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A comparative analysis of a Japanese film and its American remake

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF A JAPANESE FILM AND ITS AMERICAN
REMAKE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Shogo Miura

August 2008

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF A JAPANESE FILM AND ITS AMERICAN REMAKE

by Shogo Miura

Hollywood is remaking (adapting) Asian films, especially Japanese films, at an alarming rate. While some scholars and critics claim this is another example of U.S.-led globalization, others note that filmmakers in both Eastern and Western countries adapt film stories from other cultures. Instead of looking at the geo-political ramifications of this subject, this thesis focuses on the cultural disparities further brought to light in the remaking process. It makes a comparative analysis, not only of an original Japanese film (Shall We Dansu? 1996) and its American remake (Shall We Dance? 2004), but also these films against their social conditions, ideologies, and values of their respective cultures. In particular, we examine the group's impact on individual behavior and gender roles; the disparities of marriage; and how belief systems influence cinematic styles.

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San Jose, USA, June 2008

Shogo Miura

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hollywood, or the mainstream filmmaking industry in the United States, often tells and retells the same stories—sometimes with different characters and settings. From its earliest days, it adapted the classics of literature and folklore. Through the years, it has widened its sources to include TV series, video games, comic books, magazine or newspaper articles, lesser known films, older yet popular films, and of course films from other countries (DeNardo; Hunter). In the latter three cases, these works are often called “remakes” (Horton and McDougal 8-9).

In the last five years, there has been a marked increase in American remakes of Japanese films, especially horror films¹. Typically, Japanese films are produced for domestic release only and these films rarely receive distribution outside the country except for film festivals and retrospectives. Consequently, they are enriched with Japanese culture and mindset, which involves a penchant for ambiguous storytelling (Rowell 170; Doss 89-90)². For Hollywood to adapt a film from a foreign country much

¹ To name a few: Ringu (1998) and Ringu 2 (1999) were remade as The Ring (2002) and The Ring Two (2005) respectively. Ju-On: The Grudge (2003) was remade into The Grudge (2004) and The Grudge (2006). Honogurai mizuno soko kara (2002) was remade as Dark Water (2005). Kairo (2001) was remade as Pulse (2006). Himitsu (1999) was remade as The Secret (2007). And Chakushin ari (2003) was remade as One Missed Call (to be released in 2008). A few non-horror films such as Shall We Dansu? (1996) and Nankyoku monogatari (1983) were remade as Shall We Dance? (2004) and Eight Below (2006) respectively.

² Scholar Tomoe Doss reasons the penchant for ambiguity is the result of the sociocultural background of the Japanese language and its relation to syntax which has affected the way people think. She writes: “Social consciousness developed in the early community and affected societal thought and ways of communication. The Japanese came to feel a responsibility not to disturb the minds of those in the community. ... Japanese communication reflects traditional ideas that talkative people are not encouraged. Disagreement is shown by silence. Consideration for others and negation of self is apparant [sic] in the Japanese language. Japanese syntax thus related to their way of communication. Syntax is loose and flexible. It allows the listener to infer. ... It avoids the confrontational out of consideration for the listener. Japanese suggests rather than states. ... Hence, the conclusion that Japanese is often ambiguous” (89-90).

more is involved than simply translating from one language to another (Horton and McDougal 8). Hollywood has to reshape the source material in its own mold, that is, to “conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and ‘invisible’ storytelling;” to make the film “comprehensible and unambiguous;” and to ensure it possesses “a fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation” (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 3). And, if we take box office returns as a mark of success, Hollywood has prospered in remaking Japanese films for Americans and—because of Hollywood’s global reach—international audiences as well. The Ring earned more than \$249 million; The Grudge, \$187 million; Eight Below, \$120 million; The Ring Two, \$161 million; Shall We Dance, \$170 million; The Grudge 2, \$70 million; Dark Water, \$49 million; and Pulse, \$29 million (estimated worldwide gross, Boxofficemojo).

Remakes of Japanese films aren’t the first examples of Hollywood raiding another culture for material. In the 1980s and 1990s, there were a large number of American remakes of French films³. Scholar Carol Durham fears U.S.-led globalization is watering

³ To name a few: 3 Men and a Baby (1987) based on 3 hommes et un couffin (1985). And God Created Woman (1988) based on Et Dieu... créa la femme (1956). Blame It on Rio (1984) based on Un moment d'égarement (1977). Breathless (1983) based on À bout de souffle (1960). Buddy Buddy (1981) based on L'Emmerdeur (1973). Cousins (1989) based on Cousin, cousine (1975). Down and Out in Beverly Hills (1986) based on Boudou sauvé des eaux (1932). Happy New Year (1987) based on La Bonne année (1973). Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills (1989) based on La Règle du jeu (1939). The Man Who Loved Women (1983) based on L'Homme qui aimait les femmes (1977). The Man with One Red Shoe (1985) based on Le Grand blond avec une chaussure noire (1972). The Toy (1982) based on Le Jouet (1976). The Woman in Red (1984) based on Un éléphant ça trompe énormément (1976). Three Fugitives (1989) based on Les Fugitifs (1986). Willie and Phil (1980) based on Jules et Jim (1962). Diabolique (1996) based on Les Diaboliques (1955). Eye of the Beholder (1999) based on Mortelle randonnée (1983). Fathers' Day (1997) based on Les Compères (1983). Intersection (1994) based on Les Choses de la vie (1970). Jungle 2 Jungle (1997) based on Un indien dans la ville (1994). Men Don't Leave (1990) based on La Vie continue (1980). My Father the Hero (1994) based on Mon père, ce héros (1991). Nine Months (1995) based on Neuf mois (1994). Oscar (1991) based on Oscar (1967). Paradise (1991) based on Le Grand chemin (1987). Pure Luck (1991) based on La Chèvre (1981). Sommersby (1993) by Le Retour de Martin Guerre (1982). The Associate (1996) based on L'Associé (1979). The Birdcage (1996) based on La Cage aux folles (1978). The Mirror Has Two Faces (1996) based on Le Miroir à deux faces (1958). True

down the unique characteristics of cultural identities, reflected not only in foreign cinemas filled with hegemonic American content which crowd out native films but also, Hollywood's dubious reworkings of foreign films. "Either they [the remakes] embody American culture and its dominance and so threaten to erase any trace of foreign influence that they might encounter along their imperialist path, or they represent foolish and futile attempts to reproduce a foreign model whose cultural and aesthetic specificity—and, especially, superiority—make it, by definition, inimitable," she says (11).

Film critic David Edelstein would probably agree with Durham. "Over the last month, I've watched close to 100 hours of foreign films and their contemporaneous American counterparts without finding one—not one—remake that measured up to the original," he says. He gives this example:

Other countries, especially France, have a more fatalistic attitude toward adultery. ... So adapting the 1975 French film Cousin, Cousine must have posed quite a challenge. An Oscar-nominated counterculture comedy that celebrates abandoning one's marriage (provided that one has been cheated on first, and that one engages in extramarital sex openly, proudly and without bourgeois guilt), the movie took a decade to remake—by which time its thrust had been painfully dulled. In place of the original's blithely irresponsible climax, Cousins offers earnest discussion, hand-wringing and self-denial; instead of reveling in the abandonment of family, it says that conscientious infidelity leads to a new, improved family. You could argue that this is a wiser, more moral scenario. But I'll bet you had more fun at Cousin, Cousine. (2)

Remakes of French films represent "a very *real* and very *current* manifestation of American cultural imperialism," says film scholar Lucy Mazdon. However, criticism of

Lies (1994) based on La Totale! (1991). Twelve Monkeys (1995) based on La Jetée (1962). Two Much (1995) based on Le Jumeau (1984). Point of No Return (1993) based on Nikita (1990).

remade films is not really about the films at all. "The majority of these negative accounts tell us very little about the filmic texts, revealing instead a great deal about reactions to the changes in French society experienced throughout the 1980s," she observes. "By condemning the remake as *vampirisation*, the draining of the life-blood of French culture by powerful Hollywood producers, French commentators underlined their fear at France's precarious position in the global economy" (148-149).

Film scholars Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos put all politics aside when discussing the American remakes of films from other countries. "While it is very convincing to discuss the American remake of foreign films in terms of the theft of the integrity of other national identities, as well as in terms of Hollywood's effort to standardize, Coca-Cola-ize the world, this position facilitates the convenient omission of other cultures from such 'reprehensible' practices," they say (28). "Every national cinema in the West, and probably in the East as well, remakes both its own films and those of other countries" (29).

As Jacqueline Nacache argues, the relationship between remakes and originals is "neither their resemblance nor their dissimilarity, but an intense circulation of images, of ideas, of words ... in a system of exchange which leaves aside aesthetic evaluations, cultural classification, and critical nostalgia, and brings to light ... this system of communicating vases which characterize so intimately Hollywoodian narrative and aesthetics" [80]. (28)

Forrest and Koos advocate that viewers should

abandon "value judgments" in order to let both remake and original unveil the mutual "enrichment" that only emerges from a juxtaposition of the two. While the spectator is far from obligated to compare the two works, much less know of the other film's existence, his or her experience is nevertheless fullest in the discovery of those seemingly insignificant elements that one film can highlight about the other and vice versa. (29)

It remains to be seen whether Hollywood's siphoning of Japanese films will turn out like the French cycle of remakes and even if the remake will become a metaphor for geo-political relations between Japan and the United States. However, by analyzing these remakes, we can understand how these films reflect some specific cultural differences between Japan and United States and, as Forrest and Koos advocate, how juxtaposing the original and remake leads to the "enrichment" of the viewer. Later in this chapter, we will briefly explore definitions of the remake—its properties and characteristics. Then, after selecting an original Japanese film and its American remake for our analysis, we will identify the specific cultural elements to be analyzed in each film, using cultural and research analyst Joseph Champoux's observational model. These elements will become the focus of subsequent chapters, where we will appraise the cultural representations against each other and in terms of the cultural norms to which they point. Our discussion will culminate in an analysis of the specifics of film form and their relationship to cultural difference.

In writing about this subject, we encounter certain dangers. Typically, these kinds of examinations use cross-cultural analyses supported by cultural studies, ethnographies, and personal observations. The results of such research have been criticized for being subjective or tainted by personal ideologies and philosophies so that any mere nuggets of truth may have been stretched out to support almost any author's agenda. Film scholar Gang Gary Xu, for example, refers this Hollywood's trend for remaking as "outsourcing," noting the geo-political ramifications of the U.S. businesses finding workers and capital overseas ("Remaking East Asia, Outsourcing Hollywood"). Carol

Durham sees the American remake “along purely ideological lines of industrial-commercial imperialism” (Forrest and Koos 28) and bases her analysis on perspectives established by American anthropologist James Clifford, who is considered a controversial yet influential authority on globalization, and Dutch sociologist Mel van Elteren (Durham 12). With this danger in mind, this author wants to make his position clear. He was born and raised in Japan, is of Japanese citizenry, understands Japanese and English, and is currently an international student in the United States. He agrees to some extent with Durham's viewpoint that globalization deprives humankind of the uniqueness, peculiarities, and idiosyncrasies of competing cultures. However, unlike Durham, this author's cross-cultural analysis is not based on personal ideology but rather represents an earnest attempt to identify significant cultural elements presented within the films. He has neutrally chosen supporting articles and books, based on availability and not preference, to provide historical-social-political background: Kyoko Yoshizumi's “Marriage and Family: Past and Present” (1995); Hideo Takeichi's “Japanese-Style Communication in a New Global Age” (1997), Takao Suzuki's “Language and Behavior in Japan: The Conceptualization of Personal Relations” (1976), Lucien Ellington's Japan: A Global Studies Handbook (2002), and Edwin Reischauer and Marius Jansen's The Japanese Today Change and Continuity (1995).

What is a Remake?

Outside of the popular press, there has been little critical discussion of Hollywood remakes, especially of foreign films (Durham 15; Horton and McDougal 1). Most books

on remakes tend to be glossaries, surveys, and directories of popular or intellectually interesting remakes (i.e., Robert Nowlan and Gwendolyn Wright Nowlan's Cinema Sequels and Remakes, 1903-1987 and Doris Milberg's Repeat Performances: A Guide to Hollywood Movie Remakes). However, as Andrew Horton and Stuart McDougal observe, remakes can be viewed from several distinct positions: “the personal (psychological), the sociocultural (political-cultural-anthropological), and the artistic (cinematic narrative: style-substance-presentation” (6-7). (We will touch upon all these aspects in later chapters.) “The remake is not a genre, nor is it a kind of film,” says Michael Brashinsky. “It is neither a newly filed old script nor a new script based on an old one. It is nothing but a film based on another film that is itself a system of narrative and cinematic properties” (162).

Other scholars offer more pragmatic views. Michelle Druxman suggests three general categories of the Hollywood remake: disguised remake, direct remake, and non-remake. The *disguised remake* is a literary property that is either updated with minimal change or retitled and then disguised by new setting and original characters. In any case the new film does not seek to draw attention to its earlier version. In contrast, in a *direct remake*, a property may undergo some alterations or even be released under a new title, but the new film and its narrative image do not hide the fact that it is based upon the original production. A *non-remake*, Druxman's third category, is a new film goes under the same title as a familiar property but there is an entirely different plot (Druxman 173-174).

Influenced by Druxman's pragmatism, Thomas Leitch observes, “The uniqueness

of the film remake, a movie based on another movie, or competing with another movie based on the same property, is indicated by the word 'property'. Every film adaptation is defined by its legally sanctioned use of material from an earlier model" (38). Leitch lists four kinds of remakes: readaptation, update, homage and true remake. A *readaptation* is a remake that ignores or treats as inconsequential the earlier cinematic adaptation in order to readapt an original literary property as faithfully as possible (45). *Updates*, unlike a readaptation that subordinates itself to the "essence" of a literary classic, are "characterized by their overtly revisionary stance toward an original text" (47).

According to Leitch, an update "transforms the original by transposing it to a new setting, or adopting standards of realism that implicitly criticize the original as dated, outmoded, or irrelevant" (47). Like readaptation, *homage* seeks to direct the audience's attention to its literary source and situates itself as a secondary text in order to pay tribute to a previous film version (47). While the homage does not pretend to be superior to its original, the *true remake* deals with "contradictory claims of all remakes – that they are just like their originals only better by combining a focus on a cinematic original with an accommodating stance which seeks to make the original relevant by updating it" (49).

According to Harvey Greenberg, most remakes of earlier films try to profit from using new stars, new technology, and a new setting (115). Whether they are paying tribute to or parodying the original films, these remakes tend to trade in on the success of early works. Though the remake tends to underestimate the original's story elements, it may open up psychological-political possibilities latent in the original or that the original's filmmakers couldn't realize (115). Greenberg notes Druxman's analysis of the

remake, saying that “it is the most comprehensive investigation of Hollywood remaking practice to date. Druxman views remaking as a function of industry pragmatism, variously undertaken because of product shortages” (126). The remake is attempted to take advantage of the cost-effectiveness of recycling previous scripts and the profit potential of new stars and techniques in proven vehicles.

Laura Grindstaff’s analysis focuses on the issue of originality. She points out that there is a critical tension in “pitting artistic or authorial vision against mediation and revision” (277). While the remake secures the prior text as the original, it has to challenge the fixity of its meanings. Grindstaff says that 70 percent of Hitchcock’s films were adaptations of novels, stories, or plays and even many of his films can be seen as “remakes” of earlier ones (McDougal as cited in Grindstaff 277). Even if the remake is re-created by a great *auteur*, its interpretation really depends on reinterpreting the meanings of the original.

Grindstaff also focuses on the American remake of foreign films as similar to the concept of translation. As literary translations of foreign texts, U.S. adaptations of foreign films certainly raise many of concerns about fidelity, superiority, and appropriation (277). She points out that the word “translation” invokes the twin concept of “fidelity and betrayal” (277). In the process of remaking, the remake is required not to ruin the original, but it must also be adapted to the culture that produced it.

After watching 100 hours of foreign films and their American counterparts, David Edelstein noted the “rules” of Hollywood’s adaptive process which affect the narrative, tone, and cast of the remake. The narrative must be linear, streamlined with steady

spacing, and offer a clear resolution to the conflicts. Any romantic elements must be emphasized and depictions of sexuality and marriage must fit conservative American family values. Instead of casting an unknown actor, studios use a well-known actor—or star celebrity—even if that person is wrong for the role. And once that is done, the star’s onscreen appearance and character must be kept strong, sympathetic, and attractive (2-3).

Selecting a Film

In Hollywood’s rush to remake Japanese films, most of these have been horror films. Reasons for this vary. Interestingly, according to film scholar John Chua, what makes Japanese horror films like *Ringu* adaptable is their already American-ized features: American suburban life style, the strong-minded yet vulnerable female as the “final girl,” unambiguous sexuality, and thrilling yet non-threatening horror (cited in Xu). However, as one film critic points out, “certain elements of Asian horror—water, hair, the trauma of secondary school, ghosts, and most especially creepy little girls—do not resonate in the west in quite the same way they do in the east” (Queenan). Therefore, to fulfill our goal of cultural understanding, it is our desire to select a Japanese film and its American remake that offer a wider cultural disparity. To do so, we turn to the Japanese dramas which have been remade recently. Shall We Dansu? (1996) and Nankyoku monogatari (1983) were remade as Shall We Dance? (2004) and Eight Below (2006), respectively. Although both films set box office records and were very popular in Japan and elsewhere (Boxofficemojo), Shall We Dansu? was the first to be remade and so it will form the basis for our analysis.

Shall We Dansu? was a critically-acclaimed, award-winning, and financially-successful film in Japan. It won the *Nippon Academy-sho* (the Japanese equivalent of the Oscar, or Academy Award) for Best Picture. It swept the Kinema Junpo Awards (the most revered film critics' award), winning Best Film (Masayuki Suo), Best Actor (Koji Yakusho), Best New Actress (Tamiyo Kusakari), Best Screenplay (Masayuki Suo), and Best Supporting Actress (Reiko Kusanura). It grossed two billion yen in Japan alone. In 1997, Miramax distributed the film in the United States where it earned around \$9.9 million and became the top-grossing foreign movie in America for a time (Boxofficemojo).

Perhaps seeing the success of recent remakes, Miramax produced Shall We Dance?. It grossed more than \$57 million domestically (more than \$170 million worldwide) at the box office. The remake's relative success may have been helped by the original film's fame, a bigger budget (\$50 million), internationally-known stars (Richard Gere, Susan Sarandon, and Jennifer Lopez), and a wider release (in 44 countries compared to the original's 17 countries) (Internet Movie Database). Critics, however, lambasted the film. "An American remake of the sweet 1996 Japanese film of the same name is an ill-fated attempt to translate a wonderful foreign-language film for American audiences – and it falls apart on its own, too," said Janet Maslin (1). According to Tom Baker, the film cannot decide "whether it wants to be a serious drama with a high standard of psychological realism or a lighthearted comedy with a much lower standard" (Baker 1). Baker describes the original film as a subtle blend of mild comedy and mild pathos, but feels that the remake pushes both elements to extremes. This results in an

overworked or exaggerated remake, in his view. “It’s as if the new movie were doing a waltz with one leg and a cancan with the other,” he says (Baker 1). However, some critics felt the remake was at least partially successful. Shall We Dance? is “a sleek Hollywood crowd-pleaser, more movie than art film, but its makers have wisely stuck not only to the spirit but often even to the letter of the original,” says Kevin Thomas. “Writer Audrey Wells and director Peter Chelsom have understood well about transporting the story from Japan to America as a cultural shift” (1). Australian film critic Guy Davis observes, “The American version of Shall We Dance? makes the bare minimum of changes to the original, even down to retaining the title” (49).

Shall We Dance? is a hybrid of a disguised and direct remake, to use Druxman’s terms, in that it changed the setting (from Tokyo to Chicago) and the original characters (from Japanese to Americans) but its narrative (characters, story, and plot) does not stray far from the original. Moreover, Shall We Dance? falls under Leitch’s definition of remake, as it is an updated version based on a film and not a literary property. The remake is transformed by transposing the same plot to a specifically American context in order to be released in American society.

Using Champoux’s Observational Model to Uncover Cultural Variances between the Original and Remake

There exist many methodologies for cross-cultural analyses. However the majority of them are fitted for certain political and/or social ideologies. Joseph Champoux offers a method which is pragmatic and attempts to be relatively ideologically

neutral. It was originally intended as a teaching resource where students watch film remakes in order to make comparative reviews of eras and uncover similarities and differences in many sociocultural concepts (see Appendix A). Champoux states:

Films spaced many years apart offer observations on cultural mores, roles and relationships in the same culture at two different times. Selected scenes could show the dynamics of value changes and highlight, with their differences, what was important at the two periods. Concepts can stand out in bold relief because of the stark differences. (210)

Although Champoux's method is about "the same culture at two different times," it is still applicable to our analysis as we observe "cultural mores, roles and relationships" in order to uncover "the dynamics of value changes and highlight, with their differences, what was important" between Japan and the United States (210). We will use particular elements of Champoux's observational model in our framework. Specifically, we will follow his structure, that is, inform the reader about the cultural backgrounds of Japan and the United States, examine significantly different scenes in the original and remade films, and then compare those scenes to real-world observations backed up by socio-cultural analysis and scholarship (211).

A series of questions—some borrowed from Champoux's examples—were developed before watching Shall We Dansu? and Shall We Dance?: What differences in gender roles exist? Are there differences in male-female relationships generally? What differences in social values are able to be inferred from the films? What differences in physical characteristics (i.e., clothing, make-up) are noticeable as social norms? Are there differences in communication modes or styles? Do the actors perform or express themselves differently between the original and the remake? Are there general

differences in cinematic style (i.e., cinematography, editing, and sound) that speaks to issues of cultural differences?

The most obvious distinguishing element of the original film is that it is a study of ballroom dance—a taboo activity in Japan⁴—and so the scenario is approached more like a documentary than a drama, relative to the American film, in that it takes the viewer step-by-step through dance basics to competition-style dance numbers. It is also a plea to the Japanese audience that dancing not be viewed as shameful and, to some extent, that dancing is part of how people express themselves. Of course, ballroom dancing is not taboo in America and so the remake eschews the basics and focuses on how romantic emotions are expressed through dance. While it follows the original’s storyline, the American narrative emphasizes the relationship of the married couple and their marital affection, based on the American standard of male/female relationships and ideals, or myths, of romantic love.

Plot Summary of Shall We Dansu? (1996)

In the original version, we are introduced to Shohei Sugiyama (Koji Yakusho), an ordinary 42-year-old businessman, living a comfortable suburban life with his faithful wife (Hideko Hara) and adorable daughter. Everything seems to be perfect for him, but

⁴ Ballroom dance requires a physical expression especially in Latin-style ballroom dance. This aspect influences how Japanese people view ballroom dance as a taboo sport. A Japanese instructor of tango explains, “Perhaps the way the tango is danced by foreigners, it is very passionate, but the way we teach it here, tango does not require a physical expression of passion through movements... we [Japanese] don’t hug, kiss, and emote like you guys [Westerners]” (Savigliano cited in Goldstein and Daliot 69; see also Waseda 171-209).

he feels something is missing in his life. Every night, on the train home from work, he sees a beautiful woman staring out from the window of a dance studio and secretly begins to take ballroom dance lessons. Although Sugiyama's original motivation for learning to dance is to meet the dance instructor Mai (Tamiyo Kusakari), the young woman in the window, he becomes emotionally attached to the class itself and enjoys the lessons with other dance students. He doesn't tell anyone about his new hobby, not even his family. Mai notices Shohei's new passion for dancing, and agrees to help teach him for the upcoming competition. At one time, she was one of Japan's finest ballroom dancers, but her father has forced her to stop dancing professionally and teach amateurs so she will discover why she failed at the famous Blackpool competition in England. Teaching Sugiyama, she rediscovers her joy for dancing. Through ballroom dancing Sugiyama develops his skills as his family life threatens to fall apart and finds himself entered in an amateur competition. Sugiyama's secretiveness leads his wife Masako to think he's having an affair. Eventually she hires a private detective to follow him (and the detective winds up becoming a devoted fan of ballroom dancing). Sugiyama finds out that his wife, having finally learned the truth, is in the audience. Sugiyama and Masako have an argument, and Sugiyama receives a letter in which Mai announces that she is going back to England to study dance and that there will be a farewell party for her. At the competition Sugiyama regrets his behavior toward his wife and struggles with whether he should attend the party. Ultimately, however, he reconciles with his wife, goes to Mai's farewell party, and dances with her.

Plot Summary of Shall We Dance? (2004)

In the American remake, we are introduced to John Clark (Richard Gere), a man with an ideal job and family—beautiful wife Beverly (Susan Sarandon), college-age son Evan (Stark Sands), and teenage daughter Jenna (Tamara Hope)—who nevertheless feels that something is missing in his life. The workday is always the same routine, the commute is a grind, and the family is usually too busy to spend time together. One evening, on his commute home, John sees a beautiful woman Paulina (Jennifer Lopez) staring out with a lost expression from the window of a dance studio. Her gazes catch his attention, and he signs up for ballroom dancing lessons hoping to meet her. John proves just as clumsy as his equally clueless classmates on the dance-floor. When he does meet Paulina, she coldly tells John she hopes he has come to the studio to study dance seriously and not to look for a woman. But, as his lessons continue, John falls in love with dancing. Keeping his new hobby from his family and co-workers, John continues to practice for the upcoming dance competition. But the more time John spends time away from home, the more his wife Beverly Clark becomes suspicious of his unusual new habit. She hires a detective to investigate him and is doubtful about their relationship. With his secret about to be revealed, John has to do some fancy footwork to keep his dream going and realize what it is he really yearns for. John soon discovers it is not enough to chase his most private dreams—because the best part is sharing. He demonstrates his love to his wife and takes her to Paulina's farewell party. John dances with his wife, and other characters find their life partners and dance with each other.

After repeated viewings, some specific differences between the films become

apparent. We have chosen to focus on three disparate but ultimately related differences: the group's impact on individual behavior and gender roles; the disparities of marriage; and aspects of cinematic styles influenced by distinct, long-held cultural concepts. These points will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2: GROUP IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS AND GENDER ROLES

Japanese society, greatly influenced by Confucianism and its rule of societal harmony, has developed around group dynamics. Hideo Takeichi calls this shared philosophy “Group Solidarity” and notes how “it can cause untold miseries for people who dare to step out of line and refuse to conform” (256). Although the Japanese are “painfully aware of the pressures of conformity, group compliance, and self-denial,” they do not blindly internalize this “dogma,” Darrell Davis observes. “The problem is that this mass ideology, which often runs counter to individual fulfillment, is intricately intertwined with people’s notions of what it means to be Japanese” (“Reigniting Japanese Tradition” 60). Thus, the “good” individual is “the player who subordinates his or her desires to group interest,” Ellington says (163). On a national scale, “Group Solidarity” does not exist in the same way in the United States because the country’s political atmosphere accommodates (and even prides itself on valorizing) differing, diametrically-opposed philosophies and ideologies. In contrast to Japan, individualism is highly valued in the United States, at least to a degree and as an abstract quality.

The characters in Shall We Dansu? and its American remake find themselves negotiating or renegotiating their lifestyles, pitting group interest against personal goals or ideals. For instance, Shohei Sugiyama (Koji Yakusho) and John Clark (Richard Gere), as well-to-do businessmen, have achieved the things their societies value (i.e., a well-paying job at a good company, a beautiful wife and offspring, and a charming suburban home). But both men soon become aware of their own dissatisfaction. Sugiyama is

trapped in an emotionally-restrained and socially-conservative society. John is stuck in one which celebrates wealth and possessions. Early in the films, both men express their angst articulated in voice-over:

SUGIYAMA: In Japan, ballroom dance is regarded with much suspicion. In a country where married couples don't go out arm in arm, much less say "I love you" out loud. Intuitive understanding is everything. The idea that a husband and a wife should embrace and dance in front of others is beyond embarrassing. However to go out dancing with some one else would be misunderstood and prove more shameful. Nonetheless, even for Japanese people there is a secret wonder about the joys that dance can bring. (Shall We Dansu?)⁵

JOHN: A million and a half people ride the El trains every day. Over 20 years, I've written wills for about 8,000 of 'em. I've sat with 'em as they've combed through their assets, figured out which kid gets the painting over the fire place, which one gets the antique spoon collection. Last thanks, parting shots, confessions. People try to fit it all in. And once I've finished, another life has been summed up assets and debts tallied, then zeroed out. You initial here and there, you sign at the bottom. Then if you're like most clients, you look up, smile, and you ask the question I've heard for 20 years: "Is that it, then?" "That's it for the paper," I tell 'em. "The rest is up to you." (Shall We Dance?)

Before exploring how these film characters reflect the extent to which groupism shapes individual behavior and gender roles in Japan and the United States, however, first we will briefly highlight the different but related social norms.

A General Climate of Groupism in Japan and the United States

Japanese groupism is cyclical. Starting in the earliest stages of childhood development, rigid behavioral codes are enforced in school systems (Ellington 183).

Children who have special learning needs or who have idiosyncratic features are often bullied or left out of their communities (Ellington 184). At a certain point, approximately from the fourth to ninth grades, boys and girls do not associate with the opposite sex (Yoshizumi 191). During this time, fathers, male teachers, and other male figures instill boys with long-standing cultural mores (i.e., as a male, it's the man's responsibility to be the family provider) as well as traits that are becoming in a man (i.e., having good posture, being a man of few words but quick to action, and being honest). The situation is similar for girls. Mothers, grandmothers, female teachers, and other female figures teach girls to exhibit traits that are socially acceptable and identifiable as feminine (i.e., being a wife and mother, maintaining a proper walk, and speaking with softness and modesty). Such social conditioning is carried on well into adulthood and, according to Yoshizumi, adds to chauvinism, feelings of discomfort between the sexes, and women displaying dependent behavior (Yoshizumi 191).

For the Japanese man, the company is his primary group. "The man's work-based group places great demands on him to produce," Sonya Salomon observes, "and it also makes great social demands [e.g. spending time with coworkers after work, not taking vacation time] and enforces a stereotype of maleness [e.g. the boss feels pressure to push employees to be over-productive even when he knows employees can't produce that much]" (134). Groupism influences the Japanese man to see his internal value represented and achieved through the company he works for rather than his figurative

⁵ This narration appears does not appear in the original Japanese theatrical release of *Shall We Dansu?* It turns up only in the American release of the film. Its addition may reflect an effort to make the Japanese original and its depiction of different social norms more comprehensible to an American audience.

spirit, heart, or soul. Men appear satisfied being part of their company and have a loyalty to their firm until they retire. "The Japanese [man] is much more likely to see himself as a permanent member of a business establishment – a Mitsubishi Trading or Mitsubishi Heavy Industry man – whatever his specific function may be," Edwin Reischauer says (133).

Japanese women are not only raised with the idea of becoming wives and mothers at some point, but the whole society, even Japan's economic sectors, revolves around this concept. Reischauer notes the status of women in the labor market:

[Women] with lesser educations commonly become the labor force in industries. Those with more education are likely to become secretaries and O.L., or "office ladies," as they are known in Japan, but these too are expected to perform menial jobs, such as serving tea to the men in the office. Marrying later and being confined longer to motherly supervision of their children than in the United States, Japanese women return later and in smaller numbers to the job market, and once there they are again likely to be excluded from the privileged lifetime employment and seniority system of male workers (181-182).

Though chauvinism is deeply rooted in Japanese society, the status of Japanese women is changing, mirroring that of Western women, Reischauer says (175). For instance, "Japanese women today have acquaintances with men even though they would never consider [those male friends] as marriage partners," Fumie Kumagai says (31).

In the United States, cyclical trends in socialization exist as well. Men do not define themselves by their companies but rather by their profession or field of expertise (Reischauer 133). However, men are preoccupied with an ever-changing "ideal" version of masculinity (or a multiplicity of masculinities) that collectively define their actual

experience's and a singular "hegemonic" masculinity that is prescribed as the norm, Michael Kimmel observes (4).

Throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, [and] frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure. (Kimmel 4)

American women today find themselves in an era of relaxed social constraints. It is now generally acceptable for women to not marry, have careers, be self-sufficient, go through multiple sexual partners, and bear children outside of marriage (Reischauer 175-176, 181).

How Characters Reflect Cultural Behavioral Norms

Sugiyama and John

Both Sugiyama and John are white-collar workers; Sugiyama is a manager in the accounting department of a major firm and John is an estate planner. After observing them in their work environments in both films, we are introduced to their family settings. When Sugiyama arrives home from work, he immediately goes to bed, apparently shrugging off family time with his wife Masako (Hideko Hara) and daughter Chikage (Ayano Nakamura). His behavior may appear cold to an American audience, especially when compared to John's who lovingly receives a birthday celebration from his family. John affectionately banters with his wife Beverly (Susan Sarandon) and son Evan (Stark Sands) and warmly teases his daughter Jenna (Tamara Hope) for talking to a friend on her cellphone. Sugiyama's behavior, however, is the norm in Japan. As a middle-class

businessman (salaryman), he is expected to spend most of his time working and socializing with his co-workers and end up going home late (Yoshizumi 185). His home is only a place for eating suppers, going to bed and taking a bath. And he may expend little, if any, time raising his children (Yoshizumi 191). Such behavior may make it seem to an American audience that the Japanese salaryman is concerned only with economic conquest and cares little for his family. But reality is more complicated as we will discuss in Chapter 3.

Sugiyama should be happy, according to Japanese cultural norms, but he is not. He has recently bought a house with the help of his firm. (It is common for Japanese companies to help married employees buy a new house. As recompense, employees must work for these firms until they retire.) Although colleagues such as Aoki (Naoto Takenaka) are envious of his status, Sugiyama says he feels he pledged his soul to the company. He realizes he is living according to society's expectations and not his own feelings as an individual. Dejected, he chooses not to socialize with his family and workmates. Although Sugiyama is at first wary of ballroom dancing, he finds himself among people who are shrewdly rebelling against taboos by tapping into their personal expressions.

John's humdrum life parallels Sugiyama's. He realizes that wealth and possessions no longer interest him. He wants to spend time with his family, but his family is too busy to spend time with him. As the manager of a department store, Beverly works late often. Jenna has her friends. And Evan is away at college. This all fits the American desire for individuality. The family is no longer one unit, but a group of individuals

trying to fulfill separate goals and desires. Left to his own desires, John takes an interest in ballroom dance.

Sugiyama and John also feel compelled to take up dance as way to pursue an aloof instructor (Mai, Paulina). Both men apply macho codes particular to their respective cultures. John, an idealized American male, is cool, calm, and collected as he makes jokes and asks Paulina out to eat after the lesson. In contrast, reflecting the Japanese discomfort between the sexes, Sugiyama appears weak, timid, and frightened as he invites Mai to dinner. Both women decline the invitation because they prefer not to socialize with students. Later, the men are given the chance to dance with the object of their desire. Sugiyama becomes rigid and nervous as he dances with Mai. John, on the other hand, grins excitedly even as he makes a wrong step. Even later, John and Paulina share a private dance lesson, which provides John the opportunity to show off his abilities and become confident in taking the lead. In Sugiyama and Mai's lessons, Mai simply criticizes Sugiyama and instructs him in full view of others. Sugiyama's behavior reflects the social conditioning that boys and girls tend not to socialize much during their childhood (Yoshizumi 191). Sugiyama and Mai's interaction mirrors natural Japanese behavior in these circumstances.

Mai and Paulina

Mai Kishikawa (Tamiyo Kusakari) reflects the current position of Japanese women, having to navigate a society which is opening up to ideas of Western feminism and female independence yet endeavoring to maintain certain traditions. "The old

Confucian adage that a woman should in youth obey her father, in maturity her husband, and in old age her son still has some validity,” Reischauer says (175). According to tradition, as a single woman, Mai is subject to her father Ryo Kishikawa. Mai’s father is not domineering; in fact, he has allowed her to pursue her love of ballroom dance despite its taboo status and even when it took her to competitions outside Japan, to the United Kingdom. But after Mai’s recent failure in Blackpool, Kishikawa makes her return to Japan and teach at his dance studio. At first, Mai does not understand why he would force her to do so. Kishikawa says he is trying to help her understand and overcome her flaws. Mai is upset anyway and shows her frustration by shattering the picture of herself with her former dance partner. She does not accept the situation, but defies her father and sets out to find a new partner on her own, thus reflecting a combination of submission to her father as well as independence.

Though Mai is a ballroom dancer, even she holds a taboo view of dancing. When Kimoto, a prospective partner and perhaps love interest, asks her to make their debut in a dancehall, she calls the people there “lounge lizards and showgirls.”

KIMOTO: Why should I, Blackpool semi-finalist, dance in a dump like this? Am I right?

MAI: Is this some kind of test?

KIMOTO: It wasn’t intended to be but it is now.

MAI: So I must have failed? I can’t dance here.

KIMOTO: That’s a shame.

MAI: You should lighten up and enjoy your dancing. It’s more than just a competition.

Unlike Kimoto, who views dance as an outward expression of inner joy, Mai only values dancing as a competition which is supposed to bring honor, awards, reputation, and as an extension of the family business.

Mai's competitive spirit is echoed in Paulina, but in her case this drive may be seen as a manifestation of the American dream of individuality. Whereas Mai was raised in a ballroom dance environment by parents who were instructors and owners of a dance studio, Paulina came from a working-class family of dry cleaners. "[My dad] is a dry cleaner; as is my mom, my brother, my two older sisters, and me," she says. When Paulina was young, she received an invitation to a ballroom dance competition and was inspired to become a dancer. "It wasn't the kind of dream my parents had in mind," Paulina says. Her words suggest she had to fight against her parents' wishes in order to fulfill her dream of becoming a dancer, expressing her own desires. A working-class girl toiling her way to the finals of world-class ballroom dancing, Paulina epitomizes the American dream of social mobility and success.

Mai, as played by Kusakari, has a ballerina's slender build, perfect posture, and graceful movements, embodying at least some of the Japanese ideals of feminine delicacy and beauty. Indeed she seems to be floating even when she's not dancing. It is easy to see how Sugiyama would find her attractive. Early on, however, Mai is merely a sexual curiosity, an object, a thing to be looked at, admired and attained. Her literal physical distance from Sugiyama signals her distant attitude. But as the story deepens and as we learn more about Mai, we come to see her dignity and sensitivity as an individual. When Mai shares the details of her failure at Blackpool with Sugiyama, we no longer see her as the perfect china doll, so to speak. Paulina, on the other hand, as played by Lopez, is not a ballerina but a competent, multi-styled dancer. Interestingly, unlike Mai, Paulina remains a distant figure throughout the film even after the audience learns of her back

story. At one point, Paulina describes the rumba, saying:

The rumba is the vertical expression of a horizontal wish. You have to hold her, like the skin on her thigh is your reason for living. Let her go, like your heart's being ripped from your chest. Throw her back, like you're going to have your way with her right here on the dance floor. And then finish, like she's ruined you for life.

Essentially, Paulina remains a mysterious, exotic, sexually seductive figure, embodying western stereotypes of female sexual attractiveness⁶.

Aoki and Link

Sugiyama's coworker and fellow secretive ballroom dancer is Aoki, a shy man who behaves bizarrely. His attempts to glide gracefully when he walks appear like a soft-shoe military march. Coworkers mock him behind his back. Link, Aoki's counterpart in the American remake, is the antithesis of Aoki. He is the social bug at work; he is aggressive and arrogant and loudly expounds on his love of sports, particularly football.

After they are unmasked as dancers, both men ask for their secret to be kept. Aoki fears his penchant for the taboo activity will make him the object of more ridicule at work. Link, on the other hand, fears others will view him as gay and then ostracize him. Whereas Aoki is full of shame, however, Link is still proud of his actions. "My dream is to be able to dance free and proud under my own name for all the world to see," Link says. This dissimilarity reflects "the cultural difference between American individualism

⁶ A *Slant Magazine* critic says: "A strange vision of exotic desire, Lopez (wonderful when the filmmakers finally allow her to turn her frown upside down) is essentially reduced to playing the role of Spicy Virgin Mary" (Gonzalez). A *US Magazine* reader says: "[Lopez] has charisma, the body and she's exotic and that's all she needed to be where she is today" (Hancock). Another critic writes: "She's sexy and fragile, voluptuous and vulnerable, the ideal girl-woman for a self-confident he-man" (Fuchs). The remarks of these critics highlight different aspects of American ideals of femininity.

and Japanese sense of honor” (Suo 207). Although concerned that he will be perceived as gay, Link is not actually ashamed of dancing and he does not seem to care what other people say as much as Aoki does. “Americans enjoy being different without fear of being ostracized,” Suo observes. “Japan has not been a society where individuals who dare to be different have traditionally fared well” (Ellington 183).

Later, coworkers finally discover Aoki and Link’s secret and mock them. Aoki and Link’s reactions are indicative of the different behavioral norms in Japan and the United States, respectively. Aoki hides from coworkers, quietly listening in on their conversation, and apparently feeling shame even after Sugiyama stands up for him. On the other hand, Link confronts his ridiculers, twirling a woman around in front of his coworkers and saying, “Fuck you all, and football sucks!” Aoki still sees ballroom dancing from society’s perspective as shameful, but Link finds courage to assert his masculinity and individuality through dancing.

Hattori and Chic

The secondary male characters of Hattori and Chic also reflect differences in Japanese and American constructs of masculinity. Hattori (Masaru Tokui) is a small obliging man who is ridiculed for his lack of height by female dancer Toyoko. When he, Tanaka, and Sugiyama talk at a restaurant, he is the only one who is quickly honest about his reason for dancing but also shrewd enough not to be overheard by passersby. Hattori wants to improve his skills to show up a rival, but he does not want to suffer society’s scorn for dancing. Furthermore, being a small man, he is something of a social outcast

and is teased about his stature. Toyoko dismisses Hattori, calling him a “short ass” who has “fussy little steps.”

His American counterpart is Chic (Bobby Cannavale), a young man who says he is taking ballroom dancing just to meet women. Chic is overly preoccupied with displaying his masculinity, eyeing almost every woman he meets and even implying John is a homosexual. However, Chic is actually gay. Thus, his over-compensation or role-playing of masculine traits actually underscores the rules for acceptable masculine behavior in American society. Like Link, Chic must hide his true nature in order to be seen as “manly.”

Tanaka and Vern

Tanaka and Vern are large men who claim they are dancing for their health. Tanaka says he is a diabetic and his doctor wants him to dance for exercise. Vern says his fiancée wants him to lose a couple pounds before they are married. However, after Toyoko and Bobbie deride them for their sweaty and fat constitutions, we learn their deeper motivations. “Do I really make you sick? Am I really that disgusting?” they ask their tormentors.

Tanaka says his girth has made him a social outcast. He particularly felt hurt when the first girl for whom he had strong feelings ridiculed him the way Toyoko did. Those with idiosyncratic features are often bullied or ostracized (Ellington 184; Takeichi 256) and so Tanaka, through dancing, becomes free from his cares and forgets his worries. Dancing also brings him in to contact with other outcasts who are sympathetic to

his plight and gives him a sense of belonging to a larger group, an important Japanese social norm. Hattori, for instance, becomes his friend and even has his niece partner with him for the competition.

Vern admits has not proposed yet to his girlfriend whom he calls a good dancer. Being a timid man, Vern is easily emasculated by others. He quickly kowtows to Bobbie's berating rather than stick up for himself. Moreover, much like Tanaka, his appearance, poor eating habits, and sedentary lifestyle leave him open to teasing and abusive treatment. For American men, "manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us," Kimmel points out (4). Thus, Vern figures he will gain control over his life by losing weight. He becomes as skilled a dancer as his love interest, and thus conforms more closely to the American norm of masculinity as an embodiment of power.

Chikage and Jenna

As a teenager, Chikage finds herself at that time in life in Japanese society when the sexes are socially separated (Yoshizumi 191). As noted earlier, young girls go through a learning period, being taught what socially acceptable cultural norms are for women. In Chikage's case, we see this inculcation in a series of talks between her and her mother. Chikage believes fathers should work to provide for their families, which may include buying a house. She also believes wives should make their husbands' meals. When Masako says Sugiyama does not require her to get up early and make him breakfast, Chikage asks: "That's being in love, is it?" At this time in her life, it is

common for young girls to succumb to flights of fancy and romantic fantasies. Chikage, as a girl in a society which is renegotiating the roles of women, may find she desires a marriage in which she is able to express herself romantically⁷. Thus, when she confronts her parents and pleads with them to dance, she may in some way be attempting to materialize her own desires through them.

Whereas Chikage may experience some discomfort with men when she begins dating and the courtship process, Jenna most likely will not as she grew up in socially mixed groups of girls and boys (Yoshizumi 191). In the West, especially in the United States, children become sexually aware at an earlier age than in other cultures. It is not uncommon for boys and girls to become sexually curious or to have sexual encounters in their early teens. This kind of socialization allows Jenna to feel she has an understanding of male-female affairs, even though she may be just beginning to have such interactions. Thus, unlike Chikage's plea to her parents, which points to a fantasy of her ideal of marriage, Jenna's same request seems pragmatic or even matter-of-fact, a request for her parents to engage and get along.

⁷ Anne Imamura reports: "[Japanese] children saw that their parents had very little in common, and ... they were familiar with family life as depicted in American movies and with the concept of the 'love marriage.' While they did not leap with abandon into love marriages, they did look more carefully at their marriage partners, and they embraced the ideal of becoming and remaining friends with their spouses" (3). She also states: "Love alone is still not viewed as a sufficiently solid basis for marriage. The young Japanese couple is more cognizant than its American counterpart of the need for social support to keep the marriage going. Family investigations are an important precursor of marriage decisions, and a Japanese man or woman is still unlikely to marry a partner who is opposed by the family" (5).

Masako and Beverly

Because so many scenes between these characters are with or revolve around their husbands, the differences in Masako and Beverly will be best covered in Chapter 3 in a discussion of the different cultural representations of marriage in the Japanese original and the American remake.

In summary, just as groupism is attached to Japanese identity, individuality is aligned with American identity. Both societies wrestle with these ideologies and are constantly undergoing change. However, those who do not adhere to the predominant values or viewpoints of the day are ostracized. People either hold fast to society's foremost mores, decrees, and conditioning processes or circulate within subcultural spheres. The characters of Shall We Dansu? and its American remake experience the turbulence of not adhering to group's interests and societies' norms.

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN MARRIAGE

As noted earlier, Americans and Japanese are generally polar opposites in their emotional outpourings. That is, the former are direct and fairly open about feelings and thoughts while the latter are indirect and reserved. "A restrained attitude is one of the most distinctive patterns of Japanese communication," Hideo Takeichi says (245). These attitudes shape cultural norms regarding marriage.

In the United States, marriage is generally seen as the culmination of romance. "In the Western countries the relationship between wife and husband is based on mutual romantic love, and it is thought to be the primary and central component within a marriage," Kyoko Yoshizumi says (192). Thus, Americans make use of rituals of giving gifts and endearments to strengthen and reconfirm their commitments especially during anniversaries and holidays (Suzuki 154).

The Japanese, however, view marriage in decidedly non-romantic terms and do not require such emotional overtures (Ellington 167; Reischauer 138). To them, marriage is primarily regarded as an institution for child-rearing. "[Once children are born,] a Japanese wife and husband are expected to act more as parents than as a couple, or in other words, to place priority on their role as parents rather than a couple," Yoshizumi says (192). So, "many Japanese husbands and wives are not particularly close," Luciean Ellington observes (167). "[Talking about] love is not regarded as essential in maintaining or sustaining a marriage in Japanese society," Yoshizumi notes (192). We will not see Japanese couples use terms of endearments such as 'honey' or 'darling,'

Takao Suzuki says (154)⁸. This is not to say the Japanese do not express love, affection, and romance within marriage. They do. It is just that Confucianism, Buddhism, and other influences make the Japanese take an inward view of such things. One Buddhist teaching decrees: “Do not seek perfection in a changing world. Instead, perfect your love.”

Adhering to this kind of reasoning, Japanese couples are expected to strive for and attain an unspoken spiritual bond (*sassuru*) (Takeichi 247).

In this chapter, we will show how Shall We Dansu? and its American remake explore these themes, particularly how the Sugiyamas and Clarks manifest the norms of marriage, express affections and romantic feelings, and communicate (verbally and/or non-verbally) and do so differently according to the cultural norms of Japan and the United States, respectively.

The Norms of Marriage

Ostensibly, Japanese and American marriages share the same characteristics and in many ways they are shaped by their connection to the family unit. The typical middle-class “nuclear family” (*kakukazoku*) is defined as two parents (father and mother) with one or two children and its existence as a cohesive unit is desired by both cultures.

Achieving a level of consistency often involves a structure where the husband works as the main provider and the wife takes care of the chores and children. The family’s need (or desire) for economic stability, status, and comfort often dictates how much time

⁸ By adding *chan* to the end of a person’s given name, the speaker is showing intimacy and affection to the recipient.

members spend together. Thus both Japanese and American husbands spend more time on the job. Both Japanese and American wives may work (part-time or full-time) while raising their children. It is no surprise that family members have little time together in such highly competitive societies. This distancing leads to a deficiency of shared interests and verbal communication between mates (Imamura 3), both of which are also prominent reasons for divorce (in the United States at least)⁹. Similarities between the cultures do not end there, but the neither do the disparities.

The differences between Japanese and American marriages stem mostly from mass ideologies which prescribe social interaction¹⁰. In Japan, the husband is expected to spend most of his time working or socializing with colleagues and, because of this, to arrive home late often. His home may be viewed as only a place for eating suppers, going to bed, and taking a bath. He may expend little, if any, time raising his children (Yoshizumi 185). This is not neglect; rather being the breadwinner is his most important responsibility. The wife then becomes the chief child-shepherd. Leaving children, who have not at least reached adolescence, on their own or in the care of others would be considered abandonment. She is also expected to indulge her husband's habits, idiosyncrasies, or *teishu kanpaku*, behavior which Sonya Salamon roughly translates as "pretty tyrant" (131) and calls "TK behavior" (141) but other translations are "master of the house" or "tyrant husband" (Lebra 39). To a Western point-of-view, this scenario may appear as male chauvinism. However, as Salamon observes, *teishu kanpaku* shows

⁹ According to a [DivorceMagazine.com](http://www.divorcemag.com/poll_results.php) poll (http://www.divorcemag.com/poll_results.php).

¹⁰ We discussed some of these ideologies in Chapter 2.

signs of dependency behavior rather than Japanese machismo. Takie Sugiyama Lebra, who performed an extensive study on Japanese couples in 1978 which still has relevance today, elaborates further:

Dyadic communication [is] enhanced by the husband's childlike dependency upon the wife's domestic service "around his body" (*mi no mawari*). The husband, preoccupied with his work, does not know what to wear and how to dress himself unless the wife selects a set of clothing and helps him put it on. "My husband does not bother to lift even one thing at home" is a common remark. Many women complain about this constant attention-demand by their husbands, but also betray their enjoyment of being so unquestionably indispensable. More important, such around-the-body care gives a chance for intimacy and communication. ... If the wife happens to be in another room, the husband demands her presence by calling out what he wants, such as "Cigarettes!" "Ash-tray!" "Water (for drink)!" Instead of getting up and dialing the TV channel by himself, he calls out, "Channel 8!" If the wife is at work, she has to run back and forth between the two rooms. An informant, who has just begun to experience these constant summons because of her mother-in-law's death, analyzes the husband's behavior as *amae*, and continues, "Unless he calls me to him in this way, there will be no chance for us to be together face-to-face." (Lebra 39)

Amae roughly translates as "the propensity to presume and accept indulgence from another person" and, in a marital relationship, it is an expression of love, Lebra states (39). If the marriage suffers for whatever reason (e.g., infidelity, lack of communication, abuse, and workaholism), divorce is not the norm. Years after Lebra's study, divorce is still viewed as socially unacceptable, especially when children are involved. Yoshizumi mentions that many Japanese couples continue to stay legally married even if their relationships are unstable (191). Nevertheless, divorce is a fact of life. According to Divorce Rate, 27 percent or one in every four Japanese marriages ends

in divorce. According to Health Ministry statistics, the divorces rate in Japan more than doubled, from just over 95,000 in 1970 to 206,955 in 1996 (cited by Divorce Rate).¹¹

American marriages are shaped by ideologies which push for mutual dependency as well. At one time, prior to women's liberation and equality movements in the 1960s, American wives were expected to behave much like Japanese wives, doting on her husband, children, and home. Today, American couples typically view themselves as equal partners, or as soul mates (Ingoldsby 12), under a contract of mutual obligation (Suzuki 154) or companionship (Yoshizumi 190). A husband demanding his wife stop what she is doing in order to tend for his every whim can be seen as abusive and unloving. Although mates are expected to express love for one another, they may not include presuming and accepting indulgences from each other. The wife may sidestep a career to raise her children (up to a certain age) or hire a nanny to care for her offspring. A woman who performs the traditional duties such as housekeeping and child-rearing while also having a fulltime job becomes the idealized supermom or superwife (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). If the marriage does prove unstable, the couple has the option of divorce or separation. Divorce used to be a social scar as it still is to an extent in Japan. However, as about 50 percent of American marriages end in divorce (Divorce Rate), these harsh views are fading.

¹¹ Anne Imamura reports: "Although the majority of divorces are between people in their thirties, in recent years a small but rising number of senior-citizen divorces is making headlines. In these cases, couples divorce around the time of the husband's retirement. Among the various factors contributing to this phenomenon are the following: the couple's children are settled and the parents' divorce cannot affect their life chances anymore; the wife feels entitled to 'retire' because she has fulfilled her obligations by rearing the couple's children; and the wife has developed her own social network and is not dependent on the husband. This clearly contrasts with the traditional norm of the wife entering her husband's family and bearing up under any differences with the husband" (5).

The Husbands

Shohei Sugiyama's predicament is the norm for many Japanese husbands; figuratively and sometimes literally there is little room for husbands and fathers (Imamura 6). Sugiyama's long hours at work make him a shadow figure to his wife and family. We see this perfectly in a number of scenes: when he arrives home early from work and immediately goes to bed; when he gets up early and prepares his own meals; and when he and his family separate at the mall. Throughout these scenes, Sugiyama has little interaction with his wife and apparently none with his daughter. His presence at home becomes "a disruption of their schedules rather than a natural part of their family life" (Imamura 2). When Sugiyama comes home from work, Masako has to put her other activities on hold and immediately care for his needs.

MASAKO: You're early. You said you'd go out drinking so I thought you'd be late.

SUGIYAMA: Mmm...

MASAKO: Do you want something to eat?

(*Shall We Dansu?*, 1996)

Another disruption occurs when Chikage interrupts Sugiyama as he researches ballroom dancing on the home computer. Normally, when her father is not around, Chikage has free use of the computer but she has to wait for him to finish. Moreover, we see a lack of intimacy between Sugiyama and Masako. They sleep in separate beds, which indicate they are in a cooling-off period. Their interaction is also limited because he tends to his own needs, not relying on his wife's domestic service "around his body" (*mi no mawari*) (Lebra 39). Due to this distancing between the husband/father and his family, Japanese men suffer from a fear of going home. "Consequently, they tend to linger in bars or

coffee shops until late in the evening,” Imamura says (6). In Sugiyama’s case, this fear blended with other emotions influences him to take up ballroom dance.

In contrast to Sugiyama, John Clark seems to have an idealized relationship with his family at first. In an early scene, we see him and his family sitting around the dinner table, celebrating his birthday. Everyone is joking, smiling, and getting along. However, it is not long before we see this occasion is the exception rather than the norm for the family. As subsequent scenes demonstrate, usually, everyone is busy working, going to school, or being with friends. John is a man alone rather than “a man of the house.” He recognizes this and tries to reinvigorate his romantic commitment to his wife by using compliments (“I worry about Jenna. She’s too beautiful. That’s your fault.”) and asking her out (“Can we go to see a movie sometime?”) (Suzuki 154). The American film reinforces the ideal of romance as an integral part of compassionate marriage.

The Wives

Masako lives the ideal life for a wife and mother in Japan. Her husband does not demand much from her. Her daughter is practically her best friend. And she is happily returning to the job market after years of raising Chikage and being a housewife. By Japanese standards, she is the epitome of an independent woman. We see this especially when she suspects Sugiyama of having an affair and hires a detective. Even though infidelity is frowned upon, it is not typically considered a sufficient reason for divorce (Yoshizumi 190). The wife should be able to tolerate such TK behavior and allow her husband to indulge himself. However, though she hires the private detective, in not

confronting her husband directly, Masako also adheres to Japanese tradition. And, even though she privately calls him selfish, Masako accepts her husband's actions in an act of *amae*.

Beverly fits the definition of a supermom/superwife according to American cultural ideals defined above. In one scene, we see her juggle aspects of work, homelife, motherhood, and wifedom.

JOHN: (*enters kitchen*) There's a female bonding ritual going on in the den.
 BEVERLY: (*on the phone but to him*) I know.
 JOHN: What are they doing in there?
 BEVERLY: (*hangs up phone*) Tattooing "I love Satan" on their foreheads, piercing their bellybuttons, stuff like that.
 JOHN: Great. What did you say about that?
 BEVERLY: I said, "Don't get any blood on the couch."
 JOHN: (*sits at the table*) I worry about Jenna. She's too beautiful. That's your fault. (*smiles at her*)
 BEVERLY: (*hands him a card*) Here, sign this.
 JOHN: What is it?
 BEVERLY: (*rubs his shoulder*) It's your mother's birthday card.
 JOHN: Oh, God. Thank you.
 BEVERLY: How was your workout?
 JOHN: Same. How are you?
 BEVERLY: Fine. You know, ordering the spring line at the store, yada-yada. I've got to get going.
 JOHN: I thought you just got here.
 BEVERLY: Yeah, but it's the fundraiser at Jen's school. So your dinner's in the oven and the girls have already eaten.
 JOHN: Can we see a movie sometime?
 BEVERLY: Yeah. Or at least we could look at the ads in the paper together. (*grabs his dry-cleaned clothes from the wall*) How are you doing?
 JOHN: (*shrugs*) Fine.
 BEVERLY: (*she kisses him and hands him the clothes*) Check on them now and then, OK? (*exits*) Don't wait up.

Beverly calmly and confidently navigates between being the cool mom, allowing her daughter to have a sleepover; the loving wife, remembering her mother-in-law's

birthday and rubbing John's shoulder; the housewife, taking care of John's dry-cleaning and meals; and the organizer, tackling not just her job but also other responsibilities such as school fundraisers. By imparting some family responsibilities to John, looking after the girls' get-together in this case, Beverly most likely views herself as an equal partner in her marriage. Significantly, however, she eliminates romance, an important element in American cultural ideals of marriage.

Much like Masako, Beverly has boiled her life down to routines until she realizes her husband may be having an affair. Interestingly, Beverly does not confront her husband. Instead, like Masako, she hires a detective. One critic noticed Beverly's actions are out-of-character for a typical American wife. "[She] would not put up with the same situation with which the original Masako confronts," Roger Ebert says (2). Whereas Masako is duty-bound not to ask, Beverly is free to probe the issue directly. "Have you just thought about just asking him?" asks Devine the detective. "Yes, I thought about it..." Beverly begins before Devine cuts her off. We never know her real reason for avoiding a confrontation with John. However, seeing John's odd behavior and a coworker shell-shocked by a recent separation, Beverly seems justified in her fears. "My husband is a serious man, Mr. Devine," she says. "If he's having an affair, it is not casual." Her words also suggest a closeness to or an intuitive understanding of her husband, something not found or expected in Masako's marriage. Moreover, Masako's hiring of the detective shows us that she, like many other Japanese women, is not close to her husband (Ellington 167). Whereas Beverly uses the detective to squash her fears and remind

herself why she married, Masako relies upon her detective to provide insight into Sugiyama.

Both Masako and Beverly embody their respective cultures' attitudes toward working wives. In Masako's case, she works to help pay for their new house. She is returning to the labor market after years of raising Chikage and being a housewife. Her conduct fits the expectation of Japanese mothers to raise their children from infancy to adolescence (ages 13-19). Even with a job, Japanese wives are still expected to be home before their husbands and fulfill their traditional duties. Masako would not be absolved from such responsibilities (unless Sugiyama allowed it). Beverly, her American counterpart, is quite another matter. It is not stated how long Beverly has been working as a department store manager and whether her employment offsets financial needs of the family.

Expressions of Romance and Affection

Americans consider affection and romance as outward expression, something to be done physically or emotionally, manifested as kissing, hugging, joyful emoting, talking about feelings, and other displays of love. The Japanese conversely take an inward view of such things. They can feel passion for their mates but to exhibit and discuss it, especially in public, is embarrassing (Ellington 167; Reischauer 138; Yoshizumi 192; Suzuki 154). Thus, affection and romance are expressed through subtle means, such as making decisions that will have a positive effect on the other person. This

is part of the unspoken spiritual bond (*sassuru*) husbands and wives are expected to develop¹².

We see this distinction in how Sugiyama and John respond to their wives learning their secret about ballroom dancing. In both films, Masako and Beverly leave once their husbands discover them at the ballroom dance competition. In the American remake, John runs after Beverly and explains himself.

JOHN: Please, Beverly, can we talk...

BEVERLY: No, there is nothing to talk about.

JOHN: Will you please stay here?

BEVERLY: Oh if you want to talk to me, you can start by explaining what was it that I just saw in there? What did I witness?

JOHN: I'm not having an affair. They're my new friends.

BEVERLY: But you could've told me about it, couldn't you? You completely left me out. Why didn't you tell me, John? You've gotta answer that.

JOHN: I was ashamed.

BEVERLY: Ashamed of what? Of dancing? What??

JOHN: Of wanting to be happier. When we have so much. And it's not your fault. (*Shall We Dance?*, 2004)

John realizes he hurt his wife and goes through a series of actions to signal his affection—and desire—for emotional intimacy and romance with Beverly. He shares Paulina's letter with her, tells her he has quit dancing, and even apologizes. Even after Beverly forgives him, John persists. He forgoes Paulina's party to fortify his devotion to Beverly. He visits his wife's workplace, presents her a single rose, and asks her to dance—all in front of her employees.

JOHN: It's a silly rose.

BEVERLY: It's beautiful. Why aren't you at the party?

JOHN: Oh, because it's a dance and to dance you need a partner and my partner is right here. Beverly, dance with me.

¹² *Sassuru* will be discussed further in the next section.

BEVERLY: I don't know how.

JOHN: Yeah, you do. You've been dancing with me for 19 years. (Shall We Dance?, 2004)

John's romantic gestures emphasize Beverly's importance in his life and his desire to maintain their relationship, and they also correspond to American ideals of romantic love and marriage.

In contrast to John, in the Japanese original, Sugiyama does not appear romantic and affectionate. He does not chase after Masako when she leaves the dance competition, he does not immediately apologize to his wife, and he does not appear interested in restoring the emotional balance. In fact, according to his culture, Sugiyama is in the right and does not have to make amends. Thus, he reflects the "traditional ideal, according to which the most manly of men is a man of few words, one who does not reveal personal weakness by complaints or lay bare his innermost thoughts and feelings, least of all to his wife," says Sumiko Iwao (cited in Shaub 94). However, he eventually confers with his wife and learns her thoughts and feelings.

SUGIYAMA: Did you know it?

MASAKO: Yes, for a long time. But I was too frightened to talk about it. I kept believing you'd tell me, but you didn't say a word. At first I thought it was an affair. I was relieved to find out it was just dancing. But I still couldn't understand why. It brought you to life. I felt left completely on my own. Today when I saw you, it was even harder to understand. It hurts me so much. Even if it was dancing, it was still an affair.

SUGIYAMA: It wasn't just an affair. I was seriously involved... until today.

MASAKO: Until today?

SUGIYAMA: Yes, I've finished with dance.

MASAKO: Why? Because of me? It'll all be my fault.

SUGIYAMA: No, not at all. It's... it's just not for me, that's all. (Shall We Dansu?, 1996)

Even though Sugiyama says he is quitting not just out of consideration for Masako, in an earlier scene he tells Toyoko and Aoki he “put [his] family through enough.” So Sugiyama may be masking his true feelings once again. By showing concern for his family’s welfare, and sacrificing how own individual interests (in dancing), he is indeed expressing his love. Sugiyama explicitly shows his devotion to Masako by teaching her how to dance. Chikage’s presence during this scene serves to further underscore this display of affection. This may be the first time she has seen her parents express themselves in this way. To her, it may even be romantic.¹³

Verbal Communication and the Unspoken Bond

Whereas John and Beverly’s long chats typify the American penchant for verbal, explicit communication, Sugiyama and Masako’s light exchanges illustrate the Japanese norm of relying less on speech and more on wordless, sympathetic communication (*sassuru*). In both cultures, married couples are expected to develop personal methods of communication or shorthand. However, the Japanese expect husbands and wives to reach a spiritual level of *sassuru*. Shall We Dansu? writer-director Masayuki Suo was influenced by Yasujiro Ozu’s films, in which *sassuru* is prevalent, and so he made the Sugiyamas’ relationship just as quiet and subtle. *Sassuru* is not easy to achieve though.

¹³ Young Japanese often see their parents have very little in common, Imamura observes (3). She continues: “They were familiar with family life as depicted in American movies and with the concept of the ‘love marriage.’ While they did not leap with abandon into love marriages, they did look more carefully at their marriage partners, and they embraced the ideal of becoming and remaining friends with their spouses” (3).

Takeichi calls it “a form of communication that struggled to preserve the harmony between speakers and listeners” (247). It requires alertness, attention, and discernment. American couples are expected to be in tune with their mates’ body language and speech patterns as well, but they normally rely on verbal communication to directly, concisely convey thoughts and feelings.

The Unspoken Bond

The unspoken bond between Masako and Sugiyama is seen when Masako identifies Sugiyama's depression early in the film, quoted earlier:

MASAKO: You're early. You said you'd go out drinking so I thought you'd be late.

SUGIYAMA: Mmm...

MASAKO: Do you want something to eat?

SUGIYAMA: No. I'm tired. I'll take a bath and go to bed.

MASAKO: Okay... (*Shall We Dansu?*, 1996)

To us, Sugiyama looks exhausted as he has a long commute home from work. But Masako is keenly aware of Sugiyama's behavior and sees his depression. She does not ask him about it though. Instead Masako discusses her observations with Chikage, and we learn she has been aware of his condition for some time. Unlike Masako, Beverly is completely unaware of her husband's emotional health because he does not verbally express his feelings and she is preoccupied with juggling career, home, and her children. On multiple occasions, she has the chance to identify John's depression in his behavior and speech, but each time she fails to recognize it. John does not overtly express his feelings and Beverly cannot intuit them. Both characters will have to remedy these

elements according to American norm of ideal marriage. The first instance happens after his birthday party.

BEVERLY: Sorry about the bathrobe.
 JOHN: What do you mean?
 BEVERLY: Oh, I just had such a hard time getting you a present.
 JOHN: I love this bathrobe.
 BEVERLY: I think the problem is that you never really want anything.
 JOHN: That's not true.
 BEVERLY: That's true. Tell me one thing that you really want.
 JOHN: What you gave me tonight. Evan coming home, everyone's at home, that cake you make.
 BEVERLY: Tell me one thing that you want that comes in a box. (*no response*) I rest my case.

She sees something is wrong but thinks John is only unhappy with his birthday gifts. A few days later, Beverly has another opportunity to identify John's despair—again, quoted earlier:

BEVERLY: How was your work out?
 JOHN: Same. How are you?
 BEVERLY: Fine. You know, ordering spring line at the store, yada-yada. I've got to get going.
 JOHN: I thought you just got here.
 BEVERLY: Yeah, but it's the fundraiser at Jen's school.
 JOHN: So your dinner's in the oven and the girls have already eaten.
 JOHN: Can we go see a movie some time?
 BEVERLY: Yeah, or at least we could look at the ads in the newspaper together. (*pause*) How are you doing?
 JOHN: Fine...
 (*Shall We Dance?*, 2004)

John is not fine, and it seems for a moment Beverly recognizes it. But she kisses him and leaves. It is only when Jenna mentions a change in his mood does Beverly become somewhat aware of John's condition and even then she does not consider deeper implications.

Words Have Value

Both John and Sugiyama apologize to their wives for not including them in their activity. But their words and the cultural context surrounding them are vastly different. Whereas John's apology and actions presents a clear path to unambiguous romantic reconciliation, Sugiyama's does not. John actually apologizes twice to Beverly and each time he clearly expresses conjugal affection and emphasizes the importance of emotional connection and romantic bonding in marriage. The first time he says:

JOHN: The one thing I am proudest of in my whole life is that you are happy with me. If I couldn't... If I couldn't tell you that I am unhappy sometimes, it was because I didn't want to risk hurting the one person I treasure most. I'm so sorry. (*Shall We Dance?*, 2004).

On the second occasion he invites her to dance with him:

JOHN: It's a dance, and to dance you need a partner and my partner is right here. Beverly, dance with me. (*Shall We Dance?*, 2004).

Sugiyama, on the other hand, does not have to apologize for his behavior. In fact, neither Masako nor Chikage asks him to do so. However, Chikage persuades Sugiyama to teach Masako how to dance. While dancing with Masako in their backyard garden, he simply slips in his apology amongst his dancing instructions to her.

SUGIYAMA: When I move my left foot, go back on your right. When I move my right, then it's your left. We turn 90 degrees to the right and then, 'quick quick,' bring our feet together.

He teaches her the blues.

SUGIYAMA: If I go back on my left, you come forward on your right. If it's my right then come forward on your left. As you turn left 90 degrees,

bring both feet together on 'quick, quick.' Then once more from the start... (*pause*) I'm sorry for making you lonely.

They continue to dance together. (Shall We Dansu?, 1996)

Sugiyama's quick verbal apology reflects the Japanese attitude toward speech.

"[Talking about] love is not regarded as essential in maintaining or sustaining a marriage," says Yoshizumi (192). "If they [Sugiyama and Masako] ever truly make amends the viewer can only guess," notes Stephanie Kien (cited in Shaub 94). But as Sugiyama does not have to apologize or "lay bare his innermost thoughts and feelings, least of all to his wife" (Iwao cited in Shaub 94), Masako may give his words more weight for that very reason.

In conclusion, the characters in Shall We Dansu? and its American remake embody cultural norms of middle-class marriage in Japan and the United States, respectively. In the two films, cultural differences can be seen in communication processes and expressions of affection. Americans typically prefer verbal exchange. Japanese prefer to use as few words as possible and favor unspoken sympathetic communication (*sassuru*). Deficiencies can be found in both systems. American rely on outward emotions and actions to maintain relationships. Japanese rely on inward actions, deciding to looking out for the other's interest or accepting the other person's indulgent behavior. In Chapter 4, we shift gears and turn to a specific and extended consideration of differences in film style and acting between Shall We Dansu? and Shall We Dance? Our

discussion will examine how film style and film acting are both shaped by and reflect cultural norms in Japanese and American society, using the two films as our examples.

CHAPTER 4: PRINCIPLES OF CINEMATIC STYLE

Historians, scholars, and observers have wrestled with culture's impact on Japanese cinema, but most of these analyses, especially those by Westerners, are piecemeal studies of Japanese cinema and craft a rickety umbrella of cinematic style based on a few auteurs who may not fully typify the Japaneseness of Japanese cinema. Even David Bordwell¹⁴ had to admit western film scholars needed to adjust their viewpoints of pre-World War II Japanese cinema¹⁵. In To the Distant Observer, Noel Burch observes that Japanese cinematic style borrows from other art forms, specifically pictorials and theatre. For instance, he asserts that the wipe (an optical effect used as a transition between shots) echoes the Kabuki's technique of moving the *shoji* (sliding partition) to introduce a new character or tableau (119-120). However, Darrell Davis highlights problems with some of Burch's theories. "Burch twists Japanese culture to fit his view of cinema," David writes. "Burch declares himself uninterested in the real Japan, to the chagrin of scholars of Japanese literature and history" (Davis, "Reigniting Japanese Tradition..." 63).

Japan has been subjugated by Western art, music, drama, and science for more than a century. Thus, as Tadao Sato notes, modern Japan is an ingenuous or awkward mix

¹⁴ When we say "style," we are in partial agreement with David Bordwell's narrow definition. "[Style is] a film's systematic and significant use of techniques of the medium," Bordwell writes. "Those techniques fall into broad domains: mise en scene (staging, lighting, performance, and setting); framing, focus, control of color values, and other aspects of cinematography; editing; and sound. Style is, minimally, the texture of the film's images and sounds" (Bordwell, On the History of Film Style 4). We depart from Bordwell's idea in that we believe film style reflects more than the "choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances" (Bordwell, On the History of Film Style 4).

¹⁵ In his essay "Visual Style in Japanese Cinema, 1925-1945," Bordwell observes: "During the 1950s and 1960s, most critics believed that Japanese film's 'golden age' lay in the postwar period, the age of masterpieces by Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Ichikawa, and others. During the 1970s and 1980s, the spotlight shifted. As more works became available from the 1930s, and as critics began to turn to the neglected early films of Ozu and Mizoguchi, the prewar period came to seem the most exciting and innovative era" (5).

of traditional and imported Western cultures. So much so, Sato writes, that “it is difficult even for the Japanese to distinguish between them” (Currents in Japanese Cinema 31). However, “every Japanese artist is unconsciously influenced by the traditional aesthetics and outlooks that are an integral part of Japanese culture,” he says (“Japanese Cinema and the Traditional Arts” 181). We argue here the underlying principles of Japanese cinematic style echo long-held cultural traditions that are unique to Japan.

Whereas the ultimate goal of Hollywood film style is to attract and hold the attention of many viewers, not just Americans but all “classes and nations” (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 3), Japanese film typically caters to a singular society of deeply-rooted traditions, values, and viewpoints. Although Japanese cinema has assimilated foreign film techniques through the years, it is “intensely conscious of its own ‘Japaneseness’”¹⁶ (Richie, Japanese Cinema 59) and reinforces it in a system of “predilections, [which are] unexamined, often unnoticed” (Richie, Japanese Cinema 85). He describes it as:

A way of scripting, a way of composing a scene, a way of shooting, which is unmistakably Japanese. It is this Japanese way of ordering things, of choosing things, of creating things, and of revealing assumptions which no amount of internationalism can altogether suppress (Richie, Japanese Cinema 85).

A Japanese way of seeing becomes more apparent if we remove ethnic codifiers such as language, costumes, settings, music, and actors' physical appearance from Japanese and

¹⁶ Darrell Davis asks: “Is ‘Japaneseness’ something Japanese cinema is bound to outgrow? Has national distinctiveness always been no more than a marketing ploy? Have representations of what is commonly recognized as ‘Japanese’ outlived their usefulness? If not, then to whom are they useful?” (“Reigniting Japanese Tradition...” 56)

American films. We would better notice differences in cinematic style. In this examination, we will focus on the principles which fuel and set apart actors' performances, composition of film frame, and editing patterns and rhythms in Japanese and American films. In particular, we will look at both MA (間), which primarily represents the Japanese concept of space-time, and *intensified continuity*, or what Bordwell described as the aesthetic result of Hollywood's efforts to compete against and adapt to other media.

MA as Cultural Watermark

Although it may go "unexamined, often unnoticed," MA (間), the Japanese concept of time and space, affects "almost all aspects of Japanese life" (Isozaki) so much so "it has become a distinctive mode of seeing and hearing the world, as well as one of the principal features that define what it is to be Japanese" (Rowell 162). MA is derived from Buddhism, which was officially introduced to Japan in the sixth century. Early Japanese Buddhists used the notion to express emptiness or the void, but through the years its meanings and applications have expanded. Simplified English interpretations would be "interval," "pause," "time," and "space" (Nakao 148; see also Nelson 922).

MA, defined by Iwanami's Dictionary of Ancient Terms as "the natural distance between two or more things existing in a continuity" or "the space delineated by posts and screens (rooms)" or "the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena occurring continuously," gives rise to both spatial and temporal formulations. Thus the word MA does not describe the West's recognition of time and space as different serializations. Rather, in Japan, both time and space have been measured in terms of intervals. (Isozaki)

Lewis Rowell provides a comprehensive definition of MA, which will inform much of our exploration of the concept and its representation in Japanese cinematic style.

We quote him here at length:

MA is the emotion that arises in the intervals between actions or events, in the silences, negative spaces, and moments of nonaction. It can be contended that most of life's defining events and processes occur unseen and unheard, from conception to death. The standard Western strategy in art seems to have been to mark these moments with explicit accents, treating them more like points than spans, and thereby compelling recognition from the spectator—on the artist's terms. In contrast, the Japanese strategy is to create conditions that will stimulate the imagination of informed and intuitive spectators, and then grant them the time or space to make their own connections. The arts of Japan seek to suggest, not to make explicit statements. Within a society that seems bound by so many shared cultural associations and symbolic meanings, art actually plays a liberating role by unleashing the imagination and the emotional responses of its audiences. (Rowell 162)

MA can be incorporated and is identifiable in architecture, fine arts, music, dance, calligraphy, storytelling, painting and theatre (Isozaki; [About.com](#)).

When *ma* is used in conjunction with the arts it relates to rhythm and beat (it was originally a concept related to music). It can best be described in theater as a dramatic pause in spoken lines, in music it is interpreted according to each musician's taste and how one wishes to space the notes. In painting, the empty space (*ma*) is used to enhance the whole of the painting. ([About.com](#))

MA can also signify an emotional state, particularly puzzlement, awkwardness, and embarrassment (Shimizu and Narita 1059-1060). Some MA-related expressions of emotional states are: “*ma(ga)waru(i)* [to] be embarrassed, feel self-conscious,” “*mano(binoshita)* slow, dull, vacant-looking (face),” “*manu(ke)zura* dumb look,” and “*ma(ga)nu(keru)* [to] be stupid; be funny; be out of harmony”(Nelson 922). The Japanese have other distinctive cultural concepts such as UCHI (内) and SOTO (外), “inside” and

“outside” respectively, which are central concepts underlying the Japanese way of organizing human relationships, communicating, and constructing grammar (Makino, “Situated Meaning” 211; see also Makino, “*Uchi* and *Soto* as Cultural and Linguistic Metaphors” 29-64)¹⁷. However, whereas UCHI and SOTO can be applied to characters’ behaviors or dialogue, MA is a concept that can be applied to specific aspects of film style (i.e., editing, composition, and acting) as our future discussion will demonstrate.

Intensified Continuity

David Bordwell observes that Hollywood films produced after the 1960s adhere to an intensified cinematic style which favors rapid cutting, many close views, extreme variance of lens lengths (wide versus long), and more camera movement.

Close-ups and singles make the shots very legible. Rapid editing obliges the viewer to assemble discreet pieces of information, and it sets a commanding pace: look away and you might miss a key point. In the alternating close views, the viewer is promised something significant, or at least new, at each instant (Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity” 24).

Bordwell also notes a number of causal factors for *intensified continuity*. It may be due to advancements in production technology (i.e., smaller lightweight cameras, fine-cut film editing systems, and later digital editing); imitation of styles seen in television (i.e., MTV and music videos), foreign films, and other media; and the use of multiple cameras in

¹⁷ Japanese linguist Seiichi Makino explains: “Japanese people utilize the highly universal spatial and relational terms in their society [...] as a key organizational focus for Japanese self, social life, and language. *Uchi* is primarily a space for self (and for whomever self can empathize with) and *soto* for society, but the spatial concept is so situationally determined that the self and society relationship is highly fluid. ... *Uchi* [can be characterized] as a locus for engagement, knowledge sharedness, familiarity, informality, privacy, experience, control, and sacredness, and *soto* as a locus for detachment, knowledge

production which “will predispose filmmakers to cut often” (“Intensified Continuity” 23). However, two prominent reasons rise to the top. First, the industry desires to efficiently produce a film within limited time and budgetary constraints. Secondly, alternative takes allow for changes to a film’s story/pacing/performance/etc in post-production (“Intensified Continuity” 24).

Bordwell highlights a number of what he considers significant drawbacks to this style. Performers are typically locked in fixed positions, either sitting or standing, and deliver dialogue in isolated shots (singles) or over-the-shoulder (OTS) setups. Despite limiting actors’ movements, blatant mismatches of position, eyeline, and gesture become more prevalent and obvious. “Choppy cutting also subtly jars our sense of a smooth performance,” Bordwell says. Moreover, so many close-ups of actors’ faces leave little to no room for geography and viewers lose a sense of space (“THE DEPARTED: No Departure”).

Acting

Japanese and American film acting styles are ostensibly not all that different. They borrow from the same schools of performance, namely Western realist forms such as “method” acting. They embrace presentational styles in which film actors, especially when delivering dialogue, minimize body movements and perform in predetermined positions. And their techniques of displaying emotions are inverse reflections of their

non-sharedness, unfamiliarity, formality, and publicness, among others” (Makino, “Situating Meaning” 207-208).

respective cultural norms. We will explain the dissimilar principles or reasons for such methods.

In favor of obtaining single shots or close-ups of actors, Bordwell notes, today's actors are given two simplified staging options. The first, stand-and-deliver, is most common. "In the stand-and-deliver approach, which may in turn into a sit-and-deliver approach, the characters are shown taking up positions, usually in a master shot," he writes. "An axis of action governs the actors' orientations and eyelines, and the shots, however varied in angle, are taken from one side of the axis. Actors' movements are matched across cuts. As the scene develops, the shots tend to get closer to the performers, carrying us to the heart of the drama" (Figures Traced in Light 22). Bordwell says walk-and-talk, the second approach, provides more dynamic figure movement. "In the walk-and-talk option the characters are striding down the street, through an office, or along a corridor, usually toward the camera in a lengthy tracking shot," he writes. "Thanks to auteurist film criticism and increasingly lightweight cameras and handheld supports, the prolonged following shot became de rigueur for nearly every film" (Figures Traced in Light 29).

Proponents of American acting techniques have responded to the emphasis of closer views, advising performers to be more aware of close-ups and continuity¹⁸

¹⁸ Michael Caine admonishes actors: "Never smoke in a long shot. When the time comes for the close-up, where did you take that puff? When did you change hands? How long was the ash? Start getting complicated during the master, and the whole scene may go out the window when they come to the close-up. Time and time again you'll hear some actor who is desperate to be creative say, 'I'll undo my buttons while he's talking and then I'll do this and then I'll do that.' And when it's time for the close-up, the director will say, 'Where exactly do you do that?' And the actor will have to say, 'I don't know.' Then the master will have to be shot again." (65-66).

(Bernard 3-4; Comey 18-19; Haase 71-82). “Close-up acting requires the ability to listen and react quietly, subtly,” says Richard Blum (3-4). “Most scenes are broken down into many fragments, and the actors keep repeating the same lines and moves, both physical and emotional, with the camera demanding more and more intimate exposure as it comes in closer and closer,” says Haase (53). “The camera’s mobility and tight framing of faces, its ability to ‘give’ the focus of the screen to any player at any moment, also means that films tend to favor *reactions*,” says James Naremore (40).

The desire for realism and proficiency has led to controlled performances. American actors convey their characters using gestures, facial expressions, and vocal choices that could be swiftly interpreted and easily understood by the audience. They rely less on non-verbal performance to express subtle emotions, which may not be quickly legible to viewers. “Mannered acting,” affectations like hesitating, stuttering, winking or grimacing, is viewed as overacting and is believed to take the audience out of the film (Weston 58). Moreover, gestures and other bodily movements are kept to a minimum to make it easier for continuity editing.

Bordwell criticizes today’s performances, saying they lack “grace or emotional significance” and forfeit vibrant expressions (“Intensified Continuity” 25). However, Peter Chelsom commends Susan Sarandon’s “control” in Shall We Dance? particularly in the scene where Beverly calls off the private detective. On the verge of tears, she gives her we-need-a-witness-to-our-live speech¹⁹. “It’s not what actors show on you onscreen

¹⁹ Beverly says: “We need a witness to our lives. There are a billion people on the planet. I mean, what does any one life mean? But in marriage, you are promising to care about everything – the good things – bad things – the terrible things – mundane things. All of it. All the time, every day. You’re saying, ‘Your life

that's interesting, it's what they're hiding from you," Chelsom observes. "What someone like Susan does so well is create an emotion and then bottle it, bottle it, put a cap on it, cap on it, fight it, fight it, rather than push it" ("Commentary with Director Peter Chelsom"). Interestingly, although her eyes are teary, Beverly doesn't cry. This same control occurs later in the film when John finally confronts Beverly about keeping secrets from her. John's face appears to be wet. Has he been crying? We don't know. But, in a close-up shot, he says, "If I couldn't tell you that I was unhappy sometimes, it was because I didn't want to risk hurting the one person I treasure most." The film cuts to a close-up of Beverly, who is once again on the verge of crying. When she hears John say those words, her frown briefly turns into a smile. Cut back to John's close-up. "I'm sorry," he says then exits. Cut back to Beverly's close-up. She doesn't seem know how to react. Her eyes dart around. Again, she doesn't shed a tear. Interestingly, in this scene, John and Beverly are shown in separate close-ups and not in a two-shot. It reminded us of a particular question: "Why can't our directors sustain a fixed two-shot of the principals and let the actors carry the scene—not just with the lines they say but with the way they hold their bodies and move their hands and employ props?" (Bordwell, "THE DEPARTED: No Departure").

It is a common belief, in the West and in some parts of the East, that closer views of the face are supposed to stir feelings in viewers. So it is interesting to note that Japanese cinema in general does not rely on close-ups for emotional impact (Richie, A

will not go unnoticed, because I will notice it.' 'Your life will not go unwitnessed, because I will be your witness.'" (Shall We Dance?, 2004).

Hundred Years of Japanese Film 40). This is not to say there are no close-ups in Japanese film; there are. This is not to say the Japanese curtail their emotions to harmful effect; they do not. In fact, “the Japanese actually are a deeply emotional people,” Reischauer says, “but they strictly hide their emotions as much as possible” (138). This tendency has led the Japanese to make great distinctions between what one truly feeling inside (*hon'ne*) and what one professes in public (*tatemae*)²⁰. Because they are accustomed to “playing roles in life,” “hiding feelings,” and “counterfeit emotions,” as some observers notice, the Japanese possess “a certain facility in the art of acting, that ability to step outside oneself and create the semblance of an emotion not actually felt” (Richie and Anderson 397). “The effort to do this may account for their ubiquitous smiles in sorrow and embarrassment as well as pleasure,” Reischauer says (138). The Japanese just may have come to realize the face may not be true indicator of how one feels. Instead, overt actions and subtle body language become subtler gauges of motive and feelings.

Japanese actors may specialize in one of many acting styles, including “the highly formalized Kabuki, the conventionalized Shimpa, the naturalistic Shingeki, or various foreign acting styles, all the way from the Actors Studio ‘method’ to the display of personal eccentricities exhibited by some foreign film stars and scarcely deserving the name acting at all,” Richie and Anderson say (393). Japan’s best film actors, they add, come from the stage and have had Shingeki training.

²⁰ This distinction directly relates to the UCHI (“inside”) and SOTO (“outside”) dichotomy mentioned earlier.

The Shingeki (“New Theatre”) Movement, led by Kaoru Osanai in the early twentieth century, introduced Western realist forms such as Vsevolod Meyerhold’s biomechanics and the “method acting” of Konstantin Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theater to Japanese theatre (Cazdyn 131-135).²¹ Early advocates of Shingeki were highly critical of traditional drama’s stylized, unrealistic conventions and how these were transposed to cinema. One supporter said:

Why don’t Japanese filmmakers use close-ups? ... Why do Japanese films focus on a setting in which the actor looks like a tiny doll in motion against a vast background? ... I have seen Teijiro Tachibana [a man] playing the heroine in Resurrection and thought it interesting in the love duels between Katyusha and Nevdulov. In the New Theater, however, we must have actresses; a female impersonator spoils any sense of realism. The same is true in films. Only when these horrible *benshi* give way to music used to enhance artistic effect, will we have films which appeal to the intelligence of the spectator, and realize the potential of this medium. (McDonald, Japanese Classical Theater in Films 25)

Japanese actors have been accused of overacting and underacting. However, these indictments usually originate from critics adhering to a Western perspective of performance. We must view the situation from another standpoint. Though realism is of concern to Japanese performers, there is still a preoccupation with MA or a “dynamic balance between object and space, action and inaction, sound and silence, movement and rest” (Nitschke 56). Watching even the most ordinary Japanese film, we see the temporal structure of the Japanese performance grounded in the same principle of intervals found

²¹ Japanese stage director Terasaki Hironori reports: “*Shingeki* ravenously appropriated from Western theatre the Greek classics, Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Brecht, Ionesco, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Neil Simon, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, and so on. Important contemporary Japanese *shingeki* playwrights include Abe Kobo, Yashiro Seiichi, Yagi Shuichiro, Akimoto Matsuyo, and Kara Juro” (104).

in Noh, Kyogen, and Kabuki²². As Rowell notes, MA occurs “in the silences, negative spaces, and moments of nonaction” and we see these manifested in film performance. We see MA in ambiguous silences, when actors non-verbally express their characters’ psychological feelings. Negative spaces become readily apparent when we see actors caught or stuck between emotions or thoughts (i.e., portrayals of nervousness, clumsiness, puzzlement, awkwardness, and embarrassment). Moments of nonaction arise as poses, actions, or single words. All three may seem similar to Western “pauses, dramatic interruptions, and pregnant silences,” but as Rowell points out this is not the case. Americans view dramatic pauses as single highlights. Japanese performance, however, is a series of linked events or individual units, intervals within intervals²³, “prefixed and suffixed by moments of meaningful tension and concentration,” Rowell says (170). Consequently, depicting MA requires a certain amount of exaggeration, which can be easily seen as overacting and underacting.

MA-as-acting: Ambiguous Silence

As textual analysis of scenes from Shall We Dansu? reveals, in scenes of ambiguous silences, the actors non-verbally express their characters’ feelings. Their use of blank expressions alerts the audience to questions about the characters’ motives and

²² “Indeed, Komparu Kunio regards *noh* as no more, nor less, than the art of *ma*; the staging is meant to ‘create a constantly transmuting, transforming space [*ma*] of action’; the acting, to do ‘just enough to create the *ma* that is a blank space-time where nothing is done’; the music, to ‘exist in the negative, blank spaces generated by the actual sounds’; the dance, to acquire ‘the technique of non-movement’” (Nitschke 56). Referenced from Kunio Komparu’s The Noh Theatre: Principles and Perspectives. Tokyo: Weatherhill/Tankosha, 1981.

²³ “*Ma* is nested within *ma*, just as intervals are nested within larger intervals,” Rowell says (164).

causes them to ponder their feelings. In conjunction with the film's editing, a delicate ambiguity of meaning and character is achieved.

Early in Shall We Dansu?, we are given long, uninterrupted shots of Sugiyama. We see him blankly stare out windows (i.e., from his office and while riding the train). Our perception of Sugiyama is colored by the film's preface. In the original Japanese release, an anonymous voice briefly discusses the European perspective of ballroom dance. In the American release of the original, we hear Sugiyama describe the social climate in Japan in relation to dance and public displays of affection.²⁴ Unlike the narration in the original release, the narration in the American release paints an internal picture of Sugiyama's feelings and removes much of the ambiguity in Sugiyama's silences. We may feel he is already upset with Japanese society early in the film. However, it is late in the film when he becomes truly aware of his feelings and motives for his actions.

In the American remake, John too displays ambiguous silences. Scenes of John in the office and the train visually mirror those of Sugiyama. However, John's opening narration clues the audience into his feelings. Thus, John lacks full-fledged ambiguity. Moreover, Richard Gere allows John to smile at times, apparently reacting to his internal dialogue.

²⁴ See page 19 for full narration.

MA-as-acting: Negative Space

Again, as defined earlier, negative space refers not to a place but to manifesting moments within a span of thoughts, feelings, actions, and movements. We commonly see this when performers display the feeling of caught or being stuck between emotions or thoughts.

After Sugiyama discovers Aoki is a dancer, they have drinks at a restaurant. Sugiyama adopts a very attentive pose. His body language and facial expression are meant to show that he is actively listening to Aoki. When Aoki says he has reached the third level of the Japan Amateur Dance Association, Sugiyama looks at him in admiration. However, we do not know whether Sugiyama really feels this way about Aoki's achievement; he is merely acting according to expected behavior. When Aoki asks Sugiyama why he started dancing, Sugiyama is caught off guard. Sugiyama stumbles over his words and his face shows he is stuck between emotions. "For my health," he finally says. "That's what they all say," Aoki replies. Aoki has left Sugiyama off the hook and Sugiyama's behavior returns to "normal". Both the actors' performance style and the film's editing work together to portray and evoke the negative space and richness of performance and meaning associated with MA.

Ma-as-acting: Moments of Non-action

In terms of acting, then, moments of non-action are manifested, heightened, or exaggerated pauses which break up the flow of actors' natural movement and become a

series of poses. We make a careful distinction between Japanese moments of non-action and American dramatic pauses. In the latter, actors hold a singular pose in order to have an emotional impact. However, Japanese performance is “a series of individual units—poses, actions, single words” (Rowell 170).

In Japanese Shall We Dansu?, Sugiyama has difficulty learning the half-turn dance step. His movements are disharmonious with others. Sugiyama’s actions break down into a series of miscalculated, clumsy moves. Showing his frustration, Sugiyama places his hand on his head before attempting another step. He holds this pose for a few seconds, apparently contemplating his movements or trying to gain his bearings, before finally returning to a simple standing position.

We see another exaggerated display of negative space when Toyoko pauses after she rips off Aoki’s wig at the dance studio. Apparently in shock, Toyoko holds the wig above her head in a frozen pose for the next 20 seconds. Toyoko’s pause/pose ends when Mai enters the room. Aoki, on the other hand, has a series of shorter pauses. First, he turns to Sugiyama and pauses. Second, he runs away and pauses/poses in front of a picture of Donny Burns. And, lastly, when Mai enters, he freezes/poses, covering his head.

In Shall We Dance? (2004), we see examples of American dramatic pause when Link loses his wig during the dance lesson, after John argues with his wife, and after John apologizes to Beverly. These poses come at the end of flurried movement rather than breaking up the entire action in the scenes as a series of poses. Furthermore, dramatic

pauses do occur in the Japanese film. We see this when Sugiyama's first session of dance hall and after Aoki is mocked have certain dramatic pause.

Composition

Scholars have commented on the distinguishing characteristics between Western and Japanese use of space in pictorial art. In early Western art, "the human being was the measure of all things, and space was something to be dominated by man," notes Kathe Geist ("Playing with Space" 284). This philosophy was incorporated into two-dimensional designs which were not only geometrical, centered, and symmetrical; they also usually contained human figures placed in the center of the composition. By medieval times, a Christian God had become the subject of most paintings, becoming "the measurement and the measurer" of pictorial space.

Nature was a secondary subject in Western painting and was usually rendered with an Aristotelian, scientific scrutiny. This collaboration between science and art led, during the Renaissance, to the development of one-point perspective, which soon replaced the multipoint perspective systems through which narrative space up to that time had been less convincingly created. (Geist, "Playing with Space" 284)

In addition, Renaissance art's goal of depth included depictions of light and shadow, creating the illusion of three-dimensional models in a two-dimensional plane.

Richie observes two ways in which Western film was influenced by Western painting:

First, the specific source for the emotive power of film imagery, seen in "the distinctive rendering of light by the painters of the North European Renaissance"; and second the painters' "ways of composing the space in

pictures to suggest and invite psychological motion.” (Richie, “Influence of Traditional Aesthetics on Japanese Film” 156)

In contrast Japanese visual style is flat, two-dimensional, lacking the play of light and shadow that creates the illusion of three dimensions, and yet the image can be either symmetrically or asymmetrically balanced. “The presentation of a unified view is one of the elements in Japanese culture—the garden, ikebana, the stage—and it is not surprising that an acute compositional consciousness should be part of the visual style of the country,” Richie observes (A Hundred Years of Japanese Film 59; see also Bordwell, History of Film Style 109).

Too much, however, symmetry was considered a detriment to the spectators’ imaginations. Thus, as Geist observes, the Japanese artist depicted religious concepts of MA (interval) and MU (void) in paintings as active design elements (“Playing with Space” 284). “Nature contains a lot of vacant as well as unseen spaces, and traditional painters apparently felt no needs to either lay bare or fill up all this space when rendering it two-dimensionally,” Geist writes (“Playing with Space” 284). Chang notes the prominent use of clouded areas, which seem “unfinished as compared to the rest of the picture.” “This requires the observer to complete the painting with his own imagination before visualizing the entire painting,” Chang writes (18).

Here we must make an important distinction. MA is typically thought of as empty space. But as Geist noticed, it is MU (無) which implies empty space, void, or nothingness. Again, MA is an interval or “the natural distance between two or more things existing in a continuity” (Isozaki). At one time, MA was a unit of measurement in

architectural design. And, as Richard Pilgrim points out, MA still indicates a relationship between objects in space.

By extension *ma* also means “among.” In the compound *ningen* (“human being”), for example, *ma* (read *gen* here) implies that persons (*nin*, *hito*) stand within, among, or in relationship to others. As such, the word *ma* clearly begins to take on a relational meaning—a dynamic sense of standing in, with, among, or between. Related to this it also carries an experiential connotation, since to be among persons is to interact in some dynamic way. (Pilgrim 56)

Japanese aesthetic did not absorb the one-point perspective which was developed during the western European Renaissance. “The perception of space as something infinitely divisible and homogeneous has not developed,” Isozaki says. “Even landscapes and other three-dimensional scenes are apprehended as lacking depth and exist on a single plane in the picture” (*MA: Space-Time in Japan*). The illusion of depth is created by “superimposing one form on another,” or placing one object in front of another, rather than through a rendering of light and shade.

Whereas American film tends to use light and shadow to create the illusion of a three-dimensional image, the Japanese film generally uses full, flat lighting in its two-dimensionality. In a number of scenes, we see how in the American remake is supposed to mirror the Japanese original, but we note see how they differ conceptually. Particularly, both men ride commuter trains to and from work. Natural light is used in both sequences. However, in *Shall We Dance?*, John is lit in the typical three-point/three-dimensional lighting system, which makes him stand out from the other passengers and background. In the Japanese original, Sugiyama is lit [from] one light source, which produces a shadow on the left side of his face. This shadow does not give a sense of

depth; rather it is a dark area of the screen. Under the full lighting, Sugiyama does not stand out from other passengers and his surroundings. This graphically represents the cultural context to which he belongs and in which he is placed.

Editing

In general, Hollywood and Japanese film styles employ the same continuity editing techniques which promote a sense of continuity or logical coherence between shots. Temporal and spatial continuity can be achieved a number of ways, particularly using establishing shots, obeying the 180-degree rule, ensuring eyeline equivalence, and matching action between cuts. However, Japanese film style is known for its slow pacing²⁵ and its flagrant use of discontinuous editing techniques which violate continuity editing rules. Whether MA has influenced these and other oblique editing choices seen in Japanese cinema has yet to be fully determined. By examining previous connection between MA and film editing as well as other MA concepts, we attempt to establish a definitive MA-as-editing principle.

²⁵ In comparison to recent American films which employ more rapid editing than before. "Between 1930 and 1960, most Hollywood feature films, of whatever length, contained between 300 and 700 shots, so the average shot length (ASL) hovered around eight to eleven seconds," Bordwell explains. "In 1999 and 2000, the ASL of a typical film in any genre was likely to run three to six seconds" ("Intensified Continuity" 16-17). He notes how fast cutting is principally applied to shot/reverse-shot exchanges. "Editors tend to cut at every line and insert more reaction shots than we would find in the period 1930-1960," Bordwell writes ("Intensified Continuity" 17). He blames Hollywood's excessive editing for "blatant mismatches of position, eyeline, and gesture" and "choppy cutting [which] also subtly jars our sense of a smooth performance" ("THE DEPARTED: No Departure"). A similar study of ASL in Japanese films has yet to be done. However, Bob Davis did record the ASLs for three Takeshi Kitano films (*Boiling Point* (1990), *A Scene at the Sea* (1991), and *Sonatine* (1993)) as 13.5, 14.5, and 12 respectively ("Takeshi Kitano").

Scholars by and large connect MA to Yasujiro Ozu's "pillow-shot"²⁶ (also known as "still life," "empty shot," and "curtain shot"). In Noel Burch's estimation of Yasujiro Ozu's use of the technique, he claimed, "These shots never contribute to the progress of the narrative proper, they often refer to a character or a set, presenting or re-presenting it out of narrative context" (161). Instead, "[they are] invariably presented as outside the diegesis, as a pictorial space on another plane of 'reality,'" Burch wrote (161). Geist disagrees with Burch, however. "The so-called empty shots frequently have a narrative or symbolic significance, but one that is by no means readily apparent," she says ("Playing with Space" 287). In her essay "Yasujiro Ozu: Notes on a Retrospective," Geist contests Burch's idea that certain shots suspended the diegetic flow. She notes how Ozu subverts the rules of classical continuity, for example, showing the point-of-view shots before shots of the onlooker. "What Burch calls pillow shots, which he sees as lying strictly outside the narrative flow, are often narrative shots out of order, small eddies in the narrative flow, which the viewer must re-order in his mind," Geist posits (5).

A number of Japanese directors have been said to use "pillow-shots." Hirokazu Kore'eda's²⁷ "pillow-shots" (still-lives of landscapes and objects but not people) are supposedly similar to Ozu's work (Brian; Marran; Ebert). Mamoru Oshii²⁸ not only uses

²⁶ A Japanese journalist used this term when making an analogy between Ozu's intermediate scenes and pillow-words (*makura kotoba*) or pivot words (*kakekotoba*) which are used as decorative filler in Japanese poetry (*waka*). There may be a connection between Ozu's love of *renga*, collaborative or linked *haiku* poetry, and his use of "pillow-shots." "Since *renga* is similar to film editing, I found it a good learning experience," Ozu once said (Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film* 59).

²⁷ Kore'eda is the director of *However* (1991), *Lessons from a Calf* (1991), *August Without Him* (1994), *Maborosi* (1995), *Without Memory* (1996), *Afterlife* (1998), *Distance* (2001), *Nobody Knows* (2004), *Hana yori mo naho* (2006), and *Even If You Walk and Walk* (2008).

²⁸ Oshii is the director of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), *Avalon* (2001), and *Amazing Lives of the Fast Food Grifters* (2006).

“pillow-shots,” he creates “pillow sequences [which] can sometimes advance the narrative,” Richard Suchenski says. “These dialogue-free sequences are filled with shots of spaces and characters that, while only tangentially related to the main narrative, encapsulate the overall thematic and aesthetic concerns of the given film, recasting them in an abstract, symbolic key” (“Mamoru Oshii”). Thus, it seems likely that a MA-as-editing principle takes many forms; it may not assume one definitive form.

Pacing in Japanese films can be seen as an application of *michiyuki*, a MA concept which coordinates movement from one place to another. “When one moves through a space, the space is divided invisibly by one’s movements and breathing,” Isozaki says (MA: Space-Time in Japan). In Kabuki plays, it is the “[dramatized] process of going from one place to another, in which space is considered as a time-flow perceived through the characters’ experience” (Isozaki). *Michiyuki* is also applied elsewhere. In gardens, the space between stepping stones determine the walker’s rhythm. The Tokaido, the ancient road connecting Kyoto and Edo (present day Tokyo) was punctuated by fifty-three stops. “These way-stations, resting places for the travelers who walked along the Tokaido, were placed so that each stop marked a point from which to view some special feature of the landscape,” Isozaki says (MA: Space-Time in Japan). If we transpose this reasoning to film editing, we can see shots or scenes as figurative stepping stones in a path. The filmmakers (the path’s designers) not only want to guide audiences (walkers) but reward them with moments of reflection (vistas).

With all this in mind, we provide a tentative two-fold definition of the MA-as-editing principle. *It is a shot or series of shots which serves as a pause or break between*

intervals of shots or scenes. Pauses can be shots of people, objects, or landscapes literally or symbolically related to the narrative, but they do not have to be. Their functions are uniquely separate from a cutaway (a shot used to solve editorial errors such as a jump cut), or a shot used for time-space transition, or a montage (a sequence of shots that condense or expand narrative time). We see examples of MA-as-editing in Shall We Dansu? when Toyoko dances by herself and Aoki hides behind a pillar. *The MA-as-editing principle is also series of intervals, bordered by repeating or similar shots, which create editing rhythms.* We see this when Sugiyama first learns to dance. Throughout the scene, his attention is divided between instruction and Mai.

Conversation Editing

Editing of conversations is typically handled in shot/reverse-shot patterns that adhere to the 180-degree rule of continuity editing. Basically, the rule implies that characters in the same scene should always have the same left/right relationship to each other to avoid ambiguity or confusion. If the camera passes over the imaginary axis connecting the two subjects, it is called crossing the line. At times, Japanese films veer away from this rule, employing a 360-degree approach²⁹ to shooting a scene. The camera is often situated on or near the axis line, creating point-of-view or near-point-of-view shots. At times, the axis line is not only crossed, it is redefined by the actors' movement

²⁹ Yasujiro Ozu is often credited the first to use this as a technique in the silent film era, but this claim may be erroneous. "Other than Ozu's films, there is no data on contemporary Japanese style: norms for Japanese films have not yet been determined, and because so few Japanese films have survived (particularly from the

and staging. (As yet, there has not been a wide study of this technique.) This technique is not meant to disorient viewers; rather it seems to establish spatial connections between multiple subjects in a scene, according to principles of MA:

By extension *ma* also means “among.” In the compound *ningen* (“human being”), for example, *ma* (read *gen* here) implies that persons (*nin*, *hito*) stand within, among, or in relationship to others. As such, the word *ma* clearly begins to take on a relational meaning—a dynamic sense of standing in, with, among, or between. Related to this it also carries an experiential connotation, since to be among persons is to interact in some dynamic way. (Pilgrim 56)

Shall We Dansu? breaks away from the 180-degree rule at times, reflecting and expressing the Japanese principle of MA in terms of how shots are staged to display the “dynamic” relationship between actors rather than a visual illusion of continuity (Pilgrim 56). We see Aoki and Sugiyama in a restaurant after Sugiyama discovers Aoki at dance studio. The men talk about why they dance. In one long shot, screen direction is established. Aoki is looking screen left and Sugiyama is looking screen right. We see they are in the corner, as if hiding away from the other patrons who are quite lively. In the next shot, screen directions changes. Now, Aoki is looking screen right and Sugiyama is looking screen left. The axis line has been crossed. But we are now presented more closer, intimate views of the men as they talk. Their conversation is soon disrupted. A young woman passes by and Aoki takes notice of her. The film cuts to a two-shot of Aoki and Sugiyama which once again crosses the axis line. Aoki is looking screen left and Sugiyama is looking screen right. The succeeding two-shot is a reverse angle of the

1920s and 1930s) any norms that did exist may well be unrecoverable,” Matt Hauske observes (“Ozu, Sound and Style”).

previous two-shot. A medium shot of Aoki allows us to see him return to the conversation with Sugiyama. It also continues the connection between Aoki and the young woman, who takes off her shoes and joins others at another table in the background. For a third time, the axis line is crossed; once again Aoki is looking screen right and Sugiyama is looking screen left. To an American viewer, this constant change of screen direction can become confusing. Thus, the American remake handles this scene in a simpler fashion by strict adhering to the 180-degree rule. In every close-up, medium, and two-shot, John is always looking screen right and Link is always looking screen left.

To sum up, cinematic styles have been and continue to be subject to cultural influence. Acting, camera composition, and editing have been examined through concepts specific to each culture, in this case MA (time-space) and intensified continuity. MA has an illustrious history in performance and composition as they have been transposed through centuries of art forms. Its relation to the more recent art of film and film editing, on the other hand, still needs to be fully examined, and this chapter has provided a first step. Although intensified continuity is a *a posteriori* theory, it outlines what has been happening to American cinematic style since the 1960s. Whereas both cultures embrace similar presentational styles (where actors perform in a small space), compositions, and editing techniques, long-held perspectives (religious, philosophical, or scientific) ultimately shape the construction of filmed stories.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The recent Hollywood trend to remake Japanese films is alarming to some viewers, critics, and film scholars. Some see this inclination, along with Hollywood's previous penchant for remaking French films, as the homogenization of unique cultures. Laura Grindstaff believes that American remakes are "about the power of one country to remake the 'other' in its own image" (301). Whether her remarks apply to American remakes of Japanese films remains to be decided. Instead of focusing on certain political and/or social ideologies, we decided to follow Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos's admonition for cultural enrichment by juxtaposing an original film produced for one particular culture with a remake crafted for another culture. For our analysis, we used Joseph Champoux's relatively neutral observational method to examine how the scenario and production of Shall We Dansu? was retooled as Shall We Dance? to reflect American cultural norms and meet American expectations for film.

In Chapters 2-4, we highlighted what is gained and what is lost in the remake process, focusing on issue of social conditioning (groupism, individuality, gender roles, and marriage) and modes of cinematic expressions (time-space MA versus intensified continuity). Just as groupism is associated with Japanese identity, individuality is aligned with American identity. Both societies Japanese and American wrestle with these ideologies and their influences, and these forces shape our daily lives—and our cultural products and representations—whether we ascribe to these ideologies personally. In American culture and film, verbal communication is prioritized as the means to maintain a strong connection in marital life. In Japanese society, the sympathetic communication

style of *sassuru* influences people's lifestyle. Therefore, character construction and even film style changes from Shall We Dansu? to Shall We Dance? in adapting the Japanese original to an American cultural context.

The cinematic style of the American remake follows David Bordwell's intensified continuity, an *a posteriori* theory on Hollywood filmmaking production which includes rapid edit and short shot durations. Bordwell's views point to Western filmmakers' current penchant for certain cinematic principles and indicate what audiences are used to and expect from the cinema. Specifically, American viewers expect faster pacing in the story and have criticized foreign films for their slowness.³⁰ Japanese audiences, on the other hand, expect their films to have dense and ambiguous storytelling and cinematic style. Moreover, concepts like MA (meaning "space," "time," "interval") have an arching impact on all aspects of Japanese film stories and production. The Japanese perceive life as a series of intervals and are used to performances hinged on poses and ambiguity.

Western critics, scholars, and filmmakers acknowledge the existence but dismiss the importance of cultural concepts such as MA on Japanese film style. Moreover, Japanese filmmakers and film scholars need to take a stronger interest in the homegrown cultural foundations for cinematic art forms. The first steps in moving forward is not measuring Japanese cinema by Western standards and creating ways of analyzing Japanese film according to its culture. There needs to be bottom-up or even top-down empirical examinations of the key elements of film style (i.e., editing, cinematography,

³⁰ Based on the screening research of Shall We Dansu? by Miramax, 50 percent of American viewers felt that the film's pace dragged in spots, and 56 percent of them felt that the length of the film is too long (Suo 33).

sound), perhaps a study similar to that which led to Bordwell's intensified continuity.

Once such studies have been performed, we can strengthen the links between Japanese cinema and other art forms.

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APPENDIX A: Joseph Champoux's Observational Method

I briefly describe the film, the selected scenes, and give some discussion questions. The film description contained background information for introducing the scenes to a class. Estimated start point, end point, and running time appear as start, stop, and time. These numbers appear between parentheses or square brackets. The film descriptions also include discussion questions that I suggest for these scenes.

Sabrina (1954)

(Black & White, 1954, 1 hour 53 minutes, NR)

(Publisher: Paramount Pictures Corporation)

A refreshing comedy that follows a chauffeur's daughter as she develops from adolescence to charming maturity. She is in love with the playboy son of the wealthy Long Island family for whom her father works. The playboy ignores her. This changes during a stay in Paris. France stuns the playboy and motivates his romantic pursuit. The playboy's older brother also pursues her to protect her from his brother's clutches.

Scenes (Start: 0:01:50; Stop: 0:10:40; 9 minutes)

These scenes start after the opening credits with a shot of the Larrabee's Long Island house. Sabrina's (Audrey Hepburn) voiceover says, 'Once upon a time, on the North shore of Long Island some thirty miles from New York, there lived a small girl on a large estate.' They end after Sabrina says good night to her father through a window. She returns to her bedroom and closes the door.

Questions

- What were the characteristic sex roles during the 1950s in the United States?
- What were the characteristics male-female relationship during that time?
- Do those sex roles and relationships appear strange to you now?

Sabrina (1995)

(Colour, 1995, 2 hours 7 minutes, PG)

(Publisher: Paramount Pictures Corporation)

A charming remake of the original 1954 film. The story line is almost the same as the original but with modern twists. A chauffeur's daughter is in love with the playboy son of the wealthy Long Island family for whom her father works. The playboy ignores her. After returning from Paris, the playboy and his older brother both romantically pursue her. The older

brother has no serious intentions. He only wants to prevent a business deal from failing.

Scenes (Start: 0:08:40, Stop: 0:15:33; 7 minutes)

The scenes begin with an aerial shot of the Larrabee mansion. Sabrina's (Julia Ormond) voiceover says, 'Once upon a time, on the North shore of Long Island, not far from New York, there was a very, very large mansion. Almost a castle. Where there lived a family by the name of Larrabee.' They end after Sabrina says good night to her father and returns to her bedroom.

Questions

- What differences in sex roles do these scenes show compared to the 1954 version of the film?
- Were there differences in male-female relationships in the two versions of the film?
- Did you note any other differences between the two sets of scenes?

Analysis

The opening scenes of both versions of Sabrina unfold in about the same way but have different content. In the original Sabrina (1954), Mr. Larrabee (the father) is alive and part of the family interaction. In the remake, Mrs. Larrabee is a widow and an executive in the family's company.

Sabrina's character shows differences in the two films. In the original version, Sabrina goes to cooking school in Paris, as did her mother. In the remake, she goes to Paris as a photographer's assistant for Vogue magazine.

A second difference appears in the presentation of the female character David Larrabee wants to seduce. She is a giggle debutante in the original film and a sophisticated, confident woman in the remake. The differences in these scenes show changes in American culture over the forty years. (Champoux 212-213)