AMBI VALE NT IM AGE S OF JAPANESE BUSINESSMEN IN AMERICAN FILMS:
FROM A MAJ OR IT Y OF ONE (1961) TO
LOST IN TRANSLATION (2005)\(^1\)

Yoshiko Ikeda
Ritsumeikan University

**Keywords:** Japanese businessmen, American films, representations of the Other, ambivalence, self-criticism, individualism

**Svarbiausios sąvokos:** Japonijos verslininkai, amerikietiški filmai, kitoniškumo vaizdavimas, prieštaraiingumas, savkritika, individualizmas.

**Introduction**

Japan’s dramatic recovery from devastation after World War II has owed greatly to the Japanese businessmen who have been to the United States to study US technology, to adapt, refine and improve that technology, and sell the refined and improved products back to the United States. Images of Japanese businessmen expanding their business into the United States began to appear in American films in the early 1960s; this trend accelerated in the 1970s and became much more focused in the 1980s and 1990s. In the field of film studies, these images of Japanese businessmen have been researched in both the United States and Japan on the basis of each film, such as *Rising Sun* (Locke 2000, Kawai 2005), while the effects of economic friction on films have also been discussed

---

\(^1\) This paper derives from the first part of my dissertation, “Mutual Images in American and Japanese films from A Perspective of representations of the Other and National Identities” (2007). This paper uses arguments and examples from this dissertation and provides additional material.
(Kakii 1992: 215-222). However, an analysis focusing on Japanese businessmen has not been made historically or chronologically. Even when chronological analyses have been done, depictions of Japanese businessmen are only mentioned in the larger framework of the images of the Japanese in American films (Murakami 1993; Masuda 2004) and no specific comparison or contrast has been made among these images of businessmen. Most of research shows that Japanese businessmen in American films are negatively stereotyped and attitudes toward them are very hostile; the argument is these are reflections of economic war. At best, these images of Japanese businessmen have only been examined in terms of Said's orientalism and criticized for being derogatory, prejudiced, or for reinforcing and recreating the negative effects of the West’s attempt to justify and maintain its superiority over the East (King 2010: 5-18). The research does not explain why some images are positively depicted, nor does it explore more complicated functions of these apparently negative stereotypes. These images are extracted from the film narrative and not fully discussed in the context of the plot in which the historical, social and cultural factors are buried and American ideals or individualistic values are embodied. In other words, they are not discussed in terms of the American cultural mechanism that creates such stereotypes of the Japanese businessman in a given era.

This paper analyzes images of Japanese businessmen in American films from the 1960s to the present and attempts to examine some of the aspects of American culture and society that have led to the construction of these images. The films to be examined are A Majority of One (1961), Grand Prix (1966), 1970s films, Gung Ho (1986), Die Hard (1988), Rising Sun (1993) and Lost in Translation (2005). The paper focuses on films released in the late 1980s and the early 1990s and interprets these images of Japanese businessmen in relation to the self-image of Americans in the stories. Thus, it explores more complicated functions of self-criticism as well as functions by which their own values and self-image are rationalized in order to reinforce them. How are Japanese businessmen depicted in these films in contrast to American characters? Why are they sometimes positively described and sometimes negatively described? Or, to be exact, why do these images criticize American characters while at the same time reinforcing them? What are the cultural motivations in each era behind the way these Japanese and American characters are depicted? This paper attempts to answer these questions.
Representations of the Other and Ambivalence

Before analyzing the films, it is important to explain briefly about this paper’s working hypothesis. Representations of the Other have been characterized and studied in terms of ideological and political tools, as Said shows in *Orientalism* (1979). This process has reduced representations of the Other to their ideological and political functions and overlooked their cultural functions. As seen in Moller’s arguments in “Pictures of the Enemy: Fifty years of Images of Japan in the American Press” (1996: 29-42), these representations have been criticized for their ideological nature and harmful effects on communication and dismissed as racism and ethnocentrism. This paper recognizes the cultural significance of representations of the Other and their intricate relationship to the social construction of cultural identity and self-criticism (Ikeda 2000: 72). This paper assumes that representations of the Other not only define the Other, but also the identity of the people who create such representations. In other words, images of the Japanese in American films represent aspects of both the Japanese and Americans themselves. Representations of the Other work in two ways: 1) they serve to reinforce the identity of their creators, and 2) they serve to criticize their creators’ identity and suggest avenues for transformation. For more details on functions of representations of the Other, see my previous papers, “The Cultural Significance of Stereotypes; Argumentative Tools for Self-Criticism” (2000) and “Images of Japanese Men in American Films from WWII to the Present: Representations of the Other and National Identities” in *Image of Japan in Europe* (2008).

This paper draws on another concept: the psychoanalytic notion of ‘ambivalence’. Homi K. Bhaba uses this idea as a central concept in his analysis. According to Bhaba, ‘ambivalence’ signifies “a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite”, or in this case, “a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from a person” (Ashcroft et al. 2000: 12). Humans understand that other people are the same but also entirely different from themselves. This conflicted relationship to the Other is complicated; humans deny the differences they perceive in the Other, believing that humans are all the same; at the same time, they admit the Other, while denying and rejecting the Other. Construction of ‘otherness’ is, therefore, a very complicated process containing self-contradictions that show both fear and disavowal of otherness and as well as longing for and affirmation of otherness. What remain are therefore traces of contradictory
beliefs and conflicting emotions, which lead to ambivalent views and anxiety toward one’s own identity and authority within the discourse of stereotyping others.

Based on these theories, this paper analyzes images of Japanese businessmen in American films from the 1960s to the present.

Films from the 1960s and 1970s

A Majority of One (1961)

The first film to be examined is *A Majority of One*. This film originated as a popular Broadway play\(^2\) which won the Tony Awards for Best Actress in a Play, Best Scenic Design and Best Direction in 1959 (Internet Movie Data Base). In 1961, the play was made into a film by Mervyn LeRoy. It is an unusual love story between a middle-class, middle-aged American widow from Brooklyn called Jacoby and a wealthy Japanese widower businessman called Asano. Interestingly enough, the Japanese businessman is played by an English actor, Alec Guinness. The two meet on a ship sailing for Japan when Jacoby goes there with her daughter, Alice and her son-in-law, Black. Black is a diplomat who is about to go to Japan for business. At first, Jacoby has something against the Japanese, because she lost her husband and son in World War II, but she begins to accept Asano when she finds out that he lost his wife at Hiroshima. She is charmed with his polite, elegant and considerate manner. He is also charmed by her wise and warm heart and the care and medicine she gives him when he gets cold. Over the course of the journey, the two come to like each other. Asano is depicted as a polite and respectable gentleman (see Fig. 1). He is one of the top Japanese businessmen to participate in the US-Japan trade conference. Towards the end of the story, Jacoby’s son gets into trouble because of the blunt words he uses toward Asano. Her son is hostile to Asano, and suspects that he is using him and his mother-in-law in order to influence the conference. In contrast, Asano is depicted as being very sensitive to people of different cultures. By contrasting the sensitivity of the Japanese businessman and the insensitivity of the American diplomat, the film highlights the ‘ugly American’ who is insensitive to people from other cultures. He is self-centered and unable

\(^2\) Directed by Dore Schary.
to understand the Japanese. This kind of self-criticism on the part of the Americans is also seen in another film, *The Ugly American*³, released in 1963, which uses a Japanese actor as a friend of an American ambassador sent to Sarkhan, an imaginary country in Southeast Asia. The American’s friend (see Fig. 2) ends up being killed by the American ambassador’s inability to understand a different nation and culture and his lack of sensitivity toward this different social context. The death of his best friend highlights the American ambassador’s ugly aspect, which is indifference and insensitivity to a different culture and society.

---

**Grand Prix (1966)**

The next film from the 1960s, *Grand Prix*, is a film about Formula 1 racing cars. In this film Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune – famed for his role in Kurosawa’s *Seven Samurai* (1954) – plays the role of Izo Yamura, a Japanese businessman who hires an F1 racer, Pete Aron, who had previously been fired by another company after injuring his colleague in a car clash. The Japanese engineers try to do their best in order to meet the needs of Aron. Yamura’s character seems to be based on a real Japanese businessman, Soichiro Honda, who joined F1 racing and founded a giant cooperation, Honda Motors. His depiction is very positive: he appears as a dandy with a strong sense of honor. The film touches on Japanese economic expansion, but it is not a big deal and does not appear in a negative light.

Why do American films from this era depict the Japanese so positively?

---

³ Director George Englund, with Marlon Brando, Sandra Church, Eiji Okada. Universal Pictures. This film derives from a bestselling political novel with the same title written by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer in 1958.
For one reason, after World War II, Japan became an American ally in the Cold War against communist countries and closely followed the instructions and intentions of the United States. In addition, in the middle of the controversial Vietnam War in the 1960s, some Americans may have begun to question their understanding of people from other countries and cultures as seen in *The Ugly American*. In fact, on April 20, 1963, *New Republic* pointed out that the depiction of the imaginary country in *The Ugly American* closely resembled Vietnam in those days (Kauffmann 1963: 29).

**The three films from the 1970s**

Research in the American Film Institute film catalogue located three films depicting Japanese businessmen in the 1970s: *Hammersmith is Out* (1972), *The King of Marvin Gardens* (1972), and *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974). In these films, Japanese businessmen appear only in one or two scenes, and all of them try to buy American technology or corporations. In *Hammersmith is Out*, five Japanese company presidents appear at the same time, wearing the same kind of suits and ties. They all politely bow, but don’t change their facial expressions. They are depicted as being stoic and enigmatic robots without humanity or feelings. In *The King of Marvin Gardens*, two Japanese businessmen (see Fig. 3) are depicted as weird foreigners eating strange seafood and believing in superstitions. In *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, the Japanese are also very comical: they bow and are very polite, but take pictures everywhere. They can speak English, but they don’t look as though they do (see Fig. 4). They apparently have no sense of humor. In all these films, Japanese businessmen come across as inscrutable Orientals completely different and alien from Americans.

In these 1970s films, Japanese businessmen, who are depicted as robots, highlight American individuality, while the American characters are vividly depicted and display a robust sense of humor. The Japanese don’t interact with the American characters and play a very minor part in the story. The films depict the advance of the Japanese economy into the United States: all these businessmen go to the United States to buy American technology, land or companies, although the films don’t really cast this in a negative light. During the 1970s, the Japanese economy was still developing, largely by following the US example, and was still playing catch-up. It is obvious
in these films that the Japanese economy was not yet seen as a threat by Americans.

**Fig. 3. Weird Japanese**

**Fig. 4. Inscrutable Orientals**

**Films from the 1980s and 1990s**

Unlike the 1970s films, in which the Japanese don’t play major roles, there are many 1980s films which focus on the Japanese and their threat to the American economy. There are three popular films depicting Japanese businessmen in the 1980s: *Gung Ho* (1986), *Die Hard* (1988) and *Rising Sun* (1993).

**Gung Ho (1986)**

The first film in the series, *Gung Ho* (1986), was the most popular American comedy film of the year in the US. The story begins with a scene in which Stevenson, an American worker, goes to Japan to invite a Japanese automobile factory to save his deserted hometown. The film depicts the trade frictions and cultural clashes between the American workers and a Japanese automobile corporation. This film uses negative images from the 1970s in a very comical way. Like other 1970s films, the Japanese executives Stevenson meets in Japan all dress in the same manner, do not even understand his humor, and throughout the meeting their faces remain stoic and neutral. They are negatively depicted as undifferentiated ciphers who have almost no individuality and no humanity. To an American worker who insists that he is a special worker, the Japanese manager responds, “No one is special”.


These negative and comical images of the Japanese are exactly opposite to the positive, traditional celebration of American individualism, which values the individual's right to be independent from the institutions for which they work. This laudatory attitude toward individualism is presented with a sharp contrast between the main Japanese actor playing the manager Kazuhiro and the main American actor playing the manager Stevenson (see Fig. 5). Stevenson works as a liaison between the Japanese and Americans. He is portrayed as a courageous, effective and autonomous businessman who goes all the way to Japan alone, and convinces Assan Motors to relocate to his hometown. He is an excellent speaker who is able to persuade the American workers to start work with a low salary. In contrast, Kazuhiro avoids making even a single speech in public, admitting that he is a poor speaker. He obeys his boss, dedicates himself to the corporation and entirely conforms to the institution. He is naively honest and somewhat of a dupe. He directly asks Stevenson stupid questions such as “Can I trust you?” and is sometimes made fun of by Stevenson. Kazuhiro is depicted as immature and indecisive, and consequently ineffective as an executive manager. When Kazuhiro is immobilized by the conflicting demands of his boss to increase the number of cars manufactured and the strong resistance from the American workers, Stevenson finds a way out of this difficulty by suggesting a salary raise in exchange for achieving results.

The Japanese corporation is depicted as being a hierarchical and somewhat old-fashioned institution which oppresses the Japanese as well as the American workers. The name of the company, Assan, literally means ‘oppressive’ and ‘miserable’. The Japanese workers are depicted as miserable workaholics who blindly conform, are loyal to the corporation, and sacrifice their personal lives for work. Their traits are obvious in Kazuhiro, who obediently accepts the company’s demands, gives his loyalty to the company above all else, and suffers from the conflicting pressures put on him by the company and the workers. He denies himself any enjoyment of his private life, putting work first. Kazuhiro acknowledges this problem with Japanese culture. At one point, he declares, “We are insane…We work too damn hard. This is not our lives. This is a factory. Our friends, our families should be alive. We are all killing ourselves. We are milled. We have things we can learn from Americans.” The image of Japanese workaholics suffering in the service of the corporation they work for serves to justify and affirm the American contemporary philosophy of work and life, which distinctly divides the home and work place, private and public life. The Americans
clearly put their private lives first, refusing to allow work to rule their lives. Robert N. Bellah explains one of the dominant characteristics of modern American individualism: “The most distinctive aspect of twentieth century American society is the division of life into a number of separate functional sectors: home and work place, work and leisure, white collar and blue collar, public and private…[They consider that their] family is more important and the work will wait” (Bellah: 43).

However, on closer analysis, it becomes obvious that the Japanese businessmen, in fact, are used to criticize the American working style as well. The Americans are described as sloppy, lazy employees who only work for their salary and self-interest, and do not cooperate with each other in order to manufacture cars. When bitterly arguing with Stevenson, Kazuhiro claims: “Americans have become selfish and have lost their team spirit. That makes Americans weak”. Kazuhiro and other Japanese workers, who are depicted as suffering workaholics who blindly conform, are loyal to the corporate institution, and sacrifice their personal or private lives for work. Such depictions reveal the importance of hard work or devotion to work, cooperation and a sense of togetherness embodied in teamwork. The film criticizes American workers for lacking or having lost quality traits, and thereby, becoming less competitive than the Japanese. Stevenson cries out in the union, “The great old American do or die spirit… Yeah, it’s alive, but they [the Japanese] have got it…We got it back damn fast…” In other words, the Japanese businessmen are used to explore why the Americans have become less competitive and weak. The Japanese serve to spotlight the American workers’ loss of the “do or die spirit”, industry, teamwork, and moral obligations in work. The film shows that Americans fail to see the link between their work and the benefit of the community. Christopher Lasch criticizes the work ethic of contemporary Americans:

Until recently, the Protestant work ethic stood as one of the most important underpinnings of American culture…For the Puritans, a godly man worked diligently at his calling not so much in order to accumulate personal wealth as to add to the comfort and convenience of the community…[However,] the growth of bureaucracy, the cults of consumption with its immediate gratifications, but above all the severance of the sense of historical continuity have transformed the Protestant ethic (Lasch: 106-131).

Lasch is well aware that contemporary Americans work mainly for personal wealth and do not associate their work with the benefit of the community. *Gung Ho* attempts to bring back this sense of the community
good as well as the “do or die spirit” among American workers, and, further, to transform their work habits. The notion of the good of the community is represented in the good of their hometown. The story begins with a depiction of the depressed and weary town while Stevenson is on the way to the airport to leave for Japan. His goal is to convince Assan Motors to relocate there and save the town from financial ruin. Though American workers come into a series of conflicts with the corporation, when they realize the factory is about to close down, they finally unite and work harder for the common purpose of saving their town. Stevenson confidently says, “I would rather have these cars...we made together by hand...Those cars stand for something pretty great. I am very proud of those cars.” The president of Assan Motors responds to him with a smile, “Good teamwork.” In the last scene, listening to American pop music, American workers wearing the company’s uniforms enjoy the morning exercises, which are designed to cultivate group spirit, together with the Japanese workers. This scene is symbolic of the modified American workers’ attitude, which have harmonized with the company. The film depicts two competing worlds: Japanese conformists lacking personal self-fulfillment and American individualists lacking a sense of unity and cooperation. By mediating the two extreme worlds, the film posits an ideal of cooperation, moral obligation and teamwork that unifies workers’ private lives with their work and their community. The film title, “Gung Ho”, derives from a Chinese phrase meaning, “let’s do it together”. The Japanese businessmen remind Americans of the “do or die spirit”, the lost Puritan work ethic and a sense of community, and serve to criticize Americans for having lost these values and community relationships.
Before going on to the 1990s film *Rising Sun*, one more film from the 1980s, *Die Hard* (1988), needs to be discussed. In this film, the depiction of the Japanese is used only as its background and Japanese businessmen do not play a major role in the story. The film depicts a group of terrorists who occupy the Nakatomi Plaza Building and hold the employees as hostage. Nakatomi is depicted as a huge, threatening corporation, and the building is a symbol of Japan’s economic invasion of Los Angeles. The terrorist leader compares hijacking this building to the way that corporation makes money, calling it a “hostile takeover”. Despite the underlying economic anxiety and threats, the President of the corporation, Takagi, is positively portrayed. Unlike the executives in *Gung Ho*, he is especially respectful of female employees and their abilities and very friendly to his subordinates. His authority is casual and human instead of impersonal and oppressive. Takagi (see Fig. 6) is portrayed as a typical elite. He was born in Japan, moved to California, was sent to an internment camp during WWII, but finished his degree at Harvard. He is also depicted as being brave enough to acknowledge that he is responsible for his employees’ security. Nakatomi, a Japanese corporation is negatively stereotyped, but the very top of the corporation is depicted as being understandable and trustworthy. The favorable depictions of the Japanese top executives are common to the films *Grand Prix* (1966), *Gung Ho* (1986) and the next film, *Rising Sun* (1993).

*Rising Sun* (1993)

*Rising Sun* is notorious for its Japan bashing. This film received strong criticism from Asian Americans⁴. Two American detectives try to solve a murder that takes place in a gigantic Japanese corporation in Los Angeles. The elder detective is familiar with Japanese society and people and respectful of their culture. However, the younger detective is not. Both the corporation and Japanese businessmen are described in extremely negative terms. The film goes out of its way to emphasize the foreignness and difference of Japanese culture. The elder detective is given the task of explaining differences such as bowing, manners and even the unique relationship between the boss and his men. The corporation, Nakamoto, is

a much more threatening and powerful company with modern equipment and guards. It is trying to purchase an American semi-conductor company, the sale of which is opposed by US Senator John Morton. The Japanese executives, including a principal suspect, Eddie Sakamura, are depicted as depraved lechers who keep young white women in an apartment and bring them in to play naked in private rooms in the executive suites. The Japanese threaten both American industry and American women (see Fig. 7). Exotic symbols of Japanese culture are everywhere: Japanese drums (see Fig. 8) and stoic kimono-clad women with unnatural bowing manners. The inner workings of the Japanese corporation are depicted in lurid terms as completely different from their American counterparts. The first assumption is that the murder was committed by an evil, obscene Japanese businessman.

Fig. 7. Japanese men and white women 8. Japanese drums

However, when the story comes to an end, and if we look more closely, the film gives a sharply critical view of Americans themselves. The apparently evil Japanese turn out to be good guys who highlight the negative aspects of the American characters. One of the suspects, Eddie, behaves like Americans, but still partakes in the Japanese sense of obligation. Eddie dies to save the younger detective, who has risked his life to save Edie. Ishihara, another Japanese employee of Nakamoto Corporation, who is also a suspect, confesses that he is involved in the case, but he attempts to help the corporation purchase the American semi-conductor company. Finally, the corporation also turns out to have good intentions. The president, Yoshida, confesses that he thought he could save the American corporation and economy, and thus did not expect he would confront the senatorial or
government opposition against their purchase. Yoshida himself is depicted as a good, trustworthy man who pursues justice and is trusted by the elder American detective.

This altruistic aspect of the Japanese businessmen is foreshadowed in the opening scene, in which the audience sees a western playing on a video player in a karaoke shop. In the video clip, a Japanese cowboy, who seems at first to be a villain, ends up saving a woman caught by evil white cowboys. Like the western in the opening scene, the real criminal turns out to be a white American. In contrast to the Japanese, the younger detective and his other American colleague take bribes and show clearly that their only loyalty is to themselves. The younger detective excuses himself by saying he has to take that money because he is just divorced and needs it to raise his daughter. In the story, an American guard working for the company, comments, “Around here, if something doesn’t work or I’ve got a problem, I tell somebody and they fix it. It’s not like where I was working at GM. This is different here.” On the surface, the Japanese corporation is as an evil interloper that threatens American economic power and preys on blonde white women. However, when looked at carefully, the film suggests that American corporations lack the gung ho spirit and gives a warning to American society. While the Americans work for their own interests, the Japanese work for the interests of not only the corporation, but also the society that the corporation is part of. The film warns that the American way of pursuing only self-interest destroys the institution, the economy, the police and ultimately the country itself. Lasch argues in his book of *Culture of Narcissism* that religion’s power to restrain the excessive pursuit of self-interest is lacking in modern society, essentially removing a vital controlling mechanism in the dialectic tension between the individual and the society. Lasch describes such individualism as “the world view emerging among us centers solely on self and has individual survival as its sole good” (32-33). Thus, he severely criticizes such an egotistical moral character as destructive and infantile.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were serious trade frictions between the US and Japan and the economic conflicts were often described as an economic war. Negative images of Japanese businessmen, like the images of the Japanese soldiers in propaganda films from World War II, abound in films from this period. These negative images tend to glorify the traditional values of American individualism, but at the same time, they
very often portray its destructive consequences, a point of special concern during this period.

Lost in Translation (2005)

The last film to be examined is *Lost in Translation*. The film depicts two Americans who come to Japan for the first time. Bob is a middle-aged actor who shoots a whisky commercial, and Charlotte is a young woman who accompanies her photographer husband. Tokyo is depicted as a hypermodern metropolitan environment, isolating them. The film presents the Japanese using very conventional stereotypes. It depicts the Japanese businessmen and businesswomen as being excessively polite and hospitable. Bob realizes that he is much taller than the average Japanese and both have a hard time understanding Japanese people’s pronunciation of the English l and r. Bob cannot communicate well with his commercial director because his interpreter abbreviates what the director says to him. These images of the Japanese are used to isolate the two protagonists, leaving them floating in an alien world with only each other to lean on. This sense of alienation and isolation, which is similarly constructed in the previous film, *Rising Sun*, drives them toward each other and away from their partners. In other words, the depictions of the Japanese are used to unite two lonely people of the same culture and to convey this feeling of isolation to the audience. The images of the Japanese perform the basic function of the stereotypes of the Other: to reaffirm and confirm one’s own culture and society and thus strengthen one’s own sense of identity as Walter Lipmann originally explains in *Public Opinion* (1922). The Japanese businessmen in this film, rather than serving to reinforce certain aspects of the American character, serve to identify themselves and strengthen the sense of the security in the same culture.

Conclusion

As we have seen, in the 1950s and 1960s films Japanese businessmen are positively portrayed in order to criticize the insensitivity of Americans. In the 1970s films, negatively portrayed Japanese businessmen serve to reaffirm and reinforce American individualism and the superiority of this individualistic culture over the group-oriented culture of the Japanese. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s films, the expansion of Japan’s economy
is depicted as an existential threat to the American economy, and by extension to the American way of life. Thus, very negative depictions of Japanese businessmen abound in films from that period. On the surface, these negative images of Japanese businessmen serve to justify and reinforce values of American individualism. On the other hand, however, the Japanese elites are favorably portrayed. This favorable depiction, in tandem with the other negative images, serves to highlight and criticize the destructive aspects of American individualism. In *Lost in Translation* (2003), Japanese businessmen are negatively and comically stereotyped in a way reminiscent of the 1970s films. Thus, the images of Japanese businessmen in American films from the 1960s through the 2000s function in two different ways: to reaffirm fundamental values of American individualism and to criticize the destructive aspects or excesses of the individualism.

Why are these images and functions of Japanese businessmen so ambivalent? It can be assumed from the above analysis that this ambivalence derives from American ambivalence and anxiety toward their own individualism and society. On one hand, individualism is the essence of American identity. Bellah asserts that “We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness of the individual” (142). Americans insist on individual dignity and autonomy against authorities and institutions. They recognize and fear that “society might overwhelm the individual and destroy any chance of autonomy unless he stands against it” (Bellah: 144). Despite this suspicion of authority and institutions, today’s complex and bureaucratic society needs a fair amount of group cooperation in order to be stable and efficient. During the recession of the late 1980s, Americans were more inclined to recognize the destructive aspects of their individualism. Excessive emphasis on the individual and suspicion of any invasion of the private sphere by institutions was seen as impeding American competitiveness and as ultimately destructive to the individual and the community as well. Recognizing the need for both the individual and the community, Americans are always fearful of losing the balance between the two.

This anxiety produces the conflicting emotions in Bhaba’s writing and adds several layers of complexity to interpretations of the way Japanese businessmen are portrayed in American films. Images of Japanese businessmen offer solace to Americans by presenting a negative vision of Japanese conformity, which results from emphasis on the group and on society. These images camouflage the American anxiety toward themselves and alleviate their fear of the Japanese economy and businessmen. When
Americans recognize the danger of excessive emphasis on the individual, on the other hand, the same Japanese images provoke a productive introspection that allows Americans to grapple with the destructive aspects of their own identity. Japanese businessmen serve to revive the lost sense of American traditions, such as the sense of community, which in the past restrained destructive aspect of individualism. The ambivalent images of Japanese businessmen give solace to American audiences, but also gives them a vehicle for grappling with their fears and anxieties.

References
Locke, B. Keith. 2000. There’s a crowd: The racial triangle of “white”, “black”, and “Asian” men in post-World War Two United States culture. [Dissertation], Brown University, Providence, RI, USA.
Abstract

Construction of ‘otherness’ is, according to Homi K. Bhaba, a very complicated process containing self-contradictions that disavow its difference from self-defense and yet mask the anxiety derived from the desire and fear toward otherness. Remaining, therefore, are traces of contradictory beliefs and conflicting emotions, which lead to ambivalent views and anxiety toward one’s own identity and authority within the discourse of otherness. Bhaba uses the psychoanalytic notion ‘ambivalence’, which refers to “a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action” in his analysis of stereotypes of the Other.

This paper examines the ambivalence reflected in the images of Japanese businessmen in American films from the 1960s to the present. The films to be examined are A Majority of One (1961), 1970s films, Gung Ho (1986), Die Hard (1988), Rising Sun (1993) and Lost in Translation (2005). The dominant images of Japanese businessmen are negatively constructed in such a way that they defend American self-images. However, especially in the late 1980s and early 1990s, these Japanese images seemed not only to defend Americans themselves, but also mask their own anxiety toward themselves and further criticize themselves for their reconstruction of their own self-images. The purpose of this paper is to explore the contradictory beliefs and conflicting emotions of Americans reflected in the ambivalent images of Japanese businessmen in the above films.

Santrauka

Anot Homi K. Bhaba, „kitoniškumo“ konstravimas – tai labai sudėtingas procesas, sukeliantis vidinius prieštaravimus, kurie neigia egzistuojantį skirtumą tarp savigynos ir vidinių prieštaravimų,