

研究ノート

Speed Tribes and Making A New Japan

Theodore Bonnah

Japan as the global future

How and when exactly did Japan become synonymous with the American vision of the future? As Littlewood adroitly pointed out in 1996, as late as the 20th century Japan was often portrayed as backward or barbaric, and was evoked or explored with traditional images such as geisha and samurai. Into this panoply has crept futuristic images of bikers in dystopian cities, computer geeks and man-machine hybrids. As the American fiction author and creator of the cyberpunk genre William Gibson puts it, “Japan is the global imagination's default setting for the future” (Observer 1). This is not limited to the speculative sphere, however, for as Allison notes, Japan’s power over the ‘global imagination’ translates into the imaginative products of its video game and anime industries that dominate world markets and demonstrate their ability to live in the modern ‘flux’ world (34).

Historically, US images of Japan in particular have been marked by authors whose works are popular not only for their own writing ability, but also for their adroit tappings of the zeitgeist. Lafcadio Hearn explained and exported the ancient mystery of Japan to a young country back home; Ruth Benedict was charged to unravel the traditions that shaped the morals and minds of an enigmatic and inscrutable enemy; writers such as Edward Hall and others in the 1980s tried to understand the ‘hidden differences’ of the economic powerhouse that threatened to buy America itself. But since the collapse of Japan’s Bubble economy, a new vision of Japan has emerged, one in which Japan stands for the future, both good and bad. The urge to redefine Japan is evident in both economics and culture, from Hayashi’s branding of 1990s Japan a ‘lost generation’ economically, to the declaration of ‘Japan’s New Generation’ on the cover of *The Face* in 1993, and to books like Naff Clayton’s exploration of a supposed social revolution in Japan.

This wave of new Japan perceptions was most concretely articulated by

Karl Taro Greenfeld in *Speed Tribes*, a 1995 work of creative non-fiction that presented a selection of underworld archetypes as Japan's 'next generation', and which has gained cult status for obliterating the samurai and geisha tropes of yesteryear. Greenfeld's new Japan remains uniquely itself while taking a form of pastiche globalization, is affluent and decadent while in a recession, and epitomizes both the forward-thinking embrace of technology as well as an example of when it goes too far. Greenfeld's picture of a 'new' Japan is of a lost nation that no longer matters, with the implication that, if Americans are not careful, Japan's next generation will be America's, too.

Fifteen years have passed since the publication of *Speed Tribes*, accompanied by a fading from Japanese society of the actual social phenomena of *bosozoku* bikers that are emblems of the book, as well as most of the other sub-cultures presented in it. As Greenfeld himself replied to documentary filmmakers doing a film on Japanese bikers in 2004, "why would someone still be interested in filming the bosozoku?" (Moorghen). Although the popularity of *bosozoku* bikers and *bodikon* erotic dancing have fallen by the wayside, the subculture of *otaku* (maniac collectors), *hikikomori* (shut ins), and pampered *Todaisei* (Tokyo University graduates) Greenfeld introduced have increased in importance over the passage of time, and no other receptacle of representations of supposedly modern Japan has been able to supplant those presented in the pages of *Speed Tribes*. The book's cultural footprint has steadily widened, and both a documentary and movie based on Greenfeld's work have been variously in production as late as 2004 and 2011, respectively. The book has also jumped from the cultural into the educational realm, with *Speed Tribes* included in a 2004 syllabus for Japanese government policy and politics course at MIT, an international studies course in 1997 at university of Oregon, a 2009 anthropology course at MIT, and a global cultures course in 2006-2007 at the university of London South Bank. *Speed Tribes* was first sold in digital format in 2010, and despite being a 17 year old text has remained in the top 100 ranked Amazon e-book sales on Japan of this writing (Amazon.com), no small feat in a list including the latest Japanese language texts, erotic fiction, martial arts books, and tourist guide books.

It is easy to dismiss *Speed Tribes* as a sensationalist, non-academic work on Japan and therefore unworthy of serious study. However, it is precisely because the people and subcultures it presents have escaped scholarly

treatment while becoming shorthand for modern Japan that they are worthy of a closer look. As Littlewood writes in 'The Idea of Japan', his exhaustive exploration of western representations of Japan, the study of images of culture and their manipulations is a shadow zone outside of academia that nevertheless reflects and effects other spheres of interaction. Although many books have come out on the darker sides of Japan since the 1990s, *Speed Tribes* is different from contemporaries like Whiting's 1999 *Tokyo Underworld* and *Tokyo Vice* (Adelstein in 2009), both of which are case studies of one aspect of the Japanese underworld. Only *Speed Tribes* articulates a view of Japan's 'next generation' and presents itself as the journalistic exploration of this phenomenon. *Speed Tribes* itself did not change the face of Japan, but rather it was an adroit tapping of the zeitgeist, one that has changed little in overall direction since its publication, and is therefore worthy of scrutiny. *Speed Tribes* is a cult phenomenon, just as the otaku and other sub-cultures it chronicles, and its appeal is precisely the eschewal yet reliance on the journalistic, financial, or scholarly lenses of Japan that have previously dominated US Japan relations.

In this era of globalization and global media, the proliferation and persistence of cultural and economic representations of a 'lost' or 'new' Japan articulated by Greenfeld and promulgated in internet memes and odd news stories can easily spill over into the political and business realms. In terms of US-Japan relations, the gap between reality and image can ultimately impact on consumer confidence between the 1st and 3rd largest economies in the world, who are both allies in keeping Pacific security and stability, and who have a long history of both positive and negative interaction. To not call into question this phenomenon is folly, and as Iwata suggests, "There is a sense in which it is necessary to examine the mechanism of the so-called Japonism and to criticize Occidental ideology" (Iwata 59). The best way to understand the nature of this phenomenon is to study why Greenfeld's need and timing to create came about, which techniques the author used to facilitate it, and who benefits from and consumes this re-imagining of a 'new' post-modern Japan.

A New Japan for a New Era

Of course, Greenfeld's interpretation of underworld Japan for a Western

audience was not the first work to redefine the idea of Japan. The 1990s mark the end of Japan's economic dominance, and interpreters of Japan responded to this phenomenon by presenting it in a new light. The acknowledgments in *Speed Tribes* are a list of the initial wave of interpretive precursors who made their career writing about the dark side of Japan: Ian Buruma's *Behind the Mask*, Bornoff's *Pink Samurai*, Fallow's *More Like Us*, Kaplan & Dubro's *Yakuza*, Seidenticker's *Low City, High City*, and Venturi's *Underground in Japan*. Whereas Greenfeld's inspirations each focused on one aspect of Japanese society's dark underbelly, only KTG offered a smorgasbord of such images palatable to many Japanist consumers, brought to life through his superior descriptive skills and gilded with a veneer of journalistic reliability. Why did Greenfeld couch his iteration of Japan in terms of a new, more personal creative journalism? As Said states,

within a text there has to take place a metamorphosis from personal to official statement; the record of Oriental residence and experience by a European must shed, or at least minimize, its purely autobiographical and indulgent descriptions in favor of descriptions on which Orientalism in general and later Orientalists in particular can draw, build, and base further scientific observation and description. (157)

KTG effectuates his representations by presenting them as a journalistic fiction. The change in paradigm in relations is reflected in the change of new garde interpreters of Japan.

Speed Tribes is a book about a time, namely the immediate post-Bubble Japan of the early 1990s, but it is equally a book about timing. Specifically, it lays bare the moment when Japan ceased to be dominated by images of its past, and where present Japan was overtaken by Japan-as-future. Culturally, Greenfeld focuses on the obsessive and anti-social nature of Japanese data-mining otaku long before the term gained the cultural currency and representation of myriad subcultures it has now. In the financial arena, Greenfeld's jaded view of Japan's Bubble and decadence presages the trend of seeing Japan's credit crunch as an object lesson or warning about the direction of American finances as presented by Drifte and White, and although

Ledbetter attempts to debunk this belief, the subprime loan problem belies the accuracy. Although the exact manifestations may change, *Speed Tribes* heralds the birth of Japan's soft power, a hybrid of culture and finances. Greenfeld is merely shuffling the deck of images representing Japan in response to the new hand its economic stagnation and the rise of China have dealt it.

It is important to note that the Japanese do not see their country in the 1990s in as wholly bleak terms as America does. Japanese see the Bubble as a transient phenomenon, and refer to it a 'jidai', an era, or more literally, a 'time that will change'. They have the understanding that a boom cannot be expected to last indefinitely, nor will its effects. Likewise, in Japan the odd or antisocial *bodicon* and *boso-zoku* subcultures Greenfeld chose to depict were youth phenomenon of the Bubble era whose time has come and gone. The 1990s instead mark Japan's shift away from purely economic and industrial power to cultural or 'soft power'. In 1995, the first Japanese player in the NBA was a success and source of national pride, opening the floodgates for the Japanese invasion of US baseball by great players such as Ichiro and Matsui, and the start of the global pervasion of manga and anime. These are all normal changes of the tides in a country that is its own world and center of cultural production, unlike the increasingly de-centralized production of the English speaking world.

Besides re-branding to suit the times, another constant of Western representations of Japanese is their depiction as inscrutable, whether as indomitable samurai, banzai-charging WWII soldiers, or faceless salarymen. In the 1990s a new image of Japan was needed to explain to Americans the incomprehensible nation that could be on top of the world financially one moment, and then lose it the next. As Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca mused in 1990, "Japan today is wrapped in a Teflon kimono," and this frustration on the part of Americans towards perceived perfection of Japanese caused by their domination of the auto market, then slide into economic stagnation without a credit crunch, called for a response. Digging into the dirty side of Japanese society à la Greenfeld or Whiting became de rigeur in the 90s when the collapse of the Bubble economy revealed Japanese imperfection and humanity.

Just as Iwata notes that many Japanese felt estranged from the traditional images of samurai and geisha that bound them, foreigners in Japan too could see little connection between these ancient stereotypes, the

robots of the Bubble and Japan Inc., and the bikers and social misfits around them. The need was thus for a post-modern Japan that could de-construct its old images and peer past its façade of a polite and orderly society. Enter Greenfeld to give shape to these changes in both Japan's political reality and representation, ones that would appeal to a new foreign audience for images of Japan. The 21st century is seeing a change from consumers of research on Japan as Japanologists interested in finances, history, traditional culture, and politics, to a new global generation of otaku and fetishists whose needs were not met by academic or journalistic texts. This new form of Japanism needed articulation and found it in *Speed Tribes*.

Finally, this trend to re-imagine Japan is not limited to the cultural sphere, however. The title of Hayashi's economic analysis of the bursting of Japan's bubble, 'The 1990s in Japan: A Lost Decade' exhibits rather suggestive language for a rigorous work in the 'dismal science' and indicates the need to define Japan as lost, entering a new phase after its post-war economic explosion. In both *Speed Tribes*' 'next generation' and Hayashi's analysis of the 'lost generation', Japan is measured by the yardstick of the US. To compare Japan with a nation that far outstrips it in the natural resources required for economic supremacy, military might to back its political agendas, and the democratic tradition that supports its culture is obviously quite unbalanced. Tellingly, Hayashi finds Japan's increase in holidays for workers a major factor in its economic slowdown. This is a reversal for the Japanese who were damned in the 1980s as robots working to put Japan Inc. at the top, and who now become criticized for tumbling down the economic ladder after taking a well-deserved rest following their rebuilding of the country and its post-war ascension. Hayashi also admits robust investment in this period, as opposed to the freezing and 'credit crunch' that followed the 1990 and 2008 US meltdowns. With Japan no longer poised to buy America as it had feared, a recalibration in the image of Japan was thus needed. This unequal comparison allows for America to exercise its supposed moral superiority, as well as a way for the American consumer of Japanism to understand what is being relayed to them.

Manufacturing Authority in Speed Tribes

How did Greenfeld construct his new Japan? To achieve any change of image, the interpreter of Japan first has to define the place he is examining. Lafcadio Hearn focused on the aesthetic and mysterious Japan while Ruth Benedict chose to see the spiritual and social facets beyond wartime propaganda. Greenfeld articulates his choice at the beginning of *Speed Tribes* when he writes, "I decided my Japan would be life in the bars, at the nightclubs, and on the streets. I had never read about this in Time, Fortune, or the Wall Street Journal. I would hang out with these kids and write their stories." (xiv). This declaration shows that his seemingly objective presentation is a quite subjective mimetic choice. But the main question is why he felt the need to drag Japanese social skeletons out of the closet, to use obscure subcultures and underworld figures to create the 'New Japan'. For Greenfeld, it is not the political news and business magazines which are no longer relevant, it is this lost Japan itself which has ceased to be relevant and must thus be depicted as negative.

However, to understand how *Speed Tribes* gained authority as the vision of modern 'real' Japan, it is first necessary to observe how the author actively assembled the authorial persona that would lend credence to his representations and insert him in the pantheon of American interpreters on Japan. Greenfeld establishes this persona in the foreword, where he makes himself the main character and recounts the experiences in Tokyo that became the inspiration for *Speed Tribes*. He identifies himself as a half-Japanese, half-American born in Kobe, raised in Los Angeles, and educated in New York, who returns to Japan as a journalist in 1988 covering trade and diplomacy. This defines the author as an insider to both Japanese and Americans, an objective journalist, and finally, as knowledgeable about economics, the main field in which Japan had been judged up to that time. Greenfeld establishes the power this dual identity gives him in the prologue when he writes, "Only idiots and foreigners didn't get rich during the bubble," an equity warrants salesman for Japan's largest securities house once confided in me." (x) He is at the same time confidant to the Japanese, learning about Japan Inc. from its inside players, while confiding to American consumers about the 'real' Japan he sees.

Through this duality Greenfeld resolves the fundamental criticism that the observer changes his object merely by observing. Furthermore, Greenfeld also tackles the opposite criticism that the native insider is too close to his subject when he disingenuously remarks that his British girlfriend's skin is the hue that "Japanese men were supposed to be very fond of." (xi) This disavowal of any connection to Japanese values reinforces both KTG's supposed objectivity and status as American and effectively makes his authority absolute with his American audience.

Greenfeld has thus created the illusion that his persona is both the outsider American journalist telling us the objective truth, while simultaneously being the Japanese insider that can get to places no outsider could go. However, Greenfeld tellingly omits his tenure as a Japan Exchange Teaching Programme English teacher in Kanagawa in 1988-89, the less glamorous route by which many foreigners come to Japan. Since JET Programme tenure would mark Greenfeld as inimically foreign, it would break this illusion of authority, so is naturally not included.

Greenfeld further strengthens his persona in the acknowledgments, stating that Tribes "would have been difficult to write had not other foreign journalists and scholars written about Japan and shown the way". Here he is foreign again, and heir to both the journalistic and scholarly Japanist traditions. The names cited by Greenfeld show that the system of Orientalism citations identified by Said is equally alive and well in Japanology. Greenfeld notes Ian Buruma's *Behind the Mask* as one of his inspirations, while Ruth Benedict is not mentioned. This gap in the system of citations is bridged by Buruma himself, who wrote the foreword to the latest edition of Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*. In fact, the cover for the Harper Perennial edition of *Speed Tribes* is a hyperlink of reviews and citations, with blurbs from Pico Iyer, and William Gibson, further linking *Speed Tribes* and Greenfeld to an interpreter of Japan system outside of the purely scholarly world. This reinforcement of the system of citations is merchandizing in its most populist form, appealing to the hip or in the know. Although KTG may seem to repudiate the Japanist tradition by inventing a 'new' Japan, since every author on Japan fashions their own image of Japan by focusing on certain elements, his choice in fact renews and reinforces it.

Although KTG's authorial persona gives him a fiction of access to two

cultures, *Speed Tribes* has been criticized as not being entirely fact. This is a response to Greenfeld's conscious use of 'creative non-fiction', a style of writing for which he has been anthologized in 'best of' collections. Greenfeld has admitted to using 'composites' of people to create characters, and although he includes journalistic facts and figures, his eye for detail, characterization, and narrative voice are those of the fiction writer. It is precisely this blending of the real and the creative that lends his writing appeal, and Greenfeld deftly sprinkles dry facts amid the narrative to lend his words power. In defending his creative reporting techniques Greenfeld states,

For me, especially with my earlier books, they were fictionalized nonfiction. I was taking a lot of liberties with characters, I openly said that I was using composite characters. I was using fiction techniques to tell what I believed were real stories. Basically, *Speed Tribes* came from me knowing a lot of people in Tokyo who would tell me these stories about what they'd done, and I didn't go out and check these stories. I wrote them the way they were told to me because I thought they were great stories. You can't do that anymore. If you do, it's seen as a violation. (Wolley)

KTG's authoritative fiction is thus a boon to the new consumers of Japanese images which don't meet the strictures of academic or rigorous journalistic inquiry, but which appeal to modern otaku devourers of fictional Japan.

Besides presenting himself as a journalist and scholar, KTG also presents himself as a translator, another role expected to have some objectivity and authority. Greenfeld's proffered English translations of Japanese terms exhibit various manipulations, while his status as a journalist validates them. His first significant act of creative interpretation is redefining his title term, *bosozoku*, to suit his agenda. Once again this manipulation occurs in the foreword, where Greenfeld explains that "Speed Tribes', a literal translation of *bosozoku*, is the term I have come to use in referring to all these new subcultures" (2).

Greenfeld himself later admitted that his translation was not literal when he defended it against criticism in a New York Times book review. Greenfeld replied to the reviewer's objection to his translation, "Would he have preferred

the more literal ‘Out-of-Control Running Tribes’ as a title? If so, he is free to use that title when he writes a book.” Greenfeld’s reply demonstrates his need to defend both his authorship and knowledge, and clearly shows that he subverted literal translation to further his agenda. In truth Greenfeld’s rendition is far from literal, but has an aesthetic appeal to it, proving that KTG has a knack of stringing together information in a way relatable and enticing to American consumers of Japan images. The combination *Speed Tribes* is a very post-modern rendering, echoing both the high-pace of Tokyo life and the group facet of Japanese society, a type of contradiction in terms that Littlewood identifies as common in representations of Japan. Greenfeld has at the same time made a creative choice of English cognates, put the term to a metonymous use to subsume Japan into its subcultures, and reinforced the contradictory definition at the heart of Japanology.

Greenfeld follows this first major act of definition with minor manipulative translations throughout *Speed Tribes*. There are few ‘straight’ translations in the book common to a guide on a foreign culture. Many of Greenfeld’s interpretations are laden with value judgments and trivia; the definition of *Chinpira* as little pricks is mere titillation, where the word punk would serve equally well. Then there is the translation of Romanized English words from *waseeigo* (Japanized English) back to native English, such as *turendo* to trends and Live houses (183) for music venues. These inverted translations let the reader see through Japanese eyes and amplifies the strangeness of Japan.

But more important than the translation of words is the translation and relation of ideas. When Greenfeld describes Keiko as “looking like 100 yen, which is less than a dollar” (118), he is laying bare the discrepancy in American and Japanese values, and the insignificance of the latter. This is reinforced in the description of Todai university as *ichiban* (149), and of the Geisha roots of hostessing, (231). KTG makes Japan intelligible by describing prison rehabilitators as Cool Hand Luke and Stand and Deliver types, while showing Japanese inability to grasp American icons like Patu-rikku Shwazhee (135). Greenfeld’s mishmash of Japanese and American icons and perspectives reveals Japanese hybridity as an impure otherness that seeks to copy the US but does so imperfectly, a viewpoint Littlewood asserts as common to the west’s idea of Japan (1994).

The depiction of Japan as impure, mixed with foreignness it detests

but cannot do without, runs throughout *Speed Tribes*. Even Japanese ultra-nationalists smoke Russian cigarettes and go surfing when not practicing kendo or holding meetings to expound their ideology. The culmination is Greenfeld's comparison of Japanese social phenomenon with American counterparts. This is a form of translation laden with value judgments. This last type of linguistic translation manipulation is indicative of a larger thematic translation or relation of Japan to America. By linking or putting Japanese things in an American context, KTG makes them understood, but not without adding a moral value. The comparison is largely to the detriment of Japan.

Equally telling are the times when KTG doesn't compare Japan with the US. Greenfeld asserts that Japanese prison will "knock the life out of any exuberant youth" (81), but is US prison any different, especially considering the convicted bike thief like Dai?

Another aspect reinforcing the concept of decadence is the unreliability of characters in *Speed Tribes*. Just as Greenfeld's translation choices serve his purpose, so do the characters he chooses as titular in all 12 chapters of the book. Every character spotlighted in a chapter somehow shirks responsibility or opposes authority. Whereas traditional images of Japanese were circumscribed by their loyalties to their country, family, and the emperor, Greenfeld's 'new generation' are notable for their resistance to one or many of these loyalties. Biker gang leader Tats ignores the order of his superior and his mother; office worker, Keiko disobeys her parents' wishes to run off to Australia; and even uber-nationalist Ozaki turns down the overtures of an uyoku oyabun, or fascist party chairman.

Besides these lexical and narrative manipulations, throughout *Speed Tribes* KTG advances the theme of decadence to create his vision of the 'next' Japan. His first act is to link money with sex, which has the effect of depicting Japan as a decadent place, exactly the type that could hold the greatest wealth in the world and lose its way to materialism. Once again it is the foreword where he introduces this concept, when he describes the bubble economy as "asset appreciation spreading like crabs in whorehouse (x)." He then launches into an anecdote of his British hostess girlfriend, the embodiment of selling sex for money to Japanese customers, who are in turn the rapacious Japanese businessmen buying up American real estate at the time. KTG's characters

are defined by this immorality throughout the novel; his first character Izumi has enough money for three girlfriends, the porn stars also embody sex for money, and the hostess girls debate whether to do it. Those who refuse the association are pushed around by it, like Keiko, who employs her erotic capital to trade power over men instead of sex, but is left strapped for cash. This theme continues and gives Japan a decadent, immoral air. Tats' lover Chiharu also has "exaggerated femininity" which contrasts with "a lack of interest in anything that wasn't of immediate benefit to her" (35). In Greenfeld's 'new' Japan, love and sex are commodities, and feminizing is just a strategy for selling them.

Next, KTG points to drugs as the glue holding together the worker bees of Japan, the escape for its disenfranchised members, and the status symbol of its clueless elite, and ultimately another explanation for both decadent Japan's rise and recent fall. The various scenes of drug use imply its inescapable presence in this 'new' Japan, as does its pairing with foreign corruption. Nineteen year old bike gangleader Tats goes from sniffing glue (24) to his first shot of metamphetamine (26) at the Shonan Run. Choco Bob Bon smokes shabu (87) to escape the drudgery of Japan, Iranians work construction & sell drugs, while valium is legally available (103-104). Keiko does E for the first time with an Australian (139), foreign hostess Rachel wants drugs to make her man happy (167), while Tokyo rich kids see it as status thing (170). The overall message is of Japan as wide open for drugs (172), and even the drug language barrier necessitates *gaijin* (174) for the Yakuza. In reality, Japan is a human society, and drug use is an understandable evil. Although Greenfeld focuses on drug use to a large extent, in reality illegal substance abuse has been a facet of the worker society of Japan for much of the 20th century. The protagonist of *Ningen Shikkaku* by Osamu Dazai, a classic of modern Japanese literature, loosely based on the author himself, does drugs. For America mired in its War on Drugs to criticize Japan's could be seen as the height of hypocrisy.

Finally, the overall impression of Japanese society Greenfeld transmits through his character's voices is one of the opposite of the United States' meritocracy and the grandiose 'American Dream' it offers, which Greenfeld demonstrates through the various small 'Japanese dreams' of his protagonists. Porn actor Choco Bon-Bon, whose dream consists entirely of obtaining a newly hip in Japan *Kharman Ghia* (88), articulates this paucity of Japanese vision

when he insists, “You have to think small”. His reasons for this desire are a litany of the mundane aspects of his life such an acquisition will liberate him from: “No traffic. No trains. No crowds. No videos. No cum shots” (114). Bicycle thief Dai accepts his petty dream: “We steal motorcycles. It was a future, a role, a niche in society” (71). Office worker Keiko dreams of an Australian Statue of Liberty, as opposed to her image of the Japanese, a guy in a grey suit with ‘Work Hard’ over his head (142). To Greenfeld’s protagonists, Japan is a rigged game, and one that only people with the right birth can win. This society is as rigged as the socialist mechanisms of subsidizing underperforming companies noted by Hayashi, further strengthening the gulf between Japan and the US yardstick by which it is measured.

Japan as a warning sign

Who then, are the intended consumers of the images of Japan presented in *Speed Tribes*? Greenfeld gives us an indication in the final chapter, Snix: The Otaku. Just as the author establishes his authority in the prologue by inserting himself as a character before introducing the 3rd and 1st person narrative voices of individual Japanese protagonists, he mirrors his opening act of narration in the final chapter by reintroducing his own voice. In this final chapter Japanese people are now relegated to a mass of ‘they’ directly in opposition to the ‘we’ of Greenfeld’s intended audience, a mass upon which the author now renders judgment. Coming at the end of Greenfeld’s choice of criminal and marginalized elements to represent Japan, this final chapter sends a clear message: *Speed Tribes*’ hybrid Japan is corrupt, and so is the globalization it embraces.

Globalized Japan is thus the antithesis of America, what America must never become. America, in return, is identified by the protagonist in the chapter ‘Homestay’ as the place to escape to, where freedom reigns and you can get a Glock. It is the best homestay place, and is contrasted with the worst, China, here making its appearance in Greenfeld’s prescient cosmology as the yin to America’s yang. The warning is both a financial and moral caution against an inscrutable and impure Japanese culture. The ‘rigged game’ of Japanese society Greenfeld’s protagonists decry is as social as it is sexual, and sexual as it is financial and moral. There can be no distinction.

The disenfranchised bosozoku are in turn just as immoral as those landed interests that prey on them. Japan is as morally lost as it is financially, and if Japan is the default for what the future will look like, Americans should fear it. Levi-Strauss identifies loss of identity as the fearful aspect of cultural interaction (1987), of becoming the same as the Other. This fear is precisely what Greenfeld plays on in the final chapter of *Speed Tribes*.

However, when looked at without fear, the hybrid Japan that Greenfeld warns of is the first truly globalized society in Asia. If that sounds strange, consider this: after closing its doors, Japan had America batter them down, then after waging war with the outside world, America again came to its doorstep. This engendered the passive Japan of geisha tropes and idyllic temples identified by Littlewood as the successor to the Kamikaze and Samurai images of wartime propaganda (61). The active Japan of the Bubble is the result of the accumulation of contacts and contracts and pipelines Japan assembled during its rise as an economic superpower, the threat of which recalled the suited samurai image to duty. For Greenfeld's Japan is a hybrid, keeping its own identity while grafting on foreign influences and elements, which necessitates the calling into service of its underworld and fringe subcultures to represent the new hybrid entity it has become. Japan is international while guarding its cultural core à la Levi-Strauss, making it more inscrutable and scarier to Greenfeld's audience. In this light, it is no surprise that *Speed Tribes* made it onto the syllabus for a course on globalization and global cultures at London South Bank University in 2006-7, an institution from an island country subject to many of the same international pressures and relations as Japan itself.

Balancing out Greenfeld's intended readers is another audience of *Speed Tribes* that Greenfeld did not intend: the modern otaku themselves. Modern otaku are no longer Japanese, nor only interested in computers or data collection like those presented in the book. *Speed Tribes* is an admittedly prescient book in its representation of the otaku and hikikomori (shut ins) phenomena long before their popularization, but it is also extremely dated by its small mention of technology, anachronistic cellphones are big deals, and omission of Akihabara, otaku meccas. Just as the author could not foresee the global explosion of otaku culture, he did not realize that foreign otaku and Sinophiles are now major consumers of ideas of Japan in addition to

the economics, politics, and 'high' cultural specialists on Japan, motivating Greenfeld's use of the bosozoku as alternatives to the diplomats and businessmen as images of a 'new' Japan.

The otaku of Allison's global imagination marketplace form a wider spectrum than Greenfeld's bosozoku, encompassing law abiding folks and group-oriented cosplayers that are the antithesis of Greenfeld's antisocial hackers. The scant mention of anime or manga in *Speed Tribes* except as boring old Be-Bop High School manga instead mark 1990s Japan as the crucible in which Japanese technologies of imagination would be formed and perfected to satisfy the lost generation of consumers who would need them to complete their lives. In this way, it is precisely otaku culture that has profited from *Speed Tribes*' revealing of Japanese sub-cultures and their subsequent popularity as internet memes and media tropes. The stories of *Speed Tribes* coincide with the birth of the modern otaku culture, and foreign otaku can be seen as the post modern form of the Japanist, as opposed to the post-Meiji restoration western representation addressed by Ikeda, wartime anthropologists like Benedict, or the seekers of Japanese business secrets such as Hall. Allison's cultural essay also outlines interactive Japanese media, which were in nascent form at this point, like the video games hacked by the otaku. The lost generation of *Speed Tribes* is thus the catalyst for Japan's development of these sales techniques and their technologies of imagination, and ultimately the rise of Japan's 'soft power'.

Finally, *Speed Tribes* also offers something for the traditional repository of Japanist thought, the university. Although the book's penetration into university curricula has not been large, it has been diverse. The very fact that MIT, SLC and USC have used it in courses as disparate as Japanese policy and politics, anthropology, and global culture shows the flexibility the book has and its value in providing what academia lacks. It is useful for starting debate as Rietveld shows, while Samuels' inclusion of it for his 'otaku' students (2011) shows its resonance with popular culture. The rise of China as an economic and powerhouse makes it a political reality as well, one that stepping out of the shadow of academia as Littlewood suggests would seem to be an increasingly important development.

Conclusions

The idea of Japan as future is, of course, simply a metaphor for explaining how it has coped with the modern world of economic, political, technological and cultural flux by forming its own unique hybrid modernity. Although America's image of Japan has traditionally been formed between the lenses of finances, diplomacy, and culture as dictated by the era, each of these alone fails to explain why this Japan can be held in both fear and attraction for the American mind. The relation between America and Japan is one where the whole picture is greater than the sum of its parts, and a hybrid or globalized view is necessary to take these interactions into account and balance any subjective reactions.

Claude Levi-Strauss posits that cultures grow and advance the most have more interaction with other cultures (79-80). Japan has a culture that America sees as worth interacting with, and translators of Japan such as Greenfeld provide the medium of that translation. The recalibration of representative images by these interpreters to suit the times is as natural a part of US-Japan relations as of all international relations, but one that should not go unquestioned. The images of Japan, though loosely based on real phenomena in Japanese society, can easily become exaggerated representations of the whole carrying an alarmist message that can distort perceptions. Perceiving Japan clearly can let other countries see how it keeps the core of its identity while incorporating others, and how it transitions in flux times such as the economic cycle of boom and bust that seems to be *de rigeur* in the post-modern world. This phenomenon should be studied in the case of other international relations as globalization accelerates even further. However, if Americans allow themselves to be blinded with fear of future and globalization, America's credit crisis and right wing agenda may pull it into a similar depression that pops the bubble of American exceptionalism as surely as the Japanese financial bubble was popped.

References

Allen, Matt and Sakamoto, Rumi. (2006). Popular culture, globalization, and Japan. New

York: Routledge.

Allisson, Anne. (2008) La culture populaire japonaise et l'imaginaire global. Critique internationale 38 (janvier-mars).

Amazon.com. (1998 to present). "Speed Tribes customer reviews".

Drifte, Reinhard. "Japan's foreign policy in the 1990s : from economic superpower to what power?"

Fry, Gerald. (1997). International studies 440/540: The Pacific challenge [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu>

Gibson, William. (2001). "Modern boys and mobile girls". *The Observer*. Sunday April 1, 2001.

Greenfeld, Karl Taro. (1994). *Speed Tribes: Days and Nights with Japan's Next Generation*.

Greenfeld, Karl Taro. (1994). *Speed Tribes: Children of the Japanese Bubble*.

Hall, Edward (1984). *Hidden Differences*. New York: Doubleday.

Hayashi, Fumio. (2002). The 1990s in Japan: A Lost Decade. Review of economic dynamics, vol.5:1, pp.206-235. January.

Hillegonda, Rietvald. (2006). Global cultures unit guide [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/international/documents>

Iwata, Kazuo. (1990). "Mousume or Mousmee: Westerners' image of Japan in English since the Meiji Era." *Aichi University Educational Supplement*. 40:1. 55-73. NII Electronic Library Service.

Jetwit.com. (March 24, 2009). "Another JET alum author-karl Taro Greenfeld". The alumni magazine. Retrieved from <http://jetwit.com/wordpress/2009>

Kingston, Jeff. Japan's Quiet Transformation: Social Change and Civil Society in the Twenty-First Century.

Laurence, Henry. (2002). Japanese politics and society fall 2002 syllabus [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://ocw.mit.edu/courses/political-science>

Ledbetter, James. (2011). "No, We're Not Turning Into Japan: But Here's Why This Annoying Argument Won't Go Away." Slate.com.

Levi-Strauss, Claude. (1987). *Race et Histoire*. Denoel: Paris.

Littlewood, Ian. (1994). *The Image of Japan*. Seeker & Warburg: London.

Moorghen, *Speed Tribes Revisited: An Hour with Karl Taro Greenfeld*. Jean-Marc. Figure8productions. [website posted interview]

Moskowitz, Mark. (March 2009). Japanese cultures anthropology 308 syllabus 2009 [webpage]. Retrieved from <http://people.cas.sc.edu/moskowitz/courses/japan/2009japan.syllabus.html>

Rauch, Jonathan. A new Japan: The young and the restless. The Washington Post-Washington, D.C. Nov 20, 1994 Start Page: WBK4

Jonathan Rauch reviews the books "About Face: How I Stumbled onto Japan's Social Revolution" by Clayton Naff and "Speed Tribes: Days and Nights with Japan's Next Generation" by Karl Taro Greenfeld.

Said, Edward. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage: New York.

Said, Edward. (1979). *Orientalism*. Vintage: New York.

Sakamoto, Rumi. (Dec.1, 2011). Email with author.

Samuels, Richard. (Jun.27, 2011). Email with author.

Samuels, Richard. (2005). Politics and policy in Japan Spring 2005 syllabus [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://stellar.mit.edu>

White, Gregory. (2010). "Nomura's Richard Koo Reiterates Warning To America: Japan Is The Country You're Doomed To Become." *Business Insider*.

Wolley, Leann. "From New Journalism in China to Autism: Interview with Karl Taro Greenfeld." Asia Pacific Arts [webpage]. Retrieved from asiapacificarts.usc.edu.

Abstract

Since the collapse of Japan's Bubble economy, portrayals of a 'new' Japan have increasingly appeared in books and other media, and modern Japan has even been called the 'default setting for the global future'. This trend at redefining the image of Japan is epitomized by Karl Taro Greenfeld's 1995 novel *Speed Tribes*, which introduced a pantheon of underworld and sub-cultural images as representations of Japan's 'next generation'. Examining the popularity of *Speed Tribes* offers a method for understanding the motives and methods behind the recurrent phenomenon of cultural interpreters like Greenfeld at crucial turning points in Sino-American relations.

Greenfeld's powerful representations have not dissipated with time, but have instead migrated from the cultural to the political, appearing in the syllabus for an MIT political science and policy course in 2004, and undergoing recent attempts to turn the book into a documentary and dramatic film. Japan remains the 3rd largest economy in the world and an important counterweight in Asia to the rise of China, thus an exploration of the author's techniques of disseminating representations about Japan is in order.

I trace how Greenfeld creates an authoritative persona in *Speed Tribes* to cement his authority, then uses journalistic, narrative and interpretive manipulations to depict his 'new Japan' as a place of decadence that no longer matters economically or politically. Next, I examine the author's message of warning to Americans against becoming a globalized hybrid like the post-modern Japan he articulates. Finally, I examine the consumers of these images of a 'new Japan', and how they have extended from traditional academic, economic, and political experts to popular otaku culture fetishists and consumers of the products of imagination at the heart of Japan's 'soft' power.