

Japan on American screens, 1908–1915

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Japan invaded the United States sometime in May 1910. Or at least that is what a *Moving Picture World* editorial claimed in its 28 May 1910 issue, as it contemplated a forthcoming release entitled, *Love of Chrysanthemum*. *Moving Picture World* readily identified this Vitagraph film as yet one more refashioning of *Madame Butterfly*, that is, a contemporary story in which an ill-fated, cross-cultural and inter-racial romance between a Japanese woman and an American man ends with her suicide. For this preeminent American trade magazine, the “Japanese Invasion” was not literally a matter of spies, immigrants, or imported goods, and not a case of Japanese performers or stage productions making their way into the American entertainment market. New releases from Edison, Kalem, and Vitagraph had put Japan on view for American motion picture audiences and prompted *Moving Picture World* to ask two related rhetorical questions: what accounts for America’s “peculiar interest” in Japan, and “what is the connection ... between the United States and Japan?” The answer, according to *Moving Picture World*, was somewhat complicated:

- First, there is a “sentimental link” between the two nations, typically figured as an “inevitable love story” in which “the occident mixes with the orient”.
- Second, there is an aesthetic (and decidedly anti- or un-modern) appeal of Japan: “there is idyllism in everything Japanese” – its “grace ... charm ... poetry”, its “prettiness ... art ... simplicity”.
- And, third, there is the highly topical logic of contemporary geopolitics: America’s former protégé had become its “rival in the Pacific”, for the New Japan had emerged as a “world power by virtue of its conquests, its army, its navy, and its ambitions”.¹

Into the mid-1910s these knotted strands of desire, fear, admiration, curiosity, and appreciation – of Japanophilia tempered by Japanophobia – would find expression and validation in a significant body of films. This fascination with things Japanese and concern over trans-Pacific relations was hardly limited to the film industry. Japan’s victories first over China (in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895) and then over Russia (in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905), its occupation of Formosa and Korea, its foothold on the Chinese mainland, its much-noted modernization and militarization – all these “achievements” earned Japan the status in Western eyes as a veritable nation on the Euro-American model. Within a generation, Japan had emerged as a new colonialist force to be reckoned with in the Pacific, where the United States had by the turn of the twentieth century staked its own imperial claims to Hawaii and the Philippines. From the late 1890s on, but especially after 1905, the United States and Japan both experienced a series of loudly declaimed war scares, crises often driven by



Fig. 1. Editorial cartoon: “Have a Look! Have look!” *American Review of Reviews* (August 1907).

the unabashedly racist attempts of elected officials in California to segregate and deny full citizenship to Japanese Americans and to curtail Japanese immigration to the United States. In such a climate, the “Yellow Peril” became more than a handy slur for nativists.

The prospect of armed conflict between the United States and Japan was played out across American media, including Kalem’s 1909 release, *The Japanese Invasion*. In May–June 1909, the *Washington Post*, for example, published in serial form *Banzai!*, a full-length novel that ends with Japanese and U.S. troops battling in the American heartland. Four years later, Kay-Bee would release a three-reel spy melodrama with the same title. Predictably, heightened tensions between Japan and the United States were prime fodder for daily editorial cartoons, a feature of most large American newspapers. One particularly germane image from the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (reprinted in the news magazine, *American Review of Reviews*) shows Uncle Sam as a barker, inviting customers to his mutoscope parlor while a startled “Jap” cranks a machine showing “Uncle Sam’s Asiatic Fleet”: here *actualité* footage serves as a propagandistic adjunct to the building of real battleships (Fig. 1).

These representations form part of what I call *Japan-in-America*, the widespread and surprisingly diverse network of mass-produced images of Japan that publicly circulated in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century across a host of media and cultural channels, including postcards, stereoviews, magic lantern slides, magazines, photographs, sheet music, advertisements, and books.² In order to track how motion pictures contributed to this complex, historically specific example of cross-cultural representation, I have compiled a comprehensive list of Japan-related titles released in the United States between 1908 and 1915, which is appended to this essay.

This filmography includes what would have passed as non-fiction as well as fiction, for it covers any film advertised or reviewed in the United States that prominently features characters, locations, or activities identified as “Japanese”, including films that recount the experiences of Americans in Japan or of Japanese in the United States. For the sake of expediency I will refer to these as “Japan films”. (Admittedly, this is, at the edges, a hazy category: how much self-styled Japanese content makes for a Japan film? what distinguishes a marker of Japanese-ness from all-purpose Asian-ness?) Any film that satisfies my basic criterion is cited in the filmography, regardless of its length or genre, regardless of where it was shot or if it features performers of Japanese descent, regardless of its titular country of origin.

Constructing such a filmography, I would argue, is a useful and necessary step in analysing this significant instance of cross-cultural representation. As a heuristic, this filmography helps identify similarities and dissimilarities between and across fiction and non-fiction film, American-made and “foreign” product, scenics and star vehicles. It allows us to see the centrality of *Madame Butterfly*, but not to reduce the field to one influential text or cycle of texts. It provides some measure of the visibility and marketability of Japan in the American film industry and a framework for examining how Japan films are positioned within a rich and varied cultural discourse operating across a broad range of popular media. In so doing, it offers what I think is an important model for conceptualizing the “national” in early American cinema.

My primary sources for identifying Japan films are principally company catalogues and trade magazines that were published in the United States, most notably, *Moving Picture World*. These period documents provide information beyond release dates, plot summaries, and the names of actors, crew members, and production companies. Industry discourse, as I will later discuss, also reveals how Japan was marketed to motion picture audiences in the United States and suggests the ways that Japan films engaged or prompted consideration of broader issues concerning performance and casting, genre and intertextuality, topicality and verisimilitude.

According to these print sources, the cinematic presence of Japan in America surged after 1908 and remained notable well into the 1910s, reflecting topical interest in Japan as well as the growth of the motion picture industry at large, the increasing popularity of narrative films, and, later, the advent of multiple-reel features. Chronologically, this filmography moves from Biograph’s *The Heart of O Yama* (1908) and Edison’s *Daughter of the Sun* (1909) to Famous Players’ *Madame Butterfly* (1915), starring Mary Pickford, and Sessue Hayakawa’s first major roles, in *The Typhoon* (1914) and *The Wrath of the Gods* (1914). The list covers split-reel, one-reel films and multiple-reel features; productions from (or at least handled by) [Gaston] Méliès, Pathé, Éclair, and Powers, as well as from Thanhouser, Majestic, Kalem, Kay-Bee, Selig, Domino, and Vitagraph. It covers scenics as well as comedies, topical dramas as well as period pieces, “educational subjects” and trick films as well as star vehicles. In addition to films shot in the United States, the list includes a number of films that ostensibly were produced in Japan by Japanese filmmakers and others that were shot on location in Japan by foreign companies.

Although the filmography focuses on 1908–1915, it is worth underscoring that from the late 1890s, Japan was a familiar subject on American screens, in the form of motion pictures – as well as, more frequently, lantern slides used for illustrated lectures.³ Japanese dancers and acrobats figured early on as cinematic attractions, as did Japanese railroads, harbors, and military forces, and the Russo-Japanese War occasioned a flurry of films, including one of American Mutoscope & Biograph’s first two-reel narrative, *The Hero of Liao-Yang* (1904).⁴ Newspaper accounts suggest that Russo-Japanese War

films were widely exhibited in the United States, as might be expected given the extensive coverage in all American popular media of what was billed as the first modern war between an Asian and a Western nation. Barely three months into the conflict, an American weekly periodical in May 1904 decried "kinetoscope fakes" of Russo-Japanese War battles produced on the streets of Paris to satisfy the "spectators at vaudeville entertainments" who were clamoring for war footage.⁵ Throughout the war, both "fake" and "real" films of the conflict were screened at vaudeville theaters and other commercial venues, as well as at Chautauqua assemblies, fairs, and other non-theatrical sites. For instance, more than twenty of "the latest and best [moving picture] productions in the world" – shown in "2,000 feet films" – were featured in a lecture by a Japanese national who spoke on the Russo-Japanese War at the Bedford, Pennsylvania courthouse in July 1905.⁶ And the Japanese exhibit at the Portland, Oregon fair that year offered a show composed of a live jiu-jitsu performance and "horrifying" war footage – "realism with a vengeance" – depicting the casualties of Russian artillery and the heroic charge of Japanese infantry.⁷

In fact, scattered evidence from local newspapers suggests that films related to Japan (and not only topical war footage) were often screened non-theatrically, most likely remaining in circulation for years as part of the repertoire of professional lecturers, missionaries, and traveling exhibitors. Charles Musser's research on Lyman Howe's career is invaluable in this regard, and contemporary reviews regularly point to the use of motion pictures by Burton Holmes, who would soon become the pre-eminent travel lecturer in the United States. The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* noted that Holmes' 1900 lecture on Japan featured motion pictures of jinrikisha, a funeral procession, a "crowd of Japanese feeding a very tame flock of pigeons", and dancing geisha who, when projected on the screen, had about them "an atmosphere of unreality as if they were characters out of a fairy story and not real persons in a real land before a real camera".⁸ A decade later, motion pictures had become part of the stock in trade for travel lecturers who covered Japan, like Thomas Jefferson Clark whose appearance at a school in Fort Wayne, Indiana, included films identified as *The Making of a Fan*, *Shooting the Rapids*, and *Japanese Wrestlers*.⁹

As well as including notices about non-theatrical screenings, newspapers provide invaluable information about the theatrical exhibition and public circulation of Japan films in the United States. At the very least, theater ads help verify whether the films promoted (or, even more vaguely, "announced") in the trade press actually made it to the screen. Yet theater ads, almost by definition, counter the classificatory "purity" of a filmography. To be attentive to exhibition practices is to be continually reminded that the individual motion pictures I have grouped together as Japan films were actually embedded in eclectic programs that were not necessarily unified along national or thematic lines. For example, *The Love of Chrysanthemum*, which prompted *Moving Picture World's* editorial on "The Japanese Invasion", showed with *What Americans Are Made Of* at the Arris Theater in Mansfield, Ohio (3 June 1910), while at the Wizard Theatre in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (23 June 1910), it ran with an Essanay western and a film about "aboriginal life in America".¹⁰ (For me, such information always raises fascinating questions about programming strategies and the reception of individual films and the movies at large.) By contrast, I've found no examples of multiple-film programs devoted solely to Japanese subjects in movie theaters, aside from the offerings of professional lecturers who occasionally played metropolitan venues (Fig. 2).

At the same time, it is also worth recalling that split-reel films were frequently combined on a single reel by distributors and thus, in a fashion, pre-programmed before they even reached a theater. Variety was no doubt served when Selig, for

Today, Sunday, Big Monster
Show At The
5c Alhambra Theater 5c

Mr. William Airey presents the
latest Vitagraph Picture-Play,
**"THE LOVE OF
THE CHRYSANTHEMUM."**
A love story of Japan. The scenes
of the play are taken from real
life in the Orient. You can't
afford to miss this one.

The real Wild West Picture
of them all,
**"THE SISTER, THE BROTHER,
AND THE COWPUNCHER."**
See the stolen purse.
See the big ranch in Arizona.
See the rivals for the hand of the
girl.
A story of the wild and woolly West
teeming with interest.

Two other pictures will be shown;
among them will be an A. B.

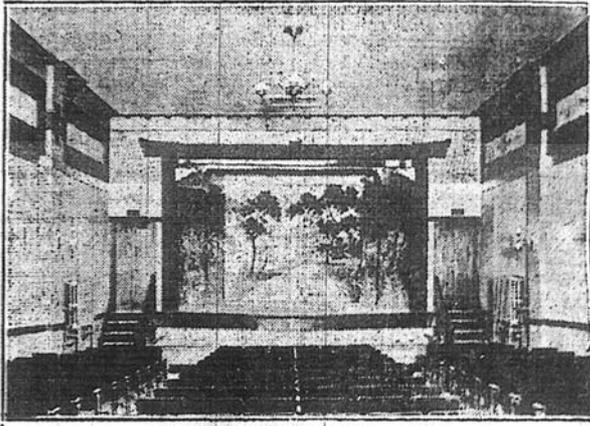
Fig. 2. Alhambra Theatre ad,
with Love of
Chrysanthemum,
Washington Post
(12 May 1910).

example, paired *The Ainus of Japan* (1913) (about Japan's "aborigines") with the "farce comedy", *The Suffragette*, or when Éclair's *Holy Cities of Japan* (1913), picturing the "scenic beauty" and religious practices of "Mikadoland", shared a reel with *Greasepaint Indians*, a burlesque in which Indians attack a French film crew making a Western in Oklahoma.¹¹ At the other extreme, when *The Wrath of the Gods* (1914), a spectacular feature film set in Japan, played the Strand in New York City, the goal was to provide a thematically and stylistically unified experience. *Variety* noted that "special and incidental music was written by Joseph Littau, pianist of the orchestra there. The stage [at the Strand] was given a Japanesy air and atmosphere by the management."¹²

Other ads point in sometimes quite surprising ways to the "Japanesy" presence in American movie theaters, off as well as on screen. It is not clear what exactly made the Alvin in Mansfield, Ohio a "Japanese Theater", but that was how it was advertised in 1910. How widespread was this phenomena? A construction company boasted in a 1914 ad in the *Detroit News* that it had built for a client what it called "A Japanese Theater": "the only theater finished in the Japanese style east of the Mississippi River ... the interior is strikingly Japanese in design and color", complete with lights "imported from Japan" (Fig. 3).¹³ Did this venue or the Nikko Theatre, run by K. Ueyehara in Seattle, Washington, make a concerted effort to show films in the "Japanese style?" How many other theaters on the Pacific Coast operated according to what seems to have been the segregated policy of the Nikko, which was advertised in 1909 as "Half White and Half Japanese?" (Fig. 4).¹⁴

The Nikko Theatre – whose proprietor seems to have been Japanese – offers such an intriguing example because it operated during a time marked by war scares and highly charged debate over the status of Japanese residents of the United States.¹⁵ The

A JAPANESE THEATRE



Built by This Company for
Phillip Brabyn, Esq., 1420 Mack Ave.

This is the only theater finished in the Japanese style east of the Mississippi river. The scenery was painted by Carl Bromel, late of the Metropolitan Opera house of New York City, from models direct from Japan. The interior is strikingly Japanese in design and color. This part of the work was done by our Decorative Department. The lighting devices were imported for us from Japan and assembled and installed by The Schwab Chandelier Company.

Another evidence of our ability to produce satisfactory results.

THE GREENWICH COMPANY.
General Contractors,
804-5-6 FREE PRESS BUILDING.

Detroit News, Thurs. 27 August 1914.

Fig. 3. Japanese Theater ad, Detroit News (27 August 1914).

situation had not become any easier in 1914 when the Japanese-American Film Company was formed. Described in *Moving Picture World* as “the first company in America to be owned, controlled and operated by Japanese”, this enterprise supposedly featured a troupe of 40 players brought directly from Japan and a commitment to filming “the customs of the old country with absolute fidelity”.¹⁶ The Japanese-American Film Company’s first (and perhaps only production) was *The Oath of the Sword*, said to have been shot in Japan and on the University of California campus. Ads for theaters in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Oshosh, Wisconsin, prove that this film – promising “real Japanese actors” and “not a dull moment” – was actually in release during 1914–1915.¹⁷ Trade press accounts identify *The Oath of the Sword* as a cautionary tale in which cross-cultural marriage and even travel between Japan and the United States lead inevitably to homicide and hara-kiri. Although “according to Anglo-Saxon ideas the story leaves much to be desired”, the film was still praised by *Moving Picture World*’s reviewer, who found the peculiar otherness of Japan to be desirable as well as undesirable.¹⁸ He was impressed in particular with what we might call the ethnographic attractions of this fictional narrative: the Japanese-American Film Company’s “extremely attractive and fascinating portrayal of Japanese manners and customs, their home life, their fisheries, their betrothal and marriage ceremonies, and, lastly, their peculiar code of honor”.¹⁹

Such subjects – quite common in the period’s larger discourse on Japan – were hardly unique to *The Oath of the Sword*, as a careful reading of promotional material, adver-

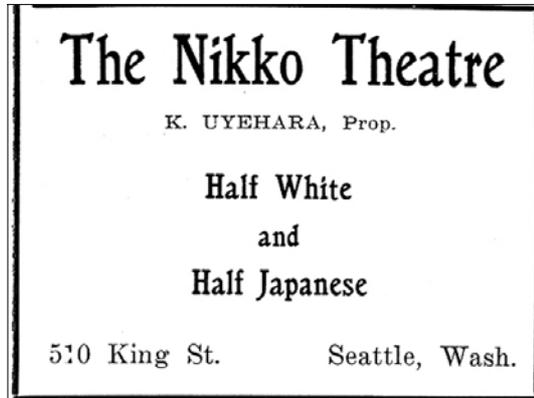


Fig. 4. *Nikko Theatre ad*, *Coast Magazine* (November 1909).

tisements, synopses, and reviews of the Japan films makes clear. Through the lens of industry discourse, we can readily see certain motifs, narrative strategies, thematic concerns, mimetic imperatives, and generic preoccupations that broadly inform cinematic representations of Japan in this period. With these concerns in mind, let me briefly propose some preliminary ways of mapping the territory covered by this filmography.

One-third of these Japan films are scenics, travelogues, industrials, or educational motion pictures usually no more than one reel in length, including several titles from Pathé, Méliès, and Selig, as well as a group of films shot by a Vitagraph troupe on its 1913 trip to Japan.²⁰ Certain of these films reprise topics common from a decade before, like jiu-jitsu demonstrations and geisha performances. Rural Japan and picturesque natural splendor appear prominently, while other scenics focus on Tokyo or Yokohama, festivals and rituals, acrobatic firemen, famous temples, the modern silk industry, or the age-old practices of Japanese craftsmen. Diminutive Japan is also a recurrent motif, reflected in films about Japanese children, like Méliès' *Things Japanese* (1913) and Pathé's *The Children of Japan* (1913), or about "miniature gardens" like Mutual's *Japanese Gardens* (1913). All these activities, sites, set pieces, and attractions appear regularly in postcards, travel literature, illustrated lectures, and stereoviews of the period. And in fiction films as well: a review notes that Domino's *The Courtship of O San* (1914) has "enough real Japanese atmosphere ... heightened by the typical Japanese ceremonies, tea drinking, formal calling, at weddings and the like, all of which the average spectator has become familiar with from tropical [sic] pictures of Japan".²¹

The continuity between non-fiction films and the larger discourse concerning Japan is strikingly apparent in, for example, an episode on Japan from the *Post Weekly Travel Series* (produced by the Post Film Company in New York City, likely in the mid-1910s), which has been preserved by the Nederlands Filmmuseum.²² Drawing on footage from various sources, some of which likely dates back more than a decade, the *Post Weekly's* tour of Japan ranges from the famed Buddha at Kamakura and hairdressing techniques to military training for children, Tokyo street scenes, and leisure activities in Yokohama. Each stage of the tour covers what was by 1915 familiar Japanese terrain, yet the *Post Weekly's* itinerary – like most travel literature – follows no master narrative. The dissimilar episodes together recall the contradictory appeals of Japan outlined by the *Moving Picture World's* speculations about a "Japanese Invasion".

Although two-hour illustrated lectures about Japan were commonplace, apparently only one non-fiction feature film on America's Pacific neighbor/competitor circulated in this period: the *Dorsey Expedition in Japan*, a six-reel "travel feature" that was given a

limited release by the United Photo-Plays Company in 1915 and was subsequently distributed in abridged form by Universal.²³ George A. Dorsey, then curator of anthropology at the Field Columbian Museum in Chicago, promised "remarkable scenic effects" and glimpses into "unfamiliar corners of the Orient", including Japanese pearl diving and whale hunting.²⁴ It is very rare to find any written record of the reception of such films, but the *Chicago Daily Tribune* published the reaction of a Japanese viewer to the screening of the Dorsey film at the Studebaker Theater in Chicago. "There is too much of the geishas and the gay Japan – too little of the practical and virile Japan", wrote Souno Imouye, who fully sensed how deeply United States-Japanese relations hinged on the politics of representation. What, according to Imouye, were the absences informing Dorsey's cinematic/anthropological foray? "In all those six reels we see nothing of Osaka, the biggest factory town in Japan", he declared, "nor any of the stately feudal castles, today filled with the empire's troops, nor of the elegant Christian edifices now flourishing all over the country ... the real Japan of today is teeming with electric plants, iron works, foundries, and factories of every sort".²⁵

Kinemacolor's 1913 production, *With the Japanese Army*, probably came closer to picturing the "virility" – if not the thriving Christianity and bustling industrialism – that Imouye found lacking in the Dorsey travel films. Virility figured as physical prowess was also on display in certain films, dating back to early American Mutoscope & Biograph productions like *Japanese Fencing* (1901), that continued to evince a fascination with Japanese martial arts. Méliès' Japanese 'Judo' – *Commonly Known as Jiu Jitsu* (1913) was one example, though even a period piece like *A Love Story of Old Japan* (1912) could make room for a "very spirited jiu-jitsu duel".²⁶ Yet masculinist, if not always modernized, Japan was most likely to appear on American screens in dramatic narratives rather than in scenic non-fiction. For example, feudal Japan was the setting for tales of samurai honor, and the Russo-Japanese War provided the backdrop for Pathé's *Japanese Girl* (1908), Méliès' *The Yellow Slave* (1913), Apex's *Hari-Kari* (1914), and Pathé's *The Death of a Geisha* (1914). At the same time, a number of American companies offered contemporary melodramas picturing Japanese spies at work in the United States, like Imp's *The Peril* (1912), in which a Japanese butler is prevented from absconding with secret American military information.

Adjacent, complementary, or in counter-distinction to films that play upon fears of a Japanese-tinged yellow peril were tragic dramas of cross-cultural and inter-racial romance, usually involving literal movement between the United States and Japan and frequently ending with the suicide of the Japanese heroine. Balboa's *Sacrificial Fires* (1914) offers a particularly overdetermined example, for it concludes with the young Japanese bride, abandoned by her Yankee lover, wrapping an American flag about her body before killing herself. In only one of the 25 versions of doomed romance is the male lead Japanese and the female lead Euro-American; in only a few of these films does the inter-racial couple survive together. All the rest follow the pattern of *Madame Butterfly*, which had appeared as a novella in *Century Magazine* in 1898, then soon thereafter in book form, before being adapted for the stage by David Belasco in 1900. (Puccini's opera premiered in New York City in 1906.) One abiding paradox of this cycle of inter-racial romances is that all these Japanese corpses (the product, at least indirectly, of an American and European presence in Japan) do not signify the death of Japan. Quite the contrary. It is as if the willingness of individual Japanese to sacrifice themselves, samurai-like, for honor or shame, for love or patriotism in films like *The Japanese Spy* (Kalem 1910) only served to bolster the nation, rendering it ever more truly "Japanese" even as it embraced the geopolitics of the twentieth century. These heroic victims all in some fashion die "for the Mikado", like the heroine of Than-houser's 1913 film of that title.



Fig. 5. Méliès ad for *The Yellow Slave* and *Things Japanese*, *Moving Picture World* (4 October 1913).

Not surprisingly, industry discourse concerning Japan films frequently reveals an essentialist understanding of national identity, coupled with an awareness that authenticity is marketable and that Japan's otherness (for better or worse) is part of its appeal for American audiences. The ads for Méliès' *The Yellow Slave* – typical of the promotion for its series of Japanese subjects in 1913 – announce in boldface that this production is “the real stuff”: a film about “modern Japan”, whose prime selling point is that it was “taken at Yokohama and enacted throughout by real Japanese” (Fig. 5).²⁷

But what about films that were not actually shot on location in Japan? Could the intangible but visible Japanese “atmosphere” be effectively evoked through the careful selection of costumes and sets? This was Edison's solution when it filmed *In a Japanese Tea Garden* (1913) at the Japanese tea garden at Coronado Beach, California.²⁸ Production design could even overcome the fact that a film's leading Japanese role was played by a non-Japanese performer, most notably in the case of Pickford's *Madame Butterfly*, in which “dozens of Japanese men and women are seen in support of the star”. *Moving Picture World* had no complaints about this compensatory logic, praising both Pickford's performance and the film's extreme care in constructing its Japan through shots of gardens, interior sets, and “quaint ceremonies of ordinary intercourse”.²⁹ In keeping with this strategy, Famous Players' promotional notices for *Madame Butterfly* claim that the producers had relied on the advice of a “member of the New York Nipponese colony” and made extensive use of “beautiful Japanese gardens in the United States”.³⁰

As with the case of Pickford playing the doomed Cho-Cho-San, it seemed possible for Westerners to imitate the movements and gestures of “Japanese” performance. A reviewer for *Moving Picture World* praised Gaumont's *O Kôma San* (1913) because its “feminine [French] actors were well trained in the short-stepping movements of the

Japanese women and their docile manner".³¹ Yet Taku Takagi, Japanese-born star of Thanhouser's *Birth of the Lotus Blossom*, pinpointed the ambiguity (and naiveté) inherent in the idea that imitative performance could capture cultural authenticity when she told an interviewer that the "hardest part" in acting for an American film company, "is that they want me to play an Americanized Japanese. They want me to play just like a Japanese girl the American imagines."³² By 1912, versions of the "Japanese girl" had long been a fixture in American popular culture.

All questions of performativity notwithstanding, according to industry discourse the race of the player absolutely mattered. The problem with *Hara-Kiri* (1914), wrote a review, is that "the Japanese characters are obviously not native Japs", while the "jarring note" in the otherwise "splendid" *A Tragedy of the Orient* (1914), which features "mostly Japanese players", is that "the director casts a non-Japanese woman utterly lacking in the physical characteristics which would make it possible for her to create even a fair illusion".³³ Selig's *Among the Japanese* (1911) was even more roundly criticized: "'Orientals Tramping around the Studio' would have been another good and appropriate title ... the number of critical and sharpeyed fans is increasing every day and they know enough to know that pictures of Japan should be taken in Japan".³⁴ Conversely, the promotional material and the reviews for *The Wrath of the Gods* emphasize that Thomas Ince not only gave his principal female role to Tsuru Aoki, said to be from the actual Japanese island where the story is set, but he also "scour[ed] the lower part of California for Japanese laborers, which are to be worked in as peasants in the picture".³⁵ Authenticity was worth promoting. Thanhouser made sure to announce in August 1915 that it had hired a troupe of Japanese actors then appearing at San Francisco's Panama-Pacific Exposition to perform in its *In a Japanese Garden*.³⁶

Threaded through the industry discourse related to Japan films there are ideologically charged assumptions concerning racial purity, the legibility of Japan's difference, and the presumed convergence in Japan of race, culture, and nation. Of course, these points require further analysis beyond what is offered here. As we know, early and transition-era cinema obsessively, if selectively, screened the world (past and present) for audiences in the United States – mapping, touring, constructing one place after another and another. Yet more than other areas of the non-European screen world – more than Egypt, China, India, or Mexico, the South Seas or Africa – Japan was perceived to be a modern nation state as well as an ancient civilization, and so it constituted a telling point of comparison for the United States at the turn of the twentieth century.

To analyse Japan's place in early American cinema we must take into account non-fiction as well as fiction and American as well as non-American productions, drawing on industry discourse along with information about theatrical and non-theatrical exhibition. A similar strategy would be effective in considering, for example, Japan films during the 1950s, a period that involved much more than the distribution of *Rashomon* (1950) and the production of *Sayonara* (1957). It remains to be seen to what extent this way of approaching the cross-cultural representation and circulation of an alien nation (Japan) within a home nation (United States) can be applied to historically specific situations involving America as the alien cinematic other circulating, for example, within Japan or Iran or the Netherlands.

Appendix: Japan Films, 1908–1915

Across the Broad Pacific (Essanay 1912)

The Ainus of Japan (Selig, 1913)

An Almond-Eyed Maid (Edison, 1913)

Among the Japanese (Selig 1911)

- An Affair of Three Nations* (Pathé, 1915)
At the Flame the Butterfly Burnt Its Wings (Éclair 1912)
The Bad Light (Great Northern/Nordisk, 1911)
Banzai (Kay-Bee, 1913)
The Birth of the Lotus Blossom (Thanhouser, 1912)
The Biwa Canal (Selig, 1912)
Buddha (Selig, 1913)
The Buddhist Priestess (Thanhouser, 1911)
The Butterflies (Cines, 1908)
Carnival of Japanese Fireman (Pathé, 1911)
The Cheat (Lasky Feature Play Company, 1915)
The Children of Japan (Pathé, 1913)
Cities of Japan (Méliès, 1913)
The Clue (Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, 1915)
The Cormorants, or Japanese Catching Fish with Birds (Urban-Eclipse, 1911)
The Courtship of O San (Domino, 1914)
Daughter of the Sun (Edison, 1909)
The Death of a Geisha (Pathé, 1914)
Dorsey Expedition in Japan (United Photo-Plays, 1915), composed of the following films, with separate copyrights:
 Japanese Pearl Fishing
 Kyoto, the Ancient Capital of Japan
 Nara, the Cradle of Japanese Art, Literature, and History
 Scenic Japan
 Tokyo, Japan
 Whaling Industry, Aikawa, Japan
The East and the West (Thanhouser, 1911)
Enchanting Japan (Selig, 1912)
The Engine of Death (Apex, 1913)
The Famine (Kay-Bee, 1915)
Flowers of Japan (Pathé, 1913)
For the Mikado (Thanhouser, 1912)
The Fox Woman (Majestic, 1915)
The Geisha (Kay-Bee, 1914)
The Geishas Girls of Japan (Selig, 1912)
The Geisha's Love Story (Pathé, 1912)
The Geisha Who Saved Japan (Kalem, 1909)
The Hairy Ainus (Pathé, 1913)
Hako's Sacrifice (Vitagraph, 1910)
Hara Kiri (Apex, 1914)
The Heart of Oyama (Biograph, 1908)
The Holy Cities of Japan (Éclair 1913)
Home Life in Japan (Méliès, 1913)
In a Japanese Garden (Selig, 1912)
In a Japanese Garden (Thanhouser, 1915)
In a Japanese Tea Garden (Edison, 1913)

EARLY CINEMA AND THE “NATIONAL”

In Diplomatic Circles (Biograph, 1913)
The Industrial Japan (Kalem, 1913)
In Japan (Selig, 1911)
In the Land of the Mikado with Homer Croy (Nestor, 1915)
It Happened in Japan (Méliès, 1913)
Jack's Chrysanthemum (Vitagraph, 1913)
Japan (Post Film Company, circa 1915)
A Japanese Courtship (Majestic, 1913)
The Japanese Dagger (Eclipse, 1913)
Japanese Dice and Butterflies (Pathé, 1911)
Japanese Funeral (Méliès, 1913)
Japanese Gardens (Mutual, 1913)
A Japanese Idyll (Rex, 1912)
The Japanese Invasion (Kalem, 1909)
Japanese 'Judo' – Commonly Known as Jiu Jitsu (Méliès, 1913)
A Japanese Love Story (Lux, 1911)
The Japanese Mask (Pathé, 1915)
A Japanese Peach Boy (Edison, 1910)
Japanese Shoemaker at Work (Méliès, 1913)
The Japanese Silk Industry (Powers, 1914)
The Japanese Spy (Kalem, 1910)
The Japanese Swordmaker (Méliès, 1913)
Japanese Vaudeville (Cines, 1907)
A Japanese Wedding (Méliès, 1913)
Jiu Jitsu (Pathé, 1913)
Katsura River – Picturesque Japan (Pathé, 1914)
The Legend of the Chrysanthemum (Universal, 1912)
Life in Japan (Pathé, 1914)
Little Chrysanthemum (Beauty, 1915)
The Love of Chrysanthemum (Vitagraph, 1910)
The Love of Loti San (Selig, 1915)
The Love of Oro San (Lubin, 1914)
The Love of Tokiwa (Vitagraph, 1914)
A Love Story of Old Japan (Pathé, 1912)
The Lure of the Geisha (101 Bison, 1914)
Madame Butterfly (Famous Players, 1915)
Mimosa's Sweetheart (Majestic 1913)
Miss Taku of Tokio (Thanhouser, 1912)
New Year in Japan (Pathé, 1912)
The Oath of O'Tsuru San (Majestic, 1913)
The Oath of the Sword (Japanese-American Film Company, 1914)
O Koma San (Gaumont, 1913)
O Mimi San (Domino, 1914)
Opening of the Shichijio Bridge, Japan (Méliès, 1913)
The Peril (Imp, 1912)

Raising Barley in Japan (Selig, 1912)
A Relic of Old Japan (Domino, 1914)
Rice Industry in Japan (Pathé, 1911)
Sacrificial Fires (Balboa, 1914)
The Samurai's [sic] Expiation (Pathé, 1911)
The Samurai School (Pathé, 1912)
Scenes in Japan (Vitagraph, 1913)
Seeing the Funny Side of the World with Homer Crow (Joker, 1915)
Shooting the Famous Hozu Rapids of Japan (Méliès, 1913)
Shooting the Rapids at Katsuragawa, Japan (Selig, 1912)
Shooting the Rapids in Japan (Pathé, 1911)
Sight-Seeing in Japan (Vitagraph, 1913)
Some Japanese Workmen (Pathé, 1915)
The Spider (Éclair 1913)
Street Scenes, Yokohama, Japan (Vitagraph, 1913)
Temples of Japan (Méliès, 1914)
Things Japanese (Méliès, 1913)
A Trade Secret (Gotham Film Company, 1915)
A Tragedy of the Orient (Broncho, 1914)
A Trip to the Famous Picnic Grounds, Arashyma, Japan (Méliès, 1913)
The Typhoon (New York Motion Picture Corporation, 1914)
Victims of Fate (Pathé, 1912)
The Vigil (Domino, 1914)
The Vitagraphers at Kama Kura (Vitagraph, 1913)
The White Pearl (Famous Players, 1915)
With the Japanese Army (Kinemacolor, 1913)
The Wrath of Osaka (Vitagraph, 1913)
The Wrath of the Gods: The Destruction of Sakurajima (Mutual, 1914)
The Yellow Slave (Méliès, 1913)
Yokohama Fire Department (Vitagraph, 1913)

Notes

1. “The Japanese Invasion”, *Moving Picture World* (28 May 1910), 873. *Moving Picture World* will hereafter be abbreviated as *MPW*.
2. For more on this project, see the digital archive, <http://www.indiana.edu/~jia1915/>
3. See, for example, *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States, Film Beginnings, 1893–1910* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1995), 540–544; and Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema* (New York: Scribner's 1990), 38–41, 359–360, 368, 381–382, 446.
4. The American Mutoscope & Biograph Company, for example, included films like *Japanese Troops on the Taku Road* (1901) in its coverage of the Boxer Uprising. I discuss representations of the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War texts in “Narrating the New Japan: Biograph's *The Hero of Liao-Yang* (1904)”, *Screen* 47.1 (Spring 2006), 45–65.
5. “Kinetoscope Fakes”, *Independent* 56 (May 26, 1904), 1215.
6. “Lecture by a Japanese”, *Bedford (Pennsylvania) Gazette* (21 July 1905), 1.
7. “Some Side Glances at Portland Fair”, *Los Angeles Times* (29 June 1905), III8.
8. “Pretty Customs of the Japs”, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (6 January 1900), 11.

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9. “School Lecture”, *Fort Wayne (Indiana) News* (16 April 1910), 2.
10. *Mansfield (Ohio) News* (3 June 1910), 12; *Gettysburg (Pennsylvania) Times* (23 June 1910), 1.
11. *MPW* (8 February 1913), 572; *MPW* (9 August 1913), 903.
12. *Variety* (12 June 1914), 22. *The Wrath of the Gods* was purported to have attracted 21,000 spectators when Marcus Loew screened it along with a vaudeville bill for the opening of his summertime evening entertainment at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn – *New York Times* (23 June 1914), 11.
13. *Detroit News* (27 August 1914). Thanks to Paul Moore for this information and for providing a copy of the advertisement.
14. Advertisement in *Coast Magazine* (November 1909). For a sense of West Coast exhibition specifically geared toward Japanese-American audiences, see Jan Olsson, “Pressing inroads: metaspectators and the nickelodeon culture”, in John Fullerton (ed.), *Screen Culture: History and Textuality* (Eastleigh: John Libbey, 2004), 126–128; and Junko Ogiwara, “The Exhibition of Films for Japanese-Americans in Los Angeles in the Silent Film Era”, *Film History* 4.1 (1990), 81–87.
15. A news item entitled “The Yellow Peril” – *MPW* (25 February 1911), 418 – claimed that the Japanese were working “cooperatively” to gain a foothold in the exhibition business in Los Angeles.
16. *MPW* (17 October 1914), 314.
17. *Daily Northwestern (Oshkosh, Wisconsin)* (22 December 1914), 15; *Fort Wayne (Indiana) Sentinel* (16 April 1915), 6.
18. *MPW* (10 October 1914), 200. Perhaps “Anglo-Saxon ideas” were also behind the decision of Chicago’s municipal censors to insist on the elimination of a scene in *The Oath of the Sword* showing a “Japanese holding man under water” and two subtitles that cast an American character in a particularly bad light – *Chicago Daily Tribune* (13 November 1914), 14.
19. *MPW* (10 October 1914), 202. W. Stephen Bush made a similar point when he praised *The Japanese Sword-Maker* (1913) for its “fidelity” in representing the Japanese landscapes and ceremonial occasions and expressing “the Japanese way of looking at life” – *MPW* (8 October 1913), 243.
20. “Picture Making in the Far East”, *MPW* (21 June 1913), 1231–1232.
21. *MPW* (28 February 1914), 1090.
22. Thanks to Nico de Klerk for making this and other films from this collection available for the 2006 Domitor conference.
23. *MPW* (2 September 1916), 1559. This footage might also have been released by Powers in 1916 as the one-reel film, *Hunting Whales in Japan* – *MPW* (16 September 1916), 1877 – and *Behind the Scenes in Japan* – *MPW* (30 September 1916), 2130.
24. *Chicago Daily Tribune* (12 May 1915), 17.
25. *Chicago Daily Tribune* (13 June 1915), B11.
26. *MPW* (31 August 1912), 864.
27. *MPW* (4 October 1913), 107. See also the description of Domino’s *O Mimi San* (1914) – “A strongly developed Japanese subject, with Jap actors in the leads. The costuming and garden scenes are excellent” – *MPW* (7 February 1914), 678.
28. *MPW* (1 March 1913), 920. Mutual filmed parts of *The Fox Woman* at a tea garden in Coronado that was “decorated entirely with Japanese plants and bric a brac” – *MPW* (19 June 1915), 1926.
29. *MPW* (13 November 1915), 1323.
30. *MPW* (30 October 1915), 977.
31. *MPW* (19 April 1913), 291.
32. *MPW* (28 September 1912), 1286.
33. *MPW* (17 January 1914), 295; *MPW* (13 June 1914), 1542.
34. *MPW* (21 October 1911), 198.
35. *MPW* (31 January 1914), 545. Part of the irony here is that Aoki was also regularly cast as a Native American in westerns from Domino and Kay Bee – *MPW* (5 December 1914), 1385; *MPW* (12 December 1914), 1586.
36. *MPW* (28 August 1915), 1496.