Shakespeare, Digeridoos, and Samurai Cowboys: Remixing National and Cultural Identities in *Sukiyaki Western Django*

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In the 21st century, pop culture has gone global, and it is taking audiences with it. Thanks to the advancement of communication technologies, audiences around the world have access to an increasing amount of media and popular culture, including much that originates from outside their own national and cultural borders. As such, audiences appropriate and assimilate national and cultural signifiers from around the world into their own national and personal identities. According to Mark Poster, cities and neighborhoods tend to be defined by particular ethnic groupings, but mass media can destabilize local customs, making people more aware of other ways of life and socialization (751). Producers of mass culture artifacts also appropriate national and cultural signifiers from around the world, which they then recontextualize into new hybridized contexts that contain elements of the original identities but remain separate from them at the same time.

The film *Sukiyaki Western Django* (Takashi Miike, 2007) serves as a prime example of the phenomenon described above, because it depicts a hybridized transcultural identity created through the act of appropriating, remixing, and recontextualizing no fewer than three separate and distinct cultural/national identities. The term transcultural (or, more accurately, transculturation) was first coined in 1947 by Fernando Ortiz. He argued that transculturation was a better descriptor for the process of acculturation

because the "result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them" (103). Transnational, meanwhile, refers to the act of crossing or extending national boundaries, and this idea particularly applies to cinema, which has become increasingly transnational in the early part of the 21st century. Given that *Sukiyaki Western Django* (henceforth *SWD*) contains elements of at least three different national identities, it embodies both concepts. As Vivian P. Y. Lee observes, the film "exemplifies the complex entwinement of film cultures in global cinema today" (153). Such entwinement is increasingly common in the postmodernist media landscape of the 21st century, but more than most films *SWD* functions as a purely transcultural text largely because of how it remixes and recontextualizes national and cultural identities along with elements of film cultures.

Sukiyaki is a stew made up of many different ingredients, much like how director Takashi Miike's film features a variety of cultural and filmic elements. Equal parts samurai film and Spaghetti Western, *SWD* contains elements of Japanese, American, and Italian national and cultural identities. Thus, the film puts a new spin on an old cinematic paradigm wherein directors remix elements of other films to create something new. In this case, Miike remixes and recontextualizes cinematic notions of national and cultural identities to create a new hybridized transcultural identity that reflects 21st century globalization. Miike conforms to Jim Smith and D.K. Holm's notion of the "director as DJ," but rather than simply remixing filmic signifiers into a new context, *SWD* also remixes and recontextualizes national and cultural identities via the language of cinema itself. From this process, Miike created a film that challenges and transcends notions of national borders, colonialism and cultural imperialism, because the national and cultural identities all exist onscreen more or less equally in *SWD*.

American National Identity and The Western Genre

No cinematic genre exemplifies the American national identity quite like the Western. Michael Coyne asserts that the Western represents "the quintessentially American melodrama" (2). This assertion is supported by the fact that the Western has been a part of the United States' cinematic landscape since the medium's earliest days. For instance, one of American cinema's earliest existing narrative films, *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903), is a Western. Similarly, genuine cowboys such as Tim McCoy and Civil War veterans like General Nelson A. Miles served as advisers and actors on early Western films (Langman xiii), providing a connection between American history and the myth of America produced by Hollywood. While Western films draw from historical fact, they nevertheless depict an idealized and often mythologized version of the westward expansion of the United States, at once creating and reinforcing an idealized version of the American national identity.

   With over a century of reinforcement via popular culture, the national and cultural identity of the United States has become synonymous with images of cowboys wearing white hats and riding horses into battle against the twin evils of bandits in black hats and rampaging hordes of Native Americans decorated in face paint and feathered headdresses. According to Coyne, several American political figures have attempted to court the favor of American citizens by appropriating Hollywood's image of the rugged cowboy. Coyne's examples include George H. W. Bush showing off his cowboy boots while on the campaign trail in 1992, Bill Clinton naming *High Noon* (Fred Zinneman, 1952) as his favorite movie in interviews, and, most notably, Ronald Reagan's almost total appropriation of Western imagery into his own personal identity (2). Even the more recent presidents have engaged in such appropriation and reinforcement; like Reagan, George W. Bush crafted a public persona

based largely on the cowboy myth, while Barack Obama frequently donned a cowboy hat on the campaign trail in an effort to gain favor with conservative voters. Coyne argues that examples such as these illustrate and reinforce the close links between Western iconography and the American national identity. Hollywood and other cultural gatekeepers then package and market this identity, and subsequently export it to other nations and cultures outside of the United States in the form of films, television programs, comic books, and novels.

Remixing the American West

Herbert Schiller contends that American mass culture represents a form of global imperialism, because it often invades and imposes itself on the popular culture of other nations. Jane Stadler points out that this process is not a one-way model, but rather that cultural interplay "suggests movement from a pure cultural form to something increasingly hybrid and devalued" (685). The Western represents possibly the perfect vehicle for transmitting messages about the American national identity to other cultures, due to the genre's association with the American national identity, albeit in a heavily mythologized form. This notion of national identity sometimes becomes appropriated by people from nations outside of the United States, and this can result in the creation of hybridized transcultural identities that contain aspects of both cultures, but remain separate and distinct from either of the original identities. For instance, Andrew C. McKevitt argues that non-Japanese fans of Japanese anime often appropriate and assimilate Japanese cultural signifiers into their own individual and cultural identities through the act of engaging with anime texts.

Similarly, producers of mass culture artifacts frequently appropriate national and cultural signifiers from around the world, which they then remix and recontextualize into new hybridized transcultural identities that

contain elements of the original identities but remain separate from them at the same time. Rennett argues that directors increasingly appropriate and recontextualize their filmic inspirations into something new and different, much like a DJ remixes music samples. Rennett contends that Smith and Holm's concept of the "director as DJ" especially applies to the directors of the French New Wave and the Hollywood Renaissance, as these were cinematic movements "comprised of practicing cinephiles, individuals with a strong affection for cinematic history" (406). Rennett cites Quentin Tarantino as a prime example of a "director as DJ," but he acknowledges that such activity has become increasingly common in the 21st century, a time when intertextuality marks a vast array of films and television series.

Japanese director Akira Kurosawa also engaged in a type of intercultural cinematic appropriation; Kurosawa remixed stylistic techniques used by Hollywood stalwarts such as John Ford and Howard Hawks, and applied them to films like *Seven Samurai* (1954) and *Yojimbo* (1961), both of which exemplified the Japanese cultural identity. Similarly, starting in the early 1960s, the national cinemas of several European nations openly appropriated the generic tropes and signifiers associated with the Western, as evidenced by the rise of Westerns produced in countries like Germany and Italy. Even the former Soviet Union got into the game, producing a handful of "Red Westerns" or "Easterns." With films like *White Sun of the Desert* (Vladimir Motyl, 1969), *The Seventh Bullet* (Ali Khamraev, 1972) and *At Home Among Strangers, A Stranger at Home* (Nikita Mikhalkov, 1974), Soviet filmmakers attempted to marry the "traditional Soviet and Revolutionary adventure film and the equally traditional American genre of Westerns" (Riabchikova 228). This tendency to remix and recontextualize the Western genre becomes particularly interesting when considering the various levels of cultural appropriation that occur within each text. For example, *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964) is a Western produced

in Italy, but is ostensibly a remake of the Japanese film *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961), which was itself inspired by the novels *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Glass Key* (1931), both written by American author Dashiell Hammett. Thus, an Italian director appropriated the cinematic notion of American national identity while simultaneously remaking a Japanese film that is itself a loose adaptation of two American novels. The result is a film that remixes and recontextualizes all of these national identities into a distinct hybridized transcultural identity.

In the early part of the 21st century, other nations have produced their own Westerns that appropriate the tropes and signifiers of the American national identity and recontextualize them into entirely new hybridized transcultural identities. Such films include *Tears of the Black Tiger* (Thailand, Wisit Sasanatieng, 2000), *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (South Korea, Kim Jee-woon, 2008), *Blueberry* (France, Jan Kounen, 2004), *The Proposition* (Australia, John Hillcoat, 2005), and *Yahsi Bati: The Ottoman Cowboys* (Turkey, Ömer Faruk Sorak, 2010). The directors of each of these films could be considered a "director as DJ," because they all appropriate elements of filmic and cultural signifiers and remix or recontextualize them onscreen. Yet, of all these international Westerns produced since 2000, only *SWD* truly melds aspects of the American national identity with those of other national identities (such as Japanese and Italian) to create a hybridized transcultural identity that reflects the impact of 21st century globalization.

Transnational/Transcultural Identity in Japanese Film

Darrell William Davis asserts that after World War II, the Japanese national identity was represented cinematically by the monumental style. Rooted in the propaganda films of the 1930s, the monumental style was a response to prewar Japanese cinema, which was highly Westernized and existed on the cusp of Japan's emergence as a modernized and

industrialized nation. The monumental style canonized the past to present a uniquely Japanese national identity, one based on traditional Japanese cultural aesthetics that emphasized hierarchical family dynamics that followed the patriarchal structure of bushido, or the way of the warrior. Yet, as Davis notes, the intent of these films becomes complicated when considering that the technology used to make them was developed primarily in European nations, and Japanese cinematic techniques were appropriated largely from a Western (read: Hollywood) stylistic idiom.

While Japanese filmmakers of the era utilized Western technology and cinematic techniques, they nevertheless conveyed thoroughly Japanese messages meant to create and reinforce a Japanese national and/or cultural identity rooted in tradition and nativism whereby "the institutionalized production methods were specific to Japanese social customs" (Russell 24). Catherine Russell explains that culturally specific gender dynamics, personnel hierarchies, financial decisions, low-tech production methods and even pre-production drinking rituals distinguished the Japanese film industry from its Hollywood counterpart. Andrew Yang, however, argues this national identity arose "through friction; it is only through such subversions that greater inclusion and change may occur" (447). This idea recalls Stuart Hall's contention that identity is only truly defined in relation to the Other. Indeed, much of Japan's cinematic history has been defined by various frictions or tensions, such as those between Eastern production methods and Western production technology. Thus, the Japanese national identity has long been defined in relation to various Others, from cultures to time periods.

Russell, however, argues that Japanese classical cinema already constitutes a sort of transnational cinema in and of itself, and thus points to the existence of a transcultural, globalized identity. She asserts that new contexts of reception such as art house cinemas, theaters dedicated to international cinema, television broadcasts, and the advent of DVD have marked the Japanese cinematic identity as unstable and uncanny (30). In

cinematic terms, these new historically delocated contexts of reception have rendered the Japanese national identity fluid and mutable. This mutability will only increase as communication technologies continue to advance and open up even more contexts of reception, such as digital downloads and online streaming services like Netflix and Hulu. Furthermore, this new context of a mutable cinematic identity applies to other national cinemas, not just that of Japan, and the lines between national cinematic styles will become increasingly blurred as long as communication technologies continue to advance and allow for the bridging of different cultures. As Russell writes, "Within a transnational model, local histories of theatrical representation might be seen to cross boundaries, languages, and cultures precisely with the cinema as its narrative language" (32). A film like *SWD* is constructed in such a way that it actively crosses cultural and linguistic boundaries while existing firmly within the context of cinematic rather than cultural or national language. Indeed, such films point to the creation of new hybridized transcultural identities that directly result from the forces of globalization and the spread of mass culture.

Olivia Khoo notes that a film like *SWD* "complicates the boundaries of national cinema" (92), and she argues that both the global and regional reception and the circulation of these films represents an important factor in the creation of a new category of Asian film, as newer films like *SWD* were created with a global, rather than local, audience in mind. Yet, by positioning *SWD* within this broad category of Asian cinema, Khoo downplays the film's significance within the specific discourses surrounding both Japanese cinema and the idea of a Japanese national identity. More importantly, such positioning appears to ignore how the Japanese national identity becomes recontextualized when it encounters other cinematic conceptions of national identities and how those identities in turn become similarly recontextualized when they encounter the cinematic conception of the Japanese national identity. Furthermore, while

Khoo acknowledges the film's multiculturalism, she does not consider how this attempt to appeal to a globalized audience points to the creation of a new type of a hybridized transcultural cinematic identity that results from 21st century globalization.

A textual analysis of *SWD* reveals how a "director as DJ" like Takashi Miike appropriates elements from mass culture texts produced both inside and outside the borders of his own national and cultural identity, and remixes and recontextualizes them to create a hybridized transcultural identity. The next section examines how the elements of Miike's film compare to those found in Westerns produced in the United States and Italy. Additionally, the analysis also reveals how *SWD* recontextualizes elements of the traditional Japanese national identity, and then combines them with the other national identities Miike has appropriated. This analysis reveals how Miike appropriates different national identities and then remixes and recontextualizes them into a globalized, transcultural context to create a hybridized transcultural identity.

Hybridized Transcultural Identity in Sukiyaki Western Django

In *SWD*, an unnamed gunman rides into Yuta, Nevada, a rundown mining town controlled by two rival gangs, the Genji (whites) and the Heike (reds). The gunman wants to find the Heike gold rumored to have been buried there several years back, but he quickly learns that he can earn more money by playing the two gangs against one another. With the help of some of the townsfolk, including Ruriko (aka the fabled female gunfighter known as Bloody Benten) and her grandson, the mute Heihachi, the gunman soon puts his plan in motion. When he falls for the beautiful but tragic Shizuka, however, the gunman soon loses his focus, and the vicious Boss Yoshitsune of the Genji clan jumps at the chance to take out this new rival.

To understand how *SWD* appropriates, remixes, and recontextualizes the American National identity as established by the Western genre, it is first important to define the Western by identifying the genre's tropes and conventions. These include, but are not limited to: Stetsons (aka cowboy hats), usually of the white and black variety to signify good guys and bad guys respectively; horses, stagecoaches, and/or covered wagons; desert vistas filled with scrub grass and tumbleweeds; tribes of savage or noble Native Americans (routinely referred to as Indians); frontier towns with ramshackle buildings; and hardened men wearing six shooters at their hips. Occasionally, such films also include depictions of emerging technologies, such as telegraph poles and steam trains, or even automobiles. While none of these generic tropes and signifiers are exclusive to the Western, their combined presence usually indicates that the film can be classified as such (for more, see Altman; Smith; Bordwell et. al.).

Much like how the dish sukiyaki contains many different ingredients, *SWD* contains elements of various cultural and filmic ingredients. The film includes iconography traditionally associated with Westerns, albeit in a recontextualized, hybridized form: six-shooters, cowboy hats, and tumbleweeds all appear within the text, although they exist alongside signifiers of other nations and cultures. First, the film reinforces the creation of a new hybridized identity through costuming. The bad guys in *SWD* all wear outlandish outfits that combine elements from both traditional samurai and cowboy apparel—albeit with a modern punk aesthetic—as established by popular culture. The wardrobe of both the Genji and Heike clans is comprised of an eclectic mishmash of dusters and kimonos, blue jeans and sandals, and this melding of styles represents an appropriation and hybridization of both the American and Japanese national identities.

Similarly, the film's setting displays elements of remixing and recontextualization. While the action takes place in the fictional mining

town of Yuta, Nevada, the ramshackle buildings of the American West have nevertheless been replaced by Buddhist temples and other examples of Japanese architecture, and Mount Fuji looms in the background of several shots. Indeed, while the streets of Yuta might resemble those of Hadleyville in *High Noon* or even Flagstone as presented in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968), the presence of *kura* storehouses, minka-style farmhouses, and other forms of Japanese architecture destabilizes the traditional Western setting. At the same time, the Western tropes and signifiers serve to prevent the establishment of an entirely Japanese aesthetic. Instead, *SWD* suggests a melding of styles that results in the creation of a hybridized identity comprised of elements from both the Japanese and American national identities.

In addition to the costumes and setting, the film also establishes a hybridized identity through staging and performance. For instance, Japanese actors play all of the characters, yet they speak phonetic English and use American colloquialisms such as "y'all" and "lily-liver" in another nod to the American national identity. Khoo observes that Miike's decision to have all of the Japanese actors speak in heavily accented English provides the film with a sense of displacement, and serves to "disrupt otherwise unmarked dominant cinema" (92). At the same time, this decision feels like a conscious homage to the linguistic conventions of both the original Hollywood Westerns, which were all shot in English, and the original Spaghetti Westerns, which were frequently dubbed into English (depending on where they were shown). Yet, rather than attempt to situate the film within some sort of broad category of Asian cinema by distinguishing itself from the American or European films he appropriates, Miike instead engages in an act of remixing and recontextualization. As Stadler writes, *SWD* speaks "the global language of genre cinema with a distinctively Japanese accent" (686). Drawing on Dimitris Eleftheriotis's work, Stadler goes on to explain that like the Spaghetti Westerns it

references, *SWD* transcends both national and cultural boundaries and therefore exists within the context of national cinema.

The staging and performances also draw on ideas of Japanese national identity and cultural traditions. *SWD* frequently appropriates elements of *Noh* and *kabuki* theater into its narrative. According to Richard Hand, *kabuki* plays often featured outrageously violent scenes of torture, self-mutilation, sadism, and elaborate fight scenes. *SWD* also includes such content. For example, late in the film, members of the Genji clan beat and torture the gunman in a scene that evokes both *kabuki* theater and similar sequences in Spaghetti Westerns like *A Fistful of Dollars* and the original *Django* (Sergio Corbucci, 1966). *Kabuki* also features actors striking exaggerated poses and facial expressions. (Hand). Such stylized performance techniques also feature heavily in *SWD* thanks to Miike's strategic use of freeze frames and close-ups throughout the film. Along with the exaggerated facial expressions of Boss Kiyomori, leader of the Heike clan, the film includes a comedic action sequence in which the gunfighter leaps out of the second story window of a bar to escape the vengeful Genji clan, and Miike pauses the action during a dramatic moment to heighten the tension.

The film also references early Japanese cinematic traditions; prior to World War I, Japanese films functioned as part of a larger performance that combined elements of live theater and film known as *rensageki* or "chain drama" (Bordwell 6). This becomes most evident during the film's opening sequence, which unfolds on an obvious soundstage, complete with a beautiful painted backdrop that appears to reference the woodblock prints featured in Katsushika Hokusai's "Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji" series. During this sequence, a cowboy named Piringo (played by Quentin Tarantino) relates the tale of the Battle of Dannoura to an audience of gunslingers who have come to kill him. This sequence recalls the Japanese cinematic tradition of using a live commentator known as a *benshi* who would provide narration and dialogue during screenings of silent films,

and help Japanese audiences make sense of the film. Miike uses the character of Piringo (whose name is likely a reference to Ducci Tessari's classic 1965 Spaghetti Western, *A Pistol for Ringo*) to not only establish the film's story from the outset, but also as a way of easing the audience into the film's highly stylized cinematic world. Thus, in addition to the Western elements described above, *SWD*'s stylistic conventions also appropriate and remix the Japanese national identity.

This appropriation of national identities also manifests in the film's themes. Thematically, Westerns typically concern the conflict between the modernity of civilization and the perceived savagery of the lawless frontier (see Altman; Smith; Bordwell et. al.). Westerns often explore this theme by focusing on the conflict that exists between the past, represented by the wide open frontier, and the future, embodied by civilized society. According to Coyne, this theme most often emerges in the form of the contentious relationship between the notion of community and the idea of the odyssey. In essence, the community represents safety and comfort, but can also seem quaint or dull. Meanwhile, the frontier remains intimidating because it represents an unknown space, but this mystery also renders it alluring. The hero exists at the intersection of these two ideas, keeping one foot planted firmly within the realm of civilization and the other in the lawless and savage frontier. His internal conflict therefore reflects an inherent dichotomy within the American national identity itself: community serves as an example of what citizens within a democracy can accomplish when they work together toward a common goal, but it nevertheless contradicts the idea of Americans as rugged individualists capable of accomplishing anything on their own if they only set their minds to it.

The hero of *SWD* embodies this distinctly American conflict, as the gunman exists on the boundary between civilization and the lawless frontier. The gunman is a quiet loner who exists outside of the community, more at home sleeping under the stars than in a bed under a roof. Much

like the characters played by John Wayne and Clint Eastwood in numerous Westerns produced in Hollywood and elsewhere, the gunman is a powerful, stoic individual who lets his actions speak louder than his words. However, the gunman must occasionally still rely upon the community, as he learns late in the film when members of the Genji clan viciously beat him and leave him for dead. Members of the community nurse the gunman back to health, and they go on to assist him in his quest to find the Heike gold that was buried outside of town years earlier. Thus, the film depicts the tension between individualism and community that lies at the heart of the Western genre.

At the same time, however, *SWD* also evokes traditional Japanese cultural values. According to Susan J. Napier, values such as "purity, self-sacrifice, endurance, and team spirit" have been "historically regarded as quintessentially Japanese" (289). The gunman embodies the spirit of endurance, particularly when he nobly attempts to save Shizuka and Heihachi from the clutches of the Genji clan, and in response must endure a vicious beating at the hands of the vicious Genji thug, Yoichi. Despite embodying such distinctly Japanese traits, however, the gunman does not necessarily belong to the community. He still belongs to the wide open frontier, as evidenced when he leaves the gold to Heihachi at the end of the film and rides off into the sunset alone, presumably to seek out other adventures. This turn of events suggests that he does not completely conform to the notion of "team spirit," and therefore does not embody the communal disposition often associated with Japanese culture. Instead, the gunman is the very definition of the traditional individualistic Western hero, even though he clearly possesses some Japanese ideals.

Furthermore, much like the Spaghetti Westerns that inspired it, *SWD* abandons the black and white morality of traditional Hollywood Westerns in favor of a murkier type of morality. Only a handful of Stetsons appear onscreen throughout the film, but they are all black, including the one worn by the unnamed gunman who ostensibly fills the role of the "good

guy." White hats do not appear anywhere in the film, and thus there is no clear distinction between morality and lawlessness. The film's protagonist embodies this murky morality; the gunman is more anti-hero than straight up hero. Initially, he is only interested in one thing: finding the gold rumored to have been buried there by the Heike clan years earlier. He has no interest in liberating the townsfolk from oppression (at least, not at first). Spaghetti Westerns routinely featured morally dubious "heroes" as a way to deconstruct the myth of the American West presented in Hollywood Westerns (see both Frayling and Hughes for more on the tropes and conventions of Spaghetti Westerns). Like the protagonists in *A Fistful of Dollars* (Sergio Leone, 1964) and *Django*, the gunman in *SWD* exists within a moral gray area. He is ultimately a heroic figure, but at the same time he willing to engage in duplicitous acts to further his own agenda. The gunman will lie, cheat, steal, or even kill people if he can benefit from such actions. Moreover, he is not above putting the citizens of Yuta in harm's way to achieve his goal. By referencing Spaghetti Westerns—themselves a combination of American and Italian national identities—Miike appropriates an identity that has already been hybridized and recontextualized, and this in turn informs the new transcultural identity presented in *SWD*.

The film's inspirations also reflect this notion of transnational and transcultural identity. *SWD* is partially inspired by *Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961), which was itself partially inspired by the novels of Dashiell Hammett, in particular *Red Harvest* and *The Glass Key*. Both books feature gritty crime stories that present an idealized and mythologized version of the American national identity, though one that is somewhat different in tone from the one created and reinforced by Westerns. Nevertheless, *SWD* clearly recontextualizes *Yojimbo*'s story, suggesting another level of appropriation due to the nature of that film's transcultural origins. Miike openly acknowledges his appropriation of *Yojimbo* by having Benkei of the Genji clan speak the line, "No doubt

about who's going to be the last man standing, best you don't get any ideas about playing Yojimbo." This becomes even more interesting when one realizes that in addition to *Yojimbo*, the line also references the film *Last Man Standing* (Walter Hill, 1996), a Prohibition-era reworking of *Yojimbo* inspired by the same Dashiell Hammett novels that Kurosawa appropriated when creating his film. Thus, Miike acknowledges the debt that *SWD* owes to other films that are themselves the result of hybridized transcultural identities.

Ultimately though, *Yojimbo* is a distinctly Japanese film, representative of the *chanbara* (swordplay) film, which is itself a subgenre of the *jidai-geki* (period) films prevalent in Japanese cinema. *Yojimbo* is firmly rooted within the cultural context of the Japanese national identity, though it is also at least partially informed by the American national identity in two ways. First, the film is based on the two Dashiell Hammett novels discussed earlier. Second, as Davis notes in his discussion of Japanese cinema, *Yojimbo* was shot using equipment developed outside of Japan's national borders and primarily associated with Hollywood and the United States. This informed how the filmmakers conveyed the Japanese national identity onscreen; they were either attempting to emulate Western cinematic styles or specifically reacting to them. Either way, *Yojimbo* represents an appropriation and recontextualization of cultural and national identities, and thus adds another level to the creation of the hybridized transcultural identity depicted within *SWD*.

While *SWD* primarily draws from Japanese, Italian, and American cultures, the film also appropriates and recontextualizes a number of other national and cultural signifiers. The film contains brief allusions to the Australian national identity in the form of a didgeridoo and aboriginal music. Additionally, the film is also partly inspired by the story of the War of the Roses as chronicled in William Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, which represents the English national identity in *SWD*. The appropriation of this national identity becomes evident when Boss Kiyomori holds up a bound

copy of the play, but one that features Japanese kanji characters on the front cover. When Boss Kiyomori demands that his henchmen refer to him as Henry from now on, the film presents a character played by a Japanese actor who speaks in phonetic English and dressed in a mishmash of Western and Eastern clothing casting off his Japanese name in favor of a Western one. This single moment represents a confluence of appropriation, recontextualization, and hybridization, and thus functions as a perfect summation of *SWD* itself.

Finally, *SWD*'s hybridized transcultural nature also manifests in the song that plays over the film's end credits. Composed by Koji Endo, "Django Sasurii" is a cover of the theme from the original *Django*, which was written and performed by Italian composer Luis Bacalov. Whereas the original version of the song is performed in English, the version included in *SWD* is performed in Japanese, and features a range of musical influences from around the world, including Japanese flutes and acoustic guitar flourishes reminiscent of Spanish flamenco music. More importantly, however, the song begins immediately after a climactic scene in which the enigmatic gunman rides off into the sunset, just as text appears onscreen informing the viewer that the boy Heihachi eventually made his way to Italy and became the man known as Django. Thus, the film's closing sequence suggests that the various national identities that exist alongside one another both onscreen and on the film's sidetrack have been remixed and recontextualized into one hybridized identity that reflects 21st century globalization.

Conclusion

Rooted in everything from the historical Japanese theatrical traditions of Noh and kabuki theater to American Westerns to aboriginal music and more, *Sukiyaki Western Django* appropriates the American national

identity while simultaneously adapting two separate Italian Spaghetti Westerns, which themselves appropriated and recontextualized the American national identity. As a result, the film offers insight into how director Takashi Miike remixes and recontextualizes the original texts in the style of a director as DJ, and also how he uses the national identities of the different cultures that produced those texts to create a hybridized transcultural identity rooted in both but nevertheless wholly new and entirely separate from either of them.

Yang asserts that "Cultural nationalism […] tends towards the exclusionary while poststructuralism tends more towards uneasy inclusion" (439). A film like *SWD* exemplifies this idea, because it is rooted in the poststructuralist language of transnational and transcultural cinema and thus transcends traditional notions of national and cultural boundaries. The film is not defined by the tensions that exist between the cultural and national identities it has appropriated, but rather by a sense that these identities have been merged into something new and different that exists independently of the original. Therefore, *SWD* reflects the increasingly globalized audiences of the 21st century. Contemporary viewers have become more comfortable with cultural and intertextual mash-ups thanks to the prevalence of remix culture and mediation brought about by the ubiquity of advanced communication technologies. Miike appropriates elements from the films and cultures that inspired him, and recontextualizes them into a new context that reflects and indicates 21st century globalization; in these new contexts, the meanings of the signifiers become decentered from their origins, creating new meanings that reflect the remix culture that frequently defines popular culture in the 21st century globalized world.

In this regard, Miike shares similarities with other contemporary directors like Quentin Tarantino, Neil Marshall, Kim Jee-woon, Guy Ritchie, the Wachowskis, and Nicholas Winding Refn, all of whom produce distinctly postmodern films primarily informed by the language

of cinema. However, Miike does not simply remix the films that inspired him. Rather, he also appropriates and recontextualizes the national identities that define the films that inspired him, largely because of the link that exists between cinema and national identity. Indeed, the cinematic apparatus often functions as one of the most convenient means of conveying and articulating notions of historical and national identities (see Coyne; Davis). By remixing and recontextualizing several cultural and national identities, *SWD* creates a hybridized transcultural identity, one that contains elements from three distinct national and cultural identities that exist side by side more or less equally onscreen. Therefore, *SWD* offers valuable insight into how national and cultural identities are becoming increasingly connected within a cinematic context. Understanding this remixing could provide better understanding of how international audiences make sense of different national identities through the popular culture they consume on a daily basis, and how they appropriate and recontextualize these identities to create new transcultural, globalized identities.

At the same time, the film can also be read as camp due to the outrageous costumes, extreme subject matter, and over-the-top performances. As Susan Sontag notes, camp emphasizes exaggeration, artifice, and stylization (42-43). Sontag draws a distinction between pure camp (that is, camp ignorant of its own campiness) and self-conscious or self-aware camp, but each serves the same function: to celebrate extravagance and destabilize or challenge the boundaries of good taste. Indeed, camp allows traditionally marginalized groups or those who lack cultural capital to "parody their subordinate or uncertain social status" by mocking both themselves and those in power (Ross 57). Camp often serves as a way to plunder cultural stereotypes in a way that both reinforces and shifts the balance of cultural power (Ross 57-58). *SWD* serves as a prime example of camp, because the film appropriates various cultural stereotypes and drapes them in outrageous costumes that

destabilize these stereotypes and delocate them from their original national and/or cultural connotations. Furthermore, as Lee observes, *SWD* "exploits the superficiality of conventions and stereotypes and thereby unmasks generally held assumptions about cultures and identities" (154). By remixing and recontextualizing cultural stereotypes into a new hybridized, transcultural context, the film resolves the tensions between different national or cultural identities by allowing them to exist more or less equally onscreen and revealing their similarities.

Thus, from the perspective of camp, Miike's remixing serves to comment on past and present cultural imperialism, colonialism, and cultural stereotypes. The new hybridized transcultural identity produced in the film represents an approach to destabilizing traditional boundaries constructed through such imperialism. In *SWD*, no single specific cultural viewpoint has priority over the other in the storyworld's construction. This construction, then, suggests how a transnational and transcultural identity can emerge through engagement with contemporary globalized pop culture spread through advanced communication technologies: no specific nation's pop culture prevails over another's. Therefore, the film's hybridized transcultural identity represents the political potential of other transnational and transcultural pop culture texts to challenge, transcend, and unite across national and cultural boundaries.

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