns in global popular culture, in both economic and ideological terms.



### **Chapter 3: Miyazaki Hayao's Philosophy of Animation Aesthetics**

*My view of anime is an imaginary space that can be achieved only by this medium, not by comics, children's literature, or live-action film.<sup>1</sup>*

—Miyazaki Hayao

While acknowledging that the meanings of media texts are bound to the socio-cultural discourse of their time and place of production, it is unrealistic to study film texts as completely independent of creators (and others involved in the creative process), because directors such as Walt Disney (and his successors) and Miyazaki Hayao have significant control as auteurs throughout the creative production. Thus, if a director produces a body of texts that display a consistent style and a consistent set of themes, it is reasonable to assume that those texts reflect something about the director's (auteur's) worldview, which is in turn rooted in his or her experiences and beliefs from childhood on. This emphasizes the director's agency, but does not deny the agency of the viewers. Nonetheless, my study looks at animated narratives by auteurs, which, allowing a certain level of viewer activation, demonstrate their producers' creativity and intentions more explicitly than "a viewer-based creativity."<sup>2</sup>

Without resorting completely to an auteur study of Miyazaki, in this chapter I will discuss his formal and narrative style, as well as the philosophical influences that underpin that style, in order to give a context to the textual analysis of the following chapters.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten* (Starting Point) (Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, 1996), pp. 42-44. My translation.

<sup>2</sup> Torben Grodal, "Agency in Film, Filmmaking, and Reception," in *Visual Authorship: Creativity and Intentionality in Media*, eds. Torben Grodal, Bente Larsen, Ibsen Throwing Laursen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2004), p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> The term "auteur" means "author." Auteur studies, focusing on the creator of a film rather than other aspects of its production, distribution, or narrative content, was popular among film scholars in the 1960s, and continues to be an important stream of cinema criticism. One of the key concepts of this theory relevant to my research is that a director's film reflects his or her creative vision.

Miyazaki is famous for involving himself in every step of the production process to command control over the vision, working as a story-writer, animator, director, and producer for many of his works, as well as other films made by other directors under the Studio Ghibli banner.

Miyazaki has often been called the Walt Disney of Japan by film critics, and both directors can be classified as globally-recognized auteurs, yet Miyazaki's approach to fantasy and his worldview are significantly different from Disney's.<sup>4</sup> Miyazaki occupies an interesting position in the history of both animation and *anime*, not only because he introduced new aesthetics of animation that differs from both Disney and from other globally exported Japanese *anime*, but also because his works have given rise to a perception of animation as a mature art form, both domestically and internationally. Having received the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2002, and the award for Best Animated Feature at the 75<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards in 2003, Miyazaki Hayao's *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*, released 2001 in Japan, 2002 in the U.S.) brought *anime* to a new level of respectability internationally. In the U.S., the total box office gross of *Spirited Away* topped \$10,055,000. Also, according to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), this *anime* is ranked number 54 among the top films from all over the world, and number one in the animated film category.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter is concerned with Miyazaki's philosophy of animation and his worldview, as demonstrated in his work, his interviews, and inferred from information about his background. It particularly focuses on his conscious self-positioning in

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<sup>4</sup> Although Walt Disney died in 1966, his legacy has been carried on up to the present by The Walt Disney Company, including Walt Disney Pictures, which makes the animated films for which Disney is most famous.

<sup>5</sup> The IMDB keeps a listing of the top rated 250 films, based on ratings by the registered users of the website using the methods described there. Over 1300 theatrically released films are considered.

opposition to Disney and also to other types of *anime*. A comparison of the approaches taken by Miyazaki and Disney not only identifies some distinctive characteristics of Miyazaki's *anime*, but may also reflect his view of Japan in relation to its "others," both Western and Asian.

### 3.1. The Foundation of Miyazaki's Fantasy

It is fascinating to speculate about how much Miyazaki's personal background is woven into his narratives, ranging from his experience of the war to his vision of globalization. He was born in Tokyo in 1941, in the middle of what the Japanese call the Fifteen-Year War (from 1931, with Japan's invasion of China, to 1945, the end of World War II). Between 1944 and 1946, the Miyazaki family took refuge in Tochigi Prefecture, which kept his family from becoming victims of the relentless bombings of Tokyo.<sup>6</sup> What seems to have influenced his view of technology most is the fact that Hayao's father, Miyazaki Katsuji, was the director of Miyazaki Airplane Company, which made rudders for the Zero fighter planes used by the Japanese troops, including the suicide corps ("kamikaze"), during the Second World War. It is not too farfetched to speculate that coming to terms with the sense of guilt over his family's active involvement in the war led to the filmmaker positioning himself as a pacifist. He articulates his perception of the war through his *anime* characters, such as the mentally struggling ex-soldier in *Kurenai no buta* (*Porco Rosso*, 1992), and through his unorthodox representation of weapons of war in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (*Kaze no tani no Nausicaä*, 1984) and the

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<sup>6</sup> By the end of World War Two, Tokyo had lost over 65% of its residential buildings to fires caused by incendiary bombs. In one night alone, March 9-10, 1945, over 2000 tons of incendiaries were dropped on the city, leaving at least 80,000 people dead and untold numbers homeless. Over the course of the war approximately one million Japanese civilians were killed, a large percentage of them in Tokyo. See Orbaugh, *Japanese Fiction of the Allied Occupation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 29-31.

“production of weapons as jobs for the unfortunate” message in *Mononoke hime* (*Princess Mononoke*, 1997). These examples will be illustrated in greater detail in later chapters.

From 1947 to 1955, during his elementary school days, Miyazaki’s mother was sick in bed with spinal tuberculosis. The experience of his mother’s sickness and her absence is to some extent integrated into *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbour Totoro*, 1988). Set in the countryside (Saitama Prefecture, where Miyazaki lived after getting married) in 1950s Japan, this is a story of two sisters who find a way to grow up without their ailing mother, and experience a fantastic encounter with nature. These girls may embody Miyazaki’s own childhood experiences and feelings, as well as his own early adult life in Saitama.

Miyazaki’s interest in the world of animation and children’s media started in the late 1950s, when he was a senior high school student. He saw Japan’s first feature-length color *anime*, *Hakujaden* (The Legend of the White Serpent) (1958) directed by Yabushita Taiji for Toei Dōga,<sup>7</sup> and through it he became fascinated with the power of animation. And it was when he watched the Russian animated film *Snow Queen* (1957) that he finally decided to dedicate his life to animation.<sup>8</sup> At Gakushūin University, he joined the children’s literature research club.<sup>9</sup> He graduated from the university with degrees in political science and economics, and then started working at Tōei Animation in 1963. Soon after joining Tōei, Miyazaki led demonstrating animators in a union dispute, and the following year he became the Chief Secretary of the company’s labor union. These events

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<sup>7</sup> *Hakujaden* is a story of romance between a girl, who is an incarnation of a white snake, and a young boy who helped her in the past. It presents the strength of their love, which overcomes any obstacles or interference put in their path. Miyazaki fell in love with the heroine for her dedicated passion to her loved one. See Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> Though acknowledging that the story of *Snow Queen* itself was quite ordinary (the lonely and powerful Snow Queen kidnaps a boy and his best female friend rescues him, despite many obstacles on her journey), Miyazaki claims to have been impressed by the characters’ passion that came through in the drawings.

<sup>9</sup> Many clubs at Japanese universities are very serious and require large commitments of time and effort.

both reflected and furthered his political conscience. (His generally critical view of materialistic capitalism is explicitly demonstrated in the themes of some of his films, such as *Spirited Away*.) In the following year, he helped the production team on *Taiyō no ōji Horusu no daibōken* (The Adventures of Prince of the Sun Horusu) (1968).

Around this time, Miyazaki married Ōta Akemi, who was working as a key animator on *The Adventures of Prince of the Sun Horusu*. Their first son, Gorō, was born in 1967,<sup>10</sup> and in the following year, the Miyazakis moved to Saitama, a neighbouring prefecture of Tokyo.

In 1971 Miyazaki left Tōei Animation and joined Takahata Isao (his future partner at Ghibli Studio) and Ōtobe Yoichi at A-Production. Seven years later, *Lupin III: The Castle of the Cagliostro* (*Lupan: kariostoro no shiro*) the first *anime* Miyazaki directed, debuted on television, and was made into a theatrical feature in the following year. In 1983, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* was released. More than any of his previous works, *Nausicaä* launched him as an animator on the world stage.

The year 1985 was critical for Miyazaki in achieving his current status as an animator and a director. Studio Ghibli was established with funds from Tokuma Shoten, the publishing company that released the *manga* version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (also by Miyazaki).<sup>11</sup> From this year onward, Miyazaki started traveling to Europe as well as within Japan in order to gather inspiration for his later works. He took a trip to Wales, for example, to prepare him to make the studio's first film, *Laputa: Castle in the*

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<sup>10</sup> Miyazaki Gorō is the director of the animated film, *Gedo Senki* (Tales of Earthsea) (2006) by Studio Ghibli.

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki Toshio, the manager of Tokuma Shoten, Takahata Isao, and Miyazaki are the directors of Ghibli Studio. Miyazaki chose the name "Ghibli," which in Italian has two meanings: a wind blowing from the Sahara; and the name of a model of Italian airplane that was used during World War II. According to Suzuki, the name signifies Miyazaki's determination: "Let's blow a sensational wind through the Japanese animation world." (Margaret Talbot, "The Auteur of *Anime*: A Visit with the Elusive Genius Hayao Miyazaki," in *The New Yorker*, January 17, 2005, p. 72.).

*Sky (Tenkū no shiro Laputa, 1986)*, which was seen by about 775,000 viewers in its first year alone.<sup>12</sup> The studio produced two feature-length *anime* releases in 1988: *My Neighbour Totoro* and *Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no haka)*. Although the studio's three directors (Miyazaki, Takahata, Suzuki) and others were reluctant to embrace the idea of selling ancillary merchandise along with the *anime* release, in reality, product spin-offs of Ghibli's *anime*, especially from *Totoro*, brought in a significant amount of revenue for the studio and helped to cover production costs.<sup>13</sup>

In 1989, Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli released *Kiki's Delivery Service (Majo no takyūbin)*, which became the number one box office attraction among Japanese films released that year. This not only brought in a significant amount of revenue to finance the studio's next *anime* production, but also allowed the studio to expand and help with more technologically sophisticated production of animation, including digital techniques.

### 3.2. Miyazaki's Aesthetics (1): what is *anime* to him?

Miyazaki describes the function of *anime* as “filling in our sense of emptiness” or “substituting for what is lost” in our life.<sup>14</sup> One could conclude that this outlook is the result of witnessing Japan's dramatic growth into a materially affluent nation after its defeat in the war. What Miyazaki considers to have been lost includes humans' attachment to nature, sensitivity to the minutia of everyday life, and a willingness to understand the world around us. For this reason, Miyazaki does not appreciate the recent forays into virtual reality or video games that simply create an alternate reality to make the

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<sup>12</sup> Dani Cavallaro, *The Anime Art of Hayao Miyazaki* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006), p 41.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Also, see Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 78.

<sup>14</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, pp. 42-44. My translation.

audience oblivious to issues in the real world.<sup>15</sup> In *Princess Mononoke*, for instance, he articulates this vision through words spoken by the old shaman in the village: “*kumorinaki me de misadameru naraba, aruiwa sono noroi wo tatsu michi ga mitsukaru kamoshiren*” (If you look hard at the world with unclouded eyes, you might be able to lift the curse that is upon you [or you will find a way out of the problem]). This is the way in which Miyazaki hopes to encourage his audience to approach problems in the world—with eyes “unclouded” by fear or illusion.

As stated in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, to Miyazaki, *anime* is a drama through which he communicates his worldview. In doing so, instead of reducing animation to simplistic and sanitized children’s entertainment, which, according to Miyazaki, Disney does,<sup>16</sup> he attempts to present complex matters in a comprehensible manner. This is because, to him, “childhood” should not be a time when children are simply protected, but it should instead be a time when they are exposed to reality, so that they will be able to take on the challenges that await them later in life. This idea may originate in his own childhood, which had its share of struggles (such as his family’s involvement in the war, and the absence of his mother due to illness).

### **Animated fantasy for children: the concept of “childhood”**

While some say that Miyazaki’s *anime* is not for children because of its complexity and depth, Miyazaki consistently stresses that his target audience is ten-year-old children, because that is the age when children start thinking about how they want the

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<sup>15</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, pp. 102-13.

<sup>16</sup> Miyazaki Hayao often expresses his dislike of Disney’s animation. See, Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi: *Nihon no san’in no enshutsuka* (Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi: *Three Japanese Directors*), eds. Saitō Makoto, Ikeno Jakkyū, and Takebayashi Shōko (Tokyo: Rockin’ On, 1993), p. 132-33.

world to be.<sup>17</sup> In fact, many of his works are coming-of-age stories. In this respect, Miyazaki's work resembles much of Disney's: they are both primarily targeting child viewers. However, there is a significant difference between the two in terms of their conceptualization of "childhood," which surfaces through their narratives and imagistic representations.

Since his encounter with *Hakujaden* in childhood, Miyazaki has never taken popular media lightly. Instead, he contends that the role of popular media such as *anime* should be:

to make it possible for the audience to get energy to go through reality, by letting them release repression from their daily lives and offering them a space where they can discover aspirations, innocence, and self-assurance inside themselves.<sup>18</sup>

The concept of "childhood" to Miyazaki is not associated so much with protection as with energy for survival: children's media does not necessarily require dumbing down the text to appeal to the masses. Rather than simplifying and sanitizing the text, he attempts to create a fictional sphere anchored in reality, which is filled with the messiness and ambiguity of human nature. This fantasy is meant to encourage children to live up to challenges without falling into simplistic nihilism or escapism, despite the bleakness of some aspects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The term "innocence" in the above quote, however, reminds us of the world of Disney. While these two studios offer a different fantasy experience to viewers, they both

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<sup>17</sup> In his book, Miyazaki states that even if he were to change his target audience, his focus is always on children. See *Shupatsuuten*, p. 123. Also, he says that he has no intention of making animation for adult audiences, in the interview with Rockin' On Inc. (See. *Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi: Nihon no san'nin no enshutsuka*, p. 116.)

<sup>18</sup> Miyazaki, *Shupatsuuten*, p. 102. My translation.



attempt to bring back a sense of “innocence” that seems to have been lost, and which the medium of animation can more effectively manifest than other media. This suggests that, whether animation is used as a means of escapism or as an energy source for facing reality, “innocence” or the willingness to accept things is an element that both studios value in childhood (and for life).

Miyazaki’s message above is often explicit in his narratives, and is verbally articulated on the promotional poster of *Princess Mononoke*, reading: “生きろ (Live!).” Miyazaki’s fantasy attempts to maintain a realism that deals with what it is to live—fear and joy. He lays bare this point in an interview:

I would say, ‘if you don’t want to deal with life or death, don’t bring your children.’ I drew Princess Mononoke with her mouth covered in blood. It is wrong to interpret blood as a representation of terror, because blood is a proof of life...<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the following remark encapsulates his view of fantasy for children, questioning the escapist view of fantasy:

... It is no use expressing groundless hope in films—having them assure a bright future. Yet this does not mean that life is not worth struggling for. Some films tend to construct “hope” in order to mask reality, especially when society is depressed... I would never think that films should always provide hope for the audience.<sup>20</sup>

Miyazaki’s approach to children’s media intends not only to inspire his audience to face a brutal reality, but also to make them realize their potential and help them release it

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<sup>19</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, *Kaze no kaeru basho: nausicaa kara chihiro made no kiseki* (Where the Wind Returns: the Trajectory from Nausicaä to Chihiro) (Tokyo: Rockin’ On Inc., 2002), p. 174. My translation.

<sup>20</sup> Kanō Seiji, “Miyazaki Hayao intabyū: eiga ga itsumo kibō wo kataranakerebaikenai nante omowanai” (Miyazaki Hayao Interview: I Do not Think Films should Talk about Hope). This interview is originally included in *TECH WIN* Special Issue/VIDEO DOO! Vol. 1 (October, 1997). ([http://www.yk.rim.or.jp/~rst/rabo/miyazaki/miyazaki\\_inter.html](http://www.yk.rim.or.jp/~rst/rabo/miyazaki/miyazaki_inter.html)) (accessed on December 7, 2005) My translation.

through the power of fantasy. Thus, for example, Miyazaki does not see death and blood as offensive to his audience, because his educational point is to teach children of the pain and struggle which they will need to overcome in life. This view of “childhood” is also supported by Japanese clinician Yamanaka Yasuhiro, who acclaims Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* as a source that may return energy back to today’s children, who lack energy and ambition, he claims, because they have been overprotected from the reality of unpleasant and complicated issues such as life and death.<sup>21</sup>

Based on his philosophy of “realistic” fantasy, Miyazaki does not produce narratives that produce a predictable happy ending, but instead develops a protagonist who has to cope with reality, which “will be filled with eczema or AIDS patients, with the world population exploding. In this environment, we still have to go on,” because “our only choice is to keep living while making the same mistakes over and over.”<sup>22</sup>

From all these aspects it can be seen that Miyazaki’s conceptualization of “childhood” contrasts with the understanding of the term commonly embraced in contemporary North America—a phase of life that needs to be sheltered from the dark side of reality—which is manifested and maintained particularly through Walt Disney’s legacy of fantasy. Positioning himself explicitly in opposition to Disney, Miyazaki stresses this contrast:

Media products should have mass appeal but, simultaneously, they should intellectually stimulate the audience. I dislike Disney animation, because the audiences leave a Disney fantasy in the same condition as when they entered it. This is an insult to the audience.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Yamanaka Yasuhiro, *Hari to chihiro sedai no kodomotachi* (Children of the Generation of Harry and Chihiro) (Tokyo: Asahi Shuppan, 2002), pp. 37-40

<sup>22</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 364, and p. 519.

<sup>23</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 102. My translation.

Elsewhere, Miyazaki expresses the same frustration toward the “fake” quality of humanism that is seen in “Disney-esque” animation. He similarly criticizes Tezuka Osamu, the so-called “Father of Japanese *manga*,” for his often-expressed admiration of Disney’s humanism. Miyazaki sees Tezuka’s enthusiasm for Disney as advocating “Eurocentric” values, and as revealing Tezuka’s sense of inferiority toward Disney and “the West.”<sup>24</sup>

Another characteristic of Miyazaki distinctive from Walt Disney is his emphasis on creating a fantasy that is not much “bigger” than everyday life—a fantasy (re)discovered in the “everyday-ness” of daily life, which he aims for through his characters and narratives. He explicates this philosophy as follows:

I think that even the most trivial everyday experiences, or ..., the things we touch or what we feel, become important parts of our essential selves. As the layers of fallen leaves enrich the soil when they lose their shape, the accumulated layers of memories that we gain through experience must be enriching the essential parts of ourselves. In other words, I think that is what “imagination” is about.<sup>25</sup>

The everyday nature of Miyazaki’s fantasy effectively bridges the gap between reality and the imaginary, creating a fantasy that is neither much larger than life itself nor completely separated from reality.

It is also important to point out that, given the global changes happening within our modern material civilization, Miyazaki identifies other Asian countries such as South Korea, North Korea, and China, as inevitable followers of Japan in terms of modernization;

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<sup>24</sup> See Kurosawa Akira, *Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi*, p. 132. This does not mean that Miyazaki rejects all ideas from Europe or the U.S., but he has a critical view toward a simplistic humanism, binary concepts, and Eurocentrism (as well as any country’s ego-centrism). See Miyazaki, *Kaze no kaeru basho*, p. 46, p. 80, p. 334.

<sup>25</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, “A Message from the Managing Director,” in *Ghibli Museum, Mitaka Catalog* (Tokyo: Tokuma Memorial Cultural Foundation for Animation, 2004), pp. 246–47. No translator listed.

he says that they all are bound to encounter the same problems that Japan has faced and struggled with. One may argue that Miyazaki thus bravely reveals and problematizes the reality of modernization for young viewers in Japan and in other Asian countries, yet, simultaneously, his comment can be also interpreted as his nationalistic, Orientalist view of these “other” Asian countries as Japan’s “followers.”

### **The significance of Miyazaki’s female characters**

An almost exclusive use of “shōjo” protagonists is one of the characteristics of Miyazaki’s work. He comments in an interview that girls are more suitable than boys to draw out human emotions, because of the assumption that the former express them more straightforwardly than the latter, and he adds that boy protagonists would be too realistic and too painful for him to deal with.<sup>26</sup> I will examine Miyazaki’s (mis)use of “shōjo” by looking at specific works in later chapters to see how his “shōjo” perform in relation to the concepts of gender and national identity; this section will provide a brief overview of the functions of the “shōjo” and other female characters in Miyazaki’s works.

As explained in Chapter 2, the concept of the “shōjo” arose in modernizing Japan as part of a constellation of policies and discourses intended to confine female sexuality and to maintain the gender demarcation between “feminine” and “masculine.” From the time of its origins to the present, the concept “shōjo” has been used in a variety of ways by many different artists, politicians, cultural critics, and others, to signify various (usually negative) aspects of Japanese femininity. Discussing the signification of “shōjo” in Japanese popular culture in the 1990s, Sharalyn Orbaugh lists examples of the ways that the “shōjo” has been used to stand in for the Japanese national subject in the work of

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<sup>26</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 505.

cultural critics and politicians in particular.<sup>27</sup> In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, “shōjo” has been used to signify everything from utter passivity to sexual excess; from the most useless and parasitical of national subjects to the freest, most liberated of post-modern subjectivities; and so on.

Examining the depictions of “shōjo” in *manga* and *anime* from the 1960s to the 1990s, Orbaugh emphasizes the emergence of a new type of female protagonist: a “battlin’ babe” who exhibits traits that are a hybrid of elements traditionally associated with “shōjo” and elements traditionally associated with “shōnen” (boys and young men).<sup>28</sup> It is suggested that, taking in Orbaugh’s argument, many of Miyazaki’s protagonists fit the definition of the “battlin’ babe.”

Similarly, Susan Napier stresses the liberating aspect of Miyazaki’s “shōjo” protagonists—she views them as a vehicle for an implicit cultural resistance to Disney (or dominant Western) aesthetics and to some Japanese traditions in the realm of gender and national identity articulations.<sup>29</sup> Napier argues that by depicting a “shōjo” that is detached from such typical associations as “femininity” and “purity,” Miyazaki defamiliarizes the mythologized image of Japanese women “as long-suffering and supportive,”<sup>30</sup> and problematizes the existing concept of gender itself. Napier also points out that Miyazaki’s frequent depiction of “flying girls” (as in *Nausicaä* and *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, for

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<sup>27</sup> Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin’ Babes,” p 298. The use of (young) women to signify the national subject is not unique to Japan. As Anne McClintock has observed, women are “typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation but are denied any direct relation to national agency.” Anne McClintock, “No Longer in a Future Heaven,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1997), p. 90

<sup>28</sup> Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin’ Babes,” pp. 295-310.

<sup>29</sup> Napier, p. 33. For more on the cultural role of the “shōjo” in Japanese society, see Napier, p. 118, as well as Chapter 2 on “shōjo.”

<sup>30</sup> Napier, p. 177.

example) also reveals his intention to exhibit empowered women, through the association of flying with liberation.

Further, Miyazaki's imagined worlds are generally governed or controlled by female characters (e.g. Lady Eboshi, who runs the iron village in *Princess Mononoke*; the kingdom ruled by Kushana in *Nausicaä*; Yubaba, who runs the bathhouse in *Spirited Away*; and Osono, a powerful lady who runs a house in *Kiki*, etc.). Male characters are often supporting figures who have less visibility or are depicted as infantile. In this sense, Miyazaki, too, like the cultural critics, artists and politicians quoted in Orbaugh's article, is using the figure of the girl/woman to represent Japanese society more generally. It is therefore crucial to examine the specific uses he makes of this symbolic figure.

According to Napier, Miyazaki's "shōjo" represents an active, assertive, and independent female, who embraces both "masculinity" and "femininity."<sup>31</sup> His narrativization of female protagonists as warriors—demonstrated by Nausicaä's and San's violent behavior—challenges the classic ultra-feminine image of girls, and destabilizes the feminine-masculine dichotomy. Thus, Napier acclaims Miyazaki's work for its gender fluidity. In this respect, Miyazaki's protagonists draw on the Jungian idea that any individual carries both feminine and masculine principles, rather than thinking of them as mutually exclusive.

Thomas Lamarre understands Miyazaki as playing with the notion of "shōjo" in a similar, but slightly different way. He argues that Miyazaki does not necessarily abolish gender demarcation, but instead creates a space where both boys and girls can exist autonomously without one subordinating the other.<sup>32</sup> This view suggests a new

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Lamarre, p. 351.

visualization of gender identity, which problematizes the myth of “femininity” that has been closely associated with Japan (and other modern nations as well, of course). Despite some differences, both Napier and Lamarre agree on the potential destabilization of conventional gender and sexual dynamics through Miyazaki’s fantasies.

One may also identify that this destabilization of the dichotomy is not realized only by “shōjo,” but also by representations of different types of (older) females in Miyazaki’s work. Conventionally, women are associated with nature, and men with culture/civilization/technology, but Miyazaki often represents both features within women. For instance, Kushana (*Nausicaä*), Eboshi (*Mononoke*), and Mosley (*Mirai shonen Conan* [*Conan, The Boy in the Future*], 1978) all exhibit a technophilic desire to conquer nature, whereas Nausicaä, San, and Lana (in the same films, respectively) exist close to nature. Female characters are thus used to embody various roles in Miyazaki’s work, and while some are more central than others, all have both good and bad elements; they are complexly realized personae.

Moreover, his “shōjo” are empowered with or without physical beauty or “princess” status, which is contrary to Disney’s typical “pretty girls being rescued” narrative.<sup>33</sup> It can be argued that, in contrast to both Disney’s fairy tale heroines and the stereotypical “shōjo” characters of *anime* since the 1960s (with huge starry eyes, disproportionately tiny waists, and long, slim legs), who are often entrapped in Cinderella-type narratives, Miyazaki’s protagonists seize the power to combat representation of Japanese women in the dominant cultural discourse. In other words, Miyazaki’s use of

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<sup>33</sup> Disney’s eight “princesses” (Ariel, Cinderella, Snow White, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Aurora, Belle, and Mulan) represent what a “princess” is supposed to look like in the dominant (Western) media discourse. Some of these characters are not literally princesses, but the main (if not the only) reason that they are called “princesses” is their physical beauty or prettiness, and their meeting with “princes” who form a romantic relationship with them. See [http://disney.go.com/princess/html/main\\_iframe.html](http://disney.go.com/princess/html/main_iframe.html).

“shōjo” protagonists functions as a potential tool to challenge the dominant Western ideologies about “femininity” in contemporary society.

Yet, Orbaugh also complicates representation of female warriors, by concluding her discussion of the battling female protagonists in the 1990s *manga/anime* with the unsettling observation that a “shōjo” can have power only as long as she remains a virgin.<sup>34</sup> In other words, female characters are only depicted as being strong and capable as long as they do not take claim adult sexuality—a very misogynistic representation of women. Most of Miyazaki’s “shōjo” characters fit this description of virgin—strong only because they are dissociated from any sign of sex,<sup>35</sup> and this can be interpreted as Miyazaki’s choice, inevitably resulting in depriving older women or mothers of an access to power.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that Miyazaki’s “shōjo” transgress the conventional gender boundaries to the extent that they act as aggressive warriors—traditionally a “masculine” attribute. Accordingly, male-female relations in his films become unpredictable. In this sense, his narratives are “de-assuring,” and deploy a carnivalesque mode (in the Bakhtinian sense).<sup>36</sup> Romantic relationships in his films are also not necessarily consummated with marriage or pledges of marriage. In *Princess Mononoke*, for example, Ashitaka and San decide in the end to live separately, each in his/her own world. For all these reasons, I would argue that Miyazaki’s “fictional truth” generally revolves around progressive, yet credible characters.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Orbaugh, “Busty Battlin’ Babes,” p. 318.

<sup>35</sup> Murase Hiromi, *Feminizumu sabukaruchā hihyō sengen*, pp. 53-58.

<sup>36</sup> Napier, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that there are some “non-progressive” aspects in his work. Most of his films still have a romance between the female protagonist and one of the male characters—in other words, love/romance is still considered a crucial plot element for a narrative that features a girl or girls. And all the romances are totally heteronormative. This aspect does not have to undermine everything I have argued, but



## Miyazaki's philosophy of anime fantasy ~ the Ghibli Museum

迷子になろうよ、いっしょに。(Let's Lose Our Way, Together.)  
—excerpt from a Ghibli Museum pamphlet

Miyazaki's fantasy narratives are also associated with fear or feelings of the uncanny, as well as a sense of ambiguity—all of which evoke curiosity rather than simple closure, the possibility of multiple interpretations and responses. This is unlike Disney's narrative philosophy, where a policy was implemented in 1933 to discourage any elements contributing to the possibility of multiple interpretations.<sup>38</sup> The result is the promotion of narratives ruled by predetermined consequences that leave no room for the viewer's imagination to operate. Disney's unambiguous narrative is replicated in Disney's theme parks, where visitors are guided from one point to another, so that at the end of the visit they establish a singular narrative which is arranged by Disney's "imagineers."<sup>39</sup> The following publicity statement by Disney's imagineers, accentuates the creation of fantasy (as definitively separate from reality).

Here is the world of *imagination, hopes and dreams*. In this timeless land of enchantment, the age of chivalry, magic, and make-believe are reborn, and *fairy tales come true*. Fantasyland is dedicated to the young at heart, to

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it suggests that even Miyazaki is limited in his progressive-ness, and is still bound to some social conventions.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 204.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the linearity of Disney theme parks, David Johnson explains that to make sure that the visitors are provided with a single interpretive context for the images that contain elements of the historical, economic and social background of America, "the Disney people add conventional plots to inherently plotless materials." See Johnson, "Disney World as Structure and Symbol," p. 162. The word 'imagineers,' used officially by the Walt Disney Company, is, obviously, a conflation of the words 'imagination' and 'engineers.' This suggests the conscious and acknowledged instrumentality of the fantasies that it is the 'imagineers'' job to create and guide.

those who believe that when you wish upon a star, your *dreams come true*.<sup>40</sup> (my emphases)

—Walt Disney at the dedication of Fantasyland

Miyazaki's contrary philosophy toward fantasy is evident at the Ghibli Museum.<sup>41</sup>

The museum's structure and philosophy emphasizes multiple possible interpretations, reflecting the ambiguity of Miyazaki's film narratives. There is no "correct" route to follow at the site. Instead, the museum's catch-phrase, "Let's lose our way together," suggests the multiplicity of ways to enjoy the museum space. The visitors are expected to be entertained by their own creation of narrative and the mingled pleasure/fear of uncertainty. His intention is articulated more explicitly in the following "manifesto" written by Miyazaki and printed in the museum catalog *Mitaka no Mori Ghibli Museum* (Ghibli Museum, Mitaka).

"This Is the Kind of Museum I Want to Make"

A museum that is interesting and which relaxes the soul  
A museum where much can be discovered  
A museum based on a clear and consistent philosophy  
A museum where those seeking enjoyment can enjoy,  
those seeking to ponder can ponder, and those seeking to feel can feel  
A museum that makes you feel more enriched  
when you leave than when you entered!

To make such a museum, the building must be ...  
Put together as if it were a film  
Not arrogant, magnificent, flamboyant, or suffocating  
Quality space where people can *feel at home*,  
....

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<sup>40</sup> "Fantasyland" in Hong Kong Disneyland official site at [http://park.hongkongdisneyland.com/hkdl/en\\_US/parks/landing?name=FantasylandLandingPage](http://park.hongkongdisneyland.com/hkdl/en_US/parks/landing?name=FantasylandLandingPage). (accessed on April 25, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> The Ghibli museum is directed and operated by Miyazaki and his associates at Studio Ghibli. While I grant that the size of the Ghibli Museum is much smaller than any Disney theme park, the purpose of the two is similar: to provide a physical space in which fans of the company's (Ghibli's or Disney's) films can have a similar experience in real life.

The museum must be run in such a way so that ...  
Small children are treated *as if they were grown-ups*  
The handicapped are accommodated as much as possible  
The staff can be confident and proud of their work  
Visitors are not controlled with  
predetermined courses and fixed directions  
It is suffused with ideas and *new challenges*  
so that the exhibits do not get dusty or old,  
and that investments are made to realize that goal  
....

This is the kind of museum I don't want to make!  
A pretentious museum  
An arrogant museum  
A museum that treats its contents  
as if they were more important than people  
A museum that displays uninteresting works  
as if they were significant.<sup>42</sup>

Here we see clearly Miyazaki's conscious self-positioning in opposition to Disney, particularly in phrases such as "Not ...magnificent, flamboyant," and "Visitors are not controlled with predetermined courses and fixed directions." These are in sharp contrast to the structure of Disney theme parks, where, as mentioned above, visitors are literally and ideologically guided (or controlled) into going in certain directions, just as Disney films tend to feature predictable, safe plots.

While one may argue that Disney's slogans have a number of similarities with Miyazaki's—creating a world of "imagination," a happy world, and a world for children—the way they are actualized differs. Disney's theme parks stress the negation of everyday-ness and instead emphasize their power to transport visitors to a completely separate realm. Part of the technique for creating such a complete fantasy world is Disney's intentional concealing of the operation of animation "magic" from the visitors.

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<sup>42</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, "This Is the Kind of Museum I Want to Make," in *Ghibli Museum, Mitaka Catalog* (Tokyo: Tokuma Memorial Cultural Foundation for Animation, 2004), pp. 186-188. No translator listed. © Studio Ghibli. All rights reserved.

Rather than revealing the way its fantasies are created, thus bridging the gap between fantasy and reality, Disney wants its visitors to “escape” into the fantasy world.

In contrast, the Ghibli Museum focuses on making visitors “feel at home.” Thus, the museum displays how Miyazaki’s animated world is created step by step, and exhibits the history of animation technologies, revealing what goes on behind the fantasy screen. The museum is also far from an enclosed space, and is very flexible in terms of the direction visitors should take. It is in a sense a place where all people—including children—are treated as “intelligent grown-ups” who can exercise their own choice of movement, imagination and interpretation, while adult visitors at Disney theme parks are encouraged to return to the mindset of children to enjoy their visits.

The fact that Miyazaki’s stated philosophy of fantasy is diametrically opposed to Disney’s is no coincidence, of course: Miyazaki is intentionally positioning himself in opposition to Disney, a political—one could even say postcolonial—decision, which I will address in later chapters.

### 3.3. Miyazaki’s Aesthetics (2): Miyazaki’s Occidental and self-Orientalist views

This section discusses one of the most intriguing yet puzzling aspects of Miyazaki’s worldview: his depiction of “Japan” and its “others.” It should be no surprise that his *anime* problematize the concept of identity itself. This is partly because of his experience of dramatic shifts in Japan’s subjectivity in relation to its others, from wartime, the post-war Allied Occupation (led by the U.S.), to contemporary globalization and neo-nationalistic movements, all of which have troubled Japan in re-establishing a national subjectivity. On the one hand, his animated texts appear to present nationally hybrid

features in their form and content; on the other hand, they can be understood as significantly local or even nationalistic. Although a close textual analysis will be done in the following chapters, it is useful to discuss here his vision of the world as manifested through the overarching characteristics of his work, particularly in terms of representations of national identity.

It seems that Miyazaki has two general modes: 1) pastiching European culture, which can be seen in his representations of the Mediterranean landscape depicted in *Porco Rosso*, starring a Humphrey Bogart-like pig, or the mishmash of European towns in *Kiki's Delivery Service*; or 2) portraying an idealized "traditional" Japan, such as the fictionalized thirteenth-century Japan of *Princess Mononoke*, or the peaceful postwar countryside in *My Neighbour Totoro* (1988). (*Spirited Away* is a bit of a departure from these two modes, as it depicts a fantasy world within contemporary Japan, which incorporates elements of nostalgic Japanese tradition, elements from other East Asian cultures, as well as elements of Western—particularly European—landscapes.)

Of his nine feature-length *anime* films including those produced in pre-Ghibli days, six feature clearly "Western" settings: *Lupin III: The Castle of the Cagliostro*; *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, set in an European-looking town; *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*, modeled on nineteenth-century Wales; *Kiki's Delivery Service*; *Porco Rosso*; and *Howl's Moving Castle*, which features European architecture and scenery. The remaining three (*My Neighbour Totoro*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away*) are set in "Japan," and feature mostly Japanese (or other East Asian) visual elements.

At a glance, Miyazaki's works, especially in the early years, appear to exhibit his admiration for the West—similar to other Japanese *anime* that so often feature Caucasian-looking characters with blond hair. While this may indicate a "typical" inferiority

complex; at the same time, his negative depictions of an imaginary “West,” as distinguished from Japan, can be interpreted as his way of maintaining a particular vision of Japan—a potentially Occidentalizing perspective. As an example, the depiction of Western modernization as a cause of environmental disaster in *Nausicaä* and *Laputa*, can draw on the image of “good old Japan” before the influx of Western culture and ideology. Yet, it is hard to write this off as complete Occidentalism, because Japanese viewers are expected to identify with the “Western” characters such as Nausicaä and Sheeta (in *Laputa*), and these viewers are mostly accustomed to seeing blonds or characters with other hair colors as “Japanese” in *anime*, so they clearly identify across visually “racialized” boundaries.

The self-Orientalizing, on the other hand, is visible in Miyazaki’s works set in Japan, such as *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Princess Mononoke*. One can certainly argue that these films self-Orientalize Japan for the purpose of emphasizing a specific vision of “Japan,” and simultaneously distancing it from “others.” These concepts are further discussed with specific examples in Chapter 4 and 5.

### **Miyazaki’s relationship to the West (1): narratives concerning technology**

In the United States—the global center of popular media—computer-generated animation has been the dominant trend. Disney and other major animation studios in the United States were quick to adopt computerized production, and in 2004, Disney Feature Animation management decided to produce only fully computerized animations for theatrical release. In contrast, Miyazaki prefers the aesthetics of cel-based animation.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In this regard, Miyazaki’s friend and producer Suzuki Toshio associates Miyazaki with Charlie Chaplin, who held out the longest for the artistry of the silent film after the coming of talkies, and with Kurosawa

Using cel-based animation that conveys visual clarity and plainness certainly contributes to one of his goals: communicating complex concepts to child audiences. Despite the Walt Disney Company's introduction of computer-generated scenes into animation with 1991's *Beauty and the Beast*, Ghibli did not follow suit until the production of *Princess Mononoke* in 1997. While Disney launched their first fully computer-generated feature film, *Toy Story*, in 1995, it was not until 2001's *Spirited Away* that Miyazaki (Ghibli) produced his first fully digitally animated film. And despite Ghibli's increasing use of computer animation, Miyazaki has not shown any intention to abandon cel animation completely.

Thomas Looser contrasts what he calls "*anime-ic*" *anime* with Miyazaki's cel-style aesthetics, which he terms "cinematic," introducing an interesting perspective on the national/cultural identity of Japan in an international context. Contrary to the cinematic style, the "*anime-ic*" style is characterized by a lack of three-dimensionality and depthlessness (lack of authenticity). This two-dimensional style has been called "superflat," referring to the aesthetics in various Japanese media, including the popular art of Murakami Takashi.<sup>44</sup> Although the concept of "superflat" aesthetics is a recently named phenomenon, it is attributed to the "limited animation"—relatively few cels and a simple visual style resulting from limited budgets—that has characterized TV *anime* in Japan since the 1960s.<sup>45</sup>

On the one hand, some critics regard "superflat-ness" as a means of emancipatory understanding of subject identity, because it stresses identity as a surface relation,

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Akira, who kept making black-and-white films long after the coming of color. See Kevin Moist and Michael Bartholow, "When Pigs Fly: *Anime*, Auteurism, and Miyazaki's *Porco Rosso*," in *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2: 1 (2007), p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> Lamarre, pp. 333-39.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Looser, "From Edo-gawa to Miyazaki: Cinematic and *Anime-ic* Architectures of Early and Late Twentieth-century Japan," in *Japan Forum* 14: 2 (2002), p. 307-10.

negating the single-point perspective common to visual three-dimensionality that constructs a unified subject position fixed by hierarchically organized relations.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, from a different perspective, it has also been argued that the awkwardness and jerkiness of characters' movements generated in limited animation *anime* potentially promote a view of Japan as the "Other"—an image of Japanese automata moving clumsily like machines provides a spectacle for laughter, which is reminiscent of what Rey Chow identifies as one of the factors that evokes the idea of "otherness."<sup>47</sup> (See "Construction of Self and Other and politics of vision" in Chapter 1.)

The latter is Miyazaki's view: he expresses frustration with animators who create typical *anime-ic anime*, and thereby disseminate the "otherness" of Japan. In particular he feels frustrated over their obsession with exaggerated expressions, which accentuate the unrealistic-ness and deformation of characters.<sup>48</sup> He is therefore apprehensive about policies promoting massive *anime* exports to Europe and North America as symbols of Japan's national pride.

Lamarre and other critics regard Miyazaki's work as "the least *anime-ic* and most cinematic" among popular animators,<sup>49</sup> based on his marked preference for theatrical (as opposed to TV) release, his studio's investment to produce full three-dimensional animation rather than limited animation, and his entire involvement as auteur in all aspects of production to ensure continuity in style and story. Nonetheless, Miyazaki's position in terms of style is rather ambivalent, because he manages to create depth even out of the

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<sup>46</sup> Azuma Hiroki, "Super Flat Speculation," in *Superflat*, ed. Murakami Takashi (Tokyo: MADRA Publishing, 2000), p. 146. No translator listed.

<sup>47</sup> Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, pp. 50-60.

<sup>48</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, pp. 103-110.

<sup>49</sup> Lamarre, "From Animation to *Anime*," pp. 339-41. Also, see Looser, p. 318. Looser contends that although some scenes in Miyazaki's works rely on "'flat' relations within frames" that are devoid of gravity or weight, Miyazaki is very careful to provide a three-dimensional perspective, by means of color differences and camera movements.



*anime*-ic cel-animation condition of flatness, by generating “a more organically perspectival mode of space.”<sup>50</sup> Considering that an *anime*-ic style may disseminate the image of the Japanese as automata, there is arguably less likelihood of Miyazaki’s *anime* contributing to the association of Japan with “otherness” in the eyes of Westerners.

Moreover, unlike many popular cyberpunk *anime* creators, Miyazaki’s hesitation in shifting to digital production reflects his ambivalent perception of technology. On the one hand, the narrative world of Miyazaki illustrates technology and Western modernization as a cause of destruction, or as an alienating experience. On the other hand, it also shows the positive side of technology as well: how it can serve as a conduit of intimacy and humor. In his work, humans and technologies are not necessarily placed in antagonistic relationships. *Howl’s Moving Castle* provides an example where the use of fire is personified and made effective in the characterization of the fire demon known as “Calcifer,” who enables the castle to move. Another example is seen in *My Neighbour Totoro*. The most powerful and effective technology in this film is a transportation device called the “Neko-bus” (Cat-bus), which helps the protagonist to find her little sister.

These aspects suggest that in the contemporary animation industry, Miyazaki occupies an anomalous position. While criticizing the emphasis on popularizing the typical *anime* style that promotes “Japaneseness” to non-Japanese viewers, and rejecting a complete switch to full computerization, his version of the *anime* medium hybridizes the Western perspectival mode and *anime* “flatness.”

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<sup>50</sup> Looser, p. 318.

## Miyazaki's relationship to the West (2): narrative and theme

Similar to his stylistic form, Miyazaki's narrative inspiration comes in large measure from European and American sources; he has been an avid reader of Greek mythology and Western folktales, fairy tales, and fantasy literature, including works by Jonathan Swift, Diana Wynne Jones, Ursula K. Le Guin, J.R.R. Tolkien, and so forth. These influences are manifested in his work. As well, he has traveled widely in Europe: Wales, Sweden, Italy, and other places. He writes that after Japan's defeat in World War II he kept hearing that Japan was a poor and helpless country, and he believed it. It was only after he started traveling abroad, he writes, that he realized the beauty of nature in Japan.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that he is not only fascinated with Western culture, but also appreciates what makes Japan "Japan." Moreover, he states:

I have never illustrated Europe simply to express admiration toward it, or to please viewers with "fantastic" blond-haired characters. Instead, what I am interested in is the *distinctiveness that each culture and customs hold*, particularly in the countryside.... I have no judgment on which cultures are superior to others. Japanese people tend to choose things European to feel exotic. This is probably rooted in a kind of complex toward the West (Europe)... Thus, I try to draw Europe in such a way that viewers watch my work, not simply because it shows Europe, but because it makes them interested in specific aspects of Europe.<sup>52</sup> (my emphasis)

This statement indicates that Miyazaki does not intend in any simplistic sense to practice "Occidentalism," a discursive practice that allows the Orient to participate actively in the process of self-definition through the construction of its Western "Other"—at least not consciously. Through his texts, he questions the admiration for the imaginary West that is often presented in *anime*, by depicting Caucasian characters or Western

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<sup>51</sup> Miyazaki Hayao and Kurosawa Akira, *Nani ga eiga ka* (What Counts as Cinema?) (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 1993), p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> Kurosawa Akira, Miyazaki Hayao, Kitano Takeshi, pp. 142-150. My translation.

civilization as trouble-makers. At the same time, Miyazaki's West is not simply a symbol of evil either. He seems to be carefully ambiguous about how Japan's "Other," the West, is projected in his work. For example, in most cases he depicts neither a technologically advanced, superior West, nor a destructive, modernized West, but rather depicts a pastoral, visually attractive West (eg, the settings in *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Nausicaä in the Valley of the Wind*). Moreover, he seems to make an effort to create characters who embody cultural heterogeneity: Nausicaä, for example, is modeled after both Princess Nausicaa from the Greek *Odyssey* and an insect-loving princess from the *Tei Chūnagon Monogatari*, an eleventh century Japanese short story anthology,<sup>53</sup> and its narrative is also inspired by the Russo German war depicted in Paul Karel's *Operation Barbarossa*.

Miyazaki's attempt at cultural heterogeneity is also reflected in his articulation of the concept of "universality," which differs significantly from the kind of universality the Walt Disney Company strives for. Disney's "universality" is often associated with homogenization of taste across the world. Here is the way critics have described this phenomenon: "Disney is the canon of popular film; Disney is a multinational corporation; Disney is an ideology."<sup>54</sup> The slogan of Disney's imagineers is also significant: "The time

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<sup>53</sup> Miyazaki himself states in this in the first issue of the comic version of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Nausicaä in the Greek mythology was a beautiful and imaginative girl, quick on her feet. She loved nature and playing the harp and singing more than the attention of her suitors or pursuing materialistic happiness. She, unafraid, saved Odysseus and nursed his wounds when he drifted ashore covered in blood. Nausicaä's parents worried that she might fall in love with Odysseus and pressured him to set sail. Nausicaä watched his ship until it was out of sight. According to legend, she never married, but traveled from court to court as the first female minstrel. Miyazaki states that "[u]nconsciously, Nausicaa and this Japanese princess (from the *Tsutsumi chūnagon monogatari*) become one person" in his mind. See *manga Kaze no tani no Nausicaä (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind)* (Wide version), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2005), p. 137. For more on Miyazaki's inspiration from Russo-German war on *Nausicaä*, see Helen McCarthy, *Hayao Miyazaki: Master of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), p. 74; and also Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 348. Moreover, some speculate Miyazaki's *manga Shuna no tabi (The Journey of Shuna)*, which is inspired by Tibetan folklore, is the prototype of *Nausicaä*.

<sup>54</sup> Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, "Introduction," in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 2.

has come to lay aside one's own imagination, and together all shall dream Walt Disney's dreams."<sup>55</sup> This slogan is indicative of Disney's primary concern: encouraging the masses in North America and around the world to set aside consideration of conflicted and complex histories, and set aside consideration of ethnic/racial differences and tensions, in order to foster "global friendship" in the name of the Disney principle. Hence, Disney's "universality" refers to the permeation of its single (American-centric) narrative to all corners of the earth, with the effect of homogenizing peripheral ideas in the American "melting-pot." In other words, this approach to universality entails lowering the level of narrative complexity or intellectuality.

What makes Miyazaki's idea of "universality" different, as some scholars assert, are his themes of "globally consequential issues"<sup>56</sup>—issues that are relevant to a global audience—despite his insistence that he makes his *anime* specifically for Japanese viewers.<sup>57</sup> "Globally consequential issues" include: the conflict between nature and human technologies; human greed and capitalism (consumerism); gender issues; and the influence of globalization. Although Disney animations, particularly recent ones, also deal with some of these issues, they present them in a light and simplistic manner. For example, in terms of gender issues, among Disney's "princess stories," *Mulan* and *The Little Mermaid* seem to present female empowerment and assertiveness; however, they both conclude with a typical "Cinderella-style" happy ending: their heroines do not gain a complete sense of independence.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Sklar, p. 205.

<sup>56</sup> Cavallaro, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Masaki Yamada, Shin'ichi Okada, and Tadahiro Ohkoshi, "The Cutting Edge of Cool," in *Asia-Pacific Perspectives: Japan+* 2: 1 (2004), p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> It has to be noted that some of Miyazaki's protagonists do not necessarily achieve total independence. For example, Chihiro in *Spirited Away* achieves a significant level of maturity during her stay in the bathhouse,

To Miyazaki, “universality” is not, at least consciously, associated with the homogenization of different ideas and tastes into a single aesthetic standard, but is, instead, intricately (and perhaps paradoxically) tied to his philosophy of cultural hybridization. In his works one can observe his intention to combine elements from Western narratives and settings with elements from Japanese narrative and visual traditions as well. Miyazaki’s intended fantasy, composed of narrative and imagistic elements from different cultural sources, transgresses national or cultural boundaries without generating cultural homogenization.

This suggests that Miyazaki’s overarching themes allow identity politics to surface, and this may be his way of engaging in politics, unlike Disney’s apparent influence on and reflection of the U.S. relationship with other countries and events in the Middle East, which can be observed in *Aladdin*. To a certain extent, this harks back to the way Disney influenced U.S. foreign affairs in the U.S. in the 1930s and 1940s—particularly, its relationship with Latin America—through representations in *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1944), which were intended to generate a goodwill message for Latin American “friends.”

It is, however, also possible to argue that Miyazaki does not show us the unique or distinctive aspects of any specific European culture—an element of Occidentalism. In other words, instead of showing a distinctive Germany, England, or Italy, for example, he creates an imaginary generalized “Western European” or “Southern European/Mediterranean” culture. Thus, it is open for debate how far his insistence mentioned above—his respect for cultural specificities—is actualized in his work. It also

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but at the very end of the film, when she reunites with her parents, she acts in a way that is similar to her behavior at the beginning of the film (i.e. clinging to her mother).

may be debatable whether his creation of “multiple differences” merely represents a bifurcation between “foreign” vs “local,” rather than actual heterogeneous elements. Hence, it is arguable that Miyazaki’s “Europe” is no more culturally specific than Disney’s China (in *Mulan*) or “Arabia” (in *Aladdin*).

In subsequent chapters we will see in more detail the ways that Miyazaki does or does not succeed in representing difference in ideologically nuanced and useful ways. Based on the discussion above, what can be said here is that Miyazaki consciously positions his work in opposition to dominant Western discourses of identity, which he regards as too simplistic.

### 3.4. The Reception of *Anime* outside Japan and “Japaneseness”

In order to understand the potential self-Orientalism of Miyazaki’s films it is necessary to consider their reception outside Japan. This is because their receptions (particularly in the U.S. and Europe) not only shape the image of Japan among non-Japanese, but also affects how the Japanese—both the creators and viewers of *anime*—understand their own identities in relation to their “other.”

In the field of Japanese live-action film, the 1950s was called the “Golden Age,” when “great masters” such as Kurosawa Akira, Mizoguchi Kenji, and Kinugasa Teinosuke received numerous awards in international film festivals. Film critics in Europe were amazed by the production of masterpieces in Japan—a country that had appeared to be completely devastated after its defeat in the Second World War. The president of Daiei Motion Picture Company, Nagata Masaichi, eagerly exported films directed by Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, and Kinugasa to Europe. In his book on film, Nagata writes: “Japanese films

that attract foreign audiences need to have a simple narrative and mysterious characters.”<sup>59</sup> This statement indicates Nagata’s principle of stressing the exoticism of Japan to cater to Western viewers’ (Orientalist) taste. This is not a practice of strategic essentialism but of self-Orientalization (or self-othering), because the definition of “Japaneseness” sold to the West is determined by the West. Indeed, all of the films that received awards, including *Rashomon* (Kurosawa), *Gate of Hell* (Kinugasa), and *Ugetsu* (Mizoguchi), are period films whose narratives revolve around samurai and “exotic-looking” women in *kimono*, which fit the stereotyped Western image of “Japan.”

Miyazaki’s perception of Japan’s identity configuration through *anime* is partly suggested by the 1996 Tokuma-Disney Deal, which grants worldwide distribution rights for eleven of Studio Ghibli’s *anime* to the Walt Disney Company. The executive producer of many of Miyazaki’s works and managing director of Studio Ghibli, Suzuki Toshio, intended through this deal to ensure that the studio’s works were distributed around the world.<sup>60</sup> Unlike other *anime* products popular in the West (by which I mean Europe and North America), which are created to seem “stateless”/“odorless” or are even sometimes modified to erase cultural specificities,<sup>61</sup> this deal does not allow Disney to cut or modify even one second of the films. Moreover, Miyazaki frequently says that he does not have foreign viewers in mind when making his *anime*. Hence, his philosophy is not based on

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<sup>59</sup> Nagata Masaichi, *Eiga Jigakyō* (Film and My Sutra) (Tokyo: Heibon shuppan, 1957), pp. 122-230. My translation.

<sup>60</sup> Suzuki clarifies that other companies such as Fox and Time-Warner contacted Tokuma, but Ghibli chose Disney as the partner because it was the only company willing to agree to this condition. See “The Disney-Tokuma Deal” at *Nausicaä net* (<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/disney/>) (accessed on September 20, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> The success of many TV *anime* exported to the U.S. in the 1960s, including *Speed Racer*, *Astro Boy*, *The Eighth Man*, and *Marin Boy*, owe to the fact that they did not reflect Japanese culture. For example, *Speed Racer* is not simply the English version of *Mahha Go Go* (the Japanese original), but it was heavily edited in the U.S., particularly in action and allegedly violent scenes, by which Japanese aesthetics and values are discounted.

self-othering for commercial benefit, but on inscribing another version of “Japaneseness” through his *anime* without accommodating foreign viewers.

Based on these points, one could argue that Ghibli or Miyazaki’s unbending insistence on keeping a “Japanese flavor” intact is indicative of a kind of nationalistic stance. Yet, his stance seems very different from Nagata’s self-othering promotion of “Japaneseness,” which is created to fit what non-Japanese viewers expect of “Japan,” for economic benefit. It also differs from the promotion of “Japaneseness” based on the stateless “*anime-ic*” style. Miyazaki’s adamant position on the integrity of his works distributed abroad, including the imagery of traditional Japan in *Princess Mononoke* or the European settings in *Nausicaä*, signifies his resistance to the Western aesthetic standard and its ideology.

The question of whether Miyazaki’s works promote nationalism, or in other cases, promote an Occidentalist view, remains complex. It is problematic, for example, to simply assume that the popularity of the semi-historical *Princess Mononoke* outside Japan derives from Orientalist expectations to which it caters. If foreign viewers appreciated *Princess Mononoke* only because of its traditional or “exotic” elements, for example, it is unlikely that Miyazaki’s other films would have been so popular: it seems evident that non-Japanese viewers could to some degree identify with the characters in the films rather than simply finding them exotic. Miyazaki’s promotional tour in the U.S. and Canada observed the enthusiastic reaction to *Mononoke* among North American viewers. At that time Ghibli staff commented that it is pretentious of Japanese people to assume that



foreign viewers could not understand *Mononoke* because of its historical setting or the uniqueness of Japanese culture.<sup>62</sup>

The association of *Mononoke* with cultural nationalism or a self-Orientalist view cannot be completely denied. Nonetheless, the popularity of Miyazaki's *anime* is no doubt partly attributable to his use of cultural pastiche or heterogeneity. The perception of national identity through film representation is a multifaceted issue, which I have discussed only in very general terms in this chapter. Subsequent chapters will address this question in greater detail, with reference to specific Miyazaki films.

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<sup>62</sup> Ghibli staff were impressed by the knowledge North American fans demonstrated regarding Miyazaki's *anime*, and by the number of questions based on their solid research about *Mononoke*. There was considerable media coverage of the interviews with Miyazaki, including major newspapers and magazines, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *US News & World Report*, as well as online media such as AOL and AIN'T IT COOL. See Nagae Akira, "Amerika ga 'Princess Mononoke' ni nekkyoshit hi" (When the U.S. Went Wild over *Princess Mononoke*), in *Roman Album: Ghibli* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2000), pp. 20-29.

## **Chapter 4: Western Orientalism & Japanese Occidentalism** **~ Aladdin, Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, and Porco Rosso**

*...without people such as he (Morroe Gerger, Orientalist), the Middle East would be neglected; and that without his mediating, interpretative role, the place would not be understood..., partly because only the Orientalist can interpret the Orient, the Orient being radically incapable of interpreting itself.<sup>1</sup>*

—Edward Said, *Orientalism*

As suggested in Chapters 1 and 2, media narratives and visual representations play a significant part in the process of viewers' understanding of their own identities, while (mis)recognizing the "other," as well as the "self," through complex mechanisms. Assuming the significance of directors/auteurs' control over the production of animated narratives and the influence of discourses and power relations that embody their subjectivities, this chapter and the following two chapters examine animated folklores by Disney and Miyazaki. The examinations point toward explaining a link between the identities circulated through the texts and the resulting cultural identities potentially articulated by utilizing these texts.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Disney animations have been contributing to media-based ideology creation since the 1930s, and, according to many critics, in combination with theme parks, they have also served an Anglo-phallogocentric discourse. However, a better understanding of the complex mechanisms of identity articulation via media representations requires taking into account the context of the globalized animation industry, as representations presented in the emerging medium of *anime* have become quite influential since the 1980s and 1990s, rivaling Western aesthetics. Thus, although North

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<sup>1</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 289.

American animations still occupy a dominant position in the global market, the increasing number of widely distributed *anime* offer alternative narratives for cultural identity articulation, which may in turn offer alternatives to the dominant model of representation. Miyazaki Hayao's (Studio Ghibli) *anime*, in particular, in many aspects defy the Western ideologies conveyed through many of Disney's texts, as well as destabilizing American-centered cultural flows.

Close textual analyses of works from these two studios reveal the complexity of self/other construction, by attending not just to concepts of Orientalizing (the West's construction of "the East" for its own purposes) or Occidentalizing (the East's construction of "the West" for its own purposes), but also to concepts such as self-othering by "others," and self-Occidentalizing on the part of the Occident, which operate in the narrative-making process of some texts. Based on these ideas, the following three chapters examine specific animated works through the prism of self/other constructs in media representation from postcolonial and gender studies perspectives. They attempt to demonstrate how the theoretical and historical discussions of previous chapters are (or are not) embodied or executed in actual texts.

The following analyses also attend to the socio-political (cultural) backgrounds of the texts' production and the creators' intentions, as well as to the receptions of the film based on information from reviews and box office numbers. This is done because, as Martin Barker asserts, the production history behind a media product is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the media text,<sup>2</sup> as the text is always produced and interpreted in a specific temporal and spatial context.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Barker, *Comics: Ideology, Power & the Critics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 275.

The animations examined have all been theatrically released: Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998);<sup>3</sup> Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), *Porco Rosso* (1992), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and *Spirited Away* (2001).<sup>4</sup> These films were chosen because each of them provides viewers with stories that explore or evoke issues of cultural identity, and with specific notions of "self" and "other," composed of interrelating politics of gender/sexual, racial/ethnic, and national identities. Each of the three Disney works is paired up with one or more of Miyazaki's films.

This chapter examines *Aladdin*—an archetypal representation of "otherness" derived from a classical Western Orientalist view—in relation to *Nausicaä* and *Porco Rosso*—versions of Occidentalism, or Oriental media representation of its Western "other." *Nausicaä* and *Porco Rosso* reflect Miyazaki's perception of "the West," "the East," and Japan.

#### 4.1. *Aladdin* (1992): manifestation of classic Western Orientalism

Oh, I come from a land,  
From a faraway place,  
Where the caravan camels roam  
Where they cut off your ear  
If they don't like your face.  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.  
(from the original lyrics of the opening song of *Aladdin*, "Arabian Nights")<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Aladdin* was directed and produced by Ron Clements and John Musker, and written by John Musker, Ron Clements, Ted Elliott (screenplay), and Terry Rossio (screenplay), as well as others. *Pocahontas* was directed by Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, and produced by James Pentecost. The story was written by Carl Binder (screenplay), Susannah Grant (screenplay), Phillip LaZebnick (screenplay), and many others who contributed to additional story materials. *Mulan* was directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, and produced by Pam Coats. The story was written by Robert D. San Souci, as well as many others who contributed to additional story materials.

<sup>4</sup> *Nausicaä* was written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao, and produced by Takahata Isao. *Porco Rosso*, *Mononoke*, and *Spirited Away* were all written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao, and produced by Suzuki Toshio.

<sup>5</sup> Disney Animation Studio, after discussions with Arab communities, agreed to change these lyrics for the subsequent video release from "Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face," to "Where it's flat

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the United States began to take the place of the fading European imperial powers, and has wielded its hegemonic power over the Orient. Particularly after all the Arab-Israeli wars since World War II, the Arab Muslim has become one of the major figures in American popular media, such as Disney's *Aladdin*, almost always portrayed as an enemy. With an ideological combination of semiotic typology and socio-cultural "facts" (or incidents), *Aladdin* provides in animated fantasy a narrative that reflects the archetypal Western Orientalist view, which prevailed through nineteenth-century paintings and literature. The lyrics quoted above encapsulate the exoticization that is manifested throughout this animation. In fact, the ethnic and other types of representation in the film have sparked intense controversies among the Arab community in the United States and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

The significant influence of *Aladdin* can also be estimated based on its box office numbers. According to a report by *The Los Angeles Times* on April 21, 1993, *Aladdin* had grossed over \$200 million in North America by mid-April 1993 (after 22 weeks of release, while ticket sales were still relatively strong), and an estimated \$250 million in the international market, with a large portion of that drawn from Asia. The article stresses the significance of this number, stating that "a \$200-million-grossing film means that 50 million movie tickets have been sold, which is the equivalent of one fifth of the U.S.

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and immense and the heat is intense," so that the word "barbaric" in the subsequent line can refer to the land instead of the people.

<sup>6</sup> Disney's *Aladdin* was to a certain degree controversial in Southeast Asia, notably Malaysia and Indonesia, where there are significant Muslim populations. Although protests against *Aladdin* in these countries, particularly in Malaysia, ended up quietly backing down, largely due to the difficulty in publicizing their claims, this should not discount the fact that some conservative Islamic communities did pressure the government to ban *Aladdin* because of its offensive depiction of Islamic culture. (See Timothy R. White and J. E. Winn, "Islam, Animation, and Money: The Reception of Disney's *Aladdin* in Southeast Asia," in *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning*, ed. John Lent (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999).

population.” (Note that the ticket price for Aladdin was U.S. \$4.00.)<sup>7</sup> *Aladdin* was Disney’s top grossing animated feature ever up to that point.

### **Synopsis**

Released in 1992, *Aladdin* was adapted from a version of the story of “Aladdin and the Magic Lamp” from a work of medieval Middle-Eastern literature, *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* (also known as *A Thousand and One Nights*).<sup>8</sup> Set in the mythical city of Agrabah, the story follows a poor but street-smart young man, Aladdin, and his mischievous pet monkey, Abu.

We learn that the sultan of Agrabah is secretly being controlled by the evil vizier, Jafar, who is also a sorcerer and is plotting to take over the sultan position for himself. He has spent years searching for the Cave of Wonders, in which lies the magic lamp whose power he hopes to exploit. Jafar, however, learns that only one person, a metaphorical “Diamond in the Rough,” can enter the Cave.

The sultan is having problems finding a husband for his daughter, Princess Jasmine. Jafar hypnotizes the sultan and convinces him to give his magic ring to Jafar, claiming that he needs the ring to find Jasmine a husband. The truth of the matter though, is that Jafar needs the ring to discover the identity of the “Diamond in the Rough” in order to bring him closer to the location of the magical lamp.

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<sup>7</sup> David J. Fox, “‘Aladdin’ Becomes a \$200-Million Genie for Disney Movies,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (April 21, 1993), F1.

<sup>8</sup> According to *The Reader’s Encyclopedia*, *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* (also known as *A Thousand and One Nights*) is a collection of tales from ancient Persia, India and Arabia, which attained its present form in about 1450. *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* was first translated into French in 1704-1717, and into English in 1882-1884. (William Rose Benet, *The Reader’s Encyclopedia*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1965.)

Jasmine, on the other hand, not wanting to be married, decides to run away from the palace. Amidst the chaos in the street, she is rescued by a street scamp, Aladdin. Aladdin becomes attracted to the free-spirited Jasmine, but by law Jasmine is allowed to wed only a royal suitor. In the meantime, Jafar discovers that Aladdin is the “Diamond in the Rough,” and he sends palace guards to capture him. Jafar then lies to Jasmine, claiming that Aladdin had been executed for allegedly kidnapping her. Disguised as an old man, Jafar takes Aladdin to the Cave of Wonders, telling him that if he brings back the lamp from the Cave without touching any treasure, he will be rewarded. Aladdin successfully finds the lamp, but his pet monkey, Abu, attempts to take a jewel, which causes them to be trapped inside.

Although Aladdin and Abu initially manage to escape the cave with the help of a flying carpet, in evading Jafar they are forced back into it. In the cave, Aladdin discovers that the lamp is home to Genie, who serves his master with any three wishes—except that he cannot force a person to fall in love. Aladdin, having fallen in love with Jasmine, wishes to become a prince in order to try to win her love. With Genie’s help, he “becomes” Prince Ali Ababwa, and seeks her hand in marriage. Although Jasmine is initially not interested in this seemingly typical rich prince, he eventually wins her love after taking her on a romantic ride on the flying carpet. Meanwhile, Jafar finds out that Aladdin has the lamp and, with his wisecracking parrot, Iago, manages to steal it. As the Genie’s new master, Jafar makes his first wish: to become the sultan.

Jasmine and her father, the real sultan, defy Jafar, at which point he makes his second wish: to become the most powerful sorcerer in the world. Jafar then reveals that Prince Ali Ababwa is merely a street scamp named Aladdin, and imprisons him. When Aladdin tries to get the lamp back, Jafar turns himself into a giant snake in order to kill

Aladdin. At Aladdin's suggestion, Jafar makes his final wish: to become the most powerful genie, which consequently imprisons him in the lamp.

While Aladdin is no longer a prince and cannot marry Jasmine by law, the re-instated sultan is convinced that Aladdin has proven his self-worth. The sultan therefore changes the law so that the princess is able to marry anyone she chooses. In the end, Aladdin and Jasmine begin their new life together as a happy couple.

**Table 4.1. Main characters and voice actors in *Aladdin***

Characters	Voice actors
Aladdin/Prince Ali Ababwa	Scott Weinger (white American)
Jasmine	Linda Larkin (white American)
Genie	Robin Williams (white American)
The Sultan	Douglas Seale (white British)
Jafar	Jonathan Freeman (white American)
Razoul	Jim Cummings (white American)
Abu	Frank Welker (white American)
Iago	Gilbert Gottfried (white American)
Rajah	Frank Welker (white American)

Table 4.1. shows the main characters and their voice actors in *Aladdin*, since some characters and corresponding voice actors raise issues to be discussed in this chapter. It is important to note that the “Arabian” characters are voiced by “white” American or British actors.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, “Arabian” will be used to refer to the characters in *Aladdin*, whose “actual” nationality or ethnicity is obscure. Because the original *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, from which *Aladdin* is adapted, was an amalgam of tales from Persia, India and Arabia, it is unclear where the mythical city of Agrabah is supposed to be located, or who its inhabitants are supposed to be in cultural or ethnic terms. The characters in *Aladdin* are represented, as I will argue, as undifferentiatedly “Middle Eastern,” suggesting Arab and Muslim identities. By “white” in this discussion I refer to people whose ethnic backgrounds are not Arab (or other Middle Eastern ethnicity, such as Persian/Iranian) or Muslim.



### **Social background of the production and origin of *Aladdin***

In examining *Aladdin* as a Western representation of the Orient, we should not ignore the background of social and political events against which the film was produced: in particular, the (first) Gulf War, which took place in 1991, during the production of the film. Dianne Sachko Macleod describes the production of *Aladdin* as revealing Disney CEO Michael Eisner's approach to the cultural globalization (or domination) that "parallel(s) the causes and unfolding of the Gulf War." She also adds that both Eisner and the Pentagon "relied on the same storehouse of racial and cultural images."<sup>10</sup> This observation indicates that, bolstered by the Gulf War as its context, *Aladdin* further dramatizes stereotypes of the (Middle) East. That is, media reports on the Gulf War in the United States and Disney's *Aladdin* were interdependent and worked toward a mutual interest: the emphasis on freedom and quality of life for U.S. citizens, in opposition to the evil (or, at least, unliberated and inferior) "Other."

The popular tale *The Arabian Nights Entertainment*, upon which *Aladdin* is based, is known as an important text within Orientalist discourse. Although the collected tales do trace their roots to the parts of the Middle East and India—what nineteenth century Europeans called "the Orient"—they were interpreted not as fantastic tales, but as an "accurate" depiction of "the Orient," according to nineteenth century Orientalists' needs: exhibition of "the Orient" as the exotic and sexually seductive "Other," to fulfill Western desire and give an excuse for the Anglo-European imperialist and colonialist powers in order to put Oriental lands under their control. In *Orientalism*, Said cites Richard Burton's well-known nineteenth century English translation of *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* as

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<sup>10</sup> Dianne Sachko Macleod, "The Politics of Vision: Disney, Aladdin, and the Gulf War," in *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 180.

one of these “Western discoveries” of “the Orient” that contributed significantly to the characterization of fabled “Arabia.”<sup>11</sup> This characterization has carried on, if not accelerated, through contemporary popular cultural forms—film, music, and pantomime etc.—in Europe (the U.K. in particular) and North America. This important text even reveals the slipperiness of Western definitions of “the Orient,” as it has been used to keep stereotypical and racist views of China in circulation through the famous British pantomime “Aladdin,” which moves the setting of the story to China.<sup>12</sup> Through its Orientalist representations, *Aladdin* succeeds in its myth-making, partly because the origin of *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* is also ambiguous enough to be modified to fit different “Oriental” contexts.

#### **4.1.1. The Oriental “Other” as peril and domestication of the “Other”**

##### **Classic Orientalism dies hard**

From the very beginning, besides the opening song, the film provides an Orientalist tone. A peddler introduces the audience to the story, starting with the line: “A *dark* man waits with a dark purpose.” This line undeniably links one’s skin color to what one is, activating the old Anglo-American stereotype of dark skinned people as dangerous and evil. Thus, *Aladdin* starts out with the stereotypical depiction of the Western imaginary of “the Orient,” which overlooks what the Oriental is in reality, and re-creates it by visual and narrative representations throughout the film. These representations almost perfectly correspond with a comment made by Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, the director of Media Relations for the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee in the United States. He describes

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<sup>11</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 194

<sup>12</sup> Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. vi.

Hollywood films stereotyping Arabs as exhibiting what he calls the “B-syndrome”: they are portrayed as bombers, belly dancers, or billionaires. Qumsiyeh, more specifically asserts that many of films considered offensive are subsidized by Michael Eisner-run Disney.<sup>13</sup>

By the same token, an article from *The Los Angeles Times* in 1997, “Arab-Bashing for Fun and Profit,” lists twelve steps to make “successful” anti-Arab films, which include: villains having beards, wearing turbans, speaking broken English, having rude manners, threatening to blow things up, and women characterized as belly dancers.<sup>14</sup> Most of these characteristics appear on the screen of *Aladdin*. For example, the merchant in the opening scene wears a huge turban and has a strong accent; the palace guards all have turbans, beards, and big noses; and the leader of those guards uses rough language. As well, the depictions of female and male characters in *Aladdin* to a large extent verify Qumsiyeh’s critique of the “Orientalized” Arab, which I discuss below with more specific examples.

When Jasmine sneaks out of the palace to the street, she sees ordinary people’s lives in Disney’s “imagined geography” of “Arabia.” The iconic significations of a “mysterious,” “savage” Oriental “other” include: street vendors speaking in strong accents, street performers demonstrating sword swallowing and fire eating, and gangsters chasing Aladdin to cut off his hand for stealing a loaf of bread, just as another peddler threatens Jasmine with the same “savage” punishment when she steals an apple to give it to a starving child. All of these images feed Anglo-European stereotype of the inscrutable “other.”

After meeting “Prince Ali” (the disguised Aladdin), Jasmine is shown a spectacle of her own culture, as well as the “whole new world.” Ali/Aladdin takes Jasmine “to show

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<sup>13</sup> Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, “100 Years of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim stereotyping” ([http://www.ibiblio.org/prism/jan98/anti\\_arab.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/prism/jan98/anti_arab.html)) (accessed on July 28, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Laila Lalami, “Arab-Bashing for Fun and Profit,” in *The Los Angeles Times* (July 28, 1997): Entertainment Desk 3.

[her] the world” on the magic carpet. The song of “A Whole New World” in this scene reads:

[Aladdin] A whole new world  
A new fantastic point of view  
No one to tell us no  
Or where to go  
Or say we’re only dreaming

[Jasmine] A whole new world  
A dazzling place I never knew  
But when I’m way up here  
It’s crystal clear  
That now I’m in a whole new world with you  
Now I’m in a whole new world with you

As Ali/Aladdin assures Jasmine at the end of the first stanza above, their whirlwind tour of the world is not just a dream. This assurance is not only for her, but also to draw viewers into Disney’s “illusion of life,”<sup>15</sup> encouraging them to believe that what is on the screen is at least partly true. As the second stanza demonstrates, Jasmine is shown the world, including her own culture, as “a dazzling place.” What is important here is that she is not simply introduced to the world that she “never knew” by Ali/Aladdin—a brown male created by white Americans—but she is also fed the “fantastic point of view” framed by Disney. Guided by Ali/Aladdin, who is in a sense a missionary sent by the white American corporation, Jasmine “(re)discovers” her own culture, which supposedly liberates her from the constraints of her society. Differently put, the scene implies that Jasmine, an epitome of the Orient, shapes her worldview through the eye, or guidance of the West, as she is incapable of defining herself and others.

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<sup>15</sup> The term is taken from Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston’s description of Disney animation. See, Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, p. 13.

In this manner, *Aladdin* resurrects the old Orientalist view; it acts as if Disney knew things that even “Orientals” cannot know on their own—one of the fundamental claims of Orientalism: Orientalists know things that even Orientals cannot know on their own.<sup>16</sup> The quote at the beginning of the chapter is Said’s sardonic stating of this point, and here we see it brought to light again through a modern medium—animation. It is also with this mechanism of Orientalist discourse that *Aladdin* sustains myth-making, in a similar way that Barthes’ “myth” operates (as discussed in Chapter 1).

As mentioned briefly above, another significant factor that bolsters an Orientalist view is the set of “prior texts” that made up the context of *Aladdin*; at the time of its release it was framed by a significant number of U.S. media representations of Arabs as “enemy” around the time of the Gulf War. The villain Jafar could potentially be associated with Saddam Hussein, whose menacing image was foregrounded in a number of publications and news programs.<sup>17</sup> It is reasonable to speculate that, along with the actual events of the war and the conflicting relationship between the two societies, demonized images of the Middle Eastern people and customs were intensified through the production and consumption of *Aladdin*.

Moreover, what makes Disney’s “Orientalist project” viable lies in the intricate operation of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Art historian Ernst Gombrich notes that “the familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar; an existing representation will always exert its spell over the artist.”<sup>18</sup> This suggests that when animators depict a culture other than their own, they are likely to first draw the information

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<sup>16</sup> See Said, *Orientalism*, p. 321.

<sup>17</sup> See Macleod, p. 186. She mentions the stereotypical images that promoted a characterization of Arabs as enemies found in political cartoons.

<sup>18</sup> Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon, 1961), p. 82.

about that culture from existing contemporary sources such as media reports or other media forms, or from stereotyped representations spawned through various earlier media, with which they already feel familiar. In other words, the racist view of the Oriental “other” prompted by *Aladdin* is effectively maintained by the media intertextuality that viewers encounter in a variety of contexts.

Given the fact that media representation often contributes to fixing false identities of certain cultures, based on the dominant perspective, *Aladdin* can aid in projecting the Middle East—a region unfamiliar to America—with a binary view of good/bad, Self/Other, or Subject/Object. This corresponds to Bill Nichols’ concept of “recognition,” introduced in Chapter 1, which allows people (or viewers, in the context of viewing *Aladdin*) to build relationships with others and the world based on references from their own familiar encounters. It should be therefore acknowledged that the producers may have a hand in articulating Arab identity through representations in *Aladdin*, but only when their intended meanings are consistent with viewers’ pre-viewing knowledge (or referents).

#### **4.1.2. The mechanisms of gendering, sexualizing, and racializing of the “other”**

As Said points out, Orientalist discourse also instigates genderization/ sexualization of the Oriental “Other” to solidify the distinction between the Westerners and Orientals. Issues of race/ethnicity/nationality and sexuality/gender are often intertwined in identity articulation in fantasy space. According to Ella Shohat, the intersection between them was manifested saliently through filmic practice especially from the 1930s to the 1950s when the U.S. production code prohibited sexually suggestive scenes, allowing the Western colonial discourse to operate more effectively. She explains about the system:

[e]xoticising and eroticizing the Third World allowed the imperial imaginary to play out its own fantasies of sexual domination. Already in the silent era, films often included eroticized dances, featuring a rather improbably melange of Spanish and Indian dances, plus a touch of belly-dancing.<sup>19</sup>

This reveals that in order to avoid exhibiting sexual representations by means of the body of its own race/nation, the West (mainly Hollywood) used generalized “Orientals” to fill in its own sexual appetite. Although Shohat’s examples are from more than fifty years ago, it is amazing to see how this kind of condition remains significantly similar in today’s film representation.

This Orientalist quest is exemplified in *Aladdin*, particularly through the genderized/sexualized depiction of Jasmine, as well as of belly-dancing women in the street. Jasmine has a perfect hourglass figure, exaggerated by a “belly dancer” outfit, thick make-up with vivid red lipstick, eye shadow, mascara, and blush. [Figure 4.1.]

**Figure 4.1.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992). The figure shows Jasmine with a midriff-exposed dress and leaning against her pet tiger.

*Jasmine’s perfect “hourglass figure”*

This type of representation of Arab women is not unique to *Aladdin*; we can find the same image and similar romantic narratives in other media, such as the erstwhile sitcom *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-1970).<sup>20</sup> The animated opening of this show introduces Jeannie who appears to have the same body features and style as Jasmine, except for her blond hair. While white women have arguably gained ground since the 1960s in terms of the political

<sup>19</sup> Shohat, “Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema,” p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> *I Dream of Jeannie* is a story of a female genie and an astronaut with whom she falls in love and marries.

correctness of their representation on U.S. TV, the continual representation of stereotypical Arab female heroines still perpetuates the notion of Arab women as belly-dancers—a compelling sexual icon.

**Figure 4.2.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). The figure shows Jasmine looking at Aladdin and gently touching him at the balcony outside her room.

*Jasmine's seductive eyes toward Aladdin*

**Figure 4.3.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). The figure shows Jasmine trying to seduce Jafar with her alluring eyes.

*Jasmine's seductive eyes toward Jafar*

Jasmine's body is literally commodified by men (suitors) as a prize "to win." Among them is Aladdin, who says to the sultan, "Just let her meet me, I will *win* your daughter." Moreover, the scopophilic male gaze upon her body is induced by the look she casts on men, both Aladdin and Jafar. When Aladdin takes Jasmine to his hide-out to escape from an angry vendor in town, they are attracted to each other, almost kissing, and she gives a seductive sidelong look to further draw him in. She uses a similar look when she is testing "Prince Ali," as he tries to impress her outside her room in the palace. A more dramatized version of her "seductive look" is illustrated when she is pretending to be attracted to Jafar, while in fact she is tricking him to get out of the marriage that he is trying to force her into. [Figure 4.2., 4.3.] In these scenes, the look she gives both men demonstrates her conscious behavior to gain an advantage, rather than simply being exhibited as a passive object. While this seems to show Jasmine's agency to some degree, it also is a clear instance of her playing the role of the seductive "Oriental female body," which epitomizes the image of the femme fatale.



The gazes of the two male characters constantly genderize and sexualize Jasmine's body. For example, Aladdin's determination to become a prince is partly for the purpose of accentuating Jasmine's "princess-ness"—a quintessentially feminine role—so that he can be in the more authoritative position of "showing her the world." As well, Jafar's penetrating and violating gaze explicitly shows his objectification of Jasmine for his sexual desire. At the next level, the viewers of the film also watch Jasmine as she is presented to their gaze, and watch her being gazed upon by Aladdin and Jafar. It seems therefore that all three groups in Christian Metz's paradigm—the film producers (overwhelmingly male), the male characters in the film, and the male heterosexual viewers—are all participating in the pleasure of consuming Jasmine sexually, thus generating scopophilic pleasure—"the desire to see"<sup>21</sup>—in their experience of *Aladdin*.

As in the mechanism of classical Orientalism, sexualization of the woman's body is closely intertwined with racialization in *Aladdin*. Sexualization of the female body in *Aladdin* solicits the questions of which racial body is eroticized, for what purpose, and to whose advantage, reminding us of Rey Chow's "technologies of visibility" that play a significant role in creating unequal power dynamics, in terms of both gender and race/ethnicity. Because Jasmine's representation seems to be organized for the pleasure of heterosexual males—the characters in the film, the film's creators, and the male viewers—it seems unlikely that the abovementioned scenes of Jasmine's seductive look might be meant to represent Jasmine's (and brown women's) power and subjectivity to subvert conventional racialized and gendered representations. Furthermore, it is intriguing that when Jafar traps Jasmine, he puts her inside an hourglass, which not only reinscribes her body shape but also draws upon the idea that "brown men oppress brown women" from the

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<sup>21</sup> Metz, p. 58.

Western-Oriented view. Even only temporarily, this draws attention away from the fact that white men have dominated brown men and women, as well as white women, for centuries.

Another indication of the gendering/sexualizing of race in *Aladdin* is exposed in the ambiguity of brown male characters, perceived as either oversexualized peril or passive feminine “puppets”—two major characterizations of the Oriental “other” in opposition to the Western “self.” Good examples of these characterizations are Jafar and the sultan respectively. Jafar’s appearance incorporates typical sinister signifiers: a beard and elongated mustache, slanted eyes, hooked nose and gaunt face. [Figure 4.4., 4.5.] The beard also matches one of the attributes of “successful anti-Arab films” mentioned above. (Jafar shares some features with Governor Ratcliffe in *Pocahontas* and Councilor Chi Fu in *Mulan*, who also appear as undesirable characters, discussed in the next two chapters.)

**Figure 4.4.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992). The figure shows Jafar frustrated about the sultan’s being fascinated with Prince Abu.

**Figure 4.5.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992). The figure shows Jafar sitting in the sultan’s throne with scepter in his hand.

*Jafar (sordid skin tone) and his cobra-headed scepter (right)*

At one point, Jafar’s body is uncontrollably blown up like a balloon, turning him into a massive, red-skinned monstrous entity (“more powerful than Genie”) and intensifying the image of Oriental as the irrational, menacing “Other.” This reinforces the image of aggressive and frightening Oriental males.

Jafar’s ethnic identity is, however, more complicated and ambiguous than a mere embodiment of Oriental peril. He certainly has some stereotypical Arab features, such as jewelry, a beard, and a rather swarthy face, but he also speaks with a strong “high-class”

British accent, or “the language of the colonizer.” On the one hand, this may be interpreted as a caricature of white British people, and Jafar is a local Oriental who is bought off by them. On the other hand, it is also possible to assert that Jafar symbolizes an Arab who turns into a threat as a result of “mimicry” of white Westerns (British), as Bhabha describes (see Chapter 1).<sup>22</sup> It has to be noted that since the story of Disney’s *Aladdin* is set in a fictional, generic “Middle Eastern” place, it is not possible to posit a real British colonizer/Middle Eastern colonized relationship; nonetheless, a generalized sense of colonizer/colonized is certainly suggested. With this interpretation, it follows that while the white West put “the Orient” under its control and made them adapt to white ways of behaving and thinking, the latter’s act of “mimicry”—being almost whites but not quite—also hints at a potential space that allows them to subvert the white dominant discourse. In this respect, one could argue that while Disney had a chance to subvert the white dominant discourse, they instead further demonized “the Orient” by portraying Jafar’s hybridity as part of the constellation of evil that makes up his characterization.

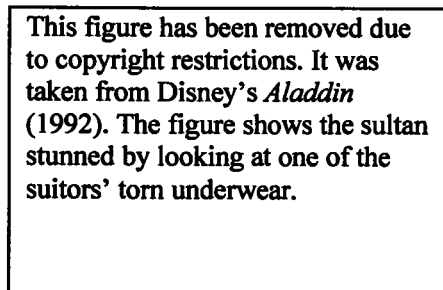
Another example of gendered race in *Aladdin* is presented by the emasculated sultan and male suitors. While classic Saidian Orientalism critics primarily discuss the sexualized or effeminized Middle-Eastern female body, *Aladdin* also evokes feminized Oriental males, a powerful tool for distinguishing the Western “self” from the Oriental “other.” For example, one of Jasmine’s suitors leaves the palace running in a “feminine” manner, with his red heart-patterned underwear exposed after the tiger Rajar bites a hole in his pants. More evidently, the sultan is literally a “puppet” of Jafar—ignorant of his kingdom’s political matters, naïve and easily manipulated. Most of the time, he remains under a spell

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<sup>22</sup> Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man,” in *The Location of Culture*, pp. 85-92.

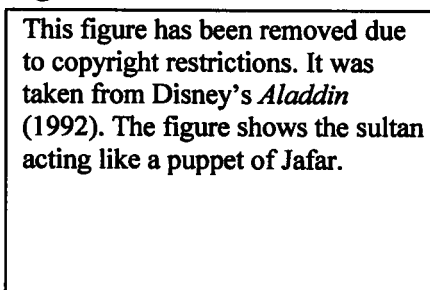
cast by Jafar, trusting his decisions and obeying his commands. In one scene, the sultan literally acts as a puppet in a clown costume under Jafar's spell. [Figure 4.6., 4.7.]

**Figure 4.6.**



*The sultan of Agrabah, father of Jasmine*

**Figure 4.7.**



*The sultan put into a clown costume by Jafar*

It is Jafar, the Oriental who follows white British mannerisms, who is effectively in the position of authority. Whether the British are intended to be caricatured or not, and although Aladdin and Jasmine win in the end, the film lays out “normal” power hierarchies between the white British (colonizer), the local authority in the colony (Jafar), and marginal groups such as effeminate males, women, and lower class people (the sultan, Jasmine, and Aladdin).

The incapability and powerlessness of “the Orient” is also signified by the infantilization of Oriental male characters in the film. The sultan easily panics and is overwhelmed when things get tough to handle, and his behavior is sometimes childlike, exemplified in the scene where he yelps with delight while playing with the magic carpet. Feminization of the Orient is also implied through the infantilization of Aladdin as well. It is natural for viewers to compare Aladdin and Jafar in various scenes throughout the film. In comparison to the tall, intimidating presence of Jafar, Aladdin has a relatively small and a “cute” rather than stocky figure, despite some muscle. He is after all a boy, daydreaming of life in the palace with Jasmine, rather than a realistic grown-up man. Indeed, Jafar treats

Aladdin like a child, calling him “Prince A Boo-boo,” which emphasizes his infantilization. This is further reinforced by Aladdin’s remark to Genie, “without you, I am just Aladdin... The only reason everyone thinks I’m worth more than anything is because of you... Genie, I can’t keep this up on my own.”

Even Jafar, who appears to be the strongest and the most powerful character of all, is also seen as being feminized: except for his magical power, his physique is very skinny and far from masculine—both in his regular figure and his disguises. Moreover, his hysterical laugh and extremely high-pitched voice when he gets the lamp from Aladdin also suggest feminized elements of his representation.

It is important to point out that the Western project of “othering” the Orient for self-demarcation also involves domestication of the “other.” This follows Bhabha’s account of “mimicry” as the colonizer’s scheme to force the unfamiliar colonized to become like themselves—the familiar—so that the former can control the latter effectively. Gombrich’s view, mentioned above, of how people are easily drawn into the familiar before facing the unfamiliar also explains the allure of the domestication scheme. This view is useful to understand the process of building characters in *Aladdin*. For example, Aladdin was explicitly modeled after (Caucasian) Tom Cruise—the “familiar”—instead of the animators looking to a local (Asian or Oriental) character for inspiration.<sup>23</sup> This seems to suggest that one can become a hero only with some element of “whiteness.” It is yet open to debate whether this should be interpreted as an attempt to avoid emphasizing stereotypical racial features, or as a domestication of the Oriental “other”—a “whitening” of Arabs by

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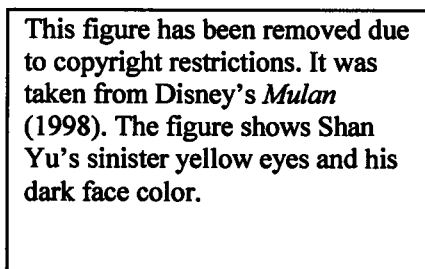
<sup>23</sup> Sean Griffin, “The Illusion of ‘Identity’: Gender and Racial Representation in *Aladdin*,” in *Animation Journal* (Fall, 1994), p. 65.

Disney—for Western consumption. Hence it is also arguable that *Aladdin* is an example of sympathetic representation of Arabs or the Orient.

#### 4.1.3. Color complex: embracing “whiteness” and posing as white

The issue of the racialized “other” in *Aladdin* seems to boil down to the problematic founded upon the perception of color. Racial hierarchy is structured, broadly, on whether one is white or non-white. Additionally, the degree of darkness makes a difference within “the brown.” In *Aladdin*, while all the characters are supposedly “Arab” and have “brown” skin, their skin tones determine their characteristics: the darker the skin, the more evil the character. For example, the skin of the “good” character Aladdin is light brown. The Sultan’s skin is also quite light, and he wears a white, Santa Clause-like beard and mustache. Combined with his characteristics and mannerisms, this signifies his “innocence” and “ignorance.” Jafar’s complexion, on the other hand, is noticeably darker, similar to the evil leader Shan Yu in *Mulan*, and his color darkens further in some scenes. [Figure 4.4., 4.8.]

**Figure 4.8.**



*Shan Yu (the evil leader of the Huns)*

Although complexion has no inherent connection with human qualities, people consciously or subconsciously generate hierarchies based on skin color; this is also practiced in the fantasy of *Aladdin*. Whereas “racism” refers to inter-group discrimination for the purposes of subjugation, “colorism” refers particularly to prejudice regarding degree

of skin darkness reflected within a non-white ethnic group.<sup>24</sup> Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall describe the link between skin tones and power dynamics among Black Americans as a “color complex,” a “psychological fixation about color and features.”<sup>25</sup> Like racism and colorism, this “color complex” privileges lighter skin tones and Western aesthetic standards, revealing again the dichotomous view of light and dark, and that degree of “desirability” depends on the question of whom white people desire. This enables the whiter/lighter “self” to be distinguished from the non-white/darker “other.”

According to psychiatrist Frances Cress Welsing’s theory of “color confrontation,” when whites recognize non-white skin as the norm, and white as minority in the world population, their deeply seated feelings of inferiority and the inadequacy of white people toward non-white skin drive them to conquer those non-whites.<sup>26</sup> Thus, whites project their self-hatred onto non-white “others.” In the United States, the connection between pigmentation and power is deeply rooted in history before the Civil War, when skin color could mean the difference between living free and living as a slave.

Russell, Wilson and Hall, analyzing different literary works, conclude that “darkness causes suffering; lightness brings love.”<sup>27</sup> In *Aladdin*, both Aladdin and Jasmine have skin tones lighter than other Arab characters, so that they are after all “good guys” despite some stereotypical depictions. In this sense, they pass as white, which allows them

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<sup>24</sup> For the definitions of those terms, see Larry D. Crawford, “Racism, Colorism and Power” ([http://www.nbufront.org/html/FRONTalView/ArticlesPapers/Crawford\\_RacismColorismPower.html](http://www.nbufront.org/html/FRONTalView/ArticlesPapers/Crawford_RacismColorismPower.html)) (accessed on July 28, 2007). It has to be noted that colorism also refers to the discrimination against lighter tones by darker ones, although this phenomenon is less discussed.

<sup>25</sup> Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Russel, Wilson, and Hall, p. 56-57. Frances Cress Welsing explores the practice of White supremacy.

<sup>27</sup> Russell, Wilson, and Hall, p. 43.

to have some of the privileges attached to the white body, although their passing as white ends up as a passive act of spectacle in the dominant discourse.<sup>28</sup>

The power dynamics pertaining to skin tones become further complicated by the issue of gender. Jasmine has light, rather pinkish skin, lighter than any other character in the film. It is possible to speculate that, were her complexion darker, she would not gain Aladdin's attention and his love. In order to attract a "prince charming" and be rescued by him, her skin color needs to be lighter than his own.

There is also a possible contribution of religion to the color complex, which further supports the notion that "lighter is righter."<sup>29</sup> For instance, Russell, Wilson, and Hall see the conflicts between Christ and Satan, spirit and flesh, good and evil as essentially a conflict between White and Black. They also show how the image of Christ—the incarnation of God—is deliberately "whitened,"<sup>30</sup> as revisionists transformed him from a Semite to an Aryan. In a similar way, in *Aladdin* it has to be a "whitened brown man"—an incarnation of Tom Cruise—who can rescue a (light) brown woman from "oppressive" (darker) brown men: the sultan (who almost forces Jasmine to marry) [Figure 4.9., 4.10, 4.6.], Jafar (swarthy skin tone) [Figure 4.4.], and the head palace guard Razoul (soiled brown skin tone) [Figure 4.11.].

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<sup>28</sup> It has to be noted that the term "passive" here differs from "passive passing" used by Peter X. Feng. Feng's passive passing assumes that an (multiracial) individual has control over how he or she is read or misread. Unlike Keanu Reeves, who, having a Chinese-Hawaiian father, became popular via his white appearance (passive passing), Aladdin and Jasmine do not have much control over their "whitening," since they are characters based on white-oriented production of Disney. (See Peter X. Feng, "False and Double Consciousness: Race, Virtual Reality and the Assimilation of Hong Kong Action Cinema in *The Matrix*," in *Aliens R Us: The Other in Science Fiction Cinema*, eds. Ziauddin Sardar and Sean Dubitt (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 155.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, Wilson, and Hall, p. 159.

<sup>30</sup> Russell, Wilson, and Hall, p. 59.



**Figure 4.9.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). It shows the figure of Aladdin.

**Figure 4.10.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). It shows the figure of Jasmine.

*Aladdin with light tone brown (left) and Jasmine with pinkish brown (right)*

**Figure 4.11.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992). It shows the figure of Razoul and his followers.

*Razoul with soiled brown skin color*

#### **4.1.4. Can “parody” work?: difficulty in deconstructing “race”**

As discussed above, Disney's representation of characters in *Aladdin* lays itself open to criticism that it contributes to falsely fixing gender/sexual and ethnic identities. In response to this criticism, one could bring in one of the animation's subversive characteristics— parodying the dominant representations of “norms” by exaggerating them—and argue that stereotyped images of the “exotic Orient” in *Aladdin* actually work to expose the constructed-ness of racial identity. This is, however, problematic because one can never tell whether stereotyping intended to be subversive is identified by viewers as such.

The difficulty of interpreting *Aladdin* as a subversive text is also demonstrated by a series of disputes against Disney's *Aladdin* since 1992. In the year it was launched, *Aladdin* was accused of reinforcing negative stereotypes of Arabs by racialized accents, facial features and so forth. Anti-Arab messages in the film were also pointed out by many

Arab-American people, including former spokesperson for the South Bay Islamic Association Yousef Salem, who said that:

All of the bad guys [in *Aladdin*] have beards and large, bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they are wielding swords constantly. Aladdin doesn't have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn't have a beard or a turban. He doesn't have an accent. What makes him nice is they've given him this American character ... I have a daughter who says she's ashamed to call herself an Arab and it's because of things like this.<sup>31</sup>

On the one hand, the constructed-ness of gender/sexual identity is well exposed in *Aladdin*. Genie, in particular demonstrates the fluidity of identity by frequently changing both shape and gender. Genie in drag (as a female tour guide, cheer leader, and so on), using the metamorphic nature of animation, deconstructs the myth of fixed gender identities. On the other hand, while his blue skin makes his race ambiguous, it is not too difficult to associate the depiction of Genie with the feminization of Arabs, considering the origin of the story. As Griffin points out, *Aladdin* uses "the imagery of the Orient to imagine a setting capable of allowing a variety of sexual identities, but [does] so by replaying the colonial imagery—reinstating Western domination."<sup>32</sup> In other words, in *Aladdin* the subversion of gender/sexual identity construction is actualized at the expense of the emancipation of the racial "other," seeming to suggest that the categorization of race/ethnicity is potentially more difficult to transgress by means of animation's metamorphosis than that of gender/sexuality.

Said in the "Afterword" of *Orientalism* emphasizes that his intention is not to insist upon the existence of the "true" Orient, but to argue that the "Orient" is itself a constructed

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Scheinin, "Angry Over 'Aladdin'," in *The Washington Post* (January 10, 1993): G5.

<sup>32</sup> Griffin, p. 70.

entity. However, in the viewer's experience of the "other" through the "illusion of life" in *Aladdin*, the distinction between the "true" and constructed "Orient" becomes extremely obscure. In the contemporary world where media fabrication and reality have become virtually indistinguishable, analysis of *Aladdin* reveals that what is important is not depiction of the "true Orient," but understanding the mechanism of constructing "the Orient": who represents it and for what purpose. My analysis of its narrative and visual representations suggest that *Aladdin* is both a contributor to, and the result of, the "neo-postcolonialism" that controls "the Orient."

#### 4.2. Construction of the Western "Other" (1): *Kaze no tani no Nausicaä* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*) (1984)

... Orientalism has been accompanied by instances of what might be termed Occidentalism, a discursive practice that, by constructing its Western Other, has allowed the Orient to participate actively ... in the process of self-appropriation, even after being appropriated and constructed by Western Others.<sup>33</sup>

The Orient's participation in the construction of the "Other," and its construction of the Western "Other," either of which potentially subverts Western hegemony, are not Said's focus in *Orientalism*. In contrast, Xiaomei Chen, as in the quote above, emphasizes that Orientalism and Occidentalism are complementary views. In other words, the notions of the Western "Self" and the non-Western "Other" do not necessarily exist independently or as fixedly as Said's work seems to imply; this is also reflected in the world of animation. The following sections examine two of Miyazaki's texts that unfold this point, particularly focusing on how and for what purpose the Orient may construct the Western "Other."

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<sup>33</sup> Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 4-5.

## Synopsis

The plot revolves around events occurring in a mystical world, with scenery reminiscent of old Europe. It has been a millennium since a global nuclear war known as the “Seven Days of Fire” destroyed human civilization, and only a tiny remnant of humanity survives, huddled in small enclaves across the continents. The images and backdrops in the opening scenes, along with the theme song, unfold the essence of Europe.<sup>34</sup> [Figure 4.12., 4.13.]

Figure 4.12.



Figure 4.13.



*Tapestries in the opening sequence* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

The narrative centers on a teenage princess, Nausicaä, whose homeland is the idyllic Valley of the Wind. It is so named because of the constant winds that keep it from being swallowed up by the *Fukai*, a thick jungle whose spores and plants are poisonous to humans, due to their ingestion of pollutants and toxins resulting from the expansion of human technology. Riding far above the desert on her glider “Mehve” (derived from the German word “Moewe,” meaning “seagull”), Nausicaä demonstrates an empathic bond with the environment, and with giant insects called Ohmu, which protect the *Fukai*.

One day, warships from the Tolmekian Empire descend upon the valley. As Nausicaä rushes back to the castle, she arrives to find a squad of Tolmekian soldiers

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<sup>34</sup> These tapestries are speculated to be based on Bayeux Tapestry, which has allegedly European origin. See “Is there a model for the tapestry in the opening of the movie?” (at Nausicaa net) <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/nausicaa/faq.html#tapestry> (accessed on December 10, 2003).

standing over the dead body of her father. Consumed with rage, she engages the soldiers in violent combat, only letting up when one of her Lords, Yupa, intervenes to halt the fight. Queen Kushana of the Tolmekian Empire, the commander of the invasion force, tells the people of the valley that the Tolmekians intend to burn the Fukai in order to reclaim the earth for humans. In doing so, the empire plans to revive the Giant God Soldiers (*kyoshinhei*) who destroyed civilization during the global war, and use them against the Ohmu and poisoned forest. Kushana takes Nausicaä and the valley's elders back with her as hostages to ensure that the residents of the valley will not intervene with her empire's project of reviving one of the Giant God Soldiers.

During the journey to the Tolmekian capital, Nausicaä faces death, war, destruction and the truth behind the Seven Days of Fire as she tries to bring peace to the world and save what is left of the ecosystem. Once airborne, the Tolmekian force is set upon by a Pejiteian craft under the control of Prince Asbel. He manages to destroy the Tolmekian transports, but Nausicaä, horrified at the death around her, climbs onto the transport to thwart the Pejiteian from attacking. Asbel hesitates, allowing a Tolmekian soldier to shoot him down. Nausicaä boards her glider and flies over to rescue the unconscious Asbel.

Back in the valley, Kushana returns and gathers her forces to quash the rebellion. As she arrives, she sees an advancing Ohmu horde and orders her troops to take up a defensive position around the warship while they prepare a gigantic Fire Demon, the last of the God Soldiers which the Tolmekians have restored. The troops retreat as they see the angry Ohmu horde bearing down on them, while Kushana appears on the hill atop an armored vehicle. At Kushana's command, a beam of pure energy penetrates across the hordes of Ohmu and a massive nuclear fireball erupts. In the end, despite attacking with all their weapons, the Tolmekians fail to control the Ohmu horde, and it is Nausicaä who sacrifices

herself to save her people, re-establish a bond between humanity and the Ohmu, and settle the conflict between the Valley of the Wind and the Tolmekians.

#### **4.2.1. Representation of the Western “Other” in *Nausicaä***

In its narrative and imagery, *Nausicaä* shows little signification of the East/Orient; most images represent the white West. More specifically, *Nausicaä* demonstrates power dynamics upheld *within* the white West. For example, struggles take place between two societies that are racially indistinguishable: the Tolmekians and the people of the Valley of the Wind. This exclusive presentation of the West reflects Miyazaki’s idea that Japanese people would not like seeing themselves onscreen or in their fantasy.<sup>35</sup> Yet this is not necessarily a sign of self-hatred, as it can be interpreted as a way of evading the dichotomous East vs. West discourse. By removing non-Western elements altogether, *Nausicaä* also succeeds in removing a potential Orientalist gaze, one which is often exercised in *Aladdin*.

From a slightly different perspective, presenting only the West also allows the East (in this case Japan) to construct a fantasy of the Western “Other.” That is, in *Nausicaä*, it is the Orient (Japan) that constructs “the West” as its “Other” that is primarily represented as a dystopian symbol—its obsession with technological development. The Tolmekian Empire, a symbol of Western technological advancement and urbanization, is contrasted with the nature-loving villagers. Based on the director’s background (see Chapter 3), one could reasonably read the Tolmekians’ weapons and the Seven Days of Fire as signifying the atomic bombs that caused Japan so much suffering.

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<sup>35</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, *Kaze no Kaeru Basho* p. 55.

Miyazaki's worldview as conveyed through *Nausicaä* is reflected by Ōbayashi

Nobuhiko's notion of civilization and culture:

Civilization is for making our life newer, quicker, more expensive, more effective, and more convenient. But when our life gets too convenient, we would not use our brains and go numb. In other words, excessive civilization can destroy human beings. In contrast, culture maintains things or styles that are older, slower, deeper, more inefficient, and more inconvenient, which may require a lot of patience. But culture can make us wiser and spiritually rich, because we attempt to overcome all inconvenience by our intelligence and ingenuity.<sup>36</sup>

Applying Ōbayashi's notions of "civilization" and "culture" to *Nausicaä*, the former is represented by the Tolmekians and the latter by the villagers in the Valley of the Wind. "Culture" by Ōbayashi's definition encompasses traditional values and approaches, and the roots from which those values derive. For instance, the villagers' tools are slow and old, yet steady and sound, and born of people's intelligence rather than made by advanced machines. Similarly, *Nausicaä*'s flying machine does not employ a mechanical engine yet requires talent and skill to operate.

[Figure 4.14.]

**Figure 4.14.**



*Nausicaä riding on the flying device "mehve"* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

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<sup>36</sup> Ōbayashi Nobuhiko, *Boku no setonaikai annai* (My Guide to the Seto Inland Sea) (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2002), p. 25.

James G. Carrier describes Occidentalism as an essentialized view of “Western social life that will...displace a village life that is itself often seen as coherent and uniform.”<sup>37</sup> The story of *Nausicaä* centers on the intrusion into the village (the traditional) by the Tolmekians (the modern). Taking Carrier’s description, the abovementioned significations in *Nausicaä* bring to light an Occidentalist view of the Western “Other” as a destructive and undesirable intruder, from which the East must distinguish itself. In this respect, by putting the Tolmekians and the villagers in opposition, *Nausicaä* provides a counter-narrative to the asymmetrical relationship between Occident and Orient posited by Saidian Orientalism critics, in which the former (“modern”) always designates the identity of the latter (“traditional”) as well as of itself.

Miyazaki clearly shows his intention when he says that “Asians and Africans used to have ways of living that maintained a peaceful relation with nature, which was destroyed by Western civilization.”<sup>38</sup> His negative perception of Western advancement is also encapsulated in his depiction of the destructive and grotesque, yet also incompetent monster, the Giant God Soldier [Figure 4.15.]. The epitome of monstrosity, the Giant God Soldier was responsible for destroying the world many years ago, and the Tolmekians now wish to access its power to solve new problems. In the end, the revived God Soldier proves not to be strong enough, and it fails. The failure of this monster of Western technology suggests the fragility and hollowness of Western subjectivity, as well as Asia’s fear of persistent Western technological influence and dominance. In a sense, the monstrosity of the West “contaminates” Japan-as-proper in cultural, military, and ideological domains.

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<sup>37</sup> James G. Carrier, “Introduction,” in *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 3-4.

<sup>38</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 337.



**Figure 4.15.**



*The Giant God Soldier (kyoshinhei)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

The depiction of the “cruel and depraved West” in *Nausicaä* overturns the taken-for-granted Western hegemonic scheme. It also offers Japanese viewers a space for national and ethnic/racial identity articulation, where “we” (Japan) and “they” (the West) are positioned in contrast, and where those identities “reflect in part an assumption or rejection of ‘the West.’”<sup>39</sup> In this respect, *Nausicaä* reveals Miyazaki’s rejection of and skepticism toward Western modernization, an important aspect of Occidentalism. Similar to the perception of the Orient as a dangerously mysterious “Other” in Orientalist discourse, the Western “Other” is associated with a sense of the enigmatic and exotic. For example, Nausicaä collects mysterious poisonous spores to use in her laboratory. [Figure 4.16., 4.17.] Highlighting imaginary differences from the Western “Other” helps to secure and fix Japan’s national/cultural identity.

**Figure 4.16.**



**Figure 4.17.**



*Nausicaä collecting spores (left) for her laboratory (right)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

Nausicaä’s “mysterious” nature is further shown also by her mediumistic power to communicate with creatures such as the Ohmu. She is resurrected in the golden meadow

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<sup>39</sup> Carrier, “Introduction,” p. 12.

created by the herd of Ohmu, who are furious with humankind, but now giving Nausicaä the warmth of their golden tentacles. This scene also resonates with her memory of a failed attempt to save a baby Ohmu in her childhood. Nausicaä is a medium between nature and human, or between life and death, recalling the stories of Jesus' resurrection. A similar analogy can be found in the Japanese "*mare-bito*,"<sup>40</sup> a person who occasionally visits this world from the other world to celebrate joyful events. The resurrection scene is accompanied by spiritual music, leaving the viewer mesmerized and with a feeling of the supernatural in this white girl—an embodiment of the Western "Other." [Figure 4.18.] This observation demonstrates a different construction of "the West" not as a destructive existence, but rather as mysteriously powerful, though not necessarily dangerous.

**Figure 4.18.**



*Nausicaä's resurrection in the golden meadow* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

In order to gain further insight into the implications of these different representations of the Western "other," it is useful to refer to Millie Creighton's study of depictions of non-Japanese in Japanese advertisements. Her study suggests that, rather than a sense of admiration for "the West," one of the reasons for the use of white Westerners in Japanese advertising is to reinforce Japanese values by portraying the potentially threatening (white) "West" that needs to be "tamed" by

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<sup>40</sup> The term *mare-bito* in Japanese mythology refers to a spirit or a visitor from the other world coming to this world to celebrate festive occasions.

Japan.<sup>41</sup> This resembles Miyazaki's negative perception of "the West" illustrated in *Nausicaä*. Following Creighton's argument, *Nausicaä*'s exclusive use of Westerners for its characters and setting reflects Japan's (or the producers') desire to domesticate "the Occident," or to (re)establish the power to control the West.

The ending of the film sees the Tolmekians' plan fail and the village in the valley regains autonomy, signifying a challenge to the idea of fixed power relationships. The uncontrollable "West," obsessed with technological advancement, ends up being tamed by the efforts of Nausicaä—a potential reference to a Japan on the periphery, pre-Western influence. This does not necessarily refer to a mere reversal of hierarchy, where one power still subsumes the other, but suggests fluid power dynamics, through which two parties go on in different directions without interfering with each other. *Nausicaä* implies that nature and humankind are not mutually exclusive; only when nature exists can humankind exist. It emphasizes the importance of balance between harmony with nature and modernization, just as Japan has survived because of its modernization owing to Western technology. One may have the impression, though, that it is necessary for the "East," or the less powerful, to sacrifice itself first in order to see positive results.

Nonetheless, it should be also stressed that Miyazaki's opinion of Western modernization and technological dystopia is rather simplistic, even if it is seemingly easy to believe, and that his view is valid only based on an imagined, utopian vision of "the East," when people lived in intuitive harmony with nature. In Said's model, "the West" is as imaginary as "the Orient" against which it is constructed through Orientalism. Similarly, in

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<sup>41</sup> Millie Creighton, "Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns," in *Occidentalism: Images of the West*, ed. James G. Carrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

*Nausicaä* this vision of “the East” is as imaginary or constructed as “the West”—a manifestation of the dialectic between Orientalism and Occidentalism.

For decades, Hollywood movies have often cast Anglo-American actors in the roles of Asian characters—a “yellow face” mask—through which whites could project their own fears and dark sides on their constructed “Other,” while repudiating this “double.”

*Nausicaä* reverses this, creating a “white face” through which Japan projects itself onto “the West.” The film functions as a mediating lens through which the Japanese “Self” is (mis)recognized in relation to the Western “Other.” Rather than merely imitating or desiring it, *Nausicaä* reveals the West through the scrutinizing eye of the East; here the East is speaking for the West, rather than the Orientalist norm of the latter speaking for the former. In this regard, *Nausicaä* highlights what Laura Nader and others describe as a “dialectical relationship” between Orientalisms and Occidentalisms; Orientalist practice operates effectively by being paired with the Occidentalist view that depicts the West, for example, as a violent, rapacious and reckless “Other.”<sup>42</sup> For this reason, the Western setting and characters in *Nausicaä* should not be naively grouped together with the many other *anime* that also use Western features to attract what I would call “Westphilia” among Japanese who are fascinated with “the West” (e.g. *Sailor Moon*, *Rose of Versailles*, etc., as introduced in Chapter 2).

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<sup>42</sup> Laura Nader, “Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Control of Women,” in *Cultural Dynamics* 2 (1989), pp. 323-55; others include James G. Carrier, “Introduction,” in *Occidentalism*. This dialectical relationship between Orientalism and Occidentalism is also parallel to Iwabuchi’s argument of Oriental Orientalism practiced by Japan to situate itself in a superior position to other Asian countries, which he claims works effectively in combination with Western Orientalism.

#### 4.2.2. Hybridization in the imaginary

As briefly mentioned above, *Nausicaä* is exclusively “Western” in its visual aspects. However, *Nausicaä*’s narrative derives in part from Japanese sources, and the resulting hybridized text possibly further destabilizes the West-East dichotomy and the essentialist notion of culture. During a conversation with American novelist Ernest Callenbach in 1985, Miyazaki said that a major event that motivated him to create *Nausicaä* was the pollution of Japan’s Minamata Bay by mercury.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in an April 1987 article in *Asahi Journal* Miyazaki states that “parts were based on Sasuke Nakao’s *Origins of Plant Cultivation and Agriculture* and Eiichi Fujimori’s *The World of Jomon...* The Russo-German war depicted in Paul Karel’s *Operation Barbarossa* and the Yunnan operation in *Dansakusen...* He also mentioned his inspiration from Howard Furst’s *Spartacus*, and so forth.”<sup>44</sup>

As for Nausicaä herself, despite her Caucasian appearance, she was not inspired entirely by Western sources. According to Miyazaki, his primary inspiration for Nausicaä derived from his fascination with the Phoenician princess Nausicaä, who rescues Odysseus in the Greek epic the *Odyssey*.<sup>45</sup> However, Miyazaki was also inspired by and modeled Nausicaä in part after another princess, this one from the twelfth-century Japanese folktale *Mushi mederu himegimi* (“The Princess Who Loved Insects” included in *The Tale of Present and Past*), who was considered unmarriageable and eccentric because of her love

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<sup>43</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 342. Minamata disease was first discovered in Kumamoto prefecture, Japan, in 1956. It was caused by the release of mercury in the industry wastewater from a chemical factory, which continued from 1938 to 1968. People who ate shellfish in the region suffered from mercury poisoning. Deaths from this disease continued over more than thirty years.

<sup>44</sup> McCarthy, pp. 74-75.

<sup>45</sup> Miyazaki, “Nausicaä no koto” (About Nausicaä), in *manga, Kaze no tani no Nausicaä*, Vol. 1 (Also, see its English translation on <http://www.electric-rain.net/NihonSun/Black&White/OnNausicaa.html>). Miyazaki was drawn to this princess, who is described as brave and close to nature in Bernard Evslin’s *Gods, Demigods, and Demons: An Encyclopedia of Greek Mythology* (New York: Scholastic Paperbacks, 1988).

for insects. In addition, the soundtrack of the film features both European and Asian orchestral and vocal traditions. As a result, *Nausicaä* is a synthesis of spatially and temporally diverse cultural resources, encompassing both Western and Eastern elements, rather than distancing them from each other.

While *Nausicaä* puts forth Miyazaki's critical view of Western modernization, there are also some indications that Miyazaki may embrace a more complicated vision of Western technological advancement than simply celebrating or condemning it. For example, Kushana—the epitome of Western technology—is represented not only as victimizer but also as victim. She has an artificial arm (thanks to Western technology), which she gets after her own is ripped off by one of the giant insects spawned by the pollution from Western modernization. Moreover, Kushana is not completely secure in her position as dictator, as she is threatened by her second-in-command Kurotawa, who waits for the opportunity to take her place. In this regard, Helen McCarthy describes Kushana's character as not being cruel to the villagers in the valley, but only pursuing her goal of possessing the secret weapon.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, *Nausicaä* is not a perfect pacifist either, as she is also prone to violence.

#### **4.2.3. Politics of vision: the Western “Other” as a spectacle?**

The construction of the imaginary West in *Nausicaä* may evade the Orientalist gaze, and instead, bring to light a potential position of the Western “other” as a spectacle for the East (Japan in particular). In the dominant discourse, a power differentiation caused by the mechanism of vision often arises from the white gaze upon the ethnic “other,” or similarly the male gaze upon a female “other.” Yet, as bell hooks suggests, this conventional power

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<sup>46</sup> McCarthy, p. 80.

dynamic becomes ambiguous through blacks' reversed gaze cast on whites, which stems from whiteness in the black's imagination.<sup>47</sup> According to hooks, the agency of black viewers allows them to politicize "looking" relations in the dominant discourse, and to exercise an interrogating gaze toward images of blacks in mainstream films. A similar argument for the agency of black viewers is made by Stuart Hall, who addresses the problem of whites' representation of blackness as being totalizing and determinant. hooks and Hall emphasize that the viewer has "an assertion of subjectivity,"<sup>48</sup> which is pushed forward by the black person who holds a gaze. This perception corroborates Foucault's contention regarding the agency of the marginal "other": in any power dynamic, there is always the possibility of resistance underlying the "other," which aids in challenging the association of "white" with "goodness."

Applying this perspective to the "yellow other," Miyazaki's critical view of the West can be interpreted as representing "whiteness in the yellow's imagination" with his interrogative eye. In addition, as the primary viewers of *Nausicaä* are Japanese, this *anime* provides a site for Japanese viewers to exercise a critical gaze upon "the West"—a subversive action toward the Western-centered hegemonic mechanism of vision.

The politics of vision in the scheme of racialization is also intertwined with gendering, in which the white woman is often glorified and the Oriental woman remains (or becomes) invisible or non-existent. However, what *Nausicaä* represents is largely white Western female figures, and this means that the non-white female body can avoid being exposed to a male gaze on the screen. By excluding non-white female characters, *Nausicaä*

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<sup>47</sup> bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory A Reader*, eds. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003). hooks also discuss black's critical gaze upon the white "other" in "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," as mentioned in Chapter 1.

<sup>48</sup> hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," p. 340.

consequently deconstructs the gendered notion of woman as being looked at and man as bearer of the look,<sup>49</sup> proposed by Laura Mulvey. Instead, the text of *Nausicaä* creates a fantasy space where non-white women can not only avoid being objects of a male gaze, but can also themselves become lookers at (white) female bodies.

Related to this discussion is sexualization of the white Western female body. In the typical Orientalist view, it is Oriental men and women who are effeminized or sexualized; *Nausicaä* overturns this racialized view, instead positioning whites as objects of a “yellow” gaze. This idea is drawn from debates among both academic and fan communities, particularly on whether Nausicaä is a sexualized figure. Murase Hiromi claims that, on the one hand, Nausicaä communicating with insects rather than boys demonstrates that she is an asexual girl who has transcended her sexuality to become a maternal figure free from the “darkness” of sexuality, while on the other hand, she is a sexual icon because of her innocent look, breasts, and exposed bottom under her mini-skirt, stimulating male viewers’ erotic desire (particularly among those with a Lolita complex).<sup>50</sup> This observation reveals that, just as in Orientalist practice, *Nausicaä* hints at Miyazaki’s (or Japan’s) Occidental view that potentially sexualizes the Occident.

#### 4.2.4. (Re)discovery of empowered women

風の谷のナウシカ 白い霧が晴れたら  
風の谷のナウシカ 手と手硬く結んで  
台地蹴って飛び立つのよ 遥かな地平線  
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds, When the white mist clears up,  
Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds, let's take off to the sky and fly  
hand in hand far from the horizon  
(from the theme song of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Winds* 1984)

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<sup>49</sup> Mulvey’s notion introduced in “Visual and Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

<sup>50</sup> Murase Hiromi, pp. 56-57.



While as discussed above, *Nausicaä* can be considered as sexualization of the white female body, gender representation in the film is further complicated because it also represents empowered female characters. Differing from the archetype of Disney's princesses, *Nausicaä* is one of the first *anime* to depict a female warrior who embodies both "masculinity" and "femininity," as mentioned in Chapter 2.

By the time that *Nausicaä* was released in Japan in 1984, academic research on women had become commonplace in Japan, and such research had also begun to be published by mainstream presses as well as prestigious university presses.<sup>51</sup> This social background may have affected Miyazaki's characterization of female figures in *Nausicaä*, and his later representations of females as well. The 1980s was the decade when Miyazaki's "flying female heroes," "shōjo" who represent mental strength rather than magical powers, started blooming. A significant number of *anime* also began to feature female warriors who, unlike female *anime* protagonists prior to the 1980s, fight for justice against evil forces in grander settings, beyond mundane day-to-day troubles. This type of empowered female representation, referred to as a "carnavalesque" mode,<sup>52</sup> exhibits "masculine" features through the bodies of female warriors, and plays a significant part in deconstructing conventional gendered representation in animation. (About female *anime* figures in the 1980s, see Chapter 3.)

Miyazaki's depiction of the allegedly "masculine" *Nausicaä* evinces a great shift in the representation of female sexuality in *anime* as well, particularly the depiction of "shōjo."<sup>53</sup> For example, the "shōjo-ness" in *Nausicaä* is free from "sexual darkness," which is part of the charm of magical girls in earlier *anime* such as Sally, Megu, or Akko (see pp.

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<sup>51</sup> Mioko Fujieda and Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, pp. 155-73.

<sup>52</sup> This point is discussed significantly by Napier, pp. 122-38.

<sup>53</sup> The concept of "shōjo" is introduced in Chapter 2.

89-96 in Chapter 2). In addition, Nausicaä challenges the previous notion of heroines' power as being magical and inherently given. Although she has some mystical ability, Nausicaä has to tackle problems that cannot be solved simply by a magic spell, unlike girls in earlier *anime*.<sup>54</sup>

This depiction of Nausicaä also challenges the conventional concept of the “princess” who waits for a prince to rescue her. One of the most striking scenes in this regard is where Nausicaä presents her violent side when, finding that her father has been murdered, she attacks the Tolmekian soldiers with her sword. [Figure 4.19.] Likewise, the military leader of the Tolmekians, Kushana, holds a position that is “normally” occupied by males.

**Figure 4.19.**



*Nausicaä in battle with the invaders who murdered her father* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

The transgressive gender characteristics of Nausicaä and Kushana correspond to Sean Ledden and Fred Fejes' idea of an “amorphic” gender framework within *manga* of the 1980s,<sup>55</sup> in which gender has nothing to do with what roles characters perform throughout their lives, and therefore female heroes are open to reverse traditional norms of gender roles. It has to be noted that the depiction of these female figures does not necessarily mirror

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<sup>54</sup> In fact, magical power is demystified in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, another of Miyazaki's works produced in 1989. Her power and ability to fly are acquired through perseverance and self-confidence, instead of inherently given magical power. As Helen McCarthy describes, “when her inherited magical talent fails her, she has to work at converting her limited innate ability into a viable, marketable skill.” See McCarthy, p. 144.

<sup>55</sup> Sean Ledden and Fred Fejes, “Female Gender Role Patterns in Japanese Comic Magazines,” in *Journal of Popular Culture* 21: 1 (1987), pp. 155-76.

present Japanese society. Rather, it is reasonable to understand that *Nausicaä* contributes to problematizing the dichotomous gender categorization that persists in both Japan and the West.

Indeed, we hardly meet any male characters who hold authority in this film. Conventional “masculinity” is not represented through male characters; instead, male figures—including Asbel (Prince of the Pejite Kingdom) who is rescued by Nausicaä, old men in the village who support Nausicaä’s fight against the Tolmekians, and the manipulative but ultimately incompetent Kurotawa, one of Kushana’s men who schemes to take over the leadership—are represented as either merely supporting or emasculated.

We must further be attentive to the hybridization of femininity and masculinity and the gender fluidity or transgression of gender categories demonstrated through Nausicaä and Kushana. For instance, Kushana is well-dressed and wears make-up (vivid red lipstick, face powder) and a tidy hairdo to present herself “properly.” Nausicaä, whether or not she is considered sexual or asexual, represents “proper” motherhood (seen in her protection of others) rather than entirely transforming into an embodiment of aggressive masculinity. While some of Disney’s princesses (Mulan, Pocahontas, and even Jasmine to a certain extent) are tough and do acquire skills, what differentiates *Nausicaä* most from the patterned gender/sexuality representation supported by Disney-esque aesthetics, is the fact that in *Nausicaä* the demonstration of strong, capable heroines does not require a context of heterosexual romance.<sup>56</sup> Though, we should not dismiss the negative aspects of Nausicaä’s depiction: Miyazaki’s female protagonists stay powerful only as long as they appear androgynous or have no experience of adult sexuality, as discussed in Chapter 3.

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<sup>56</sup> Note that some of Miyazaki’s works, such as *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, *Laputa*, *Spirited Away*, and *Howl’s Moving Castle* reinstate the heterosexual romance, although they do not necessarily do it in an overt fashion.

#### 4.3. *Kurenai no buta (Porco Rosso)* (1992)

This pig [in the film] embodies part of me. It was my dream since childhood to have a snug hideout in the Adriatic Ocean and fly in by seaplane whenever I want to.<sup>57</sup>

##### **Background of the film**

*Porco Rosso*, allegedly produced solely for Miyazaki's personal pleasure, features a male protagonist, which differentiates it from his other typical female-centered works. This *anime* is worth examining since it is considered probably the most auteuristic of Miyazaki's works. Projecting himself through the protagonist—a middle-aged man already past his heyday who gets turned into a pig—Miyazaki demonstrates his perception of socio-political issues both explicitly and symbolically.

The film's setting, Italy in the 1920s between the two world wars, still in the grip of fascism, in a chaotic phase when people struggled with their own national identity, is strikingly similar to the current world. Against this background, it is remarkable how characters in the film try to enjoy their lives as much as possible, giving the viewers energy to go through difficulties in their daily lives. Overlapped with his own postwar experience and his own struggles to come to terms with war and national identity, the setting of *Porco Rosso* is also a perfect site for Miyazaki to express his worldview.

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<sup>57</sup> From Miyazaki Hayao's interview with *Animage*. Miyazaki Hayao, "Porco Rosso wa zenbu boku no ichibu desu (Porco Rosso is All about Myself)," in *Animege* 162 (December 1991), p. 27. My translation.

## **Synopsis**

The film starts with the description of its setting, which is written in several different languages. The pig-faced protagonist, Porco Rosso (real name Marco Pagott), is listening to a radio, dozing in a deck chair, on a small island in the Adriatic Sea. In the next sequence we see Marco, a heroic bounty hunter, flying his beloved Sovoia S.21 seaplane to rescue children abducted by air pirates.

We learn that as a member of the Italian Air Force during World War I, Marco earned the rank of Captain, but during the fighting he lost his good friend Berlini. Berlini had just married Gina, the owner of Hotel Adriano, an elegant, beautiful, and intelligent woman whom all seaplane pilots in the region, including Marco, are drawn to. Disillusioned with war and despondent at the loss of his friends, Marco becomes cynical, and is transformed into a pig by a mysterious spell.

Some nights, Marco docks at the Hotel Adriano and enters the bar where Gina, in an elegant dress, sings “Les Temps Des Cerises,” a French ballad. While the clientele at the bar includes Marco’s adversaries, respect for her prevents them from making trouble near Gina’s place. Those adversaries plot against Marco and hire the clumsy Donald Curtis, a snobbish American ace of Italian lineage who longs to become a Hollywood star, to challenge him.

On his way to Milan to fix his damaged seaplane, Marco is attacked by Curtis; refusing to return fire, Marco is shot down. After salvaging the wreck of his plane and towing it to Milan, Marco is welcome by the master mechanic at Piccolo Company and his seventeen-year-old granddaughter Fio, who has just returned from the United States after finishing her studies. Marco agrees to let Fio design the modifications for his seaplane, and learns that with all the men away looking for jobs due to the Depression, the work will be

carried out by the womenfolk. Marco's old Air Force comrade Ferrarin comes to warn him that the fascist secret police are on his tail. With the political climate changing, the government considers nonconformists like Marco unpatriotic and an enemy of the state. The resourceful womenfolk come up with a plan: Marco will take Fio with him so that they can tell the authorities that she is being held hostage while they work on the plane.

When Marco and Fio arrive at his hideaway, Curtis and the air pirates show up and threaten Marco. Curtis is immediately smitten with Fio and proposes to her. To settle the pirates' score against Marco, Fio suggests a match between Curtis and Marco, declaring that if Marco wins, Curtis settles all the bills for the work on his seaplane, and if Curtis wins, she will marry him. Marco finally wins the battle and Fio's freedom.

#### **4.3.1. Fantasy toward the Western "Other": another form of Occidentalism**

*Porco Rosso* represents a form of Occidentalism different from the explicitly critical view of the West in *Nausicaa*. It reveals Miyazaki's longing for some aspects of the West; indeed, Miyazaki's fascination with Western aviation technologies may be one of the factors that feed his Occidentalist view in *Porco Rosso*. It is an intriguing coincidence that in 1992, the same year that *Aladdin*'s release provoked criticism for its Orientalism, *Porco Rosso* was encouraging an Occidentalist view. As Carrier emphasizes, Orientalism and Occidentalism operate in a dialectical manner, feeding off of each other.<sup>58</sup>

Are there any possible explanations for Miyazaki's Occidentalism in *Porco Rosso*, besides the manifestation of his childhood dream and his fascination with Western aircraft technology? According to Xiaomei Chen in her book *Occidentalism: A Theory of*

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<sup>58</sup> Carrier, "Introduction," pp. 2-3. Carrier differentiates "orientalism" as the generic use of the term, from "Orientalism" for the specific manifestation Said describes. In my dissertation, I do not particularly distinguish between them.

*Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*, Occidentalism employed in the Chinese TV series *He shang* (1988) is a tactic to help liberate China from Mao's nationalistic regime. Chen suggests that a glamorous depiction of the West can be a powerful weapon against the dominant ruling ideology within the country (in this case, traditional Confucian culture), enunciating an anti-official statement. In other words, this type of Occidentalism, revealing intra-national instead of inter-national (or ethnic) power dynamics, can be used for political liberation movements within a country.

According to Chen, stagnation of the Asian mode of production demonstrated in *He shang* is in turn interpreted as a positive representation of a scientific and modern West, as the Occidental "Other" embodies "youthfulness, adventure, energy, power, technology, and modernity."<sup>59</sup> On a superficial level, the text appears to be a sign of Western cultural imperialism. However, based on the cultural historical context of post-Mao China, Chen identifies *He shang* as "a product of anti-official [O]ccidentalism" that advocates pluralism and change through politically and culturally motivated images of the Western 'Other.'"<sup>60</sup> The producer of this show does not intend to condemn China as an inferior "Other," but instead aims to criticize the hegemonic and monolithic political ideology that can bring about negative elements of national tradition and nationalism. Thus, for instance, the narrative of *He shang* deconstructs symbols of Chinese national pride—the dragon and yellow earth—and instead conveys them as cynical, conservative, and confining. The narrative is not based on historical facts, but resorts to the mechanism of rhetoric, which operates through interplays of history, poetry, and politics. *He shang* challenges ideas of Asia's (or the subaltern's) incapability of representing itself, and of always being

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<sup>59</sup> Chen, p. 31.

<sup>60</sup> Chen, pp. 28-34.

represented by the West as the mysterious Oriental “Other.” Instead, the show attests to the ability of the East to construct the imaginary Western “Other” for its own purposes—a characteristic of Occidentalism.

Miyazaki is known for his sensitivity to socio-political issues in Japan as well as abroad, and he describes contemporary Japan as being a country that lost integrity and is confused in its identity, where people hate their own faces.<sup>61</sup> One can speculate that *Porco Rosso* brings about the same effect that the producer of *He shang* aimed for: criticism of neo-nationalist ideologies, in the guise of Occidentalism. Although Miyazaki does not illustrate negative aspects of Japan onscreen as does *He shang* of China, the imagery of the West in *Porco Rosso* is depicted beautifully and romantically, despite the harsh realities in 1920s Italy. Glorification of the “West” is illustrated particularly in Gina’s beautiful singing at the hotel bar, her gorgeous garden, her fashionable attire, Curtis’s dream of becoming a Hollywood star and president of the United States, and the beautiful scenery of the Adriatic Sea. These scenes are contrasted with fascist nationalism amid warnings of war, troops marching in the street, and a telling comment of Marco’s former comrade: “we can only fly for the purpose of protecting our nation.”

Although there are temporal and spatial differences between the setting of the film and current Japan, we can recognize a parallel between them, in terms of the emerging nationalism and chaotic circumstances within countries where people are either confused over national identities or lost in finding them. The recent Japanese neo-nationalist movement stresses the need for national pride, and insists on the superiority of the “Japanese gene” over “other” Asian races. As with *He shang*, *Porco Rosso*, by highlighting

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<sup>61</sup> Oshii Mamoru, Ueno Toshiya, and Itō Kazunori, “Eiga to wa jitsu wa animēshon datta” (Films were Actually Animation), in *Eureka* 28: 9 (1996), p. 78.



the beauty of “the West,” can be interpreted as a vehicle which makes Japanese people aware of the potential danger of this ethnocentric neo-nationalistic ideology, which aims to rebuild national pride by forgetting the cruelty exerted on other countries during the war. At the same time, the film reminds viewers of how much Japan’s modernization owes to Western influences, including technologies such as aviation. For instance, Fio, who has studied aeronautical design in the United States, embodies the technological excellence of America, and reminds us that these Western technologies have been incorporated into Japanese cultural identity formation. This demonstrates that “purity” of national identity and culture is not compatible with the growth of a nation, challenging neo-nationalists’ insistence on the superiority of Japan’s “pure” genes.

In addition, the notion of (ultra)nationalism is explicitly criticized through Marco’s statement that he “would rather be a pig than work for a fascist.” With the pig as a personification of Miyazaki himself, the line suggests a critique not only of military-based nationalism in the past, but also of the emerging neo-nationalism in Japan which may lead the country to another war to “protect” its pride. Through Marco, Miyazaki shows that national pride does not necessarily have to derive from an extreme dedication to patriotism, but can be re-established by embracing integrity on a personal level.

One of the most striking yet problematic scenes is the flashback to a World War I battle. The brief scene depicts Marco watching his dead comrades rising into a shining river of light in the sky. This style of glorification for the war dead recalls the beautified images of *kamikaze* suicide pilots used during World War II to promote patriotic spirit among Japanese troops. As implied by the wartime slogan “*utsukushiku chiru/shinu* (die beautifully),” beauty simultaneously intensifies sadness. Thus, while this scene seems to idealize patriotic death, it can also be understood as a reminder of the misery brought by war,

as well as a warning against recent militaristic nationalism. Marco's brief comment: "It (dying in battle) may have been hell there," reflects Miyazaki's attempt to undercut the beautification of death in war, and ultimately the nationalism that leads to it.

With regard to the depiction of the imaginary "West" in *Porco Rosso*, it is worth noting that Miyazaki shows differences within the West; Italy is clearly distinguished from America. It is important to stress that Miyazaki's Occidentalism as manifested in *Porco Rosso* suggests his intention to depict a plurality of cultural identities, unlike the more generalized depiction of the West in *Nausicaä*, and this may aid in counteracting essentialization of "the Occident." In the film, Italian townsfolk talk about America as a place far from their own country where people can still live freely and pursue their dreams. This view of America is also hinted at in the way people call Curtis "America-san (Mr. America),"<sup>62</sup> and in a conversation in a grocery store where a character remarks: "It's us who need to go to America to be successful or to survive." At the same time, "America" is caricatured through the clumsy, naïve Curtis, suggesting that the perception of an ideal, democratic America may be overrated and false.

#### 4.4. Persistence of Orientalism and Resistance of Occidentalism

There is no doubt that mobilizations of people, commodities, and information make Said's concept of Orientalism more complicated in the current era of globalization. This is a phenomenon that James Clifford calls the "predicament of *Orientalism*,"<sup>63</sup> a symptom of the uncertainties brought about by trends that destabilize and de-centralize Western

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<sup>62</sup> The suffix "-san" in Japanese is used typically to express one's respect to his/her seniors or superiors, as well as people who are not familiar to him/herself.

<sup>63</sup> James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 257-75.

hegemony. However, observations in this chapter attest to the enduring nature of Orientalism.

With regard to the continuity of Orientalism up to the present and possibly in the future, Said states that “Orientalism has been successfully accommodated to the new imperialism, where its ruling paradigms do not contest... the continuing imperial design to dominate Asia.”<sup>64</sup> Despite subversive features emerging in animated fantasy, *Aladdin* attests to continuing and recurring Orientalist visions in the United States through construction of the “Disneyan Orient”<sup>65</sup>—a multi-corporate and technologically enhanced version of Orientalism, which is hardly different from nineteenth-century Orientalist literary works and paintings.

Contrary to Disney’s cliché of “animation as an innocent fantasy,” close observations in this chapter underscore Disney’s political involvement with the U.S. government’s political agendas, through representations of the Oriental “other,” as introduced in Chapter 2. *Aladdin*, for example, is saturated by representations of Oriental “others” combined with representations in other media, and helps in shaping “reality” through a white-centric lens. Although this animated text represents not just one but several different “Orients,” each still has similar characteristics of exoticism, mysteriousness, and femininity. Once binary oppositions such as White/Black and Light/Dark are associated with Good/Bad or Positive/Negative, visual codes employed in animations such as *Aladdin* are potentially interpreted through these formulas: as mentioned in Chapter 1, people tend to feel at ease in recognizing the world and their identity based on something static or constant. In addition, the persistence of the Orientalist view is also sustained by the continuity of

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<sup>64</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 322.

<sup>65</sup> Macleod, p. 180.

“colorism,” a notion that does not seem to be fading, but is rather intensifying through popular media such as Hollywood films and Disney animations.

Furthermore, Orientalism continues because the construction of “the Orient” is a bi- or multi-directional one, rather than a unilateral one whereby resources provided by media creators alone bring about this collective identity. *Aladdin* is a Western creation of the “Orient” which is consumed widely by Orientals and used by those Orientals to identify themselves, and in turn reinforces the Western imagery of the Oriental “Other.” In this way, non-Western people themselves participate in the Western creation of their own identities, even including Orientalization of one Oriental country by another. Manga artist Tezuka Osamu provides examples of this in his *Strange Arabian Nights* (1951), anime *Arabian Nights: Sinbad the Sailor Movie* (1962) and the anime *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (1969). Though depicting Arabs in a comical and caricaturizing manner instead of as the evil “Other,” these three works contain elements of the Western Orientalist view of the “other.” These examples provide all the more reason to believe that Said’s *Orientalism* should be understood neither as simply a polemic approach taking the side of the Middle-East, nor as a tool to essentialize “the Occident.”

Instead of privileging either the Orient or the Occident, we need to see them in dialectical interactions, where each of them demarcates its “self.” In fact, Miyazaki’s *Nausicaa* and *Porco Rosso* are evidence of the subaltern’s agency that allows the subaltern to access a means of expressing itself and articulating a self-identity in relation to the Western “Other” by using a reversed version of Western Orientalism. These two anime underscore the interrelation of the Orient and the Occident, which may help viewers understand their cultural identities. While Said’s *Orientalism* does not recognize a resistant power among Orientals, *Nausicaa* and *Porco Rosso* demonstrate the instability of Western

hegemony. Analyses of these texts reveal that the concept of Western “Self” and non-Western “Other” is not as obvious as one may think.

As I have shown, *Nausicaä* and Disney’s *Aladdin* reveal that the politics of race and gender are intertwined. The conventional equation of white with “masculine” and non-white with “feminine”—one aspect of the genderization of race—is disturbed in *Nausicaä* via the exclusion of non-white characters. If we see *Nausicaä* as a sexualized white body as Murase suggests, the *anime* has overcome stereotypical racial depiction, yet by sacrificing gender subversion. That is, *Nausicaä* liberates the “yellow other” at the expense of the gendered “other.” *Aladdin*, on the other hand, liberates female gender identity at the expense of subverting racialization. While sexualized or gendered representation of the Oriental woman’s body has been long discussed in postcolonial feminist media studies, sexualization of the Occident in non-Western media requires further study.

## **Chapter 5: Pocahontas & Princess Mononoke:** **“Others” in Reconstructed History**

This chapter is concerned with two animations that demonstrate a sense of “otherness” through the use of history: Disney’s *Pocahontas* and Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* (hereafter *Mononoke*). These works are similar in that both draw heavily from the histories of their producers’ respective countries and depict “other(s)” in a marginal position. There are further similarities, and also differences, in the ways that representations in these animated folklores articulate present national identities.

### 5.1. Using History to Re-create the Nation’s “Other”: *Pocahontas* (1995)

The look and style of the film were inspired by the filmmakers’ numerous visits to Jamestown, Virginia, as well as by extensive research into the Colonial period. At various stages of the production, the creative team consulted with Native American scholars and storytellers to incorporate *authentic* aspects of the Powhatan culture into the film.<sup>1</sup>

It [*Pocahontas*] is a story that is fundamentally about racism and intolerance, and we hope that people will gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them. It’s also about having respect for each other’s culture.<sup>2</sup>

*Pocahontas* is a prime example of Disney’s take on the historical confrontation between European settlers and Native Americans, which focuses heavily on the romance between a white male and a Native American female. The examination of this contentious

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<sup>1</sup> Disney Archives “Pocahontas” Movie History (Disney’s official site), with my emphasis. (<http://disney.go.com/vault/archives/movies/pocahontas/pocahontas.html>) (accessed on March 16, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> This is a comment by senior vice president of Disney Feature Animation, Thomas Schumacher, describing *Pocahontas*. See Mark I. Pinsky, *The Gospel According to Disney: Faith, Trust, and Pixie Dust* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 162.

text, as well as its production process, reveals the mechanisms in which race and gender issues are intertwined.

To analyze the narrative and visual representation of this animation, Rey Chow's "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" in *Writing Diaspora* is a useful source to refer to, because of her comprehensive discussion of the system of whites' construction of Native "others" as an "image," in relation to power politics.<sup>3</sup> Her discussion includes how whites identify natives as "Natives," as well as recognizing themselves in relation to Natives. One of the most intriguing aspects of Chow's arguments is the mechanism of "vision" in the construction of "otherness," which is deployed in Disney's narrative of *Pocahontas*.

### **Synopsis**

Set in 1607 to 1608, this is allegedly the first Disney animation based on historical "fact," a story of the meeting between English settlers and a local Algonquian tribe, led by Powhatan, in what is now Jamestown, Virginia. Captain John Smith leads a band of greedy and racist English sailors and soldiers to the New World to plunder its treasure for England. In this "New World," the tribe Chief Powhatan offers his daughter, Pocahontas, to be married to the village's greatest warrior, Kocoum. Pocahontas is a bright, adventurous, nature-loving, and motherless young woman. Despite her father's wish, Pocahontas is uncertain about the path she should take, and her life takes a dramatic turn when the English ship lands near her village. As Pocahontas and Smith meet and while she tries to open his eyes to an understanding of this New World, they fall in love.

Meanwhile, the other English settlers are intent on finding gold in the New World, and they become convinced that the "savages" are hiding gold. Pocahontas and Smith then

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<sup>3</sup> Chow, pp. 27-54.

try to prevent a war between the white newcomers and natives who believes that they will destroy their land. Thomas, an inexperienced settler, kills one of the tribe members, Kocoum, but Smith lets the natives think he is responsible, so he is condemned to death. Pocahontas begs her father to spare Smith's life, and bravely places her own life on the line, saying that he must kill her first. Smith reciprocates by saving Powhatan's life by putting himself in the way of a gunshot from another settler Ratcliffe. In the end, Smith and Pocahontas must part so he can recover from the injury, but they know that their spirits will be forever joined, and that their lives are richer for the love they share.

#### **5.1.1. Perpetuation of white "Self" and "red (native) Other"**

##### **The manipulation and sanitization of history**

Although Disney's *Pocahontas* does not necessarily aim for historical accuracy, its "selective oblivion" has sparked controversy. The film creates what Chow calls "a phantom history," where Western cultural critics tend to turn the native into an object that is "manageable and comforting" through the manipulation of history.<sup>4</sup> This kind of critic's project demonstrates how "difference" is tamed and consumed. A similar treatment of the native image in Disney's *Pocahontas* leads to the process of myth making that generates a "transparent" relationship between colonizers and natives, based on Disney's general rule of "sanitization" and appropriation of the tragic aspects of history. For example, omitted elements include Pocahontas' abduction by the English, her subsequent conversion to Christianity, her name being changed to Lady Rebecca Rolfe because of her marriage to settler John Rolfe, and her death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-one in England. As the above quote by Disney's personnel indicates, the production team of *Pocahontas* claim

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<sup>4</sup> Chow, p. 37.



that substantial research was conducted on Pocahontas' life; however, the film still ends up simply as an escapist entertainment, with a predictable narrative devoid of disturbance, in which the viewer can "safely" experience "otherness." What is highlighted instead is the romantic bonding between Pocahontas and John Smith, even though many consider their relationship hardly plausible in reality, given the fact that she was twelve years old and he was twenty-seven when they met.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Disney's confidence in its "successful" execution of a historical legendary figure is quite contrary to native perception. The following comment made by Native American consultant Custalow McGowan reveals the other side to Disney's claim of a "transparent" historical description of native history.

I was honored to be asked by them... but I wasn't at the studio two hours before I began to make clear my objections to what they were doing... they had said that the film would be historically accurate. I soon found that it wasn't to be.... I wish my name wasn't on it. I wish Pocahontas' name wasn't on it.<sup>6</sup>

What is intriguing about the reception of Disney's *Pocahontas* lies in the two perceptions between natives and Anglo communities, both of which criticize the film for unfairly representing their respective cultures. That is, the historical maneuvering of *Pocahontas* brings about conflicts not only between white Disney and the native, but also between whites: British and Americans. Criticism from these communities underscore the film's simplified depictions, founded upon a binary between "self" and "other," rather than showing plurality within each of them. From the native's view, *Pocahontas*' manipulation

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<sup>5</sup> This is mentioned in Pushpa Naidu Parekh's "Pocahontas: The Disney Imaginary," in *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p. 169. He lists several books that mention Pocahontas' and Smith's ages. More on this subject, see Joseph Bruchac's *Pocahontas* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Mal Vincent, "Disney vs. History... Again," in *Virginian-Pilot and Ledger-Star* (June 20, 1995): E5.

of history is seen in the roles of characters that are reversed in terms of racial relationships. For instance, Disney's version demonstrates whites as victim exemplified by Smith being captured and given away to the villagers for execution, as well as his heroic injury to protect Powhatan. In the fantasy world of Disney, Native Americans do not seem to suffer the tremendous pains evident in historical accounts.

In comparison, the whites' assault on Native Americans is presented only by the murder of Pocahontas's fiancé Kocoum in Disney's narrative. Smith's friend Thomas shoots Kocoum "by accident," which diminishes the cruelty of the white perpetrator. This murder is somewhat justified because of Kocoum's attempt to endanger Smith's life, and is thus identified as a hardly accusable case in the narrative. Villagers in the animation are saddened; however, their pain would not be remotely close to the pain actually experienced over the period of colonization. It is more plausible that this "accident" happens just so that the narrative can illuminate Smith's nobleness when he protects Powhatan from a gunshot. Thus, in Disney's version, the characterization of Smith, who has historically been reputed as an unrelenting murderer of Native Americans, is sanitized in the name of Disney's "imagineering," and this also aids in perpetuating the white-centered patriarchal perspective. The narrative depicts whites as rational and moral victims who try to compromise with the barbarian natives, who are in turn depicted as cruel and vulgar, living in nature without any concept of compromise.

As a result, the narrative of Disney's *Pocahontas* expunges extensive pains and struggles among the natives caused by colonial exploitation that whites brought into colonial history. If the viewers do not recognize this "Disneyfied" version as imaginary, they are likely to incorporate this process of bridging between natives and whites into their

perception of the world, which will ultimately fabricate a collective memory inside and outside the United States.

Moreover, the cruelty of white exploitation, including the genocide of Native Americans, is completely overshadowed by the central plot of a romance between a warm-hearted, morally motivated white, blond haired John Smith, and a “Barbielike super model” Pocahontas.<sup>7</sup> This Barbie style characterization of Pocahontas is heavily based on Anglicized standards of beauty. Pocahontas’ face looks like she has make-up on, with mascara and vivid red lipstick. Her “super model figure” is also shown by her overtly large breasts. Her physical appearance lends credence to Mulvey’s theory of creation of a fetishized female body by objectifying it in a way that appeals to a male subject who holds a gaze.<sup>8</sup> While supervising animator Glen Keane started with the idea of a Native American face as a model, in the end, Filipino model Dyna Taylor and white supermodel Christy Turlington were strong inspiration for re-making Pocahontas.<sup>9</sup>

This character development signifies that Native Americans are domesticated by whites so that these natives look more or less like “us” white Americans, yet at the same time othering “them.” The romantic tone is further emphasized by Disney’s quintessential musical-style songs along with a recurring “leaf motif”: scenes where colorful leaves swirl around Pocahontas to enhance a mystical mood. **[Figure 5.1.]**

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<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Giroux, “Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?” in *Kinder-Culture*, eds. Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> This idea is taken from Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

<sup>9</sup> See Jason Cochran, “What Becomes a Legend Most?: How Pocahontas Got Her Cover-Girl Looks,” in *Entertainment Weekly* # 279 (June 16, 1995) (<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,297604,00.html>) (accessed on August 30, 2005).

**Figure 5.1.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995). The figure shows Smith and Pocahontas holding hands surrounded by swirling leaves.

*Leaves swirling around Pocahontas and Smith*

The romantic element is also carried over to the sequel *Pocahontas II*, which focuses on a love triangle with John Rolfe, as Smith comes back as the would-be savior of Pocahontas.<sup>10</sup> Many versions of the Pocahontas story have been disseminated through different forms of media, including books, animation, and live-action films. The most recent among them is the Hollywood made live-action film, *The New World* (2005), and it also carries over a significant romantic tone, though it underplays the image of a handsome, white, blond-haired male as a savior of red women. In this live-action film, Smith's appearance with dark hair and a beard is rather faithful to what he actually looked like,<sup>11</sup> and love between Smith and Pocahontas is suggestive rather than dramatic, unlike Disney's animated version.

The notion of whites as "civilized," and Native Americans as unsophisticated barbarians or as the object of laughter, is perpetuated visually and aurally, as we find in several specific scenes, including natives' behavior and conversations between white Smith and native Pocahontas. An explicit example is the way Pocahontas moves, running and climbing trees like Tarzan. John Smith's remark on Native Americans during a

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<sup>10</sup> Although *Pocahontas II* (1998) was not a theatrical release but a direct-to-video version, it is reasonable to draw examples from this film, because as a sequel of *Pocahontas* it certainly carries the narrative on the same premises and tones.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, in *The New World*, unlike Disney's *Pocahontas*, Smith's appearance is far removed from the typical depiction of male heroes with blond hair and blue eyes.

conversation with Pocahontas underscores the native “other’s” savagery stereotyped by whites, or differently put, reflects Disney’s take on white superiority:

*...[you think your houses are fine] because you (Pocahontas) don’t know any better, ... There is so much that I can teach you. We can improve the life of savages all over the world.*

Then Smith quickly adds:

*Not that you [Pocahontas] are savage, ...savage is just a term for people who are not civilized.*

Pocahontas follows:

*You mean, not like ‘you’ ...*

This scene is a typical example projecting the white-centric formula of “us” (white) and “them” (natives). When Pocahontas gets upset at hearing Smith refer to natives as “uncivilized,” he tries to correct his comment to dissociate “savagery” from Pocahontas herself. Undoubtedly, there is no way that his categorization of savage can exclude Pocahontas, since she *is* a member of the native tribe. Instead, his comment re-inscribes the double marginalization of Pocahontas: the female and native “other” whose status is determined by white and red (native) males. In this way, Smith (and ultimately Disney) assures his identity as a rational white male who is in the position of educating the “other.” His attitude manifests the trend of mainstream media representations, which cater to the dominant ideology, specifically the white community’s needs, and which people tend to accept uncritically.

In fact, Pocahontas’ feeling of humiliation is quickly undermined by the subsequent music of “Colors of the Wind,” sung by Pocahontas. While singing, Pocahontas takes Smith’s hand and gently leads him to show “the wonder” of the world that she is from. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as a scene that demonstrates the switch in roles of

natives and whites, in that the native Pocahontas is the one who is educating the white Smith, but on the other hand, as Edgerton and Jackson argues, one could describe Pocahontas in the scene as playing “more like an adolescent seduction,”<sup>12</sup> rather than teaching Smith a lesson because he is ignorant and unsophisticated.

Smith’s comment above exposes his (and whites’) racist perception; however, the scene is brief and the viewer’s contemplation on the issue of racism is quickly interrupted by an abrupt transition to yet another “happy song,” along with the intimate interaction between Pocahontas and Smith, which brings us back to a romantic mood. This sequence demonstrates Disney’s efforts to avoid tackling the issue of racism.

Another visual implication of “uncivilized” and “mysterious” natives is seen in the way that Pocahontas is projected on the screen, when Smith points his gun at her when he mistakes her for an animal the first time he sees her. Pocahontas, walking among rocks and trees, is shot from a lower camera angle, which unmistakably emphasizes her animalistic attributes. These stereotyped images of natives potentially influence viewers’ perceptions, and Disney’s narrative thereby may significantly contribute to re-forming viewers’ “memories” of the colonial history of natives and settlers.<sup>13</sup> In other words, by experiencing Disney’s narrative, white viewers identify themselves as a privileged “self” in relation to natives, just as Smith does by foregrounding his definition of “Native,” which fixes the position of Powhatan Native as the “Other.” In this respect, Pocahontas functions as what Rey Chow calls “a symptom of the white man,” something that offers to the white subject its

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<sup>12</sup> Gary Edgerton and Kathy Merlock Jackson, “Redesigning Pocahontas,” in *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 24: 2 (Summer 1996), p. 93.

<sup>13</sup> As Edgerton and Merlock Jackson suggest, Disney’s version of *Pocahontas* story has significantly permeated into the public through a combination of the film itself, commodity tie-ins.

ontological consistency.<sup>14</sup> That is, Pocahontas is a symptom of Smith, and therefore, only exists through Smith (a white male).

In addition, the song “Savage” sung by Governor Ratcliffe (white British male) obviously dramatizes the idea of the native as “savage.” The lyrics read:

[Ratcliffe]  
What can you expect  
From filthy little heathens?  
Their whole disgusting race is like a curse  
Their skin’s a hellish red  
They’re only good when dead  
They’re vermin, as I said  
And worse  
[English Settlers]  
They’re savages! Savages!

Relating to the identity formation of natives and whites, Jack Zipes, argues that the plot of Disney animations often represents Oedipal desire lurking in a young male character of the story. That is, the plot progresses in a way that the boy tries to humiliate his father and to take away what his father considers as most important. This Oedipal narrative is employed, with a slightly different approach, for depicting the relationship between whites and natives in Disney’s *Pocahontas*, in that a sense of “envy” for what the native “other” is presumed to lack is the underlying theme. Relating to this matter, as Frantz Fanon suggests, one can draw a parallel between the construction of “Natives” and Oedipal nature, because natives presumably envy the power of whites and attempt to take over whites’ position, just as a son envies the power of his father and threatens to kill him, or as a woman envies male

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<sup>14</sup> Chow, p. 30.

possession of a penis.<sup>15</sup> It follows that, based on this theory, the native's subjectivity is formed only by being seen as one who eternally desires what they seemingly lack.

Moreover, the native's desire to "be like a white" is signified more explicitly in the portrayal of Pocahontas' Powhatan bodyguard in *Pocahontas II*. When he is invited for tea by John Rolfe's housekeeper, he sits down and awkwardly sips English tea, tastes the tiny unfamiliar sandwiches, and he soon starts to enjoy them. When he accompanies Pocahontas to a ballroom dance at the palace, he steals clothes from the master of ceremonies and pretends to be a "respectable English man." At the dance floor, being extremely tall, red-skinned, and "different" from Englishmen, he catches people's attention, and is asked to dance by many women around him. Throughout the film, the bodyguard never speaks. The portrayal of him suggests how it is impossible for the native to get used to Western modernity, or even if the native tries to be like a white, he can never be one. The depiction of the bodyguard also draws the problematic of vision. At the beginning of *Pocahontas II*, every time John Rolfe and Pocahontas ride in carriage, the bodyguard runs beside it on the street all the way up to Rolfe's house. He is not only caricatured and laughed at, but more importantly, he turns into a spectacle for laughter to the viewers, as well as people in the street of London.

These scenes remind us of Nancy Armstrong's concern about the formation of Subject and Object. She argues that:

[t]he new wave of culture criticism still assumes that we must either be a subject who partakes in the power of gazing or else be an object that is by implication the object of a pornographic gaze.... But even the "subject" of the critical term "subject position" tends to dissolve too readily back into a

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<sup>15</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), and in this regard, Chow also describes the Oedipal structure of thinking as a structure of thinking that theorizes subjectivity as compensation for a presumed lack.



popular and sentimental version of the bourgeois self. By definition, this self grants priority to an embodied subject over the body as an object. To insist on being “subjects” as opposed to “objects” is to assume that we must have certain powers of observation, classification, and definition in order to exist; these powers make “us” human. According to the logic governing such thinking...only certain kinds of subjects are really subjects; to be human, anyone must be one of “us.”<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, the caricatured representation of the bodyguard indicates de-humanization and objectification of native “others,” so that the Western “self” secures its hold of gaze and power to claim its humanity. At the same time, the bodyguard’s acts of wearing English clothes and consuming English foods, as well as the fact that he stays in England even after Pocahontas and Rolfe leave for Virginia, signify the native’s desire to and attempts to become a subject, or become part of “us” under the white’s operation.

The same theme is underscored by a scene in *Pocahontas II*, where Pocahontas is invited to a ballroom dance by the King in London to test how “civilized” she is. After being trained in dance and “proper” manners from John Rolfe, she gets dressed in quintessential European attire and puts extremely white make-up on her face. The depiction of Pocahontas, when she dusts too much white powder on her face, is caricatured, as well as showing her excitement and willingness to instantly “become white.” A similar depiction is demonstrated in the live-action *The New World* as well, where Pocahontas is sent to the colonizer’s village, and is trained and turned into a “Western” Christian woman. Her original clothes are removed, “dirt” is wiped from her face, and she is fit into a skin-tight Western-style dress, which illustrates her becoming Westernized (domesticated by the West) inside and out. However, compared to the animated version, the live-action film exhibits

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<sup>16</sup> Nancy Armstrong, “The Occidental Alice,” *Differences* 2: 2 (Summer 1990), p. 33.

much less of Pocahontas' enthusiasm and more of her unwilling submission to the white-centric discourse.

The process of her getting ready for the ball, which includes her first showing up only with her lingerie and next only with a corset, not knowing what they are, is a sequence which exposes Pocahontas' body to the gaze of male viewers, as well as Rolfe. This completes the system of voyeurism composed of three groups of male viewers, according to Metz's idea of male "gaze": the animators, viewers, and characters in the film. As Chow emphasizes, following Fredric Jameson's view, film by nature functions as a technology of pornography, an apparatus that exposes the images projected on screen as a target of violation. Along with the narrative structure characteristic to Disney's plot, which directs the viewer to a certain perception of natives, the mechanism of "vision" on and through the screen in *Pocahontas* (and *Pocahontas II*) accelerates the notion of a red female as the objectified "other." This understanding of *Pocahontas* shares Christian Metz's and Laura Mulvey's notion of the female body on screen as the object of male "gaze." This mode of vision mobilizes violence, and suppresses the "other" to a role of passive victim. The power dynamic shaped by this system of "vision" is predictably yet effectively exercised in Disney's *Pocahontas*, in such a way that hinders the object of "gaze"—red female Pocahontas—from accessing "an alternate epistemic configuration," to express her own subjectivity. One of the most striking examples of the politics of vision is in the scene where Smith and Pocahontas encounter for the first time. In this scene, "the pleasure of scopophilia"<sup>17</sup> from a white male perspective is heightened by a close-up of her bare legs, at the same time with Smith shown fully clothed.

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<sup>17</sup> Zipes, p. 33.

The act of looking happens both ways between Smith and Pocahontas, yet in different manners. The mechanism of vision determines the positionality between the native and whites. At the beginning, Pocahontas looks at Smith from a distance with curiosity, peeking at him through a bush, because she as the native “other” is prohibited from looking directly at the white subject. Similarly, when for the first time Pocahontas faces Smith, she shyly touches her hair and looks *up* at Smith, not directly at him. In this manner, Pocahontas’ look is far from a penetrating or threatening “gaze,” but rather a look that tries to draw his attention, which makes a good contrast to the condescending look that the white settlers give the natives—literally they look *down* on the natives from their ship. Both instances emphasize the hierarchy which puts white colonizers in the position of power and the natives under their control.

Regarding power dynamics in the vision exchanged between two groups, Pocahontas’ look can be understood as what Chow calls the gaze of “the big Other.” Chow introduces the concept of “the big Other” to challenge the construction of natives as a mere existence of “the other” for colonizers, and claims that natives have the ability to look—their agency to be “witness to [their] own demolition” that results in “the identification of the native-as-image.”<sup>18</sup> Applying this idea, Pocahontas’ look is considered “neither a threat nor retaliation,”<sup>19</sup> but it makes whites see themselves projected in the native as objects, associated with a sense of “lack”—Pocahontas—so that they regard themselves as subject. At the same time, as Chow points out, this self-consciousness that the image of the native—or their “double”—brings to white settlers is not viewed as an achievement, but becomes a source of discomfort to them. In this sense, Pocahontas’ look

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<sup>18</sup> Chow, p. 51.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

at Smith leads him to enter a mode of self-reflection, which then substantiates the placing of himself as subject, in relation to her as an image of himself that signifies “lack.” Yet simultaneously, the gaze of Pocahontas’ and the Powhatan make the settlers—Smith, Governor Ratcliffe, and others—face their own sense of “lack” and become disturbed by this. This sense of unease and disconcertedness may further urge the settlers to re-confirm their self-identity, which contributes to igniting conflicts between natives and whites.

Moreover, Pocahontas’ excitement in getting ready for the ballroom dance also signifies her rather voluntary participation in abandoning her ethnic identity; she takes off her mother’s necklace—a symbol of the native tribe, in order to wear the “English” one that Rolfe gives her instead.

These depictions of “uncivilized” natives created by Disney, hark back to Chow’s comment on Western anthropologists’ frustration over the disappearance of “real Natives,” by which she stresses white Westerners’ need for static “specimens” with which to differentiate themselves.<sup>20</sup> In *Pocahontas* history is used to freeze native “specimens” at a specific time and space. This is largely because while whites make the native “other” become like themselves, it is important for them to sustain difference from the “other.” Similarly, white colonialists appear to avoid all contact with natives because of their fear of “contamination”; however, they are also dependent upon the Powhatan tribe in order to remind them of their privileged status, and to ultimately secure their identity.<sup>21</sup> It is through this mechanism of mirroring that whites recognize and position themselves.

By bringing history into the present, white ethnocentrism managed to re-establish its superiority in relation to the recreated “uncivilized” Natives. This is not necessarily an

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<sup>20</sup> Chow mentions that these Western anthropologists include Margaret Mead and Claude Lévi- Strauss. See, Chow, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> Parekh, p. 170.

issue of historical accuracy but of the creation of history for the Imaginary. Differently put, the observations above suggest that in light of Disney's myth making, a historical setting is the perfect site for the dominant power to reinstate what Said calls "imaginative geography," by depicting the "timeless Other" within a country.

Along with these perceptions, Disney's *Pocahontas* also evoked criticisms among Anglo societies as well, as mentioned briefly above. *London Sunday Times* reports that the film upset Anglo viewers in Britain with the portrayal of the corrupt English as "thugs, all greed, gold, and guns," who "treat natives like savages," as opposed to the portrayal of natives as "civilized, peace-loving and eco-conscious."<sup>22</sup> It is intriguing to observe the way in which British viewers interpret the film as representing natives as the civilized group, which is almost completely opposite to what natives and many critics read in this work. The discrepancy in interpretations between Native Americans and the Anglo communities underlines the difficulty and complexity of destabilizing a binary system in racial representations. Disney may be able to reverse the assumed positions of whites and natives, but is unable to deconstruct the system itself.

At the same time, from a different angle, *Pocahontas* can also be understood as a text that implies natives have the potential to become a threat as the recognizable "other" to white authority, through a strategy that Homi Bhabha calls "mimicry," which allows the "other" to hybridize the authority's culture for its own empowerment.<sup>23</sup> Along with whites' attempts to impose their systems and values on the Powhatan, *Pocahontas* demonstrates the natives' desire to emulate white settlers' style and their fascination with newfound material possessions, such as cannons and arms. Thus, while the Powhatan call the settlers "white

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<sup>22</sup> Gilbert Adair, "Animating History," *London Sunday Times* (July 30, 1995): 10.

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 85-92.

devils,” they have not only a sense of fear but also a feeling of awe toward the settlers. In this aspect, coupled with Pocahontas’ willingness to imitate whites, the Powhatan natives continually become like whites. What is important here is that, after mimicking whites, the natives become the double of their white model, “almost the same but not quite” because of their dark skin and their accent, and this, following Bhabha’s notion of “mimicry,” can become a threat to disrupt the dominant white authority.

Nonetheless, Disney’s narrative of *Pocahontas*, with a fusion of fantastical fiction and fact, is said to redesign history from an Anglo-American viewpoint, with a production team predominantly consisting of white Americans and the oversimplification of the cruel reality that existed between English settlers and natives. Although, as Disney’s production team claims, historical accuracy was not a priority in *Pocahontas*, the film demonstrates the danger of de-contextualizing original figures, as well as reinforcing the view of Disney as a key player in cultural and ideological imperialism.

More specifically, Algonquian Indians and Pocahontas are de-contextualized and re-placed in the context of the white American “Walt Disney Corporation,” and thereby come to be known among people inside and outside of America. Just like some “rare” objects are discovered and displayed in museums out of historical context,<sup>24</sup> legendary Pocahontas and her tribe, as well as their own aesthetics, are (re)discovered, redesigned, displayed and looked at, as an “imaginative geography” among both white and non-white viewers. Through this process, *Pocahontas* becomes a perfect site for myth-making, a site for Anglo-Americans to come to escape from historical reality.

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<sup>24</sup> This idea derives from Arjun Appadurai’s concept of a twin process of “commoditization by diversion” and “the aesthetics of decontextualization,” which describes commoditization as a force that does not distinguish between things and people. See Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 28.

In addition, racial stereotyping of natives demonstrated in *Pocahontas* needs to be problematized in light of the development of children's identities in both Anglo and native communities, since the film's primary target audiences are children, as well as their parents. According to Jean Piaget's thesis, as well as Edward Zigler and Irvin Child's, children aged two to seven have perceptual boundedness, which limits them to focusing on intuitive rather than logical aspects of media stimuli.<sup>25</sup> Based on this theory, children are considered to be more susceptible than adults to stereotyped images that *Pocahontas* projects, since they would not necessarily perceive what is shown to them in a dialogical manner. This also suggests that their perception of "self" and "other" may be heavily guided by those images. In this fashion, white, masculine ideologies can innocuously permeate into the establishment of an individual's perception of "self" and "other," based on manipulated history that is introduced from early childhood.

### **Patriarchal dominance: the conspiracy of white and red "saviors"**

White men are saving brown women from brown men.  
The women actually wanted to die.<sup>26</sup>

Disney's *Pocahontas* exposes the intertwining of race and gender issues. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Pocahontas' being "red" as well as being a woman makes her doubly marginalized in relation to the white male subjectivity. In her quotation above, in which the first line describes the imperialist view of India and the second is that of native males in a dominant position, Spivak sheds light on the interdependence between brown and

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<sup>25</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (New York: International Universities Press, 1952); Edward Zigler and Irvin Child, "Socialisation," in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, eds. Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1969), pp. 450-589.

<sup>26</sup> Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", pp. 296-97.

white males, by which they legitimize their actions in order to establish a situation where brown women become objects to be “saved.” By the same token, Chow describes this conspiring scheme as one in which there is “a perfect symmetry between the imperialist and anti-imperialist gazes, which cross over the images of native women as silent object,”<sup>27</sup> under the name of patriarchal domination.

This co-dependent relationship between brown and white men to subjectivize brown women, discussed by Spivak, parallels the one between red and white men toward red women in *Pocahontas*. Smith (white) saves Pocahontas (red) from a loveless marriage to Kocoum (red), as expected by her father (red). This suggests that red women exist as a commodity for red men, or otherwise as objects for a white male savior’s fantasy. Ultimately, *Pocahontas* successfully positions the groups of people involved in the hierarchal order of white males on top, red males (and symbolically white females) next, and red females at the bottom. Disney’s *Pocahontas* turns out to be another case that shows a patriarchal and white-oriented worldview.

### **Can the Powhatan speak?**

The representation of natives in historical context in *Pocahontas* as discussed above brings to light Chow’s question: “Between a critical desire to subjectivize them with envy (as in Spivak) and a humble gesture to revere them as silent objects (as in Julia Kristeva), is there any alternative for these ‘natives’?”<sup>28</sup> The latter perspective tends to treat the “other” (natives or subalterns) as a “dead” object for display, since its development has already ceased and been fossilized in the form of images. The fixed image of natives on display is

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<sup>27</sup> Chow, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Chow, p. 33. The former perspective is taken by Spivak, for example, and the latter by those such as Kristeva.



exposed to and expressed via a Western gaze, stabilizing both a white and a native identity. This system ensures a static condition for identity articulation, where, as Chow states, “the construction of the native remains at the level of image-identification, a process in which ‘our’ own identity is measured in terms of the degrees to which we resemble her and to which she resembles us.”<sup>29</sup> *Pocahontas* clearly plays a significant role in maintaining this image-identification mechanism, which resorts to the “we”/ “they” dichotomy.

Disney’s *Pocahontas* meticulously embodies both Spivak’s and Kristeva’s abovementioned views of natives, through visual and physical interactions between Pocahontas and John Smith, as well as those of others including Powhatan members and British colonists. These interactions determine the positionality between the groups involved. They symbolize a combination of Spivak’s and Kristeva’s views; in that Smith shows his desire for and envy of the Powhatan’s “natural” land and tries to make it part of his (or whites’) own, and at the same time, he also looks at the members of Powhatan and their culture as silent objects that need to be “discovered” by the white West, because the Powhatan cannot speak for themselves. To Smith, the native does not have a tool to communicate with the rest of the world like white colonizers; the ability to speak and recognize oneself entails use of the colonizer’s language. When Pocahontas speaks to Smith for the first time, she can only use the native’s language, which makes Smith realize that she does not understand the “civilized” language, English. However, she quickly starts speaking English, as if Smith had put a “magic” spell on her. From this point on, their conversation is carried on in Smith’s (the colonizer’s) language. This implies that Pocahontas begins to think and to act like the colonizer, whether she is willing to or not.

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<sup>29</sup> Chow, p. 35.

Moreover, it has to be noted that the Powhatan tribe members are not like Chow's natives who mock the colonizers' obsession with the imaginary native land and people, but rather they involve themselves in the settlers' identity construction scheme. As mentioned earlier, the film shows that it is not only whites' imposition of their ideology upon the native "other," but also the "other's" participation in the dominant discourse that maintains myths of the "other" and make their re-production plausible.

Pocahontas tries to convince Smith to talk with Powhatan, but in response to her pacifistic attitude, Smith replies, "Talking isn't going to do any good..., once two sides want to fight, nothing can stop them." This line signifies the aggressive conquering nature of the Western world, as well as Smith's doubt about the natives' ability to communicate rationally. His attitude highlights the idea that the natives' experiences are not translatable to whites and vice versa. The assumed untranslatability between them may be seemingly dissolved, only if "they" speak English, not because Smith speaks the native's language. In the *Pocahontas* narrative, the natives are not able to "speak," either because they do not know "our" language (English), or otherwise because they have to surrender to "our" Anglo language so that they can get their message across.

Can the modern day native "other" speak through *Pocahontas*? Considering Pocahontas' accommodation to the language that Smith speaks (English), as well as the fact that Disney only partly incorporates native people into the film production so that the main decision-making is done mainly by white males, natives are still not speaking. This demonstrates that, as Spivak argues, the reason for the natives' inability to speak is not that we cannot locate their mode of life/culture/subjectivity, but because "speaking" itself

belongs to an already well-defined structure and history of domination.”<sup>30</sup> In *Pocahontas*, Anglo subjectivity “speaks for” natives. Looking at *Pocahontas II*, it is only after learning white’s aesthetics and manners that Pocahontas talks with the King to convince him to stop attacking the natives in Jamestown and get her message across regarding native’s experiences. Pocahontas speaks, but her speech (and her behaviors) is after all formed predominantly by Anglo standards.

In this respect, the question of whether Pocahontas has the potential to translate the native experience to her Anglo “other” still remains. As Chow points out, the friction between the ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds stems from “the untranslatability” of experiences of the latter into the former. According to Chow, successful translation entails not simply the latter’s speech, but the justification of that speech, which has been destroyed in its encounter with the imperialist.<sup>31</sup> Hence, in order for Pocahontas’ (and the native tribe members’) experiences to become translatable, she should be able not only to speak, but more importantly, to justify her speech. While Pocahontas does speak about her experience of being a native to Smith, her speech is overshadowed by Smith’s introduction to the Western world, and by her strong yearning for the Western experience. In this sense, Pocahontas fails to justify her speech, and instead, her speech is yet again destroyed by Disney’s modern white imperialism.

In fact, during the film there is very little justification of her speech or of native’s experience translated to Smith and other white colonizers, except Pocahontas’ teaching of a few native words and her songs about her love of nature. From this aspect as well, any evidences of the native’s experience of oppression by colonizers is almost completely

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<sup>30</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, “The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic,” in *Post-Colonial Critic Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Chow, p. 38.

dismissed. In the film, the Powhatan tribe and Pocahontas both begin to speak through Disney's white masculine codes. Although Smith has a better understanding of the natives and is more open-minded to the "savage" culture than other colonizers, he obviously does not see things through eyes of the tribe.

As discussed in the second section of Chapter 1, media has the power to subvert dominant ideologies, not only by simply reversing the position of the dominant and the dominated, but also by creating what Bhabha calls a space "in-between," the space where the white Western concept of the "self"/ "other" binary is disrupted and contested. Instead of placing one's identity in either one of the dichotomous pairs such as Self/Other, East/West, and White/non-White, identities occupying the space in-between are disjunctive and fluid in the face of cultural differences. Thus, this space potentially generates hybrid identities or offers an interstice for a new subject to emerge and speak. In watching Disney's *Pocahontas*, we witness some indications of destabilization the dichotomies of rational white/primitive natives or men/women, through 1) representations of two groups within whites—the "evil" British characterized by Ratcliffe, and Americans or the Disney production team who characterize them; 2) depiction of the rational aspect of Powhatan; and 3) demonstration of Pocahontas' bravery to protect Smith. Nonetheless, the film does not transgress the binary system itself. In this sense, Disney chooses not to engage an "in-between" space, and instead arguably embarks upon a modern form of ideological colonization.

Hence, the white-centered narrative of Disney's *Pocahontas* recalls Spivak's apprehensions toward the processes whereby white intellectuals in postcolonial studies ironically re-inscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure, despite their research on historical sources. In

effect, *Pocahontas* animates and visualizes Spivak's view of natives' subjectivity recognized by assimilating with the dominant white (Disney's) power.

## 5.2. "Others" within "Traditional Japan" and the Exploitation of History: *Mononoke hime (Princess Mononoke)* (1997)

*Mononoke* was a major film release, and in the year it debuted was outdone only by *Titanic* as Japan's box-office champion. The fact that the film was shown at the New York Film festival, unusual for an animated feature, is indicative of Miyazaki's prominence in North America. This *anime* is another example that employs a historical setting to depict "otherness," yet in a different manner from *Pocahontas*.

### Synopsis

The story takes place in a turbulent time of Japan's history, the Muromachi period,<sup>32</sup> when the medieval social system had collapsed and society was moving towards the modern era. In this tale, animals such as wolves, boars, and deer are fighting against humans who are invading their sanctuary and destroying their forests. As a result, they are now feared as raging gods among humans.

One of the protagonists is Ashitaka, a descendant of the Royal family of the Emishi people who had been defeated by the Yamato government and had been living in a hidden mountain village. He is put under a curse of death by a raging Boar God who has become a *tatarigami*, out of anger and hatred against humans. Ashitaka then goes on a journey to Western Japan to resolve the burden of his curse, and during his visit, is dragged into a battle between Gods and humans. Through this battle, Ashitaka meets two other main female

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<sup>32</sup> According to the *Kōjien* Japanese dictionary, Muromachi Period is from 1392 to 1573. (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2008).

characters. The first is Lady Eboshi, who leads the Tatara iron-making group, and tries to get rid of the great God of the forest, *shishigami*, in order to turn the forest into a rich land for people. She assembles lepers and women who have been sold into prostitution, and founds an industrial commune that threatens the existence of the forest. The other main character is Princess Mononoke, or San, who is raised by wolves. She fights against the Tatara group and attempts to kill Lady Eboshi in order to preserve the forest. Upon learning this, Ashitaka tries to prevent these women from fighting each other and to convince them to find a way to co-exist. Eventually allying with each other, Ashitaka and San try to calm another raging God who has been cursed. As the Cursed God swallows San, Ashitaka risks his own life to rescue her.

In the end, they succeed in protecting the great God of the forest and manage to stem the devastation of the battle between the forest and human, but they choose to go separate ways, unlike the conventional endings of many fairy tales. Ashitaka is not going to join San and abandon the human community. Likewise, San does not leave the forest for civilization, because she can never completely trust humans and would not live in their community, but she has learned that she could love a human—Ashitaka.

### **5.2.1. Representation of “others”: subversion of Orientalism and self-Orientalism**

*Mononoke* is the only Miyazaki film set in premodern Japan. Some may argue that *Mononoke* is an epic meant to promote patriotism, or to draw on the nostalgic notion of the “essence” of Japaneseness because of its historical setting with “samurai” characters. However, messages that the narrative conveys significantly parallel our present time when, similar to the time in which *Mononoke* is set, Japan is undergoing rampant changes and intense interactions within and outside the country. At the same time, Miyazaki’s

illustration of a Japanese historical setting and use of entirely Japanese characters, unlike his previous works such as *Nausicaä*, allows this film to counter the Western Orientalist depiction of the East, while creating the potential of self-Orientalization.

One of the apparent themes of this film, similar to *Nausicaä* and even *Pocahontas* to some extent, is the conflict between human civilization (iron town) and nature that humans are trying to dominate. The destructive aspects of modernization promoted by the iron town with the use of Western technologies are encapsulated by the gunshot murder of the great God of the forest (*shishigami*) called for by the town people. This also signifies the brutality of foreign influences, particularly Western. Contrary to this is the visual image of the sacred forest—*shishigami no mori* (the forest of the Forest God)—which represents beautiful nature and an animistic view, manifesting a Japan before the introduction of Western technologies into the country. It is a place and time when some animals are large and can speak to each other. Deep in the forest is the lake of *shishigami*, untouchable to humans (except Ashitaka and San), and here all living beings are either given or taken life by the Forest God. [Figure 5.2., 5.3.]

**Figure 5.2.**



*Shishigami (Forest God) during the day*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 5.3.**



*The Lake of Shishigami (shishigami no mizuumi)*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

These features of the forest reflect Miyazaki's image of an "ideal Japan" as opposed to a country "where the people are about to go to wrack and ruin," and "filled with gutless

people’<sup>33</sup> To him, contemporary Japan has already lost its national identity. It is important to note that around the year that *Mononoke* was being produced, Japan was in a process of seeking and re-constructing its national identity, in which Japanese people fluctuate between two conflicting movements in society. On the one hand, Japan was still in a midst of promoting *kokusaika* (internationalization), which was intensely advocated between the 1980s and the 90s. On the other hand, Japan was also encouraging the “rediscovery” of Japaneseness. For instance, in 1992, Japan Railways Group (JR) launched a campaign called “*Santo Monogatari*,” to encourage the rediscovery of Western Japan, and the three major historical cities of Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. The move was intended to draw upon people’s re-appreciation of the forgotten “essence” of Japan and national pride. Thus, while or because the country is inevitably involved in globalization, there has certainly been a compelling nationalistic trend against the globalizing flow as well. These movements correspond to a worldwide trend. During these two decades, with the world in many ways merging into a single entity after the end of the Cold War, nations have become concerned with how to protect their national identities or value systems.

The quest for national pride in Japan saw a resurgence in the 1980s and the 90s for the first time since the 1950s and the 60s when national identity was shattered after the country’s defeat in World War II. This suggests that Japan in the 1980s and the 90s struggled (and is still struggling) with identifying itself. In the business world as well, for the last three decades, multinational corporations have grown with dramatic speed, and become increasingly international, with branches and factories all over the world. Under these circumstances the resulting insecurity and fear of being “invaded” by foreigners led many Japanese to call for a re-affirming of national identity and pride.

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<sup>33</sup> Miyazaki, *Shuppatsuten*, p. 12, p. 16. My translation.



In contemporary Japan, it is not military but cultural power that the country emphasizes in order to re-construct national identity. In this process of identity re-construction, history plays a significant role in pinpointing national characteristics or roots that distinguish from “others.” In fact, since the end of the Cold War when national boundaries were re-drawn, nationalistic sentiment among the Japanese searching for “Japaneseness” in history, has pressed for the re-establishment of a national narrative. This is, in a sense, a project to abolish the view that has dominated Japan since the defeat in the war, that pre-war national values were wrong and post-war “democratic” values introduced by the United States are enlightening and liberating. Instead of having a hypercritical view of Japan, this project advocates seeking out the “pure” Japan, of which the people should be proud.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, this nationalist sentiment has certainly infiltrated the field of popular culture to affect media texts. In 1992, one of the key members of the textbook reform society,<sup>35</sup> Kobayashi Yoshinori, released the serial *manga* “Gomanism,” which exhibited his conservative, nationalistic stance.<sup>36</sup> This series has continued to the present, with subject matter including Japan’s war responsibilities, regarding which Kobayashi stresses Japan’s involvement as self-protection, further justifying Japan’s invasion of other Asian countries by the resulting prosperity of the Great East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Trying to

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<sup>34</sup> This concept of “pure” Japan has also been a unifying factor in the country, for instance through the understanding of Japan’s invasion of China during the war; it encourages them to reject the idea of Japan as an aggressor, and stresses the event as inevitable to protect Japan’s “pure” and “superior” race from the Western “devils.”

<sup>35</sup> The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform is an organization of people who attempt to delete any sign of Japanese cruelty from history textbooks to replace a masochistic view of Japanese history with a view that fosters national pride, and who in a sense try to bring back masculinity to Japan.

<sup>36</sup> The term “gōmanism” derives from a Japanese term “gōman” referring to arrogance. Taking this meaning, in the *manga* “Gōmanism” Kobayashi pursues his arrogance by showing his own gut feeling and instinct on social issues. The series started appearing from 1995 in a bimonthly magazine *SPIO* published by Shōgakukan.

cleanse the captious view of Japan as the aggressor in history, he also denies the occurrence of the Nanking Massacre, for Japan to regain a “wholesome” national identity. Meanwhile, Japan’s oldest museum, the Yūshūkan War Memorial at Yasukuni Shrine, reopened in 1986, with the proclaimed goal of continuing to honor war heroes and reconfirming “the truth” about Japanese military history. These nationalistic trends have continued since the 1980s, along with the government’s policy of promoting *manga* and *anime* as “national culture,” which is discussed in Chapter 2.

*Mononoke* was produced against this background of events. Aiming to revitalize the country and give hope to those Japanese with a bleak outlook, through *Mononoke* Miyazaki attempts to frame an imaginary Japan distinguished from (imaginary) “Others,” by resorting to national history and highlighting the beauty of old Japan, projected in serene vistas of the forest. In this respect, it is reasonable to deduce the theme of *Mononoke* to be nostalgia for the past or promotion of nationalism, besides a lesson in ecology. Thus, targeting domestic audiences, *Mononoke* functions to self-fabricate “Japaneseness” or to self-Orientalize Japan, not for the purpose of increasing box-office revenues outside Japan (e.g. Daiei Company’s strategy of “fabricating Japaneseness” in films of the 1950s. See Chapter 3). It is rather to harken back to “the good old Japan” by showing an “untainted” land in which *kami* (gods) reside. In this aspect, one can argue that *Mononoke* manipulates history which serves to re-construct or re-discover what it means to be Japanese at a time of identity crisis, just as Disney’s *Pocahontas* does for America.

Miyazaki also contributes to forming Japanese national identity in relation to external influences. The historical narrative of *Mononoke* resorts to the “essence” of Japanese culture and tradition, which differentiates Japan from both the Western “other” and Asian “other” (mainly China). For instance, besides the distinctive scenery

quintessential to traditional Japan, Lady Eboshi emphasizes the need for modification of guns imported from China for use by her town people (mainly women). Eboshi's thought symbolizes not only empowerment of women, but also a need for contemporary Japan to re-form its own identity by differentiating itself from others. Japan's uniqueness is also emphasized by a striking depiction of animism or Shintoism throughout the film. These philosophies challenge the human-centered worldview that puts humankind at the top of the natural hierarchy, as in Christian or Western Enlightenment thoughts. Moro (San's wolf "mother")—a symbol of animism and nature—emphasizes the impossibility of mutual understanding between animistic and Western viewpoints in the following dialogue with Ashitaka:

Ashitaka: *Moro, why can't the humans and the forest live together?*

*Why can't we stop this fighting now?*

Moro: *The humans are gathering for the final battle. The flames of their guns will burn us all soon.*

Ashitaka: *And what happens to San? Are you going to let her die with you? [angrily]*

Moro: *Huh, typical. Selfish. You think like a human. San is my daughter. She is of the wolf tribe. When the forest dies, so does she.*

Ashitaka: *You must set her free! She is not a wolf. She's human.*

Moro: *Silence, boy! How could you heal her mental scar? I caught her human parents defiling my forest. They threw their baby at my feet as they ran away... How could you help her?... There is nothing you can do... Leave this place...*

From this, we can deduce the underlying criticism of human-centrism and technological development (iron and guns) that are predominantly introduced from the Western world. What is stressed is the breakdown of the hierarchy between God, human, animals, and nature. That is, nature is not an object of human control, as much as humans are not objects of God's control. Moro's words highlight the state of *shishigami*'s sacred

forest, where these four entities used to exist in rather equal terms—a description of Japan before foreign interference. This concept is encapsulated in Ashitaka’s remark when *shishigami* explodes and seemingly disappears: “God is nature itself,” and humanity is part of nature. In other words, a god is not the entity that controls humans and the natural world, but one that lives with/in them—the principle idea of animism.

By the same token, in the world of *Mononoke*, the human or the “self” does not rule its “other.” The depiction of the primitive “other” in *Mononoke* also makes a good contrast to Disney animations with a similar theme, such as *Tarzan* or *The Jungle Book*: human characters raised by animals. For instance, Tarzan and Mowgli are at the end tamed and conform to the human world, but San, also a representative of the primitive “other,” is never subsumed into humans’ regime or mainstream society. Instead, she continues to live her life between humanity and animalism. The depiction of “otherness” in *Mononoke* blurs the distinction between “self” and “other,” and destabilizes the hierarchy between them.

The animistic view is visually accentuated by the ubiquity of gods in the forest.<sup>37</sup> In the forest, gods reside in any object and animal, which is exemplified by little spirits called *kodama*, written as 木霊 or 木魂 in Japanese (literally “spirit of trees”). The recognition of animals as gods is visually demonstrated by the boar’s transformation into a *tatarigami*—an embodiment of nature’s anger toward human (civilization) and a reflection of a threatening humanity (i.e. technological development represented by the gun that fired the shot).

[Figure 5.4.]

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<sup>37</sup> I acknowledge that the concept of animism is not unique to ancient Japan, but also exists in primitive societies in various countries, including Western societies. Here “the West” that I use for contrasting to Japan refers specifically to the modern West after technological civilization.

**Figure 5.4.**



*Grotesque boar god turned tatarigami* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

The existence of the gods depicted in *Mononoke* certainly makes a salient contrast to monotheistic Christianity, or the Western way of thinking founded on that belief.

It is also worth noting that the close relationship between gods and animals in *Mononoke* is illustrated also through the hierarchy among animals. In understanding signification of those animals in the forest, Murase Manabu proposes application of the Oriental (Chinese) zodiac and Chinese calendar.<sup>38</sup> According to Murase, the strongest animals in the twelve protective deities in the zodiac are dragons and snakes, followed by dogs and pigs. For example, wolves that San rides and boars that fight against humans are understood as gods that guard the forest, whereas monkeys go to the devil. Thus, it also makes sense that *shishigami*, whose nighttime form looks like a cross between a snake and dragon, as Murase suggests, occupies the most powerful position as the supreme god of the forest. [Figure 5.2., 5.5., 5.6.]

**Figure 5.5.**



*Shishigami (daytime) close-up*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 5.6.**



*Shishigami (night time)*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

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<sup>38</sup> Murase Manabu, *Miyazaki Hayao no 'fukami' e* (To the Depth of the World of Miyazaki Hayao) (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2004), pp. 172-180.

Contrasting this animistic view is Eboshi's prioritizing human development at the cost of other beings, even gods. Eboshi's comment that "Without that ancient god the animals in the forest would be nothing but dumb beasts once more" suggests her intention to conquer the forest and lay out a hierarchical system in ecology for the sake of her (human subjects') control. Eboshi and her peoples' scheme of destroying the forest chooses violence over the peaceful co-existence of nature and humans, and defiling traditional Japanese values with modern technology. Eboshi, rather than leaving nature alone, aims to control her "others."

This destructive characteristic of Eboshi symbolizes a dark side of Western development or industrialization. In this respect, *Mononoke* challenges the Western Orientalist view that perceives the West as moral and rational. At the same time, it may also reinforce the image of Japan as the primitive "Other," a form of self-Orientalism, when watched by viewers outside Japan, especially Western viewers. Similarly, through the depiction of guns as destructive tools, as well as the invasion of the Western humanism concepts opposing Japanese traditional views, *Mononoke* casts a critical eye on Westernization and technological modernization. In this way, the historical narrative of *Mononoke* offers a site for helping Japanese viewers articulate their national identity, differentiated from their "others" (including both the West and other Asians). *Mononoke's* approach to (re)constructing national identity does not rely on the Western Orientalist representation of Japan, which is employed in Disney's *Mulan*, or the Occidental view as in *Nausicaä* and *Porco Rosso*; instead, it may fall under the category of self-Orientalism or strategic essentialism, based on the way that the *anime* distinguishes "Japaneseness" from other nations or cultures (particularly the West).

### 5.2.2. History as a site for subversion

While in many ways *Pocahontas* uses history to reinforce existing stereotypes of the native “other,” in *Mononoke*, history is used to manipulate dominant cultural representations to subvert myths about “Japan” which have permeated people’s perceptions. Susan Napier discusses this point by referring to two myths of “Japan,” which are defamiliarized in *Mononoke*: myths of the feminine as subservient and of the Japanese as living in harmony with nature.<sup>39</sup> Building on Napier’s idea of “defamiliarization” of presumed images of Japan, I will discuss two counter-narratives, by which *Mononoke* challenges an essentialized image of “Japan.” This should provide a closer insight into ways that the film can subvert myths, and offers an alternative national identity to Japan, which differs from the one imposed by the Orientalist view. One is concerning the myth of Japan as a homogeneous country, and the other is a myth about “Japanese femininity.”

#### Subversion of the myth of homogeneity

In *Mononoke*, rather than simply pursuing an essentialized or “pure” form of Japaneseness, Miyazaki uses a historical setting in order to reveal plurality and fragmentation within Japan. In other words, he problematizes the assumed national identity, by exposing the constructed-ness of myths, and reveals the impossibility of identifying Japan as a unified subject.

What makes *Mononoke* markedly different from *Pocahontas* is the way “others” are represented in national history; *Mononoke* demonstrates “otherness” that is not based on the exclusion of “others” from the “self,” and therefore, the “self” is hard to identify.

Protagonist Ashitaka is from the ethnic group Emishi—a clan that had fought against the

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<sup>39</sup> Napier, p. 177.

Yamato regime but were pushed back into the Northeast of the country. From about the seventh to the thirteenth century, mainstream Japanese society treated the Emishi as a primitive ethnic “other,” or an “abject.” In the narrative of *Mononoke*, however, this lost clan sheds light on the existence of the powerful “other,” while the Yamato Imperial Court (the central government)—the symbolic Self—is hardly part of the narrative. While there is a slight implication of the existence of the central government through Jikobō and Eboshi’s conversations, the plot revolves around “others”—Emishi and the prostitutes and lepers of the iron town. Unlike a typical dichotomous view that would unfold a narrative based on the primitive “Other” versus the modernized “Self” formula, in *Mononoke*, the modernized group in the iron town is also one of the “others.” This observation suggests that *Mononoke* not only subverts the notion of Western “Self”/Eastern “Other,” but also the structure of “Self”/“Other” within the country.

A similar argument regarding Japan’s heterogeneity emerges by following Ashitaka’s journey. Being an “other” himself in his own country, Ashitaka nonetheless constantly encounters his own “others,” indicating the plurality of Japan, despite human characters that, on the surface, appear to be of the same race. This challenges the Orientalist generalized image of a homogeneous society. Instead, “differences” are emphasized through different groups in the film: iron town residents, Emishi villagers, samurai employed by the Lord Asano (a daimyo who rules the iron town), a group of shamans, and residents in a merchant town where Ashitaka meets Jiko-bō. This depiction brings to light the idea that the population of Japan is a composite of differences, including Yamato people, Ainu, Okinawan, and foreign residents. It is a historical fact that since many hundred years



ago, various races and ethnicities, including Asians and Oceanians, have moved into Japan, and at the time Emishi existed, Japan was such a racial melting-pot.<sup>40</sup>

*Mononoke*'s narrative develops through interactions between these groups (or species), and they play a key role in identity construction. Their interactions do not exactly follow Kristeva's notion of "abjection" that excludes outsiders to secure boundaries against them from one's own group. That is, identity recognition for each group in *Mononoke* is not prompted by exclusion or assimilation of "others," but by acknowledging the existence of "others" with their differences. Thus, the relationship between in-group members and outsiders becomes more complex and more dialectic, instead of mutually exclusive. What is more intriguing is that, as mentioned above, the iron town residents consist of various social "others," who are normally invisible or negatively depicted in mainstream media representations. The iron town is a "carnivalistic" site,<sup>41</sup> where "others" and the "abject" are empowered. In this site, a figure of authority is not even visible, and it has no power to control the narrative.

Furthermore, Japan's heterogeneity is also represented as a space "in-between," or a manifestation of boundary fluidity between "self" and "other," through the characterization of three main figures: Ashitaka, San, and Eboshi. These three reside in separate domains: an ancient village where the defeated Emishi live, the forest filled with *mononoke* (possessed spirits), and a modernized iron town lived by marginalized people. Yet, they also signify fluidity in identity categorizations of nature (spirits and animals) and culture (human, civilization). The term "*mononoke*" refers to vengeful spirits of things, including dead or living people and animals, or to the cause of any unexplainable thing, ranging from a natural

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<sup>40</sup> See Kuji Tsutomu, '*Mononoke hime*' no Himitsu: *Harukanaru Jōmon no Fūkei* (The Secret of Princess Mononoke: the Scenery from the Far Away Jomon Era) (Tokyo: Hihyō-sha, 1997), pp. 78-80.

<sup>41</sup> The term "carnavalesque" refers to Bakhtin's notion of "carnival."

disaster to a headache. Thus, San (the princess of *Mononoke*)—a combination of “princess” and “*mononoke*”—symbolizes a liminal space between nature and culture. San is biologically human, despite her wild “disguise” with a wolf-pelt shawl, a spear and her nickname. Her identity resorts neither entirely to humankind nor to nature. Although she tells Ashitaka, “I am a wolf,” it is her conscious choice to “perform” as an imaginary “Other” remote from the identity from her birth. This aspect represents a problematic identity of San, abandoned by a samurai family and raised by a wolf.

Ashitaka is biologically human, but since he becomes possessed by a curse, his body is invaded by *mononoke*, or abject. In other words, his identity is a hybrid of his original “self” and a foreign “other.” He lies somewhere between the iron town that signifies human/civilization and the forest where *mononoke* exists. Different from Kristeva’s “abject”—a part that needs to be rejected to establish one’s identity—abject manifested in Ashitaka’s body is never completely removed from his “self,” but lives with him as a part of his identity. In this sense as well, *Mononoke* also highlights the permeability between “self” and “other” in the process of identity formation.

The third character Eboshi’s subjectivity is also complex. On the one hand, she is a typical (Western modern) industrialist and rationalist, which conventionally represents masculinity; on the other hand, she exhibits a great number of maternal attributes, such as taking care of the marginal or social “others,” including prostitutes and lepers. These hybrid characterizations in turn underscore the fragmented-ness and heterogeneity of “sameness,” challenging the essentialized notion of human/nature, culture/nature, and self/other. The transgression of dichotomous categorization seen in *Mononoke* includes gender identity as well, which is discussed later in this section. These transgressive representations of

“otherness” and “differences” not only manifest different groups within Japanese society, but also Japan’s relationships with its “others”: both in the West and the rest of Asia.

It is worth stressing that unlike *Nausicaä*, *Mononoke* does not identify foreign influences only with the West, but also with “others” within Asia. The technology and modernization that the iron town is eager to maintain—particularly guns—are not associated exclusively with the West but also with China, as Lady Eboshi clearly mentions the guns being imported from China. Moreover, the influence of “other” Asia is also nuanced in another aspect. *Mononoke*’s story traces back to the late eighth century, when Ashitaka’s ancestors fought against the central authority of the Yamato Imperial Court. One of the Emishi villagers says at the beginning of film:

*We are the last of the Emishi. It’s five hundred years since the Yamato Imperial destroyed our tribe and drove the remnants of our people to the east. It may be our fate that now our last prince must leave us to travel to the west...*

This scene reminds the viewers of the circumstances of the Yamato dynasty, which prospered predominantly through constant trade with China and the Korean Peninsula.<sup>42</sup> The resulting cultural and political ties bring to light how extensively “other” Asians have been incorporated into Japan’s national identity. These points may also be an indication of Miyazaki’s recognition of non-Western “others” that have influenced Japanese society over the course of history.

Napier refers to the world of *Mononoke* as “multiculturalism.”<sup>43</sup> Although this concept should not necessarily mean that the relationships between all groups are equal, it

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<sup>42</sup> *Shōsetsu nihonshi* (Detail Explication of Japanese History) eds. Inoue Mitsusada, Kasahara Kazuo, and Kodama Kota et al. (Tokyo: Yamakawa shoten, 1985), pp. 32-36.

<sup>43</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle*, p. 247.

well explains the heterogeneity depicted in this film. This concept is suggested in the closing scene: Ashitaka and San decide to go on in separate directions. *Mononoke* highlights a co-existence of differences, which do not necessarily parallel Bhabha's power-related notion of "hybridity." Through historic fantasy, the film destabilizes the enduring myth of Japan as a homogeneous, unified subjectivity.

### **Destabilization of the myth of Japanese women**

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, *Mononoke*'s narrative problematizes notions of gendered racial and racialized gender identities in terms of Japanese women. With regard to racialized gender representation, as Napier argues, *Mononoke* defamiliarizes the conventional association of Japanese women with submissive femininity.<sup>44</sup> In this respect, the characterizations of San and Eboshi exemplify the subversion of this racialized gender image of Japan.

Disney's *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*, despite the introduction of adventurous female figures, concludes with "Cinderella story endings," and therefore do not completely subvert the conventional representation of "femininity." On the contrary, *Mononoke* destabilizes the Orientalist preconception of gender hierarchy within Japanese society, not simply by reversing gender roles, but by transgressing gender identity categories.

The subversion of racialized gender of Japanese women is demonstrated mainly by three female characters: San, Eboshi, and Moro. San represents "a wild princess," somewhat similar to Nausicaä in her independence, occasional cruelty, and roughness. San's character does not at all evoke for viewers the conventional notion of "princess" and the "imagined" Japanese woman. **[Figure 5.7.]**

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<sup>44</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, p. 233.

**Figure 5.7.**



*San's mouth covered with blood after sucking poison from Moro*  
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Miyazaki's written storyboard descriptions of this scene, where San sucks poisoned blood from her foster mother Moro's wound and spits it out, articulates the subversive image of a conventional Japanese woman or a "princess." [Figure 5.8.]

**Figure 5.8.**



*Storyboard descriptions of San that oppose a conventional "princess" definition*<sup>45</sup>  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>45</sup> Miyazaki Hayao, *Princess Mononoke: The Original Storyboard* (Tokyo: Tokuma shoten, 2002), pp. 105-106.

The words that Miyazaki uses to describe San in this scene include devil-like, asura, “kuchisake-onna” (split-mouth woman).<sup>46</sup> Through these characteristics San successfully defamiliarizes submissiveness and cuteness (or “shōjo-ness”), which are typically associated with “Japanese femininity.” This defamiliarization appears particularly salient against a social background where Japan’s internationally recognized “cute culture”—the epitome of ageless “shōjo-ness”—reached its peak in the 1990s. Cuteness, or *kawaii*, in the Japanese context “celebrates sweet, adorable, innocent, pure, simple, genuine, gentle, vulnerable, weak, and inexperienced social behavior and physical appearances.”<sup>47</sup> Looked at from outside, this phenomenon often calls forth a gendering of Japan as feminine, which links the nation to infancy and helplessness. At the same time, as Brian McVeigh argues, cuteness in a Japanese context is a heavily gendered concept, which is practiced by women and men in order for the former to remain controllable and to fit patriarchal social systems.<sup>48</sup> Hence, cuteness is a manifestation of the gendering of race as well as racializing gender, a discourse that operates to reinforce the image of Japanese women as subservient and helpless beings who cannot attain positions of authority. In this respect, the depiction of San not only undermines the association of Japan with “feminine,” but also undercuts the equation of Japanese woman with a meek and vulnerable image of cute “shōjo.”

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<sup>46</sup> Miyazaki, *Princess Mononoke Storyboard*, pp. 106-107. “Kuchisake-onna” refers to both a story of Japanese mythology and a modern version of the tale of a woman, who is mutilated by a jealous husband and returned as a malicious spirit bent on committing the same act done to her. In 1979 this tale, as an urban legend, sensationally prevailed all over Japan and even to South Korea. Covering her mouth with a surgical mask, she asks people, “Do you think I am beautiful?” At the same time, she takes off the mask and reveals her mutilated mouth. When the victim runs, she chases until she catches and kills him/her.

<sup>47</sup> Sharon Kinsella, “Cuties in Japan,” in *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, eds. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995), p. 220.

<sup>48</sup> See Brian McVeigh, “Commodifying Affection, Authority and Gender in the Everyday Object in Japan,” in *Journal of Material Culture* 1 (1996), pp. 291-312.

Eboshi is another female figure who overturns the myth of Japanese women. As the leader of the iron town, she handles men, women and guns efficiently to establish military forces to kill the Forest God, as well as any invaders. Eboshi is visibly a beautiful and charismatic woman who can be both rational and ruthless—typically “masculine” attributes. She is an extremely intriguing character from a historical perspective as well. Image analyst Kanō Seiji, who established the Institute of Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki Films, describes Eboshi’s background as follows:

She is a daughter of the Shimazu clan, who, after her father’s death, is forced to marry the daimyo who destroyed the Shimazu family. She resists her husband, and is therefore sold to become a prostitute (遊女). However, eventually she is taken by the head of a Japanese pirate group (倭寇), whom later Eboshi kills. Becoming the head of the pirate group, she familiarizes herself with guns and gunpowder and establishes the iron town in Izumo domain in western Japan, waiting for the right time to take revenge for her father.<sup>49</sup>

The image of Eboshi as the head of pirates and a murderer is depicted here with her ruthless and cruel persona, which highlights a “masculine” nature, rather than a “feminine” one. Kanō’s description of Eboshi from Japanese history completely contradicts the image of Japanese women held by males in Japan and people outside Japan, further emphasizing the constructedness of gender categories.

The empowered image of Japanese women through the representation of Eboshi is further elaborated by Amino Yoshihiko: “From the eleventh to about the fourteenth century, prostitutes were not untouchables, but they were in a broad sense considered to belong to the ‘craftsman’ rank..., and they eventually became an independent circle.”<sup>50</sup> According to his description, Eboshi and other prostitutes in the iron town should be regarded as artisans

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<sup>49</sup> Kuji, p. 73.

<sup>50</sup> Amino Yoshihiko, *Nihonron no Shiza* (Viewpoints of Theory about Japan), ctd. Kuji, pp. 72-73.

or performers, who have access to a mode of expression. This subversive representation of the female “other” also parallels Benita Parry’s assertion of a space in which native women (the “Other”) act as an active agent, and from which they can “speak.” Parry states that:

... it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women’s voice on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak’s model of the silent subaltern.<sup>51</sup>

By elevating prostitutes to the status of artisans, one could argue that women in the town are able to break their silence.

Eboshi’s iron town is also a liminal space where powerful women rule and men are completely under women’s thumbs. In this space, the conventionally marginalized female “other” produces iron for purchasing rice, which men only carry. The town is also independent from male domains: Lord Asano and the Yamato Imperial Court. Although Eboshi pretends to follow the Emperor’s order to get the Forest God’s head, her god-hunting plan is based on her own interest in expanding the self-contained iron town. As Japanese women in the Muromachi period predominantly lived under a male-dominated society, similar to contemporary Japan, the female military leader points out to viewers the constructed nature of the Japanese female identity.

Another leading female figure, Moro, is a furious female wolf, who also evinces a nurturing side toward San. Moro is a leader of the forest and bravely lays her life on the line to protect the Forest God, as well as other animals. When the angry Okkotonushi—the head of the boar clan—is possessed with *mononoke*, Moro and San try to protect and calm him, hoping to prevent him from becoming a *tatarigami*. Simultaneously, Moro’s cruelty is

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<sup>51</sup> Benita Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,” in *Oxford Literary Review* 9: 1-2 (1987), p. 35.



explicitly seen in her determined plan for revenge on Eboshi; she says: “I’m waiting for that woman (Eboshi), and dreaming of the day when I will finally crunch that woman’s head in my jaws.” Moro’s long-term wish is partly fulfilled toward the end, when she bites off Eboshi’s arm. Such words, along with her violent, merciless action toward Eboshi project and accentuate an image that opposes Japanese “femininity.” The major battles in the film are between the two females Moro and Eboshi, as well as between Eboshi and San, which again subverts the dominant notion of violence as a male trait.

While Miyazaki’s female protagonists before *Mononoke* still maintained conventional “feminine” attributes—such as Nausicaä’s cute voice, Kiki’s big red ribbon and shyness toward boys—*Mononoke* reveals a dramatic change that blurs the categorization of gender in the field of *anime*. Yet, it should be noted that Moro is voiced in Japanese by male actor Miwa Akihiro, who has “performed” as a woman for decades. In this respect, one could also interpret the representation of Moro as a potential manifestation of emasculated Japanese males, or as a performance that suggests the fluidity of conventional gender categorization. (A similar discussion is done on Disney’s *Mulan* in Chapter 6.)

Another challenge to the dominant format of “princess” stories that *Mononoke* puts forward is a failure of the heterosexual relationship between “princess” San and “prince” Ashitaka. Disney’s “princess stories” all have an ending where a “prince” and “princess” are brought together.<sup>52</sup> Unlike the archetypal scenario, San and Ashitaka do not magically overcome or obliterate each other’s differences; an industrial human world for Ashitaka, and the world of nature for San. They do not “live happily ever after.” In other words, they

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<sup>52</sup> Although Pocahontas and John Smith are apart from each other at the end of the film, in *Pocahontas II: Journey to A New World* we are shown the marriage of Pocahontas and another Caucasian hero, John Rolfe.

do not consummate a typical heterosexual romantic scenario, but live separately in different worlds, neither of which is the mainstream or dominant society. *Mononoke* not only demonstrates a wild version of “princess” who is hardly the object of male desire, but also presents a “shōjo” who disturbs a typical heterosexual romantic plot. Instead of a “fairy tale relationship,” San and Ashitaka display a relationship which develops not based on the gendered code, but on the social code of difference. In this respect, *Mononoke* introduces an alternative to the archetypal Western (Disney) narrative aesthetic.

Moreover, with regard to gendered representation, *Mononoke* also destabilizes the binary associations of man/culture vs. woman/nature, by depicting San as a symbol of nature and Eboshi as cultured/civilized. Similarly, as mentioned previously, Ashitaka lies in between these two domains. In the world of *Mononoke*, nature and culture are embodied by both female and male characters. San does not solely belong to nature, despite what she claims, because she can never be a “pure savage.” That is, she is a hybrid of the two: the “Princess of the Spirits.”<sup>53</sup> Her “mother” Moro expresses San’s transgressive and ambivalent identity by saying: “Now my poor, ugly, but beautiful daughter is neither human nor wolf.”

Being a princess, San makes a great contrast to any of Disney’s “princess” characters. *Mononoke* executes what even “adventurous” Mulan, Pocahontas, and Jasmine fail to achieve in their gendered performances. The narrative of *Mononoke* does not easily allow a male to identify himself as the subject in opposition to the female “other.” His “masculine” (prince) identity is also hardly secured by the female “other”; instead, she may

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<sup>53</sup> Melek Ortabasi, “Fictional Fantasy or Historical Fact? The Search for Japanese Identity in Miyazaki Hayao’s *Mononoke hime*,” in *A Century of Popular Culture in Japan*, ed. Douglas Slaymaker (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), p. 212. Ortabasi argues this, borrowing the idea from Gotō Tsuyoshi and Kuroda Mitsuhiro’s *Mononoke hime kenkyū josetsu* (Tokyo: KK bestsellers, 1998), p. 31.

take over his subject position. All the females in *Mononoke* are self-determined and self-sufficient figures. This contrasts sharply with Pocahontas, who would panic without constant advice from Grandmother Willow and who needs help from Smith and Rolfe.

The politics of vision are relevant in discussing *Mononoke*'s subversion of the hierarchy between men and women. For instance, it is the women in iron town who bear the gaze to size up Ashitaka. A reverse visual relationship is also presented by a comparative depiction between Jiko-bō (male shaman) and Eboshi. The close-up of the two walking side by side highlights the difference of their heights; even with his high-heeled wooden clogs, Jiko-bō is much shorter than Eboshi, and therefore he needs to literally look up to this female leader, while Eboshi literally and symbolically looks down on him. In this way, the gendered hierarchy is subverted through the mechanism of vision, unlike the Disney animations previously analyzed.

What is ironic, however, is that while depictions of female characters in *Mononoke* undermine the myth of "Japanese women," the depiction of emasculated Japanese males backs up the stereotype of a feminized Japan, typical to the Orientalist view. For example, looking at her wounded husband Kōroku, Toki scolds him rather than nurturing him, saying, "You stupid! How are you gonna drive the ox now all banged up and mangled? You scared me half to death. Don't you 'little flower' me. I wish the wolf had eaten you." Kōroku does not show any sign of "masculinity," and instead, he shows tears in his eyes, the epitome of "femininity."

Another example of emasculated Japan is again presented by Kōroku—so scared of *kodama* in the forest that he cannot even stand up. Moreover, female characters speak in the way expected of men, particularly in the Japanese script. In a dialog between Kōroku and Toki, when they are looking at the iron town burning down, Kōroku feels devastated and

says, “We are done. Once the forge burns, that’s it. That’ll be the end of our iron town,” while Toki’s responds, “We are still alive. We’ll manage somehow. Now let’s go.” Her masculine style of expression reinforces Kōroku’s cowardly and helpless personality, or “feminine” characteristics. This type of characterization of Asian male figures is parallel to those in *Mulan* (i.e the gang of three and Chi Fu), discussed in the next chapter.

From these observations, it is clear that *Mononoke* reveals the interrelation between gender and racial (ethnic) representations in the process of subverting myths of Japan, by means of re-designing history. Empowering the female gender in *Mononoke* in turn emasculates or self-Orientalizes the national identity of Japan, which seems to reconfirm an Orientalist view, similar to the way in which *Mulan* re-Orientalizes Asia.

Although *Mononoke* reveals transgressions of gender and national identity categories in some aspects, it is fair to say that Miyazaki’s re-designing of history is as problematic as Disney’s *Pocahontas* is. Some may maintain that it is nonsensical to question the historical accuracy in *Mononoke*, because it is a fantasy in the first place. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that Miyazaki does guide his viewers, whether Japanese or non-Japanese, to a certain historical perspective, by selecting and highlighting some aspects of history while leaving out others. *Mononoke* may also generate a biased historical perception, similar to *Pocahontas*, in that Miyazaki avoids depicting a part of reality: the cruelty that the Japanese dominant power exerted over the marginalized. Examples include the Emishi clan’s fierce battle with the Yamato Imperial Court, the massive massacre, and the Emishi’s harsh life as slaves after their defeat.

This chapter explicates different ways in which playing with history in animated fantasy contributes to (re)constructing public memory and national narratives in *Pocahontas* and *Mononoke*, both dealing with “others” within. Both *Pocahontas* and

*Mononoke* reveal that a historical fiction, which chooses certain facts over others, necessarily risks imposing upon the viewer specific perspectives that may be unfair to certain groups of people and cultures. Nonetheless, *Mononoke* demonstrates that, by means of maneuvering history, animated fantasy can become a powerful tool that offers an “in-between” space where transgressive identities emerge to subvert dominant white, male-centered discourse, while *Pocahontas* rather re-affirms it. In a sense, history is used in *Mononoke* in order to revitalize historical and social “others.”

Hence, *Mononoke*, as viewed by a global audience, offers an opportunity to realize and examine existing presumptions about “Japan,” which Japanese people themselves may have even taken for granted. Other messages in the film may be somewhat lost on non-Japanese viewers. From the perspective of Japanese viewers, *Mononoke* addresses Japan’s need to re-establish national identity in the current climate of dramatic social change amid accelerating globalization. Miyazaki also draws attention to various minorities and therefore to the fact that Japan has never been a “homogeneous” society. To both Japanese and non-Japanese viewers, *Mononoke* also offers the message that “gender” is a social construction which is performative and never stable. In the same line of thought, the contribution of this film to the concept of identity formation is not a mere inversion of positions between binary oppositions, but a demonstration of how transgressive identities can be expressed through the fantasy world of animation.

## **Chapter 6: Western (Re)Orientalism and Oriental Orientalism** **~ *Mulan* & *Spirited Away***

Disney's exploration of other racial/ethnic groups finally reached East Asia in 1998, when the studio produced *Mulan*. This film brings a doubly marginalized character—an Asian woman—into the center of the narrative as a female warrior. By analyzing Disney's *Mulan*, this chapter first demonstrates the contemporary Western view of (East) Asia with reference to a classic Saidian Orientalist perspective, and more specifically discusses “yellowness.” In response to the Orientalism exemplified by *Mulan*, this chapter then investigates how Miyazaki Hayao's *Spirited Away* undermines or transgresses the Western Orientalist viewpoint. Also discussed is how the formation of modern East Asian identities within the region is influenced by how a Western self is created through a process of “othering” via the animated text. These discussions will explicate how the works of Disney and Miyazaki are located on different points of a continuum in relation to current discourses of Orientalism and representations of “(East) Asianness” in the world of animation.

### **6.1. Perception of “Yellowness”: *Mulan* (1998)**

#### **Synopsis**

The Disney film *Mulan* follows the experiences of a young girl named Fa Mulan. The story is based on an anonymous sixth-century Chinese poem called “The Ballad of Mulan,” and is also inspired by Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1976).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sheng-mei Ma, “Mulan Disney, It's Like, Re-Orients: Consuming China and Animating Teen Dreams,” in *The Emperor's Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney's Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), p.149, p. 153. It is worth noting that even since the sixth century, the legend of Fa Mulan has also constantly been recycled in Chinese popular culture: most conspicuously in film, fiction, and comic books in the modern period. Also, Fa Mulan is the Cantonese rendition. The Mandarin version is Hua Mulan. More

Mulan has reached marriageable age and is awaiting suitors for her hand in matrimony. In their wives, men are looking for “a hard worker with a calm demeanor, a porcelain doll with an attractive hairdo and a tiny waist.”<sup>2</sup> This does not describe Mulan, but she still wants to make her family happy and proud. When her injured, aging father is summoned to join the war against the invading Huns, Mulan cuts her hair, disguises herself as a man, takes her father’s horse and armor, and secretly takes his place in the army. With this act, she also hopes to assert her own identity and self-worth. Meanwhile, her ancestors have Mushu, a miniature dragon who is desperate to regain his credibility, awaken the family guardian to follow and protect Mulan. Mushu ends up taking on the role of guardian himself, and provides comic relief in the film.

Mulan learns to take on a masculine identity during military training under the command of Captain Shang. Significantly, all the other trainees—all males—must also learn how to be “men” according to military standards. When Captain Shang sings “I’ll make a man out of you,” he is addressing not just Mulan but all the trainee soldiers.

After their successful training, Mulan and the other troops are sent north to stop the Huns. When the troops meet the Huns in battle they are badly outnumbered, but Mulan comes up with an idea that turns certain defeat into victory. Her “true” identity as a female, however, is disclosed in the process, and Mulan is severely reproached and ordered to return home. Soon after, the surviving Huns reach the palace in the capital to overthrow the Emperor. Again Mulan saves the day and defeats the Huns. Her plan requires that three of her fellow soldiers, all men, cross-dress as women and seduce the Hun guards. (Captain Shang follows Mulan’s plan, but notably does not cross-dress.)

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about this matter, see Joseph Allen, “Dressing and Undressing the Chinese Woman Warrior,” in *Positions* 4, 2 (1996), pp. 343-79.

<sup>2</sup> Pinsky, p. 180.

After the Emperor is saved Mulan is offered a position on his council, which she turns down. She replaces her armor with the clothes of the “perfect daughter” and returns to domestic life. In the end, Captain Shang realizes his love for her, and visits her home, which leads to the familiar Disney happy ending.<sup>3</sup>

#### **6.1.1. Re-inscribing the yellow “Other”: mythologizing and feminizing East Asia**

Disney animation is often associated with advocating a view of “Asia” as a “cultural other,” mainly inspired by Western Orientalist perspectives based on stereotypical and essentialized assumptions about “the Orient.”<sup>4</sup> Disney’s *Mulan* is an example of these practices where the “yellowness” of East Asia is re-inscribed. I use “yellowness” in this chapter to specifically refer to the ways in which East Asians are represented in either American or Asian media.<sup>5</sup> The concept of “yellowness” derives from the Anglo-European nineteenth and early twentieth century fear of invasion by Asians, mainly by Chinese immigrants into the United States, and the terror of “contamination” of Anglo-Saxons by East Asian blood, known as the “yellow peril.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, one of the two role-types through which the American media have typically represented East Asian women is “the Dragon Lady” (typically a devious madam or prostitute), who threatens to seduce and then conquer American masculinity. At the same time, yellow often represents a

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<sup>3</sup> In *Mulan II* (2005), the sequel to *Mulan*, Captain Shang asks Mulan to marry him, and Shang becomes Mulan’s fiancé, confirming their mutual love.

<sup>4</sup> This argument has been discussed by scholars such as Burton-Carvajal, “Surprise Package: Looking Southward with Disney”; Dorfman and Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*; Giroux, “Memory and Pedagogy in the ‘Wonderful World of Disney’”; Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Williston: Blackwell, 2000). But they do not specifically discuss the case of the representations of East Asia or *Mulan* particularly.

<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of my discussion I use “yellowness” to denote stereotypical representations of East Asia. In using this term I do not intend to ignore specificities or differences within East Asia.

<sup>6</sup> My definition of “Yellow peril” here is taken from William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction 1850-1940* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1982). And categories of East Asian women are taken from Karen Shimakawa, “Introduction,” in *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 16-17.



“tamed race,” as we can see in the other typical role for East Asian women, “the Blossom Baby” (such as the China doll or “geisha girl”). Similarly, East Asian men are depicted either as the “egghead-wimp” or the “kung-fu master/ninja/samurai,”<sup>7</sup> as well as Xing’s categorization of representations of Asian American men in Hollywood films into the “yellow peril” formula and the Charlie Chan genre (See Chapter 1). These categorizations clearly indicate the Orientalist practice of lumping different East Asians together as the undifferentiated “other.”

I argue that Disney’s representation of the Chinese legend of Fa Mulan once more reveals the dangers of Orientalism: while some may read it as an anti-Orientalist Asian-American text, ironically it in fact reproduces some of the stereotypes it seeks to displace. This is partly because such texts, in spite of their objective of deconstructing cultural stereotypes, predictably resort to an Orientalist gaze that is both essentializing and alienating. As a result, *Mulan* reproduces a series of Orientalist discourses, by racializing and gendering its characters to project East Asians as mysterious, irrational, seductive, and passive “Others,” as opposed to the rational, masculine, white “West.”<sup>8</sup> This represents the same pattern as described in Saidian Orientalism.

It should, however, be noted that *Mulan* resists being simply read as another banal Disney creation, and instead, manages to avoid many of the stereotypical pitfalls that normally infest Orientalist takes on East Asian culture. For instance, the female warrior, Mulan, who is independent, resolute and aggressive, challenges the archetypal image of the passive Oriental female. She also undergoes harsh physical training to reorient her body

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Fung, “Looking for My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn,” in *How Do I look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), p.148.

<sup>8</sup> I put the term “the West” in quotation marks to indicate that it is not an ontological entity. “The West” here broadly means the imagined subjectivity of White Anglo-Europeans, particularly those in the United States. I do not intend to naively essentialize or generalize the binary, but attempt to use it strategically also to address the fact that “the West” is also constructed and presumed by “Westerners” for their own benefits.

and mind towards exertion that is conventionally associated with a masculine persona, even though the change is only temporary. In fact, with regard to this, the producers of *Mulan* credit the film for breaking with conventional media representations of gender and sexuality that have shaped the stereotypical image of East Asian women.<sup>9</sup>

The masculine characterization of Captain Shang must also be acknowledged. In fact, he is the only physically fit member in the camp, a masculine image of the East Asian male as toned, tanned, and tough, all of which contradict the Orientalist stereotype of the feeble or feminized Asian body. [Figure 6.1.] He is also the only one among the Han Chinese main soldier characters who does not cross-dress. In this respect, Shang's

**Figure 6.1.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Captain Shang carrying heavy weights across his shoulders.

*East Asian masculinity embodied by Captain Shang's action and body*

sexuality and gender are represented as "normal," and thus, in terms of gender categorization, nothing in his representation is transgressive or subversive. In other words, he shares the characteristics of the typical Anglo-Saxon hero in mainstream American media, in particular a muscular body that is proudly exhibited for the viewer.

To the international audiences who are used to seeing stereotypical "East Asians" in Hollywood films, Captain Shang may seem transgressive in terms of racial representation, and serve to challenge the imaginary "East Asia" that they have had in mind. Still, this characteristic of Captain Shang is overshadowed by different examples of "othering" in

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<sup>9</sup> This is expressed in *Mulan Special Edition DVD* (2004), "Character Design" by The Disney Company.

*Mulan*. For one thing, while Shang remains masculine on the surface, without being cross-dressed or feminized, in the battle situations with the Huns, it is only those who *are* feminized or cross-dressed as women who contrive the strategies that lead to victory, whereas the masculine Shang is ultimately rescued (twice) by Mulan. This seems to imply that masculinity is incompatible with “(East) Asianness” for a “hero” in American mainstream media. Similarly, the buck-toothed, slit-eyed male characters reinforce the Orientalist construction of the “alien Orient.”

William F. Wu identifies two archetypal representations of East Asian males in popular media produced by white Westerners: Dr. Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan, which Xing categorizes as “yellow peril” and the emasculated figure respectively. These two are opposite characters, the former a Western-educated East Asian evil genius who is always plotting to take over the world, and the latter an agreeable East Asian in America known for pithy, fortune cookie-style aphorisms such as “‘Illustrious ancestor once say, ‘Destination never reached by turning back on same.’”<sup>10</sup> While Fu Manchu explicitly embodies the “yellow peril” menace to the West, Charlie Chan, who overcompensates in order to undercut this image, also ends up supporting white-dominant representation: William Wu argues that Charlie Chan symbolizes the “yellow peril” after being tamed by the white West (America, in particular).<sup>11</sup> The necessity of taming is a direct response to the “yellow peril” phenomenon. These two characters have contributed to the production and maintenance of the racial binary of “white” and “yellow” in popular narratives from the 1920s onward.

Robert G. Lee associates Fu Manchu’s characterization with “ambiguous sexuality, which combines a masochistic vulnerability marked as feminine and a sadistic

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<sup>10</sup> This is a quote from the film *Charlie Chan at Monte Carlo* (1937).

<sup>11</sup> Wu, p.164, p.182.

aggressiveness marked as masculine.”<sup>12</sup> The Orientalist perspective feminizes Fu Manchu’s physical features (for example, his long fingernails), and although his education in the West makes him a more cosmopolitan and rational being than the stereotyped image of a primitive or backward Asian, it also generates a kind of Oriental “monster,” which ends up threatening the West. Fu Manchu’s “predictably deviant” sexuality projects what white viewers need—“difference” which distances the inscrutable Oriental “Other” from “us”—in order to comfort them. Lee’s description of Fu Manchu’s white rival Nayland Smith illuminates the strong contrast between depictions of the two races: “Smith... is the imaginary archetype of the Anglo-Saxon hero: gaunt, tanned, weathered, a figure evolved from...novels of romantic knighthood.”<sup>13</sup>

In *Mulan* the character Chi Fu, a member of the Emperor’s council and overseer of Captain Shang, strongly resembles Fu Manchu, both in appearance and in name. [Figure 6.2., 6.3.]

**Figure 6.2.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Chi Fu taking notes with a serious look, demonstrating a resemblance to the picture of Dr. Fu Manchu.

*Chi Fu, the councilor*

**Figure 6.3.**



*Dr. Fu Manchu*

THE FACE OF FU MANCHU © Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Like Fu Manchu, Chi Fu’s persona is evil, following Wu’s account of the representation of East Asian males in American media. Yet the fact that he is portrayed as a comical and clumsy character also serves to reaffirm stereotypes of the inept, feeble, and timid Oriental.

<sup>12</sup> Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), p.116.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

This suggests a tamed character, like Charlie Chan, one whom no one would mistake as a threat. For instance, when the Emperor offers Chi Fu's job to Mulan at the end of the story, Chi Fu faints, shocked that he has been defeated by a woman. As well, Chi Fu squeals like a hysterical girl when he tries to promote his ideas on how to fight the Huns, and is completely ignored by the head of the camp. The feminization of East Asia is amplified by Chi Fu's mannerisms in the scene where he goes to bathe in the river: wrapping his body and hair with towels in very feminine style, with only his skinny legs exposed. [Figure 6.4., 6.5.]

**Figure 6.4.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Chi Fu going to take a bath with a bath brush in his hand.

*Chi Fu's feminized mannerisms: going to bathe*

**Figure 6.5.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Chi Fu scared of a panda bear.

*Feminized Chi Fu: scared by panda*

Like Fu Manchu, these depictions of Chi Fu embody ambiguous sexuality—a combination of masochistic helplessness and aggressiveness—which recalls Lee's description of Asian sexuality above. Chi Fu re-inscribes the typical “feminized” and “asexualized” East Asian male persona commonly portrayed in mainstream Orientalist American films. Based on the theoretical explanation of the role of media texts in viewers' cultural identity formation in Chapter 1, it is reasonable to speculate that the representation of Chi Fu factors in the construction of an East Asian “Other” through the sexualizing/gendering of race. This is a process that Edward Said identifies as a

feminization of the object of the West's desire—the “Orient.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Chi Fu's conflicting characteristics—feminine and masculine, threatening and timid, serious and comical—deny a subjectivity to this yellow “other” and recall Kristeva's notion of “abjection” in the process of identity construction. Ambiguity is one of the main elements of the “abject”—an entity that is foreign to as well as a part of (or a mirror of) “self,” and that needs to be expelled from “self.”

Gendering the racial “other” is also underlined by Mulan's soldiering comrades from the barracks, the gang of three—Chien-Po, Ling, and Yao—who behave childishly and thereby embody emasculated, immature “(East) Asianness” as well as the “effeminacy” of East Asian men [Figure 6.6].<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 6.6.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney's *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Chien-Po, Ling, and Yao fighting.

*Childish behavior of Chien-Po (center), Ling (left), Yao (right)*

For example, Chien-Po is a monk, an occupation that is typically dissociated from sex and sexuality, and his depiction also suggests the image of the eunuchs who guarded Chinese palaces; Ling is very skinny and his physical attributes are far from “masculine”; and the “tough guy” Yao is voiced by gay actor and sometime drag queen Harvey Fierstein, which conceptually emasculates his character by deviating from the definition of a “hero” within

<sup>14</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p.206. For instance, Said states that “...the differences in [19<sup>th</sup> century's writers'] ideas about the Orient can be characterized as exclusively manifest differences, differences in form and personal style, rarely in basic content. Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability.”

<sup>15</sup> I acknowledge the fact that some Asian men themselves also may contribute to this stereotype through contemporary practices such as wearing make-up, using cosmetic products for the beauty of their skin, and dieting to achieve slim bodies. But it is not just Asian men who pursue these contemporary practices.

the heterosexual regime. The characterization of Yao as a whole creates a sort of multi-layered meta-pun: a gay white drag queen playing a straight Chinese man who impersonates a Chinese woman to seduce other straight men. In this respect, one may argue that the Chinese (yellow) male body is triply positioned as the “abject.” (It is also significant that even the normatively masculine Captain Shang is voiced by a gay actor, B. D. Wong.)

In terms of visual representation, these three characters literally cross-dress, disguising themselves as women at the palace in order to trick the Huns and rescue the emperor. [Figure 6.7., 6.8.] This scene clearly recaptures the vision of the feminized Orient as the object of desire. It illuminates a tendency in Disney’s discourse that is partly responsible for sustaining Asia as the mysterious, irrational, and subservient “Other” as seen by white Western eyes.<sup>16</sup> Simultaneously, these depictions conjure up a “normative” Western masculinity in (post)colonial discourse that occupies a dominating position over the Orient. East Asian maleness, viewed as a potential threat to white Western subjectivity, is in turn embodied by “abnormal” characters who transgress “normative” borders of gender categorization, in order to maintain the perception of “(East) Asia” as a cultural “pollutant” to Western society, and to tame the threat of non-white masculinity.

**Figure 6.7.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Chien-Po, Ling, and Yao putting make-up on their faces and acting feminine.

*The gang of the three disguised as women*

**Figure 6.8.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows a close-up of Ling disguised as a woman with a powdered white face.

*Close-up of Ling disguised*

<sup>16</sup> In the song “I’ll Make a Man Out of You” (words: David Zippel; music: Matthew Wilder), Captain Shang tells the troops that ideal Chinese men are “mysterious as the dark side of the moon.”

In this regard again, Kristeva's "abjection,"<sup>17</sup> referring to a psychic operation in which subjective and group identities are constituted by excluding anything that threatens one's personal or group boundaries, is useful to provide a deeper understanding of "yellowness" as a constituent of contemporary "Self"/ "Other" constructions. *Mulan* generates the abject through the portrayal of Chinese traditions and characters. The separation of "them" from "us," by representing East Asia as "deviant" through the gendering of race in *Mulan*, is the process of "abjection"—a form of repression or rejection of "otherness" rooted in power relationships between East Asia and the West.

Kristeva also attributes "abjection" to conceptual ambiguity or "in-between-ness" that potentially disturbs systems, rather than (necessarily) any "lack of cleanliness or health."<sup>18</sup> The four effeminized male characters in *Mulan*—Chi Fu and Mulan's three soldier-companions—represent "in-between-ness," which could disturb the system of "normal" identity categories. Yet, the "in-between-ness" exhibited by these characters does not seem to have the power to subvert the dominant ideology, unlike Bhabha's notion of "a space in-between" or Judith Butler's concept of subversive "masquerade" executed by and for "others'" purposes. Instead, these characters in *Mulan* simply become objects of amusement or ridicule for white viewers: they do manage to fool the Huns with their trickery, but under white Western eyes they are a spectacle for laughter, another sign of Orientalism.

The names of the majority of the characters in *Mulan* also signify the Orientalist formula of merging the exotic and familiar, which makes it possible for "otherness" to be desired, domesticated, and consumed by the West. Disney's naming, as well as its portrayal

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<sup>17</sup> Kristeva, *Power of Horror*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



of characters, not only makes the “other” relatable and consumable, but also reveals the power to delimit the existence of the East Asian “other” to what the white West knows about it. Sheng-mei Ma points out that Disney’s naming of characters in *Mulan* is an Orientalizing process, as it indiscriminately assigns names that sound familiar to American audiences. Ma’s examples include Mulan’s horse Khan (evidently named after the historical Genghis Khan), and the dragon Mushu, named after Moo shu pork.<sup>19</sup> What makes them problematic is the fact that both of these Chinese names exist in real life or history, and carry significant implications when they are placed in the Western context. For instance, Genghis Khan (another persona that embodies stereotypes of the “yellow peril”), who conquered an area encompassing half of the world’s population through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is often perceived in the West as a bloodthirsty Oriental warrior. In contrast, Khan in *Mulan* is a placid horse, suggesting that the “yellow peril” in history is now tamed by the Western power called “Disney.” The concept of “yellow peril” becomes complex, as the representative figure of the peril, Genghis Khan, also evokes a sense of reverence among Westerners toward (East) Asia.<sup>20</sup>

Another intriguing character name in this regard, Mushu, is associated with the American Chinese dish Moo shu pork. According to Sheng-mei Ma, “American Chinese cuisine” such as fortune cookies, egg rolls, and Moo shu pork are pseudo-Chinese dishes accommodated to American tastes.<sup>21</sup> This is important in discussing national identity articulations, since food is a very effective vehicle to shape national/ethnic identities

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<sup>19</sup> Ma, p.150.

<sup>20</sup> While the negative perception of Genghis Khan is pervasive, he is also regarded with a sense of awe as one of the greatest military minds and as the father of the Mongol Nation, one of the most powerful civilizations in the world during its heyday.

<sup>21</sup> Ma, p.150. These pseudo-Chinese dishes began to appear in Chinese restaurants of the United States in the 1970s. For the history of Moo shu pork in the U.S., see Monica Eng, “Is it Chinese or Chop Suey Hooley?” *Honolulu Advertiser* (January 4, 2006) (<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2006/Jan/04/il/FP601040308.html>) (accessed on January 31, 2006).

because of its repetitive use in everyday life. It is ironic that Moo shu pork, the reference to which may be intended to foreground Chinese cultural identity in the narrative of *Mulan*, is, after all, a menu item created for American palates. Thus, the reference to Moo shu pork in *Mulan* in turn symbolizes China's assimilation to the dominant power of the West, which re-configures the imaginary "Chineseness." In the United States, this Americanized cuisine is what Americans understand as "Chinese," and this is the way that diasporic Chinese people have survived by forging a place in the daily life of the U.S. In this sense, partly due to a historical inevitability, the Chinese have participated in an Orientalist scheme—the promotion of American-made "Chineseness."

The use of recognizable names or words in the portrayal of "Chineseness" once more reveals recurring Orientalizing themes. This strategy is further accentuated, as Ma suggests, in the closing scene where Mushu shouts "Call out for egg rolls"—another Chinese dish popular in the United States, and perceived as quintessentially "Chinese." This application of Chinese food that has already been assimilated in America, while being differentiated from "American" cuisine, feeds into *Mulan*'s re-Orientalizing plot.

At the same time, there are names that distance the unknown "other," instead of assimilating it. In her study, Ma argues that Mulan's fake name when she is disguised as a man, Ping, is associated with the name of the Minister of Finance in Giacomo Puccini's opera, *Turandot*. Building on Ma's suggestion, I would like to provide a further insight into this interpretation, by looking at what the choice of this name implies. It is important to note that *Turandot* itself is a product of Orientalism. *Turandot*, set in Beijing and featuring the cold Chinese princess Turandot, highlights the exotic image of the East. Composed in 1926, when China was struggling with political unrest, this opera reflects the West's fascination with China as a barbarian land. This view is emphasized mainly through the

characterization of Princess Turandot as a cruel woman who executes any suitor who cannot answer her three riddles.<sup>22</sup> In this narrative, the three ministers, Ping, Pong and Pang, are stereotypically portrayed as spectacles for ridicule among the audience. It therefore becomes apparent that Disney's *Mulan* is filled with numerous clichéd notions of the East in spite of its best intentions. The act of naming clearly functions as a stimulus for the Orientalist view of East Asia.

In fact, *Mulan* was originally rejected for screenings in China, and when *Mulan* did finally hit Chinese theaters in 1999, it failed at the box office, partly because “the story was said to be too Westernized.”<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Chinese viewers either had trouble relating to the characters, or could not accept Disney's redesigning of their traditional narrative. It raises suspicions that *Mulan* may not be so much about America's understanding of Chinese values as it is about trying to make American values appealing to Chinese viewers by imposing American values under the guise of a Chinese folktale.

The modification of the “other” for the purpose of making “otherness” familiar to and consumable by the Western “self” is nothing novel, but involves complex operations of white people's psyches. This is because it generates a sense of the uncanny, which Sigmund Freud defines as “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old—established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.”<sup>24</sup> This is the sense one feels when one encounters something familiar from an estranging distance. Through the experience of *Mulan*, white Western viewers encounter an “East Asia” which is not entirely alien but is modified in such a way

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<sup>22</sup> The prince with whom Princess Turandot falls in love is Prince Calaf from a lost kingdom named Astrakhan in Russia.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Schuman, “Magic Kingdom” in *Time Asia*, July 18, 2005.

([http://www.time.com/time/asia/2005/hk\\_disney/story.html](http://www.time.com/time/asia/2005/hk_disney/story.html)) (accessed on October 15, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” in *Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 15 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p.241.

that they can keep a safe distance from the uncanny “Other”—a version or an undesirable part that the West has to repress. Thus, the Orientalist fascination with the Orient as featured in *Mulan* probably does not simply derive from its difference but also from a suppressed feeling that arises from interactions between the unfamiliar and the familiar.

Disney’s domestication of the Oriental “other” is also evident in the modification of the iconic Chinese figure of the dragon. Mushu is presented as a symbol of East Asia, yet more closely resembles a Western dragon, with vivid orange skin, wings and the ability to breathe fire. In *Mulan* the portrayal of the East is domesticated and caricatured by the characterization of Mushu. [Figure 6.9.] Mushu’s diminutive size not only adds comical effect to the film, but also represents the infantilization of East Asia, similar to the depiction of the gang of three mentioned above: Mushu is simply too small to be taken seriously—even Mulan mistakes him for a lizard, saying, “but you are *tiny*.”

**Figure 6.9.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from Disney’s *Mulan* (1998). The figure shows Mushu looking sulky.

*Mushu, the dragon, as a caricature of Chinese tradition (or East Asia)*

Unlike the negative energies often associated with Western dragons, an Eastern dragon is a divine mythical creature that is dignified and wise. Dragons in East Asia are worshipped or perceived as protective figures, or as symbols of nobility and good fortune,

certainly not as objects of ridicule.<sup>25</sup> In *Mulan*, however, the stature of Mushu serves to mock the (East) Asian symbol, and reduces the role of the dragon to the comical and absurd. This perception is symbolically encapsulated in the scene where the distinctly American Mushu breaks a statue of a stern looking Chinese dragon—an epitome of Eastern dignity.

The discourse of *Mulan* that revolves around Mushu is further made problematic by the fact that the dragon is voiced by black American actor Eddie Murphy. Ma points out that the street vernacular of Murphy in his portrayal of Mushu reconfirms the three-layered power hierarchy between “black,” “yellow,” and “white.” I would add that Murphy’s racialized representation of the dragon reaches its climax when he performs to Mulan as a stereotypical black preacher, complete with organ accompaniment. This scene is not simply an example of white Americans mocking black Americans; more significantly, it works as a device to locate “yellow” below “black,” which corresponds to Ma’s description of the “relative powerlessness of the Asian American constituency.”<sup>26</sup> This device makes the Western representation of “East Asia” more effective, because as Ma suggests, from the position of white Americans, Murphy’s Mushu doubly alienates the Oriental “other.”

The above observations on *Mulan*’s narrative features demonstrate that white subject formation is based on oscillation between attraction and repulsion toward the Eastern “other,” and the gendering of race. This mechanism exemplifies what Robert Young describes as an encounter between “sexual systems of desire in fantasies of race, and of race in fantasies of desire.” In this sense, one can argue that *Mulan* creates a complex

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<sup>25</sup> As an example, emperors were commonly symbolized with images of dragons. The same concept of dragons is seen in Japan as well, which is exemplified by pictures drawn in temples such as Tenryū-ji in Kyoto (the figure on p. 252). Chinese dragons are usually snake-like and associated with water.

<sup>26</sup> Ma, p.152.

arena where “racial theory itself explicitly brings together all three [culture, race and sexuality].”<sup>27</sup>

Hence, although some praise Disney’s *Mulan* for destabilizing stereotypes of Chinese people by incorporating Western interpretations,<sup>28</sup> it is fair to say that overall the film unambiguously purveys an Orientalist view. The hybridized space of “white Westernness,” “blackness,” and “yellowness” presented in *Mulan* cannot be expected to undercut racial stereotypes of the Orient. Instead of being co-inhabited equally by all three groups, this space is structured into hierarchies between these groups. It is therefore clear that *Mulan* offers a site for white Western viewers to safely experience “otherness.” This temporal and spatial experience of “otherness” remains entertaining, as long as the “difference” that the “other” exhibits lies within the viewer’s comfort zone of comprehensibility. In addition, by taking up an ancient Chinese legend to merge with current representations of American-ness, Disney’s *Mulan* manages to highlight an assumed “time lag” between the East and West.

It is important to point out that the discourse of Disney’s *Mulan* is more complicated than simply reinforcing the West/East or white/yellow dichotomy, because of its racialization within Asia. This racialization within a racial group is observed in the differentiation of physical appearance among the Asian male characters. For instance, the Huns have darker skin, even more “slanted” eyes, and are animalized in that they have fangs and claws. They are also larger and more “masculine” in appearance than even the most masculine-looking of the Han Chinese, Captain Shang. The representation of the Huns in *Mulan* shares some similarities with that of black characters in mainstream Hollywood

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 97.

<sup>28</sup> Those who acclaim Disney’s accomplishment in *Mulan* include Ward’s *Mouse Morality*.

films, who are often characterized with over-masculine bodies, and symbolize violence and danger in comparison with their white (or lighter colored) counterparts. This depiction conveys a message to viewers that the darker one's skin gets, the more malicious and criminal one becomes.

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that Oriental "otherness" is not constructed solely by the creators of *Mulan* in the Walt Disney Studios (or the West), but also by (East) Asians themselves: Asian governments and Asian individuals have also contributed to "re-Orientalization" through the consumption and support of projects similar to *Mulan*. As Said points out, Orientals (by which he means Middle Easterners) are in fact "huge consumers of a vast range of United States products, material and ideological."<sup>29</sup> The consequences of their consumption raise concerns. Said goes on to state that:

There is a vast standardization of taste in the region, symbolized not only by transistors, blue jeans, and Coca-Cola but also by cultural images of the Orient supplied by American mass media and consumed unthinkingly by the mass television audience. The paradox of an Arab regarding himself as an "Arab" of the sort put out by Hollywood is but the simplest result of what I am referring to.... So if all told there is an intellectual acquiescence in the images and doctrines of Orientalism, there is also a very powerful reinforcement of this in economic, political, and social exchange: the modern Orient, in short, participates in its own Orientalizing.<sup>30</sup>

What Said describes as the Orient's participation in its own Orientalization is practiced through a variety of aspects of Disney's *Mulan*. First, in the production process, a significant number of people have some sort of (East) Asian background: writer Rita Hsiao and character design supervisor Chen-Yi Chang, for example, contributed to creating American-made "Chineseness." In addition, voice actors George Takei and Gedde

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<sup>29</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 324.

<sup>30</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 324-25.

Watanabe, who are of Japanese heritage, are also involved in this process of Orientalizing “other” Asia. Other Asian American voice actors used are: Ming-Na Wen (Chinese, Mulan), Lea Salonga (Philippina, singing Mulan), Soon-Tek Oh (Korean, Mulan’s father), Freda Foh Shen (Chinese, Mulan’s mother), Pat Morita (Japanese, the Emperor of China), James Hong (Chinese, Captain Shang), Jerry Tondo (Japanese, Chien Po).

Secondly, Chinese participation in America’s imagined version of “(East) Asia” is seen in theme park projects in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Despite the failure of *Mulan* at the box office in China, according to some sources, the unveiling of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Disneyland theme parks were timed shortly after the release of the film.<sup>31</sup> This suggests that the release of the film was seen as a stepping stone or a promotional launch of the image of China created by Disney. The power of the American message in Hong Kong Disneyland is implied in the first line of an article about the theme park from *Time*: “Main Street, U.S.A. at the new Hong Kong Disneyland looks exactly like the one most Americans remember from their childhood.”<sup>32</sup> These phenomena generated around *Mulan* in China suggest a powerful reinforcement of “imagineered East Asia” through economic, political, and social exchange.

The view of Hong Kong Disneyland as an Orientalist project is further substantiated by looking at its main Chinese restaurant, the Plaza Inn. The interior of the restaurant presents a predominantly “Chinese” image, yet one significantly rooted in Disney’s *Mulan*. The restaurant customers are entertained by a local woman dressed as Disney’s Mulan, who exhibits “Chineseness” that is constructed and has become well-known through the Disney

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Weber, “The Ever-Expanding, Profit-Maximizing, Cultural-Imperialist, Wonderful World of Disney,” in *Wired* 10, 2 (2002), p. 72. It may be worth noting that unlike Tokyo Disneyland, which is owned by a Japanese company (The Oriental Land Company), Hong Kong Disneyland is owned and managed by the Hong Kong International Theme Parks, an incorporated company jointly owned by the Walt Disney Company, and the Hong Kong government.

<sup>32</sup> See Schuman, “Magic Kingdom.”



narrative. [Figure 6.10., 6.11., 6.12., 6.13.] In these respects, this restaurant is a reproduction of Disney's creation of *Mulan*—a Chinese legend with an emphasis on American-made “Chineseness,” which potentially creates a condition similar to that in Said's account of “an Arab regarding himself as an imaginary Arab put out by Hollywood.” That is, through their exposure to the restaurant and continuous consumption of American-made “Chineseness” at the theme park (or through *Mulan* merchandise), Chinese people may even internalize American (Disney's) version of what “Chineseness” is. I therefore argue that Disney's representation of the Chinese legend reveals the insidious nature of a covert Orientalism: although on the surface it appears to displace stereotypes, it actually re-inscribes them.

**Figure 6.10.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from the website: <http://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/hkdisneyland/diary/200702010011/>. It shows a local woman dressed as *Mulan*, a character from Disney's *Mulan* (1998) at Plaza Inn in Hong Kong Disneyland.

*Woman dressed as Disney's Mulan at Plaza Inn*

**Figure 6.11.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from the website: <http://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/hkdisneyland/diary/200702010011/>. It shows a plate with Mickey mouse-shaped jellies, served at Plaza Inn.

**Figure 6.12.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from the website: <http://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/hkdisneyland/diary/200702010011/>. It shows a plate with a Mickey mouse-shaped pastry served at Plaza Inn.

**Figure 6.13.**

This figure has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was taken from the website: <http://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/hkdisneyland/diary/200702010011/>. It shows a plate with a Mickey mouse-shaped steam bun served at Plaza Inn.

*Even the dessert menu conveys an ideological message highlighting “America”; jelly, pastry and steamed buns molded in the shape of Mickey Mouse.*

## 6.2. Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Hierarchies: *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi* (*Spirited Away*) (2001)

*Spirited Away*, written and directed by Miyazaki Hayao, makes a good comparison with *Mulan*, in the sense that both animated films take part in the construction of an imaginary “(East) Asia,” albeit in different ways. *Anime*’s function as a complex site of identity formation—a third space—is explicitly demonstrated through the visual and narrative representations in *Spirited Away*.

### Synopsis

Set in the post-bubble-economy period of Japan, that is, after the economic boom and bust of the 1980s and early 1990s, the film begins as a 10-year-old girl named Chihiro is moving with her family to a new town. On their way to their new home, her father decides to take a shortcut on a dirt road. Finding the road blocked, they leave their car and walk through a long tunnel, coming to a small town. It appears to be an abandoned theme park left behind after the collapse of the bubble economy, but it turns out to be another world altogether, mythical and supernatural.

With nobody around, Chihiro’s parents begin indiscriminately eating the food laid out at the only restaurant open in the town, thinking that they can pay when the owner returns. As Chihiro wanders off and approaches a large bathhouse, she is told to run away by a mysterious young boy, Haku. As darkness falls, mysterious beings begin to appear and she returns to her parents to find that they have turned into pigs. When Chihiro attempts to leave the town, she finds a strange river has appeared to block her path, and she panics. Haku, however, helps her by directing her into the large bathhouse, which, we learn, is a place where gods and deities come to relax.

Chihiro learns from Haku that she can reverse the spell on her parents only if she can get a job at the bathhouse. When Chihiro goes to ask for work, the domineering manager of the bathhouse, the witch Yubaba, threatens to turn Chihiro into a piglet.<sup>33</sup> [Figure 6.14., 6.15.]

**Figure 6.14.**



*Domineering Yubaba*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.15.**



*Yubaba's jewelry symbolizing materialism*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

Yubaba is depicted as extremely materialistic, and we discover that she had previously cast a spell on Haku, to make him forget his true identity. Although Chihiro is intimidated by Yubaba, she stubbornly insists on getting a job, and finally succeeds in convincing Yubaba to offer her one. As she does with all the bathhouse employees, Yubaba steals all but a part of Chihiro's name, insisting on using the Chinese pronunciation of the Japanese word: Yubaba tells the girl that she will hereafter be known as Sen, the Chinese reading of the "chi" of Chihiro.<sup>34</sup>

While Sen/Chihiro has a hard time adjusting to her new environment—the work regime and the new people at bathhouse—she gradually gains the respect and friendship of the other workers. We learn that Haku's alter ego is that of a dragon, and when he returns wounded, Chihiro takes care of him and offers magical food to break the spell cast on him.

<sup>33</sup> Miyazaki regards the characterization of Yubaba as pseudo-Western in a world filled with Japanese traditional designs. See Miyazaki Hayao, "The Purpose of the Film" at <http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/sen/proposal.html> (accessed on April 5, 2005). No translator listed.

<sup>34</sup> Kanji (Chinese characters) usually have two different readings in Japanese: a Chinese (*on*) reading and a Japanese (*kun*) reading.

When the spell is broken, Haku can remember his name and true identity. After completing all these tasks, Chihiro eventually saves her parents as well. Through her experiences and interactions with others, Chihiro grows up, offering us a great contrast with her initial persona as a girl who is spoiled and lacks confidence. Thus, this is also a story of growing up, and of finding oneself. Like Alice tumbling down the rabbit hole in *Alice in the Wonderland*, Chihiro finds herself in a bizarre reality, where eating the wrong food or not eating the right food can lead to disastrous consequences.

Reminiscent of the animistic view in *Princess Mononoke*, the world of *Spirited Away* is also a space in which humans are viewed in a very negative light, and every character Chihiro meets hates human beings, yet the division between humans and non-humans is ambiguous, visually and narratively; there is only a fine line between the two. Even the pigs into which Chihiro's parents are transformed maintain some human features. [Figure 6.16.] Like *Mulan*, *Spirited Away* also features the anthropomorphic use of non-human characters, including a dragon and pigs, but what they signify in the two films is markedly different. In this spirit world, combining a sense of danger together with a sense of wonder, it appears impossible to know whom to trust or what to believe.

**Figure 6.16.**



*Chihiro's father as a pig* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

### 6.2.1. Subversion of the Orientalist view of the East and West

It is intriguing to analyze *Spirited Away*'s representations of (East) Asianness and Japaneseness in relation to the West, and its subtle but effective counter-Orientalist

discourse, which in turn problematizes binary categorizations of cultural identity.

Furthermore, the film's popularity means its messages are conveyed to viewers all over the world. The representation of Anglo-Europeans by the Caucasian-looking Yubaba, for instance, is a caricatured image of the West as seen through the eyes of Japan, especially in terms of the way "the West" is used to discursively symbolize the undesirable consequences of modernization and capitalism. It is not the Orient but the West that is stereotyped or exaggerated, reflecting Japan's negative outlook on "Westernness." The same theme is also revealed by the excessive amount of food at the bathhouse, and the employees whose greediness causes them to be eaten by the grotesque monster Kaonashi. [Figure 6.17., 6.18.]

**Figure 6.17.**



**Figure 6.18.**



*Representation of materialism: an extravagant amount of food and people eaten by Kaonashi ("uncontrollable Asia" under Western influence?) © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.*

Against this, Chihiro's persistent refusal of Kaonashi's various offers makes a clear contrast to greedy Yubaba as well as Kaonashi. Chihiro tells Kaonashi: "You can never give me what I want"; her need cannot be filled by the modern capitalist values that Yubaba advocates, but only by undermining or transcending them. After all, what gives Chihiro strength are things which a modern nation may not provide—this includes rice balls from Haku, the advice and warmth of Kamajii, a boat ride from Lin, the quality of perseverance, and an appreciation of silence. These things represent what may be overlooked in modern

Western society. This representation of Japan (through Chihiro) questions the stereotypical image of contemporary Japan as a paradise of capitalist materialism.

The uncontrollable greed brought about by Western capitalism is also signified by the body of Yubaba's baby boy, Bō. [Figure 6.19., 6.20.] His body is absurdly large and unhealthy, because he consumes almost nothing but sweets and candies—adoptions from the West—as well as being isolated in his room with Yubaba's intention to “protect” him from outside “germs.” Bō's consumption of Western food symbolizes his quest to become a part of “the West” since, just as Chihiro has to eat what the bathhouse produces in order to adapt to the spirit world, food intake makes one's body “become” part of the culture in which the food is produced. Bō is kept wrapped up in a pile of soft pillows in his room, which is explicitly Western-style with designs akin to trompe-l'oeil style paintings or reminiscent of Western fairy tales. [Figure 6.21., 6.22.] This is because Yubaba (herself an epitome of “the West”) believes that the inside of his room—the West—is safe, and exposure to the outside (i.e. the bathhouse)—a trope of “(East) Asia”—is dangerous.

**Figure 6.19.**



*Yubaba's baby, Bō*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.20.**



*Bō devouring candies and chocolates*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.



**Figure 6.21.**



*Interior of Bō's room*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.22.**



*Trompe-l'oeil* (<http://www.yvesart.com/800x600/Doors3.php#Mural>)  
© Artist & Author of "The Art of Trompe L'Oeil murals" All Rights Reserved.

However, Yubaba's attempt to keep him in a "safe Western environment" makes him spoiled and inept; his body is too big to move freely and too out of control even for his own mother Yubaba. In this sense, despite its luxury guise, Bō's room as well as his body is a space of chaos. His body, through Western food consumption turns him into a capitalist monster, completely emasculated. He is subsequently turned into a tiny mouse by Yubaba's twin sister Zeniba, but this image of Bō does not represent the emasculated East Asian body, but rather the ineptness of the West or the body influenced by the West; the shrinkage of Bō's body to mouse size connotes a collapse of the Western subject in control.

Asian masculinity is depicted positively in *Spirited Away* through Haku, in contrast to the negative depiction of Mushu in *Mulan*. [Figure 6.9, 6.23., 6.24., 6.25.] While both dragons represent a certain image of "(East) Asianness," Haku, a stern-looking white dragon, is illustrated very differently from the infantile and comical orange dragon, Mushu.

**Figure 6.23.**



*Haku, the dragon* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.24.**



*Haku in human form*

© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.25.**



*Haku in dragon form, wounded*

© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

The true identity of Haku, consistent with (East) Asian mythologies that revere dragons as graceful guardians, is a Japanese River God, characterized as a dignified masculine character, unlike the feminized East Asian males depicted in *Mulan*. As well, through his features and actions, Haku is portrayed as a symbol of East Asian nobility and dignity, unlike incompetent male figures such as the clumsy and emotional Mushu. Relating to this point, Haku's stern appearance is reminiscent of the famous ceiling painting of a dragon at Tenryū-ji Temple in Kyoto. The dragons there are said to be protectors of Buddha, and are known particularly for their vision, which allows them to gaze upon visitors no matter where the visitors are in the room.<sup>35</sup> [Figure 6.26.] Like the dragons of Tenryu-ji, Haku represents the authoritative side of (East) Asia.

**Figure 6.26.**



*A dragon on the ceiling at Tenryū-ji Temple (from a promotional pamphlet)*

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<sup>35</sup> This description is taken from the information pamphlet of Tenryū-ji Temple.



Just as the characters in *Spirited Away* create an image of a powerful Orient, so Dennis Redmond interprets the trains in the film's spirit world as symbolic of the interrelational network among autonomous cultures within East Asia. In other words, the trains represent "Asianization," a "genuinely multinational cultural space which is able to access, cite and pastiche a wide array of national forms and mediatic genres."<sup>36</sup> In fact, I would argue that besides the trains, the almost entirely (East) Asian-motif architecture of the bathhouse and the energy generated there underlines a potential form of expression for the emerging Asian power, which is composed largely of a pastiche of East Asian cultures. The abovementioned aspects all exemplify a subtle but potent counter-Orientalist discourse.

The Orientalist view of East Asia is also subverted through gender representations. For instance, Chihiro's determination to help Haku and her parents challenges the notion of the passive Oriental female, similar to Mulan who helps Captain Shang, or Pocahontas who helps John Smith. What makes Chihiro different from the latter two lies in the reasons behind her actions: she saves a male character not to lead to a romantic happy ending with him, but to recover Japanese national identity—helping Haku remember his River God identity to triumph over Yubaba, the symbol of the West. Moreover, when Bō is turned into a mouse, he must be carried by Chihiro. This suggests that (East) Asian men who are tempted to Western influences are positioned below (East) Asian women in hierarchy. This again undermines the Orientalist stereotype of Japanese women as submissive to men. These characteristics of Chihiro countervail the narrative of "(East) Asianness" created by Western Orientalists.

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<sup>36</sup> Dennis Redmond, "East Asian Tropes in Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*," paper presented at ASPAC's 2004 conference on June 18, 2004 at the University of Oregon. (<http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/SpiritedAway.html>) (accessed on July 15, 2006)

### 6.2.2. Cultural hybridity & confusion of national identity

Despite its counter-Orientalist narrative, Miyazaki's animated world is not simply Orientalism in reverse, but often reflects a multifaceted representation of “(East) Asia” and “Japan” in relation to “the West.” As seen in the various characters, the world of *Spirited Away* is a culturally and historically hybridized space, where humanity is viewed negatively, and where practically every character Chihiro meets is unique and unpredictable. River gods, dragons, radish spirits, flying *origami* birds, grumbling decapitated heads, and spirits of all imaginable shapes and sizes inhabit a mystical landscape beyond our sense of reality.

With the co-existence of such a diverse range of “others,” where many of them are gods (thereby presenting polytheism), the bathhouse offers a potentially wide range of perspectives, according to each unique individual. [Figure 6.27., 6.28., 6.29., 6.30., 6.31.] These different worldviews do not simply represent “East Asia” against the Western capitalist Yubaba, but instead offer a more complicated dynamic.

**Figure 6.27.**



**Figure 6.28.**



*Kasuga-sama (left) and Gods like legendary “Namahage”<sup>37</sup> (right)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.29.**



**Figure 6.30.**



*Gods of birds (left) and Gods with antlers (right)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

<sup>37</sup> The “Namahage God” originates in a new year’s festival in Akita prefecture, Japan, where the “Namahage” “hunt” lazy people. The idea derives from a Japanese legend.

**Figure 6.31.**



*Radish spirit* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

A plurality of others co-existing harmoniously is also found in the depiction of the employees at the bathhouse. [Figure 6.32., 6.33., 6.34., 6.35.] In this fantasy

**Figure 6.32.**



*Grumbling heads as Yubaba's servants*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.33.**



*Mr. Kamajii, working in the boiler room*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.34.**



*Various (non-human) employees at the bathhouse (left and right)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.35.**



world, “East Asia” is not represented as a composite of “sameness,” but as a kaleidoscope of “differences,” by which the categorization of “East Asia” itself becomes complicated and even blurred. In this respect, the depiction of “East Asia” in *Spirited Away* does not entirely resort to the exclusion of the “other”; self and other are not entirely separable. In addition,

to emphasize this point, all the strange “others” that Chihiro encounters can be considered as reflections of her inner self, and this also highlights the “otherness” within herself. In other words, Chihiro does not simply identify herself in opposition to others, but rather as one of the “foreigners” in the spirit world, since the “other” is potentially part of her “self.” In this respect, *Spirited Away* stresses that no culture is ever simply considered as a mere example of “selfhood” or “otherness.”

The bathhouse itself is a mix of different (East) Asian styles in terms of architecture, décor, and the food served therein (which includes steamed buns, rice balls, broiled fish, and countless other dishes). [Figure 6.36., 6.37.] The apparent “East Asianness” of individual entities is further complicated by the observation that they also possess characteristics that are difficult to associate with with a specific Asian culture: Japanese, Chinese or Korean, for example.

**Figure 6.36.**



*Red motif of the bathhouse architecture*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.37.**



*Exterior of the bathhouse*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

Images such as the faces of the River God and Kaonashi are reminiscent of masks used in both Japanese Noh performances and traditional performances in Korea. [Figure 6.38., 6.39., 6.40., 6.41.]

**Figure 6.38.**



*Similarity between Kaonashi*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.39.**



*Korean masks (female shaman)*  
© Korean Culture and Information Service, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, The Government of the Republic of Korea. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.40.**



*Similarity between the River God*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.41.**



*Korean masks (old man), which also looks like a Japanese 'okina' (old man) mask*  
© Korean Culture and Information Service, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, The Government of the Republic of Korea. All Rights Reserved.

It appears then that this manifestation of hybridity not only disturbs the dichotomous power relationship in culture, but also de-essentializes what “East Asia” is. In this sense, the spirit world presents what Victor Turner coined a space “in-between,” where all previously clearly defined categories and oppositions are overturned.<sup>38</sup> This concept of “in-between” space, which reshapes and often transgresses rigidly defined national or ethnic identities, is corroborated with representation through hybridized text.

I would argue that Miyazaki’s world lays the foundation for the creation of potentially contentious, ambiguous and hybridized identities, as opposed to the simplistic and essentialized identities prevalent in many Orientalist works. This unsettling

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<sup>38</sup> Victor Turner, and Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch identify “in-between” as a space evoking the notion of liminality, where clear categorizations are undermined. See Victor Turner, “Process, System, and Symbol: A New Anthropological Synthesis,” in *Daedalus* 106 (Summer 1977), and Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch, “Television as a Cultural Forum,” in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

“in-between” world evokes the notion of liminal space, where all clearly defined categories and dichotomous oppositions are destabilized. Thus, using Turner’s words, the world of *Spirited Away* “[makes] possible the deconstruction of the ‘uninteresting’ constructions of common sense, .... into cultural units which may then be constructed in novel ways, some of them bizarre to the point of monstrosity... Liminality is the domain of the ‘interesting’ or of ‘uncommon sense.’”<sup>39</sup>

Extending Turner’s concept further to the television viewing experience, Horace Newcomb and Paul Hirsch conceptualize cultural forms as a space “in-between,” an ever-changing meaning construction process from text, which provides a “multiplicity of meaning rather than a monolithic dominant point of view.”<sup>40</sup> From this perspective, the bathhouse in *Spirited Away* can be understood as a space “in-between,” as it defies clear definition and resists the formation of fixed relationships with “others.” This is a place where the relationship between the (acting) subject and the object acted upon can be reversible, or where by whom a Western “Self” and an (East) Asian “Other” is represented becomes extremely ambiguous.

Coupled with Turner’s notion of the “in-between,” it is useful to draw on Homi Bhabha’s concept of a “hybrid” cultural form, which refers to repetitive modification of the existing dominant culture for the purpose of cultural resistance against it.<sup>41</sup> One of the major differences in Miyazaki’s “hybridity” and Bhabha’s is that Miyazaki’s representations appear to more explicitly complicate the “self/other” or “dominant/dominated” binary. I argue that the sense of hybridity observed in Miyazaki’s

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<sup>39</sup> Turner, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Newcomb and Hirsch, p. 506.

<sup>41</sup> See Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonder,” in *Location of Culture*, pp. 114-15.



work is concerned with a phenomenon that is more complex and ambiguous than the power dynamics between the dominant and the dominated accounted for in Bhabha's vision.

Yet, we should not overlook the fact that in *Spirited Away*, it is not only the West that is caricatured, but other (East) Asians are also caricatured and differentiated from "Japan." One may argue that we can still see hierarchies within this general "(East) Asianness." For instance, it seems that the less human things get, the more "Chinesefied" they are. Lin, a character with an archetypal Chinese name, is depicted as only semi-human, relishing a treat of roasted lizard. As well, "Sen," Chihiro's name in the "non-human" world, is the Chinese pronunciation of the character "Chi" in her real, Japanese name. On the other hand, in contrast to the somewhat negative portrayal of "Chineseness," Haku, for example, is depicted rather positively. Part human and part dragon, he is revealed in the end to be a Japanese River God, a very positive, transcendent identity. Other referents that position Japanese culture or values above those from other (East) Asian countries include pure white Japanese rice balls that help Chihiro, as opposed to the Chinese food her parents gorge themselves with before they are turned into pigs.

Traditionally, a bath is a place of purity. Considering the recent cultural and economic influences of other Asian countries on Japan, the film's mix of strange non-human employees and the entry of a disgusting Stink God and Kaonashi into the bathhouse, which brings about nightmares, can be seen as the epitome of Japan's fear and anxiety toward cultural pollution. [Figure 6.42.] In this aspect, the bathhouse represents "the grotesque," which is characterized by Stallybrass and White as

**Figure 6.42.**



*Stink God entering the bath* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

“a boundary phenomenon of hybridization and intermixing, in which self and other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone.”<sup>42</sup> In the film’s hub of cultural pollution, where self and other are intermixed, there are certainly signs of self-demarcation from the “other.” This is explicitly exemplified by Chihiro’s reaction to various gods marching toward her; she feels fear and reluctance to accept the scene in front of her, saying: “What? I’m dreaming, dreaming!”

Besides the hierarchy established in relation to (East) Asia, the overwhelming power of “other” Asia is also manifested through Yubaba’s unease and panic toward the grotesque Kaonashi and Stink God—the incarnation of an aggressive capitalist (South) East Asia. This can be interpreted as the feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration in the West toward the rapid economic and industrial development in East and Southeast Asia: the image of an emerging “other” Asia through the eyes of both Japan and the West. This type of representation harks back to the conventional Orientalist view of “yellow peril,” as well as Orientalization among Orientals. Yubaba’s apprehension and suppression of “others” at the bathhouse reflects her discomfort at seeing her own inner self projected onto “Asian monsters,” or in turn the West’s reluctance to look at an undesired part of itself in the mirror of the “grotesque East.”

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 193.



Based on all these observations, Japaneseness seems to be positioned above both Western capitalist values and Chineseness in this film. While various gods represent cultural pollution and intermixing, once they enter the bathhouse (signifying Japan), they become purified. Particularly, the Stink God suffers from pollution associated with the introduction of Western capitalism and materialism to (East) Asia; he is purified at the bathhouse, and is in a sense turned into a “pure” form of “(East) Asia,” clearly delineated from the “West.”

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that, upon close examination, this presumption appears too simplistic or naïve, since the film features likable and positively depicted characters who are associated with the West, Chineseness or (other) Asianness. Yubaba’s twin sister Zeniba, for example, welcomes Chihiro into her home and comforts her with encouragement and help for Haku as well as a warm cup of tea. As well, a likable and positively depicted Chineseness is characterized by Lin, who constantly supports Chihiro through difficult times at the bathhouse.

This aspect of “self”/“other” fusion, seen also in Yubaba’s interaction in the bathhouse and Chihiro’s encounters with her inner self in the form of “others,” embodies Julia Kristeva’s notion of “otherness” or “foreignness,” which she claims exists within the self, thus making us realize that everyone is a foreigner.<sup>43</sup> One of the most distinctive images in the film is that of a girl looking at Chihiro from the platform of a train station.

**[Figure 6.43.]**

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<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Stranger to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 14.

**Figure 6.43.**



*A girl (Chihiro's "double") at the train station*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

This girl symbolically represents Chihiro's "double," and is an agent who brings a sense of the uncanny—something uncomfortable, yet simultaneously familiar. Looking at the girl at the station, Chihiro glimpses her inner self as it is projected on the "other." The girl's reversed gaze underscores the idea that we recognize ourselves only through the eyes of the other, who is part of ourselves. The gaze cast on Chihiro by the faceless shadow of her "double" also makes Chihiro recognize the uncertainty and fragmented-ness of her own identity. Taking Chihiro as a representation of Japan, this shadowy girl's figure likewise projects Japan's precarious national identity.

Just as Chihiro encounters and interacts with a variety of people (or species) and images around her, through which she comes to know better who she is in relation to them, viewers themselves may also be constantly redefining themselves and others. In this respect, again, the world of *Spirited Away* stresses the never-settled concepts of "self" and "other."

### **6.2.3. The mechanism of vision in the spirit world: look & gaze**

Another observation that both invokes and confounds the subject-object relationship is the constant appearance of eyes that gaze back at Chihiro and at the viewer. [Figure 6.44., 6.45., 6.46., 6.47., 6.48.]

**Figure 6.44.**



*Buddha looking at Chihiro*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.45.**



*Icons of eyes on billboard*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.46.**



*Signs using eyes*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.47.**



*Eye on the screen door*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.48.**



*An eye sticker on the luggage* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

Unlike Disney's *Mulan*, which tends to expect or call forth from the viewer a self-assured and objectifying gaze upon the "other" depicted on the screen, *Spirited Away* reminds viewers that the objects of their consuming gaze may respond in kind, and that they are also subject to a returning gaze. The dichotomy between who is looking and who is being looked at become multi-directional.<sup>44</sup> It stands to reason that this complex mechanism of

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<sup>44</sup> In this regard, Richard Schechner, using the stage performer-spectator situation, argues that self-other dialogue should not be merely centered upon either the subject ("me") or the object ("not me"), but the space

viewing generates a dialogical process of self recognition. This use of eyes as a tool to make the viewer realize the dynamics of vision is also taken on by Japanese artist Murakami Takashi's cartoonish illustrations, such as "Jellyfish" and "Mr. DOB," both of which are composed of multiple drawings of eyes. [Figure 6.49.]

**Figure 6.49.**

This figure "Jelly Fish" drawn by Murakami Takashi, has been removed due to copyright restrictions. It was provided by Kaikai Kiki Co. Ltd. run by Murakami Takashi. It shows a ball covered by many eyes.

*Murakami Takashi's "Jelly Fish" 2001*

Describing "Jellyfish," Murakami emphasizes the importance of drawing eyes, which evokes a feeling of the eyes watching the viewer, and argues that once he draws the eyes of a character, almost nothing else needs to be added.<sup>45</sup>

The multi-directional operation of vision observed in *Spirited Away* exemplifies Sobchack's characterization of film viewing as a process of subject formation that is based on interrelations between the text, producers, and viewer.<sup>46</sup> Thus, all these images of eyes make the viewer self-reflexive to his/her perception, promoting an awareness of the expressive and receptive nature of both the text and viewers themselves. In this sense as well, the categorization of "self"/ "other" is intentionally or unintentionally transgressed in Miyazaki's narrative.

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in-between. According to Schechner, this space negates the dichotomous relationship between the subject and the object, which generates a performative and dialogical process of viewing experience. This implies a potential self-(re)definition (re-cognition). See Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1985), pp. 111-12.

<sup>45</sup> "Murakami Takashi: *Anime* and Japanese Eyes," in *Komori On Press* 47 (2003), pp. 28-30.

<sup>46</sup> Sobchack, p. 100.

### 6.3. A Third Space: matrix of (re)Orientalism, Oriental-Orientalism, and hybridized space for identity articulation

*Spirited Away* is not simply Chihiro's personal story; her circumstances symbolize the status of Japanese society. That is, things that happen to Chihiro, an embodiment of a post-industrial Japan, are associated with Japan's national identity formation. Thus, for example, her body literally vanishing at the beginning of the film, almost forgetting her own name, Haku having forgotten his name, and the ghostly see-through figures in the train all epitomize the precarious state of Japanese identity. [Figure 6.50., 6.51., 6.52.] As Miyazaki is concerned with current Japanese society and people's repugnance for their own faces (see Chapter 3), *Spirited Away* calls to mind

**Figure 6.50.**



**Figure 6.51.**



*Chihiro's vanishing body (left) and her hands (right)* © Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

**Figure 6.52.**



*Ghostly figures in the train, signifying Japan's instability and loss of identity*  
© Studio Ghibli. All Rights Reserved.

the existence of another identity crisis that Japan encounters. Just as Chihiro's identity keeps changing as she encounters others at the bathhouse, Japan's identity keeps shifting based on cultural-political factors, through interactions with the West as well as "other"

Asia, which is rapidly catching up with Japan in the fields of economic and industrial development.

*Spirited Away* offers an alternative for cultural identity articulation through the *anime* text—a third space—which neither Orientalism nor Occidentalism can explain. The medium of animation as produced by global heavyweights like Disney has historically played a part in essentializing Asia, and still does so in recent years, through works like *Mulan*. As well, traditional Western discourses of race have dominated schemata for cultural self-definition, a means by which Western culture could define itself vis-à-vis the alleged limitations and lack of the “Other.” While Disney may have unquestioningly translated the world into its own Orientalist signification scheme, Miyazaki’s works have started translating the world into a different vision of cultural identities. *Spirited Away* challenges one of Orientalism’s strongest stereotypes of Japan: a paradise of capitalist materialism.

While some might argue that the relative positioning of Japan vis-à-vis “Chineseness” or “other Asianness” in *Spirited Away* recalls earlier colonial relationships in East Asia, others point to the way that the film continually depicts fluid cultural identities that are hybridized by cultural “others,” thereby provoking a multifaceted identity formation matrix. This again complicates the polarized worldview we find in the Western-Self vs. Oriental-Other dichotomy. Complex interactions between the West, Japan and other Asia involve “othering” within Asia, instead of a West versus non-West relationship. The practice of Orientalism relies on a desire on the part of self to construct an other, through which the self’s identity is secured. Thus, if Disney’s *Mulan* is a manifestation of this colonial desire for the “Other,” and acts as an Orientalist mirror for the

Self, Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* may be described as a form of "postcolonial counter-desire" for the "Other."

For this reason, *Spirited Away* translates the world beyond the polarizing views of Orientalism; the question of who desires whom is less obvious to the viewer in this film. Hence, Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* clearly attests to *anime* as a potentially subversive space that is able—at least in some ways—to undermine the false dichotomies of East-West and Oriental-Occidental.

## **Conclusion: Can Japan Speak?**

*... if you feel you have been denied the chance to speak your piece, you will try extremely hard to get that chance. For indeed, the subaltern can speak...*<sup>1</sup>

—Edward Said, *Orientalism*, “Afterword”

*... today Asians no longer believe that the only way to progress is through copying; they now know they can work out their own solutions... [Asians] are beginning to believe that they can attempt something different.*<sup>2</sup>

—Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think?*

The globalized medium of animation, including Disney’s work, has played a part in Orientalizing and essentializing Asia, and still does so in recent years. Some critics also argue that the popular science fiction *anime* that have circulated globally in recent years have also, unfortunately, contributed to a new techno-Orientalized view of Japan, which has aided in re-inventing a new, but still predictable and essential perception of “Asia.”

The quotations above suggest the potential of Asian “others” to speak by and for themselves using their own styles and standards, which do not merely rely on mimicry of the West. In particular, as one expressive vehicle, animation can serve as a vehicle for Japan to articulate its cultural identity in relation to its “others,” both Western and Asian. While historically Japanese *anime* developed based on a combination of Western and Asian technical and cultural influences, Miyazaki’s works attest to a mature stage of the medium, which has become independent of the dominant Western narratives and aesthetic rules. As a result, today the discourses of Western hegemony that are produced and

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<sup>1</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Can Asians Think?: Understanding the Divide between East and West* (Southroyalton: Steerforth Press, 2002), pp. 24-26.



reproduced through media representations almost always co-exist with subversive, anti-hegemonic articulations, such as those in Miyazaki's *anime*.

This does not necessarily mean that the relationship between Japan and the West—assumed in the Orientalist view to be object and subject respectively—is inverted or subverted on a permanent basis. In fact, the West's image of Japan through visual media is always changing according to each new historical context. In 2003, *The Asahi Newspaper* reported on the way Japan was represented in two recent Hollywood films, *The Last Samurai* and *Kill Bill*:

The West's representation of Japan has been filled with misconceptions and distorted views since *Madam Butterfly*, but *The Last Samurai* and *Kill Bill* represent Japan in ways that Japanese people would applaud.... While both films use the samurai spirit as their motif, their approaches to representing "Japan" make a significant contrast. In *The Last Samurai*, the director Edward Zwick employs a realist approach to depict Japan, based on considerable, detailed historical research, in order to overcome the misconception and distorted views that Western people have constructed. In contrast, in the production of *Kill Bill*, Quentin Tarantino takes an approach far removed from realism. Instead, he attempts to overcome misconceptions and distorted views by paradoxically pushing them to the utmost limit. These two films, by taking completely opposite approaches, avoid the all-too-common pitfalls that cultural representations tend to commit.<sup>3</sup>

It is open to debate whether either of these approaches has actually overcome the pitfalls of one culture producing representations of another culture. Both approaches risk essentializing Japan's national identity, typically associated in these films with stereotypical images of a feudal (or backward) society or a technological wonderland.

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<sup>3</sup> Ishitobi Tokuju, "Lasuto Samurai VS Kiru Biru: Yōga nisaku, taishōteki na nihonzō (*Last Samurai* VS *Kill Bill*: Two Western Films, Contrasting Images of Japan)," in *Asahi Newspaper*, November 27, 2003: 32. My translation.

The examination of identity formation through media made in Japan which represents “the West,” “Asia,” or “Japan” is an intriguing project because it reflects or is reflected by Japan’s anomalous position in the world. As Mahbubani (and others such as Kōichi Iwabuchi) suggest, Japan is adrift and oscillating between the “magic circle of Western community” and the “East Asian community.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, Japan can belong to either or both of two opposite categories—“the West” and “(East) Asia”—yet simultaneously belong to neither, as determined by socio-political and historical contexts. On one hand, Japan is identified as a part of the “West,” particularly in economic terms. On the other hand, Japan is simultaneously construed as an (East) Asian “Other”—the “abject”—through media representations and its global reception. This is not necessarily due to its geographic location, but more importantly because of the Western psychological or conceptual need to essentialize the Asian body. This condition gives rise to ambiguity and fragmentation in the way that “Japan” is constructed by others as well as by itself, and the resulting media representations need to be examined in light of problematic categorizations based on Orientalist and Occidentalist views.

As demonstrated in this thesis, animation shares some characteristics with live-action film, but allows producers to convey their worldviews more flexibly and in a closer form to their ideal, because of its subversive, polymorphic potential. Moreover, this study reaffirms that animation is not an apolitical medium, but serves as a contested site that is loaded with specific ideologies and ideals, which makes it perfect for discussing identity politics. In other words, the medium can not only reinforce conventional ideologies, but can also function as a vehicle to subvert these very ideologies, as both text and national cultural form.

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<sup>4</sup> Mahbubani, p. 118. Also, see Iwabuchi, pp. 14-22.

Disney's and Miyazaki's animated films have taken distinctly different approaches in terms of the way they represent "others," and, as I have argued in this dissertation, this is significant because the way "others" are represented in media can to a great degree contribute to the articulation of cultural identities. This study has particularly focused on the discussion of three racial "others" that Disney animated films represent:

Orientals/Middle Easterners (brown), East Asians (yellow), and American natives (red), with some reference to the experience of blacks in the dominant discourse. During the cultural globalization of the 1990s, Disney's attempts to represent other cultures, starting with *Aladdin*, ironically re-introduced stereotypical perceptions through the creation of the imaginary "Other," and this has aided in further delineating the white Western "Self" from its "brown," "yellow," and "red" "Others."

Analyses of Disney's *Aladdin* and *Mulan* reveal deep-seated Orientalist views expressed through contemporary Western media representations. *Aladdin* adheres to Saidian Orientalism to highlight the "difference" in the Oriental "Other" by exhibiting various archetypal tropes, such as the barbaric and violent palace guards, the devious and mysterious Jafar, and the feminized sultan. Likewise, while some acclaim *Mulan* for bringing East Asia to the American animation scene for virtually the first time, the film ends up re-Orientalizing East Asian people and their cultures by emasculating Asian males and mocking or Westernizing Chinese (East Asian) traditions.

However, the analyses in the case studies elucidate that in the world of animation, "othering" does not always take place one-sidedly. Disney's animated narratives often not only impose American values and an American-made identity of "the East" on Asian people, but also Asian viewers of those Disney animations potentially internalize this Orientalist articulation of their identity and understand themselves through this definition.

At the same time, while the dominant Disney discourse has prevailed, since the 1980s (when *Nausicaä* was released) up to the beginning of the twenty-first century, Miyazaki has exhibited ways in which Occidentalism may be practiced as saliently as Orientalism, and may function as a supplementary concept in *anime* texts. In doing so, he also demonstrates how unstable Western subjectivity is through his narrative and visual representations. In contrast to *Aladdin*'s manifestation of a Saidian Orientalist view, *Nausicaä* exemplifies an Occidentalist view that articulates an imaginary Western "Other" in order to criticize negative aspects of the West and of a contemporary Japan that has a case of amnesia about its own cultural roots, due to the influence of the West in Japan's own process of modernization.

This practice of Occidentalism sheds light on Japan's increasingly investigatory eye on the West, rather than seeing the West as a model to mimic, reminiscent of bell hooks' idea of blacks' "reverse gaze" on whites (Chapter 1). It suggests that "the West" in fantasies no longer simply induces a sense of admiration among non-white races, but instead demonstrates a resistance to the dominant Western-centered worldview. However, this can also be potentially problematic, in the sense that the Occidentalist view demonstrated by Miyazaki's films essentially resorts to West/non-West discourse, and can therefore further emphasize this binary paradigm. The way in which these films introduce this paradigm can even draw accusations of a nationalist purpose; this is particularly apparent in *Princess Mononoke* as well as *Spirited Away*.

Resistance to the dominant Western aesthetics from the position of the racial/ethnic "other" demonstrated by Miyazaki's work can be compared to women's practices of resistance to the patriarchal system. As Orbaugh describes, women's writings can subvert dominant gender identity construction through three strategies: 1) maintaining

the current configurations of power and exposing the harm done through them, 2) maintaining the current configurations of power and showing women using their received (i.e. “inferior”) roles to their own advantage, and 3) maintaining the current configurations of power and reversing the gender coding, so that women become the (powerful) subjects instead of the (passive) objects.<sup>5</sup> While all of these strategies succeed in altering the hegemonic power paradigms only temporarily, and none of them can completely disrupt and deconstruct those paradigms, as Orbaugh argues, such narrative strategies may be a necessary and useful first step in the process of attempting to subvert dominant power structures. These strategies have much in common with how Miyazaki’s *anime* texts challenge Western hegemonic discourse in terms of gender and ethnic representation.

Miyazaki’s *Nausicaä*, which criticizes Western modernization by exposing the harm it does, is akin to Orbaugh’s first and third categories above. By projecting a somewhat essentialized, mystical view of premodern Japan, *Princess Mononoke* might be considered as roughly corresponding to the second category. That is, Miyazaki may be using an Orientalist view of premodern Japan to show how the characteristics scorned, misunderstood, and misrepresented by Orientalists actually can be considered to have worked to Japan’s benefit. However, while *Princess Mononoke* seems to depict an essentialized “pure Japaneseness” by using a historical setting and highlighting the various social “others” residing in it, the film not only exposes to viewers the constructed-ness of gender and ethnic identity categorizations, but also destabilizes presumed myths of “Japan” pertaining to its homogeneity and the status of Japanese women. *Princess Mononoke* does not necessarily take advantage of “Japaneseness” in the same way as

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<sup>5</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, “The Body in Contemporary Japanese Women’s Fiction,” in *The Woman’s Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women’s Writing*, eds. Paul Schalow and Janet Walker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 119-164.

women do with their received role (e.g. by displaying ultra-femininity) as described in the second category above—the notion of Spivak’s strategic essentialism. Yet, it certainly plays with the given roles of “Japan” to challenge Western Orientalist ideologies, as pointed out by Xing, Wu and Lee in previous chapters (see Chapters 1 and 6).

Going beyond strategies of women’s writing that maintain the current gender configurations, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva theorize feminine writing as an expressive tool which subverts the phallogentric writing system—the symbolic—to express women’s identities without using masculine logic.<sup>6</sup> They claim that this notion of “female writing,” which they call “écriture féminine” and “poetic, semiotic language” respectively, can deconstruct the gender hierarchy through “re-writing” masculine rhetoric and styles, and can express the fluidity and openness distinctive to female experiences, by using unique structures, such as lack of linearity, or sentences without subjects.

If we take this notion of “feminine writing” as an analogy and apply it to the writings of ethnic “others,” then we can interpret Miyazaki’s *anime* as constituting an expressive form that attempts to distinguish itself from the dominant visual and narrative languages of Western animation. Like women’s writing, Japanese (Asian) animated film has long been unrecognized in the domination of Western aesthetics and significations. Japanese *anime* has come a long way from the days when animation made in Japan was

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<sup>6</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *French Feminist Reader*, ed. Kelly Oliver (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), pp. 253-75; Julia Kristeva’s “poetic language” as a form of female writing that happens outside the Law of the Father (or the symbolic) is introduced in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gorz, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). As I discuss below, many feminist theorists are dubious about the possibility of creating a feminine language that can entirely escape the structures of the symbolic. But Kristeva and Cixous stress the necessity to try to imagine expressive possibilities outside of the hegemonic masculine language of the symbolic, even if such a language is ultimately unattainable. Similarly, writers and artists from non-hegemonic cultures may wish to stress the importance of imagining expressive possibilities that are not already determined by the dominant culture, even if complete escape from the dominant culture is not possible.

subject to aesthetic standards dictated the West, or what we might call the “Law of the big Brother”—the United States. Up until the 1970s, Japanese animators often worked under subcontract to American studios, which required following their standards. Moreover, until quite recently Japan used to see the “West” as an object of admiration, rather than an object of criticism. Because of material and psychological conditions such as these, there was little evidence to counter the long-lasting belief held by both the West and Asia that “Asia” is unable to “speak” by and for itself, similar to the position of the female “other” who is considered to be expressed only by the male (writing) subject. Just as Kristeva’s notion of female writing based on “the semiotic” allows the female “other” to undermine the univocal signifier based on the phallogocentric “symbolic,” and claims the existence of multiple voices and significations, Miyazaki’s texts also show us worldviews different from the West, as well as the polysemy of the media text.

Analogous to Cixous’s and Kristeva’s notion of female expression in relation to patriarchy, Miyazaki’s *anime* countervail Disney’s “princess narrative”—the typical dominant Western representation system—and its white phallogocentric ideologies. All of Miyazaki’s *anime* examined from Chapter 4 to 6 not only illustrate empowered Japanese female figures, but also reject linear narrative structures with the inevitable climax and happy ending seen in Disney’s films. (See Chapter 2 for a description of mainstream Western linear narrative.) In addition, Miyazaki’s narratives typically do not make a clear and stable distinction between good and evil forces. In this respect, his *anime* countervail the Western hegemonic form of narratives and representations that feed the conventional power model of white Western subject in opposition to Oriental object.

With a different perspective, scholars such as Judith Butler question the viability of female writing proposed by Kristeva and Cixous. Butler considers the idea of “female

writing” reactive and idealistic, and points out that it does nothing to eliminate the concept of “self”/“other.” Nonetheless, I argue that enacting a reactive expression is a primary and important step, and that even if “écriture féminine” may not allow a woman to write completely outside the masculine system, working with a dissimilar system to demonstrate the “difference” does offer the female “other” access to a tool that allows her to “speak.”

By the same token, because they still rely on the dichotomous paradigm of “self” and “other,” some may recognize Miyazaki’s works as reactive to Disney Western discourse. As Lamarre suggests (Chapter 3), in Miyazaki’s films binary gender demarcation is not necessarily undermined.<sup>7</sup> I would add that the dominance of heterosexuality is not deconstructed in Miyazaki’s films, as mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition, as in the case of female writing, it may not be realistic to consider going back to or making animated work that is completely outside the Western (symbolic) system, in that Japanese *anime* has always had significant Western influence. Yet, I argue that the potential of Miyazaki’s *anime* demonstrates “difference” at least salient enough to disrupt or deflect Western symbolic systems.

Nonetheless, similar to Orbaugh’s argument regarding strategies of women’s writings, *Nausicaä* and *Mononoke* do not venture too far in terms of challenging the dichotomous structures that underpin hegemonic power paradigms, such as Orient/Occident, white/non-white, or feminine/masculine—structures that also characterize Disney’s *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, and *Pocahontas*.

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<sup>7</sup> The fact that *Spirited Away* still carries the hetero-romance structure in the relationship between Chihiro and Haku, which is characteristic of Disney rhetoric should not be overlooked. *Mononoke* also presents a heterosexual romance between San and Ashitaka, and as well, *Howl’s Moving Castle* has a heterosexual romance between Sophie and Howl. Even *Kiki* offers a little boyfriend character to Kiki, named Tombo. In this sense, one could say that Miyazaki uses the time-honored structure of heterosexual romance almost as a backbone to all his films. Nonetheless, except *Howl’s Moving Castle*, Miyazaki does not take that romance to the typical Disney conclusion: Chihiro and Haku are separated at the end (and since he is a god, it is hard to see how they will get back together); San and Ashitaka likewise end up living in different worlds.



It is not until *Spirited Away* that a marked subversion of dichotomies emerges. The examination of this film reveals that *anime* does not always provide resources for cultural identities based on such essentialist views, and it validates the idea that *anime* could find means of expression beyond simplistic “self”/ “other” dichotomies. As I have argued, the challenge to the Western-centric representation system is pushed further in *Spirited Away* than in Miyazaki’s previous films. This film transgresses dichotomies by means of hybridization and the undermining of any essential categories. In *Spirited Away*, Miyazaki not only reverses the existing racial configuration and mocks the West, but ultimately blurs the boundaries of presupposed categorizations. As discussed in Chapter 6, the representation of “(East) Asianness” is more complicated than a composite of “sameness”; instead, it is presented as a kaleidoscope of differences within the general categorization of “(East) Asia,” observed in Miyazaki’s use of different types of masks to indicate different countries, which are yet hard to identify clearly with specific cultures (e.g. China, Korea, or Japan). In other words, *Spirited Away* undercuts the concept of “sameness” within a category, and in the spirit world, identity categories are often dissociated from any value judgment (e.g. “West”= good=male v.s. “non-West”=bad=feminine, or vice versa).

Hence, in *Spirited Away* the concept of binary opposition is undercut to the extent that questions of “who is the subject or the object,” and “who desires whom” do not return one set answer. That is, speaking about a larger cultural context between Japan and the West, instead of simply referring to the subject/object relationship between characters in this film, *Spirited Away* implies that we no longer know which is subject and which is object, or which desires which. Miyazaki translates the world beyond the polarizing views of Western Orientalism, Occidentalism, or “techno-Orientalism,” all of which are

predicated upon dichotomous paradigms. From these aspects, an alternative scheme of identity articulation contributed by Miyazaki's work reaches a climax with this film, even as it reveals the existence of a different set of hierarchies—power differentiations within “Asia”—which potentially foster an elitist or nationalistic spirit among Japanese viewers.

Miyazaki provides new forms and content to the animation aesthetic, which can contribute to a new way of understanding cultural identity, without resorting to a Western Orientalist scheme. As discussed in Chapter 2, Xing characterizes Asian American aesthetics in filmmaking as using “materials collected from [Asian American filmmakers'] communities in the United States, from Asia, and even the Asian diaspora,” instead of relying on “white norms and practices.”<sup>8</sup> Through this strategy, Asian American filmmakers work to articulate an identity for themselves, challenging dominant white, androcentric representations. Similarly, some of Miyazaki's anime, such as *Spirited Away* and *Mononoke*, feature a collage of images from the (East) Asian region—a technique that can be recognized as an expressive tool to deconstruct white-centrism in the world of animation.

In this regard, Miyazaki's use of alternative representation systems illustrates a potential resource for cultural identity work through the medium of animation. His work is intriguing to investigate, not only because Miyazaki is a well-known Japanese director who challenges existing paradigms, but also because his works skillfully make the best use of Japan's position of being “adrift”—a national/cultural condition that inevitably, intentionally or unintentionally, raises the question of identity politics. Representations of nationality/ethnicity in his animated folklore complicate the conventional binary model of East and West, by alluding to a triad relation between the West, Japan, and other parts of

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<sup>8</sup> Xing, p. 81.

(East) Asia. This suggests “a third space” in identity configuration, exposing differences within the “sameness” of “(East) Asia.”

The “third space” brought about in Miyazaki’s *anime*, particularly in *Spirited Away*, constitutes a space “in-between,” where “norms” and categories become nonsense, and thereby identity is regarded as erratic and “becoming” rather than “being.” In this sense, Miyazaki’s “third space” also evokes the concept of “carnival” in animated fantasy, which makes a great contrast to what Napier describes as the reassuring narrative of Disney.<sup>9</sup> This representation, running counter to the conventional pattern, indicates Japan’s access to an expressive tool alternative to the Western-centered system, allowing it to speak about and for its own (and Asian) experiences and cultural identities.

When artists (cultural producers) respond to postcolonial discourse, they can take the approach of Judith Butler’s concept of parodic performance, which argues against the conventional notion of sex/gender identity as biologically determined.<sup>10</sup> In the case of postcolonial works it is racial/ethnic/cultural identity that may be parodically performed, to show the socially and discursively constructed nature of that identity. However, Miyazaki approaches the question of “identity” differently, and generates the same effect (i.e. the defamiliarization of received beliefs) by imagining and depicting a third space where categorizations of ethnicity and even species are all intermixed and blurred.

For these reasons, Miyazaki’s creation of “Japaneseness” in *Mononoke* or in *Spirited Away*, and his construction of an imaginary “West” for a potential criticism of Western modernization and capitalism, should not be considered merely as a reaction to the dominant discourse or a simple switching between binaries. The potential of *anime*

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<sup>9</sup> Napier, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 23.

that Miyazaki demonstrates is not only a resistance to Western ideologies, but, more importantly, it attests to Japan's position as the subject of expression, a subject that can "speak" its own identities, without resorting to Western aesthetic standards. It can therefore be argued that Miyazaki's world of *anime* introduces us to what we may call "écriture Orientale" or "écriture Japonaise."

This new potential derived from Miyazaki's *anime* is liberating on the one hand, yet may provoke another kind of criticism similar to that faced by Kristeva's and Cixous's ideas. Kristeva and Cixous have been criticized because while their idea of "écriture féminine" seems very emancipating, it actually is only applicable to middle and upper class white European women. In other words, they may skillfully address androcentrism, but this leads them into essentializing all "women" or all "femininity" into one model: white, educated, and middle class. In a similar manner, one can argue that Miyazaki's skillful creation of "écriture Orientale" is problematic because it effectively critiques or disrupts Western-centrism, but may in so doing run the risk of essentializing all non-Western "others"—especially Asians—into a model that is basically Japanese.

This issue—Japan speaking for Asia—is too important to be overlooked when discussing the expressive style of Miyazaki's work, particularly with regard to the articulation process of cultural identities in the context of West-Japan-Asia relationships. This is because his animated films can also raise the problem of the neo-nationalist or neo-colonialist outlook. In this sense, Japan's embracing of the designation as "honorary whites" during World War II and this sense of equality-to-(white) Westerners and superiority-to-(yellow or brown) Asians has some scary echoes in the way race/ethnicity is (not) depicted in Miyazaki's (or most other Japanese) *anime*. This is the opposite problem

to Disney's: Disney exaggerates racial/ethnic "differences," whereas Miyazaki erases them.

Thus, while I argue that Miyazaki's work effectively addresses complexities of identity construction, I do not insist that his animated world is a perfect model of equal cultural hybridization or multi-culturalism, since it still poses a visible limit in terms of characters' racial features. In fact, in his long career as an animator/director, Miyazaki has never created dark or black skinned characters in his work. Even the skin color of supposedly Japanese (or Asian) characters is drawn just as fair as Caucasian characters. Relating to this issue, the controversy over the use of (or lack of) skin colors in *anime* (and animation) was brought up on "Nausicaa.net," one of the largest Miyazaki (and Ghibli) fan discussion sites.<sup>11</sup> It is useful to briefly introduce this topic here, as evidence to support one interpretation of Miyazaki's work as an advocacy of racism, neo-nationalism or neo-colonialism through *anime* fantasy.

Studio Ghibli producer Suzuki Toshio sparked a flurry of heated debate with a comment he made during his interview for the magazine *Invitation* on the topic of *Gedo Senki*: "Upon reading the original novel, *Earthsea*, I had a hard time in designing the characters, because there are virtually no Caucasians. They all have dark or black skin colors."<sup>12</sup> This ambiguous comment, which can be interpreted as either the technical difficulty of drawing colored skin or Suzuki's personal prejudice against people of color, led to conflicting interpretations among fans, stirring up a long chain of heated discussions

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<sup>11</sup> This discussion is taken from a discussion group at the site called Nausicaa net. (<http://www.nausicaa.net/miyazaki/>). The language used is English. Therefore this may limit the members' registration, though the members join from all over the world.

<sup>12</sup> Kanazawa Makoto, "Suzuki purodūsā Gedo Senki wo kataru" (Ghibli Studio Producer, Suzuki, Talks about Gedo Senki), in *Invitation* (April, 2006) (<http://www.ghibli.jp/20special/000457.html>) (accessed on April 30, 2007).

on racialization of animated texts. Miyazaki Hayao's works are also subject to fans' charges of racism.<sup>13</sup>

While American writer and *anime* producer Carl Macek argues that the use of lighter colors was a technical decision rather than a political one,<sup>14</sup> the technical difficulty argument was discredited by one of the fan members, who brought in the case of Tōhō studio's *anime Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* into the discussion.<sup>15</sup> In the end of this *anime*'s production, the African protagonist's dark skin was changed to a lighter color, because the producers allegedly believed that Japanese viewers were not ready for a dark skinned heroine, and in fact held contempt towards non-white ethnic groups with which they have had little contact. In the same forum, a black Nigerian fan accused Suzuki of suggesting that people with dark skin do not exist or are not important. This comment not only dismisses the idea of the "inevitability" of using a light colors for technical reasons, but also argues that viewers' intolerance toward race in the fantasy world is ludicrous. Another member of this site, lamenting this problem in *anime*, points out that the political issue of race in this medium has been continually dismissed, which reflects ideas about race and beauty.

It must be noted that while there may be some validity to the "limited color palette" argument, there are numerous animations that have managed to overcome this difficulty, including Disney's *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*.

Considering all this, Suzuki's comments begin to sound like a poor excuse, and they also lead to the suspicion that the absence of dark skinned characters in Miyazaki

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<sup>13</sup> *Gedo Senki (Earthsea)*, Studio Ghibli's latest work, was directed by Miyazaki Hayao's son Gorō. Although the discussion is on Gorō's work, not directly relating to Hayao's, it is reasonable to apply this to make a speculation about Hayao's work, given the fact that he also never used a dark-skinned character.

<sup>14</sup> Taken from an online article on *anime Nadia* by Marc Hairston, "The 'Lost' Nadia." (<http://utd500.utdallas.edu/~hairston/lostnadia.html>) (accessed on November, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> This *anime* was broadcast by NHK from 1990 to 1991.

Hayao's *anime* is not necessarily due to technical difficulties, but instead brings racism into *anime* fantasy, a flaw for which Disney is often criticized as well (including in this dissertation). In this sense, Miyazaki's work seems to contribute to or to be affected by the idea of different degrees of desirability of whites among different non-white races—a psychological conflict over, or obsession with lightness (See Chapter 4).

From a different point of view, these discussions among fans also demonstrate the way viewers are “talking back” to the producers of cultural products, rather than unquestioningly taking in what is shown on the screen; viewers use their own expressive power as critics. One may say that the invisible, powerful existence of the white subject who dominates visual aesthetics and “desirability” is here pointed out by a black (Nigerian) person's “reverse gaze” at media texts made by a “yellow” (Japanese) person. This again confirms the agency of black spectators that hooks introduces. (Regarding the “reverse gaze,” see Chapter 1.) Placing him/herself in a position of agency, this fan's pleasure in watching Ghibli's *anime* takes place at the site of contestation and confrontation. The observation of the fans' discussions above affirms that the meaning of animated text and identity articulation based on that text are not simply imposed upon viewers, but are also monitored and sometimes questioned by the critical gazes of viewers from various cultural groups in the global market.

Thus, it should be stressed that my study does not intend to suggest that animated films produced even by major studios have a full responsibility for creating or forming viewers' identities. Film's role in identity formation is complex and depends in part on the degree of the viewer's creative activities and engagement with the text. Moreover, the content of animated films is affected by various aspects of the industry, such as economic and technological factors, as well as the political economy that has evolved around the

division of production labor (e.g. outsourcing). Nonetheless, these factors do not reduce the impact of auteurs' intended meanings or viewers' understanding of themselves and others. The integration of theories on the construction of "self" and "other" through media representations discussed in Chapter 1 allows us to speculate on the contribution that animated folklore narratives make to viewers' articulation of cultural identities, through the mechanisms of representations I have presented.

As discussed in Chapter 2, animation is a potential tool for subverting existing worldviews. *Anime* certainly (often) serves as a form of expression alternate to mainstream Western media, and it not only (potentially) reverses the Western aesthetic and ideological hegemony, but also complicates the polarized worldviews maintained through media representations. While Disney-esque animations tend to rely on a "bipolar" system to secure Western subjectivity, Miyazaki's works in particular put forward a "de-familiarization" of that bipolar system on visual, narrative, and conceptual levels, which spread to a global audience through technological advances such as the Internet. The above observations on Miyazaki's work underscore the idea that the concepts of Orientalism and Occidentalism can no longer fully explain the current globalizing world, nor can identities be understood any longer as based on essentialist perspectives. As there are multifaceted interactions within Asia, as well as between Asian and Western, or Asian and other non-Western nations, cultural/ethnic/national identities at least need to be explained with a more elaborate model than the formula of "white Western as the masculine subject" and "Asia as the feminine object."

This study also re-confirms that racial and national identities, just like gender and sexuality, are socially or discursively constructed rather than biological or "natural." In other words, the body is not racialized outside of nationally or internationally constructed



power dynamics. Race is not an ontological concept that is “naturally given”; instead, it is a concept that is formed (among other ways) by repetitive practices of media representation and reception, and that can be played with (or parodically performed). Therefore, the colors “white,” “black,” “brown,” “yellow” and “red” are always conceptual; they do not inherently mean anything. In other words, our perceptions of skin colors are discursively constructed, and are reproduced through our experiences of signification in media such as animation.

Based on these observations, the answer to Gayatri Spivak’s question: “Can the subaltern speak?” (in this case paraphrased as, “Can Japan speak?”) seems to be “Possibly, through the production/experience of *anime* such as those produced by Miyazaki, yet possibly at the expense of other Asian voices.”

Japan’s subjectivity is also complicated by the nation’s unique position of being both colonizer and colonized, as discussed in Chapter 1. After a period of Japan’s aggressive imperialism in Asia, Japan itself came under U.S. occupation in cultural, material and ideological domains after World War II, and thereafter Japan has existed as a part of the West’s imaginary “Orient.” One side-effect of this cultural colonization of Japan has been a tendency for Western media products—perhaps especially those of North America—to “feminize” Japan. This was true from the nineteenth century on, but especially so after World War Two.<sup>16</sup> Again, the tendency to depict the West as masculine and Japan as feminine is not confined absolutely to Western cultural products: there are Japanese novels and films—especially from the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the

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<sup>16</sup> The Western discourses of a specifically Japan-centered Orientalism are complex, and in some cases we find examples of Japan being explicitly “masculinized” by the West, such as Britain’s effusive praise for the samurai spirit around the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). But the majority of Orientalist visions of Japan gendered the nation as feminine. Immediately after World War Two, the large numbers of Western servicemen in Japan contributed to a vision of Japan as being populated by “geisha girls” on the one hand, and defeated, abject men on the other.

1960s—that use this same gendered power paradigm. In this context, it is especially significant that Miyazaki’s films feature powerful female protagonists. He is simultaneously challenging the submissive “geisha girl” image of Japanese women and the powerless, “abject,” defeated image of the Japanese nation as a whole.

To Japan, a country that has been, and still is, struggling to find an identity for itself, *anime* provides the potential to establish a recognizably “Japanese” subjectivity, by undercutting long-standing presumptions about the country through media products that circulate both widely and popularly. For a long time, the potentially subaltern language of *anime* texts had to be validated by the West so that “Japan” could be heard or recognized. That is, the success of Japan’s *anime* industry used to be based on Western tastes (mainly those of the United States). It is clear that a dependence on approval from the West still remains in some quarters when we consider the current Japanese government’s project to disseminate *anime* that do not reflect “Japaneseness” but are appealing for their cultural odorless-ness and “statelessness.”

Spivak argues that, unless it speaks the same language as the existing dominant forms of knowledge and politics, an act of resistance could not be recognized or heard as such. I argue that Miyazaki’s world challenges this idea. Miyazaki’s works do not use the same “language” as the hegemon Disney, and when his works are exported to other countries, Miyazaki never allows any modification of his texts. He has managed to establish a globally recognized position, from which he questions the form and content of his American counterpart. This suggests that the “language” of Miyazaki ultimately makes the dominant culture—America—listen, which may help to deconstruct its very dominance. Moreover, Miyazaki’s *anime* do not simply speak to/about the (former) hegemon, the U.S., but are instead distributed globally, allowing a wide variety of non-

U.S. or non-Western “others” to experience a new conceptualization of cultural power.

The global distribution of Miyazaki’s texts puts Asian rhetoric and aesthetics back on the map, and attests to the Japanese (Asian) subaltern’s ability to speak as well as think.

In the field of visual culture studies, *anime* has not been studied adequately compared to its North American counterparts such as Disney, especially in terms of the ethnic/national/racial or sex/gender politics encoded in *anime* narratives and images.

This study has attempted not only to highlight the significance of the study of animation—a medium that has often been considered too trivial for serious research—but also to offer a better understanding of how Japanese visual culture has brought about potentially crucial changes in the way people perceive Asia as well as the West.

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