

Anime in America, Disney in Japan: The Global Exchange of Popular Media  
Visualized through Disney's "Stitch"

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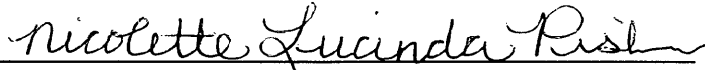
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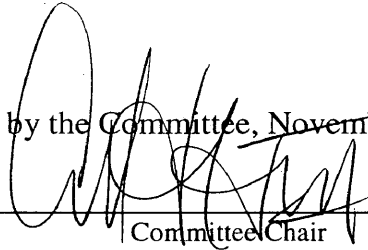
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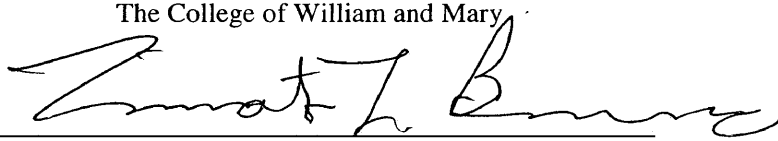
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## ABSTRACT PAGE

My thesis examines the complexities of Disney's Stitch character, a space alien that appeals to both American and Japanese audiences. The substitutive theory of Americanization is often associated with the Disney Company's global expansion; however, my work looks at this idea as multifaceted. By focusing on the Disney Company's relationship with the Japanese consumer market, I am able to provide evidence of instances when influence from the local Japanese culture appears in both Disney animation and products. For example, Stitch contains many of the same physical characteristics found in both Japanese anime and manga characters, and a small shop selling local Japanese crafts is located inside the Tokyo Disneyland theme park. I completed onsite research at Tokyo Disneyland and learned about city life in Tokyo. My work reflects these experiences as I observe the impact that Japanese culture has had on the Disney Company. My thesis also looks at the increased popularity of Japanese popular media in the United States over the past decade. I accredit this to the Disney Company's distribution of Hayao Miyazaki's films which began with the 1996 Disney-Tokuma Agreement. Through my research, I find that Japanese consumers feel ownership of both the Stitch character and Tokyo Disneyland because of the inspiration from their culture that is apparent in each. Overall, my work reveals that Stitch is the product of the exchange between American and Japanese cultures in terms of animation and shows how the Disney Company's interaction with Japan has resulted in an American created character with many Japanese characteristics.

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I am forever indebted to Toshi Ohwada and his wife, Asuka for their assistance during my time in Tokyo. Their generosity was incredible, and I could not imagine exploring Japan without their support. Chihiro Kitagawa welcomed me into her home during my time in the city. She is an amazing young woman, and I admire her work ethic. I am very grateful for the hospitality that she provided. Both Fumika Nagano and Junya Yagi were extremely helpful during my time in Japan. They spent a great amount of time teaching me about navigating Tokyo and accompanying me on my travels throughout the city. I am thankful for their kindness. Finally, Masako Notoji gave me the opportunity to speak with her about her experience with the Disney Company and her opinions on Tokyo Disneyland. Her input concerning my project was fantastic, and the conversation that I had with her helped to further my overall knowledge of Disney in Japan. I could not have completed my trip without the assistance from those mentioned above. I can say without reservation that these individuals were the most welcoming group of people I have ever had the opportunity to meet and befriend.

Finally, I could not have finished this project without the assistance from my advisor, Arthur Knight as well as the support from my parents and Eric Lail. I am very appreciative of the constant encouragement and guidance from these individuals.

## Timeline of Events Involving Japan and the Disney Company

- 1853: Asakusa Hanayashiki opens. It is the oldest amusement park in Japan.
- 1893: World Columbian Exposition opens in Chicago, Illinois. It is the first American version of an amusement park.
- 1920's: Magazines and newspapers become popular forms of media in Japan.
- 1928: The first Mickey Mouse cartoon, *Plane Crazy*, is released in the United States.
- 1931: The first Mickey Mouse cartoons are shown in theaters in Japan.
- 1937: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first full length animated feature in motion picture history, is released by the Disney Company in the United States.
- 1940's/50's: Anime and manga become popular in Japan.
- 1950: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is released in Japan.
- 1954: *Disneyland*, the television program, airs in the United States.
- 1955: Disneyland opens in Anaheim, California.
- 1958: *Disneyland*, the television program, renamed *Walt Disney Presents*, airs on Japanese television.
- 1960's: Commercialized travel to the United States begins in Japan.
- 1960: The Oriental Land Company is established by Chiharu Kawasaki.
- 1961: Nara Dreamland opens in Nara Japan. Nara Dreamland is a theme park constructed by Japanese developers that mimics the characteristics of the original Disneyland in California.
- 1962: The Land Reclamation Agreement is signed in Urayasu, Japan. Chiharu Kawasaki approaches the Disney Company to ask for a Disney theme park in Japan.
- 1964: Land reclamation from the Tokyo Bay begins in Urayasu, Japan .
- 1971: Walt Disney World opens in Orlando, Florida.
- 1975: Land reclamation is complete in Urayasu.

- 1979: The Oriental Land Company and the Disney Company reach an agreement to begin the construction of Tokyo Disneyland.
- 1983: Tokyo Disneyland opens. (Exact date: April 15, 1983)
- 1992: Disneyland Paris opens in Marne-la-Vallée, France.
- 1996: The Disney-Tokuma Agreement is signed. This allows for the Disney Company to dub and distribute films by the Japanese director and animator, Hayao Miyazaki.
- 1998: The Disney Company releases its first Miyazaki film, *Kiki's Delivery Service*. In Japan, this film is titled, *Majo no Takkyūbin*, and it was released in 1989.
- 2002: *Lilo & Stitch* enters theaters in the United States.  
The Disney Company releases Miyazaki's film, *Spirited Away*. In Japan, *Spirited Away* is known as, *Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi*, and it is the highest grossing film in Japanese history to date.
- 2003: The Disney Company releases *Lilo & Stitch* in Japan.  
The Disney Channel launches in Japan.  
*Stitch! The Movie* is a straight to video release in the United States.  
*Lilo & Stitch: The Series* airs on the Disney Channel in the United States, and it runs through 2006.  
*Spirited Away* earns Oscar for "Best Animated Film."
- 2005: Hong Kong Disneyland opens.  
*Lilo & Stitch 2: Stitch has a Glitch* enters theaters in the United States.
- 2006: Nara Dreamland closes indefinitely.  
Tokyo Disneyland is invaded by Stitch as part of a special event.
- 2008: *Stitch!* airs exclusively on the Japanese Disney Channel.
- 2009: Miyazaki's latest film, *Ponyo*, is released by the Disney Company in the United States.

## **1. Introduction:** **Disney, Japan, and Stitch**

While walking down Harajuku Street in Tokyo, Japan, I notice that one kawaii character seems to appear in every store window.<sup>1</sup> It is blue and teal with very large ears; at a first glance, it looks very similar to a rabbit; however, this creature is not an earthly animal. The character's appearance fits with the Japanese anime characters that it is situated amongst, although, unlike the anime girls and boys, it is not human. Despite its surroundings, this creature is not a Japanese anime character, but rather, a creation of the Disney Company (DC), and his name is Stitch. He is a space alien as explained in *Lilo & Stitch*, an animated film that first appeared in the United States, and then worldwide, in 2002.

It is January 2009, and, in Tokyo, Stitch, minus his human partner, Lilo, is everywhere. The character's image can be found on stationary, calendars, t-shirts, and hair accessories. Memorabilia can be purchased at convenient stores, markets, and malls throughout Japan, and via these outlets, Stitch has flooded the Japanese consumer market. Shoppers can buy Stitch charms for their cell phones, picture frames with Stitch's image, and boot keepers with Stitch's head on top. The Stitch commodities seem endless in this area of Japan.

During my time in the Akihabara district of Tokyo, I find that Japanese cell phone companies are also involved in the Stitch craze. Flashing electronic stores display cell phones whose themes include images of Winnie the Pooh, the Aristocats,

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<sup>1</sup> In Japan, the word "kawaii" describes something that is cute, innocent, small, sweet, or childish. See Aviad E. Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 173.



and Stitch. These products are the result of the DC teaming up with Softbank Mobile, a Tokyo-based cell phone carrier, in order to develop themes, ring tones, and games which showcase Disney characters and songs.

In addition, Stitch is also a star at the local theme park, Tokyo Disneyland. Instead of the traditional Tiki Hut attraction found at Disneyland theme parks across the world, Tokyo Disneyland's version is entitled: "The Enchanted Tiki Room: Stitch Presents 'Aloha E Komo Mai!'" During this animatronic show, the birds in the Tiki Room look for a lost Stitch. Eventually, he pops out of a drum in the center of the room and begins to serenade the audience. Stitch and his friend Lilo also appear in the Jubilation parade that takes place daily in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle, and Stitch merchandise is for sale throughout the theme park with the greatest amounts available in the World Bazaar shopping areas.

But Stitch is not confined to Tokyo's shops in Disneyland. The Japanese Disney Channel also brings him into the homes of many Japanese across the country via a show simply titled, *Stitch!*, which airs exclusively in Japan. Beginning in October 2008, this animated show replaced the Hawaiian Lilo with Japanese Yuna and changed the setting from the Hawaiian islands of the animated film to the Japanese island group of Okinawa.

While visiting Japan to do research on Tokyo Disneyland, I inadvertently discovered the Stitch character's enormous popularity in the Japanese consumer market. Why, I wondered, does Stitch—a success in the United States, but hardly a significant character in the Disney stable—enjoy such overwhelming popularity in Japan? I have come to think of this question as "the mystery of Stitch," and I believe

that exploring this mystery will shed new light on the complex dynamics of cultural globalization. Certainly, an important part of Stitch's Japanese success is that he does not look out of place amongst the "native" characters of Japanese animation traditions and practices. My essay will explain how such an appearance of belonging (and remember, Stitch is a space alien)—a belonging that works in both the U.S. and Japan, but also works differently in both places—could come into being by tracing the long chain of events and relations that led to the DC's creation of Stitch and the Japanese embrace of him. For such an apparently simple character, Stitch's story is illuminatingly complex.

I begin with a history of the DC in Japan and the events that occurred in order to build a Disney theme park in the Chiba prefecture of the greater Kanto region. After constructing the historical background for the park, I provide a description of Tokyo Disneyland. In order to understand why this park is unique, I analyze various parts of the park that are different from the original park located in Anaheim. My analysis clarifies the modifications that are apparent at this theme park. Tokyo Disneyland is not as American as, for example, Disneyland in Paris, France. The phenomenon of Americanization in relation to Disney, Japan, and Tokyo Disneyland is multifaceted and results in cultural hybridity. The DC localizes its theme park and some products for this region, and this process can be viewed as a form of glocalization which refers to the outcome of the process of mixing both a global and a

local culture to create a hybrid product or idea.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I argue that Tokyo Disneyland's success arises from a type of glocalization in which a non-Japanese cultural product is shaped by the local market, and interestingly, this influence becomes recursive resulting in the reshaping of the importer, Disney. The purpose of this section is to provide the story of the localization of Disneyland, an American theme park in Tokyo, and to showcase the main starting point of Disney's relationship with Japan.

The next section discusses Japanese anime and manga and the popularity of these medias in the Japanese consumer market. I give a brief history of anime and manga in order to provide a context for Disney's success in Japan. Following this is a discussion of the DC's relationship with Japanese anime companies and the distribution of Japanese anime films in the United States and globally. I also argue that the relationship between the DC and Japan has resulted in an increased status of Japanese popular culture in the United States. Information about Hayao Miyazaki, a famous Japanese animator, accompanies this history. Next, I focus on the development of the Stitch character, and its presence in the Japanese market through film and television to reveal how the merging popular media of American Disney animation and Japanese anime and manga sets the stage for this character.

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<sup>2</sup> For my purposes, Americanization means the influence that the United States has on other countries throughout the world, and, in some instances, the process of substituting a foreign culture with American culture. For an understanding of cultural hybridity, I refer to Marwan Kraidy; he recognizes that through the process of globalization, traces of other cultures come to exist in every culture. The theory of glocalization is defined in the end of this Introduction section. For more information on Kraidy's understanding of cultural hybridity see Marwan Kraidy, *Hybridity or the Culture Logic of Globalization* (Philadelphia, Penn., 2005). For more on the glocalization theory see George Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2004), 75.

Throughout the last decade, the DC has become the translator of Japanese anime and manga for the American consumer market and subsequently found influence for their own projects.

My penultimate section explores the complexities of Stitch and offers a study of the character. I begin by analyzing the character's name in order to discover the relationship between American and Japanese popular culture that he represents. I examine *Stitch!* the television show, and explain the convoluted meanings of this anime production in relation to Japanese culture and history. I also view Stitch as a sort of distillation of the long set of interactions between the DC and Japan and reveal references in the *Lilo & Stitch* narrative to popular culture from both the United States and Japan. I assert that the creation of Disney's Stitch character embodies this process and acts as a global circulator that represents the localization occurring at Tokyo Disneyland. The end result of these assessments reveals how Stitch acts as the modern-day example of the DC's relationship with the Japanese consumer market, and how Americanization can not be considered as substitutive as it was when Disney first entered Japan over half a century ago.

The final section of my work looks at Japanese animation in the United States and the ways in which Japanese popular culture is gaining recognition in American consumer markets. Here, I explore the Japanese characters, cartoons, and comics that are a success in the United States. This section aims to reveal how the DC's relationship with Japan has resulted in an increased interest in Japanese popular culture in the United States.

Consideration of the theory of glocalization is imperative for my work.<sup>3</sup> This theory defines the cultural phenomenon that occurs at Tokyo Disneyland and in relation to the Stitch character. Sociologist Roland Robertson provides a useful definition of the term: “the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas.”<sup>4</sup> Originally used in relation to international business and marketing, this theory has recently been applied to the industry of culture, and I intend to continue this trend with my work. Avaid E. Raz also considers the glocalization theory and classifies it as “the symbol that spins webs of interaction that become imbued with local meanings.”<sup>5</sup> In general, I find the theory of glocalization to involve the interaction of many global and local cultural inputs to create a kind of pastiche, or a blend, leading to a variety of cultural hybrids.

The DC is one of many film corporations that have succeeded globally by replacing local films in Europe and Asia with their own. This process is viewed as a negative form of Americanization. Edward Jay Epstein goes so far as to claim that, “Disney ...gave a concrete embodiment to [the] Americanization concepts with its

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<sup>3</sup> I recognize that Tokyo Disneyland acts as a site of glocalization, and I classify Stitch as a glocalized character. However, I focus on the localization aspect of the glocalization theory. Localization can be understood as substitutive, meaning that a local culture could completely morph or transform a foreign object or idea, making it void of past associations with any global entity, but I do not assert this position. Instead, I look at the ways in which localization affects the global supplier. In this context, the framework of glocalization is necessary for interpreting the localization that I examine. Alan Bryman offers two theories of localization that are useful in relation to this project: anticipatory localization and responsive localization. The first refers to the act of adapting principles to local conditions in anticipation of how they are likely to be received, and the latter addresses the result of the contact of a globalizing force with local conditions and culture whereby the firm feels compelled to adapt to the local surroundings. The types of localization occurring at Tokyo Disneyland and in relation to the DC in Japan are reflections of Bryman’s theories. See Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society* (London, 2004), 162-163.

<sup>4</sup> Ritzer, *The Globalization of Nothing*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, 199.

foreign theme parks.”<sup>6</sup> My essay will work against claims such as this to expose how the DC is influenced by foreign cultures and their popular media; the construction of Tokyo Disneyland and development of subsequent productions involving Stitch exemplify this idea. The concept of Americanization has morphed from its original meaning, and the Stitch character is one result of a more complex phenomenon of multifaceted Americanization.

## **2. Disney in Japan:** **The Arrival of Tokyo Disneyland**

Originally a “flower park,” Asakusa Hanayashiki is Japan’s oldest surviving amusement park. Since its beginnings in the latter part of the Japanese Edo era, this playground has been home to exotic animals, one of the first roller coasters in Japan, and a Japanese ghost house.<sup>7</sup> The park’s central location in the middle of Tokyo makes it easily accessible; however, today, with competitors like Tokyo Disneyland, the attendance at this park seems to be waning.<sup>8</sup>

Asakusa Hanayashiki may not reach the top of the Themed Entertainment Association’s yearly attendance records, but its presence in Japan was an early example of commercialized amusement and the modernization of the country. Similar entertainment venues can be found throughout the area today including culturally

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Jay Epstein, *The Big Picture* (New York, 2006), 88.

<sup>7</sup> Asakusa Hanayashiki opened in 1853. See Hanayashiki, “Asakusa Hanayashiki English Guide,” Brochure (Tokyo, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> I visited the amusement park on January 13, 2009. My friend and I were the only patrons at the park during the time of our visit. The surrounding area was bustling with people, but the park was deserted except for the workers. It would be interesting to experience the park in the summer to see if more people were in attendance.

themed parks such as Parque Espana and Canadian World.<sup>9</sup> Although Asakusa Hanayashiki can be credited with initiating the amusement park market in Japan, the ultimate triumph of the Japanese entertainment industry is arguably Tokyo Disneyland. Opening over a century after the original Japanese amusement park, it took more than a want for a new entertainment venue to secure and establish Tokyo Disneyland.

American popular culture has been a part of the Japanese market for many years. By way of advertising and film images, American mass culture made its way into Japan in the early 1920's.<sup>10</sup> During the pre-World War II era, American culture in Japan came mostly in the form of American movies, television, and animation (the first Mickey Mouse cartoon was shown in Japanese theaters in 1931<sup>11</sup>). Patrick Drazen credits the United States with the development of popular media as he writes, "there would be no animation anywhere else had it not been pioneered and developed in the United States shortly after movies themselves were invented."<sup>12</sup>

During the mid-twentieth century, or post-World War II, Japanese consumers became obsessed over Western popular and material culture. American television, movies, records, and the radio exposed them to U.S. commodities and superstars such as Elvis Presley.<sup>13</sup> The U.S.-led Occupation accelerated Japan's Westernization,

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<sup>9</sup> Joy Hendry, *The Orient Strikes Back A Global View of Cultural Display* (New York, 2000), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Rob Kroes and Robert W. Rydell, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago, 2005), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Dave Smith, "Re: your inquiry," E-mail to the author (Received April 28, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? and Wow! of Japanese Animation* (Berkeley, Calif., 2003), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Tobin, "Introduction," in *Re-Made in Japan Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New York, 1994), 1-41. 14.

specifically Americanization, and the passion for American goods and popular phenomena continued to flourish throughout the 1950's.

For the DC, the 1950's was a very successful time in the United States and the rest of the world. Its movies and products were thriving in the global market, and its first theme park, Disneyland California, opened in 1955. With movies, toys, memorabilia, and a new theme park, consumers were able to watch, buy, and interact with Disney characters; a synergistic company was achieved. Leading up to the opening of the Disneyland theme park in California, the up-and-coming television channel, American Broadcasting Company, aired a weekly show entitled, *Disneyland*.<sup>14</sup> Each episode acted as an advertising mechanism for the theme park, and Walt Disney appeared to discuss his plans for Disneyland, promote his movies, and showcase his characters. In 1958, *Disneyland* aired on Japanese television.<sup>15</sup> The view of America found in Walt's fantastical, if sanitized, world intrigued Japanese viewers.<sup>16</sup> *Disneyland* brought Walt's magic into the homes of Japanese families.

Post-World War II rebuilding and a growing appreciation for Western popular culture created an ideal climate for a highly regarded Japanese businessman, Chiharu Kawasaki, to suggest construction of a Disney theme park in Japan. He

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<sup>14</sup> Roy Disney, Walt's brother and business partner, opposed the Disneyland theme park so much so that Walt created another company, Walt Disney Incorporated, to organize, develop, and plan the park. Roy's resistance to the idea of a theme park meant that Walt had to raise the funds without their company's assistance. As a result, he worked closely with television networks for support. The *Disneyland* television show was, in essence, a return for the financial assistance received from the American Broadcasting Company. See Alan Bryman, *Disney and His Worlds* (London, 1995), 12.

<sup>15</sup> At this time, *Disneyland* was renamed, *Walt Disney Presents*, and aired in Japan under this title. After extensive email correspondence with Dave Smith, Chief Archivist for the Walt Disney Company, no conclusion can be reached as to whether Japanese viewers saw re-runs of *Disneyland* or the current shows, *Walt Disney Presents*.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Smoodin, *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom* (New York, 1994), 189.



envisioned using the positive reception of the television show, *Disneyland*, as only a beginning for a successful Disney venture in Japan. Kawasaki's position was ideal; in 1960, he was the president of Keisei Electric Railway, and he knew how instrumental the railway companies were in Japan's expansion and modernization. In Japan, large railway groups develop construction projects such as shopping malls or resorts in order to create a need for more transportation to a certain area. Kawasaki's plan: to create a railway company whose purpose would be to build and control a Disney theme park.

In 1962, Kawasaki, acting as the first president of the Oriental Land Company (OLC),<sup>17</sup> began reclamation work on a 380-hectare plot of land resting beneath the Tokyo Bay.<sup>18</sup> In response to the local government's wishes for expansion, the OLC made an arrangement with Chiba prefecture officials entitled the Urayasu District Land Reclamation Agreement which permitted the OLC to recover the land off the coast and then purchase it for development.<sup>19</sup> The retrieval of this ground officially began in 1964.

With his company working to clear and ready the terrain for development, Kawasaki approached the DC to discuss a plan to duplicate the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California and to place it on Japanese soil. His attempt failed. The

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<sup>17</sup> The Oriental Land Company was established in July 1960 with the aim of reclaiming the land off of the coast of Urayasu, Japan. Kawasaki, OLC's first president, was also acting president of the Keisei Electric Railway (KER). Eventually, he returned to KER in 1977 for financial reasons, and Takahashi Masatomo took over the negotiations for Tokyo Disneyland. See "About OLC Chronology," *OLC Group*, <http://www.olc.co.jp/en/company/history/index.html> (accessed March 11, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Kanako Takahara, "Rain or Shine, Disney's Parade Rolls On," *The Japanese Times Online*, May 3, 2008,

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nb20080503a2.html> (accessed 19 February 19, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> "About OLC Chronology," *OLC Group*.

DC was in the midst of developing plans for Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida and could not fathom their staff and operations constructing another park at that time.<sup>20</sup>

The DC used Walt Disney World as an excuse for their rejection of Kawasaki's plans. However, a Japanese theme park which opened in 1961 may have contributed to the company's refusal to place a park in Japan in the early 1960's; it certainly clarified Japanese interest in Disneyland. In 1961, just six years after the opening of Disneyland in California, Dream Park Inc., operating under the Japanese supermarket mogul, Daiei Inc., opened a theme park in Nara, Japan bearing the name Nara Dreamland.<sup>21</sup> A brief article in the *Los Angeles Times* from July of that year notes: "The Japanese, experts in the art of copying, are planning to open an amusement center near the city of Nara. And what's it going to remind visitors of – they hope? Disneyland."<sup>22</sup> The themed areas of the park included: Main Street, Fantasyland, Frontierland, Adventureland, and Tomorrowland. Photographs appearing in present day blogs and personal online albums from visits to the park show that Nara Dreamland featured a castle, a park entrance and map, a jungle cruise, a pirate ship, a Peter Pan-type ride, and even a monorail system that were close copies

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Miller, "Tokyo Disneyland," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 20, 1983, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1983/0920/092027.html> (accessed March 8, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> "Daiei May Sell 61 Group Companies in Restructuring Bid," *The Japanese Times Online*, February 12, 2005, <http://serach.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20050212a8.html> (accessed March 11, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> "Japan Plans 'Disneyland,'" *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1961, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*. Swem, Williamsburg. keyword: dreamland (accessed March 11, 2009).

of Disneyland.<sup>23</sup> At Dreamland, a British character sporting a bearskin hat acted in place of Mickey Mouse; the colors of this mascot were also red, white, black, and golden yellow. Dream Park Inc. created a cheaper version of Kawasaki's vision.

It may be a coincidence that Disney rejected Kawasaki's proposal at the same time that Nara Dreamland was opening, but whatever the case, the decade that it took the OLC to reclaim land from Tokyo Bay gave Kawasaki and the DC time to reconsider a possible deal.<sup>24</sup> I have been unable to find details on how Nara Dreamland fared in this period (it finally closed in 2006 for lack of attendance), but its mere existence made clear that Kawasaki's idea was not his alone.<sup>25</sup>

After the successful opening of Walt Disney World, Jim Cora, Disney's vice president of operations, stated, "We started thinking that if we can do two parks, maybe we can do three or four."<sup>26</sup> In 1979, a deal was reached with the OLC, and Kawasaki's vision for a Disney theme park in Japan became a reality. In April 1983, Tokyo Disneyland opened its gates.<sup>27</sup>

Negotiations for the opening of Tokyo Disneyland appeared simple, and the interactions between the United States and Japan through the participating companies

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<sup>23</sup> Jerome Aronson, "The Life and Death of Disneyland Clone Nara Dreamland," *Retard Zone*, October 16, 2008, <http://retardzone.com/2008/10/16/the-life-and-death-of-disneyland-clone-nara-dreamland/> (accessed March 13, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> "About OLC Chronology," *OLC Group*.

<sup>25</sup> In 2005, Daiei Inc. sold Dream Park Inc. to another Japanese company, Tenrushi. The following year, the park closed. This closure is described in "Get a Deep Insight into the World Theme Parks Market Reuters," *Reuters.com*, January 6, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS117950+06-Jan-2009+BW20090106> (accessed March 11, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Miller, "Tokyo Disneyland," 17.

<sup>27</sup> Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, 28.

Since 1983, the TDL (Tokyo Disneyland) complex has expanded to include Tokyo Disney Sea opening in 2001, a shopping, dining, and entertainment complex, the Ikspiari, and the Tokyo Disneyland Hotel.

seemed like two entities who merely joined together for a common cause: bring Disneyland to Japan. However, the finances of this venture were complex. In exchange for rights to DC's licensing and access to continued advice and expertise, OLC funded construction of the park, including hotel rooms for Disney's "Imagineers."<sup>28</sup> OLC would be the owner of Tokyo Disney, but it would pay the DC an ongoing ten percent of admission fees and five percent of food and souvenir sales.<sup>29</sup> The great success of Tokyo Disneyland ultimately left the DC yearning for a greater share in the profits and, in response, the DC decided to open another park in France in 1992 and to have full ownership of this park.<sup>30</sup> This endeavor, however, was not nearly as successful as Tokyo Disneyland and left DC officials envious of the OLC's sensational business venture on the Tokyo Bay.<sup>31</sup>

### **3. The Tokyo Disneyland Experience: Revealing the Local**

As previously noted, Tokyo Disneyland was developed as a copy of Disneyland in Anaheim, California. It is useful to recognize the similarities between

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<sup>28</sup> Imagineers work for the developmental arm of the DC called Imagineering, and they are involved with attraction and show design, production and engineering support, and real estate development. See Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: Manufacture of Fantasy* (Malden, Mass., 2001), 59.

<sup>29</sup> Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, 27.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream: The Story of Euro Disneyland* (New York, 2000), 29-30.

<sup>31</sup> Disney officials announced in 1993 that Disneyland Paris lost approximately eighty-seven million dollars between April 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> of that year. They also predicted losses for the upcoming months. See Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream*, 125. This was reported a year after its April 1992 opening. Also in 1993, Disneyland Paris had an attendance record of ten millions visitors. Comparably, Tokyo Disneyland had sixteen million patrons that same year. See Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, 149. Recently, Disneyland Paris has grown in popularity. According to the TEA/ERA 2008 Attendance Report, Disneyland Paris entertained 12,688,000 visitors while Tokyo Disneyland was attended by 14,293,000 visitors. Disneyland Paris, although still behind Tokyo Disneyland, has improved its numbers by twenty percent over the past fifteen years.

these two parks in order to understand the differences that result from the localization of Tokyo Disneyland. The two venues are modeled on the same principles but, as construction began, it proved impossible to create a strictly American theme park in such a culturally distinct region of the world.

Both Tokyo Disneyland and Disneyland in California lie outside of large metropolitan areas. Tokyo Disneyland is located in the Chiba prefecture of Urayasu, Japan which is approximately forty-five minutes from downtown Tokyo. Disneyland California in Anaheim is about thirty minutes outside of Los Angeles. Visitors to Disneyland California will drive to the park, but in Japan, the most efficient way to get to Disneyland is by way of Tokyo's complex subway and train systems.

Disneyland California is designed in a circular pattern which is then divided into themed sections. Tokyo Disneyland follows this basic layout. The original, Disneyland California, consists of the following areas: Main Street U.S.A., Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, Mickey's Toontown, Frontierland, Critter Country, and New Orleans Square. At Tokyo Disneyland, visitors explore the World Bazaar, Tomorrowland, Fantasyland, Toontown, Critter Country, Westernland, and Adventureland.<sup>32</sup> A closer look at Tokyo Disneyland allows for a greater understanding of the layout of a typical Disney theme park as well as a glimpse of the common rides and attractions.

Upon arriving at the park, visitors disembark from the trains, and they are funneled towards the entrances to the two Disney parks: Tokyo Disneyland and

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<sup>32</sup> See park maps, figures 1 and 2 on page 66, for a further visual comparison of these parks.

Disney Sea.<sup>33</sup> The walk towards the Tokyo Disneyland entrance brings into view the enormous Tokyo Disney Resort Hotel. This extravagant complex appears as though it is a theme park within itself. Built in 2008, this resort allows guests to have extended visits to the Disney complex without leaving the premises. It is also a stop on the complex monorail line, so guests can easily access both of the parks, the Ikspiari, and the other entertainment venues on site.<sup>34</sup>

The path leads visitors past the resort area and into a bag check. Next, they are moved into lines for tickets, and finally, into the park itself. Guests enter the park at the World Bazaar. This open-aired building has a high glass roof which covers the walking area, shops, and restaurants. Here, guests can grab a cup of coffee at the Center Street Coffee House or have a sweet snack at the Great American Waffle Company. They can also buy souvenirs from the Disney Gallery or the Grand Emporium. This area of the park looks like a nostalgic American small town street with signs for a barber shop, ice cream store, and confectionary. Classic American tunes fill the air as a man on a bicycle with a piano rides around the street performing, and a quartet serenades visitors as they make their way through this area towards Sleeping Beauty's Castle.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For the purposes of this research, I focus on Tokyo Disneyland and do not explore Tokyo Disney Sea because it is unique to Tokyo. In addition, Tokyo Disneyland is similar to the other Disney theme parks situated in various locations throughout the world: Anaheim, CA, Orlando, FL, Marne-la-Vallee, France and Lantau Island, Hong Kong.

<sup>34</sup> The Ikspiari is a complex that includes areas for shopping, dining, and entertainment. It is equivalent to Downtown Disney at Disney theme parks in the United States, but the Ikspiari is unique to Tokyo Disneyland.

<sup>35</sup> According to Dave Smith, the music is reflective of the turn-of-the twentieth century era in the United States. See: Dave Smith, "Re: Tokyo Disneyland," E-mail to the author (Received July 31, 2009).

Upon exiting the World Bazaar, guests are greeted by a statue of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse. Surrounded by flower beds and bushes, Walt and Mickey stand waving hello to incoming guests. Looming behind them is Sleeping Beauty's Castle. Visitors can choose to continue through the castle, though the crowd flows to the right of the statue and into Tomorrowland.

Tomorrowland's theme is the future (in reference mostly to space travel and technology). Rides titled Buzz Lightyear's Astro Blasters and Space Mountain are located here. The innovative rides are based on the Disney movie, *Toy Story*, and the stores in this land boast names such as Stellar Sweets and Cosmic Encounter. In Tomorrowland, visitors can experience the Disney version of the years to come.

In Toontown, which is located next to Tomorrowland, guests have the chance to meet Mickey, go on a tour of Minnie's house, take a walk through Chip'n Dale's Treehouse or Donald's Boat, and ride Roger Rabbit's Car Toon Spin. The Jolly Trolley also runs through this area of the park. Toontown is the most likely place for patrons to run into Disney characters; it is supposed to appear as a small village that is home to favorite Disney characters – favorite being objective in that characters' popularity varies worldwide, and the entire area looks like a cartoon drawing. The "town" even has its own post office and park.

Keeping with the natural flow of the crowd through the park, the next themed area is Fantasyland. The Tokyo Disneyland map provides the following description of Fantasyland: "Cinderella, Peter Pan, and all your favorite heroes and heroines are

here, waiting to make your dreams come true.”<sup>36</sup> This section of the park features rides found in other Disney theme parks throughout the world, such as Dumbo the Flying Elephant, The Haunted Mansion, and It’s a Small World. The newest attraction, Pooh’s “Hunny” Hunt is the most popular ride at Tokyo Disneyland.<sup>37</sup> Fantasyland showcases older Disney films and characters such as *Snow White* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

Critter Country and Westernland are located next to Fantasyland. Although distinguished as separate places on the map, these two themed areas blend together (this is most likely because Critter Country contains only two rides). This themed section is set-up like a nostalgic town located in the western United States with a Saloon, Trading Post, and The Canteen. Visitors can also have their picture taken with a large statue of a Native American. The Mark Twain Riverboat sails around the lake in this land, and guests have the opportunity to take a wet ride down Splash Mountain. These lands are situated opposite to Tomorrowland in the park; their historic themes also contrast Tomorrowland’s futuristic atmosphere.

Finally, guests arrive in Adventureland. The Tokyo Disneyland map states, “Cruise along tropical jungle rivers, glimpse into the mysterious world of pirates, and

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<sup>36</sup> Walt Disney Company, “Tokyo Disneyland Guide Map,” 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Pooh’s Hunny Hunt is the most popular ride at Tokyo Disneyland according to Chris Calabrese, “Pooh’s Hunny Hunt: Tokyo Disneyland Park,” *Tokyo Disney Resort Tokyo Disneyland Tokyo DisneySea Fan Photos Information*, [http://www.tdrfan.com/tdl/fantasyland/poohs\\_hunny\\_hunt/index.htm](http://www.tdrfan.com/tdl/fantasyland/poohs_hunny_hunt/index.htm) (accessed March 13, 2009). See also “Pooh’s Hunny Hunt at Tokyo Disneyland,” *Theme Park Insider*, [http://www.themeparkinsider.com/reviews/tokyo\\_disneyland/pooh's\\_hunny\\_hunt/](http://www.themeparkinsider.com/reviews/tokyo_disneyland/pooh's_hunny_hunt/) (accessed March 13, 2009).



even travel back in time. Adventure awaits you!”<sup>38</sup> Here guests can also climb the Swiss Family Treehouse, or watch a show in the Enchanted Tiki Room.<sup>39</sup> The Western River Railroad encircles Adventureland, Westernland, and Critter Country so that visitors can take a trip through these wilderness themed areas. After exploring Adventureland, guests are funneled back through the World Bazaar before exiting the park.

In 2008, Tokyo Disneyland reported an attendance of 14,293,000 visitors placing it third behind the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World and Disneyland in California on the list of the “Top 25 Theme Parks Worldwide.”<sup>40</sup> Tokyo Disneyland is the most popular theme park in Japan, and the Themed Entertainment Association report raises the question of the success of this American transplant, and why millions of Japanese visitors obsess over photographs with Donald Duck, or stand in line for hours to ride Pooh’s “Hunny” Hunt. Clearly, Disney is a global brand, but in Japan, the products work within a unique culture, and this culminates at Tokyo Disneyland where every visitor can savor what the Disney brand brings to them through movies, television, and an overwhelming amount of merchandise.

Tokyo Disneyland, though seemingly an exact copy of the original park in Anaheim, is at the same time very different from American Disney theme parks.

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<sup>38</sup> Walt Disney Company, “Tokyo Disneyland Guide Map.”

<sup>39</sup> Stitch became the theme of the Tiki Room show in summer 2008. See “Enchanted Tiki Room with Stitch Opens in Tokyo Disneyland,” *The Disney Traveler*, <http://www.thedisneytraveler.com/enchanted-tiki-room-with-stitch-opens-in-tokyo-disneyland/> (accessed March 13, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Attendance at California Disneyland was 14,721,000 in 2008. Tokyo Disneyland was only 428,000 patrons behind the American park. See Gene Jeffers and Judith Rubin, “TEA/ERA Attraction Attendance Report 2008,” 2009.

Judging by the layout, areas, designs, and rides, the park appears to be similar to United States parks, but initial comparisons are deceiving. Mary Yoko Brannen argues that “the commodified cultural artifacts of Disneyland are recontextualized in Japanese terms at Tokyo Disneyland. This recontextualization of Disneyland is a specifically Japanese construction.”<sup>41</sup> Through recontextualization, as Brannen suggests, Tokyo Disneyland proves very different from the original Disney theme park in Anaheim, and those differences are the results of the glocalization process.

A closer look at Tokyo Disneyland reveals the unique aspects of this Disney theme park. Tokyo Disneyland acts as a site of glocalization. In order for variations to occur at this theme park, local influences mix with the global brand to produce hybrid outcomes. A second encounter with Tokyo Disneyland reveals the localization (which is synonymous to Brannen’s recontextualization) that takes place at this theme park; viewing the park again exposes the local Japanese influences that are not clearly visible upon a first interaction with the description of the park.

The entrance of the park where the Tokyo Disneyland Resort Hotel stands is a good starting point. Beyond this structure a foggy outline of Mount Fuji is visible in the distance, reminding visitors that they are not in the United States; rather, they are about to partake in a recreated American experience that is emphatically in Japan.

At the entrance of the park, the Japanese version of Main Street U.S.A. towers ahead. This romanticized Main Street leads visitors through a nostalgic turn of the

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<sup>41</sup> Mary Yoko Brannen, “Bwana Mickey: Constructing Cultural Consumption at Tokyo Disneyland,” in Joseph J. Tobin, ed., *Re-Made in Japan: Everyday Life and Consumer Taste in a Changing Society* (New York, 1994), 216-34. 219.

century American thoroughfare with Disney shops and restaurants, while a barber shop quartet serenades on the sidewalk and a bicycling pianist patrols the street. The Tokyo Disneyland creation looks more like the Crystal Palace than any structure found in traditional Disney theme parks, but the OLC had many reasons for portraying this section of the park in this manner. Shopping, souvenir gathering, and gift acquisition are important aspects of travel for Japanese visitors, and the climate in Japan does not lend itself to outdoor shopping. By covering this area, the OLC created an indoor-outdoor mall, thus guaranteeing itself profits on days of inclement weather. Also, as Mary Yoko Brannen suggests, the transformation of the name from Main Street U.S.A. to World Bazaar is a result of the Japanese lack of affinity for American nostalgia. This recontextualization was established in order to capture the interest of the new Japanese guests.<sup>42</sup> World Bazaar stands at the entrance to a park manufactured by and for the Japanese, and this is merely one of the revisions of the original version of Disneyland California that exists at Tokyo Disneyland.

Moving further into the park, visitors are greeted by the same statue that stands ahead of the castle at every Disney theme park worldwide: Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse. In proximity to this statue stands a single cherry blossom tree which was planted for the Tokyo Disneyland fifteenth anniversary celebration. That same year, the OLC hoped to plant these trees throughout the park, but the DC averted that plan by stating that it would detract from the “Disney feeling” of the park.<sup>43</sup> Although

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<sup>42</sup> Brannen, “Bwana Mickey,” 221.

<sup>43</sup> Personal Interview with Professor Masako Notoji, January 14, 2009. Professor Notoji is a Disney Scholar and has written numerous articles discussing Tokyo Disneyland.

the OLC owns the theme park, their agreement states that they must represent the Disney brand as the American company portrays it. By adding cherry blossom trees, the landscape would allude to Japan, and the aura of the typical Disney theme park would be challenged. The addition of one tree, however, speaks to the location of the park, and asserts for Japanese visitors that this park is a part of their culture.

The park leads visitors through six themed areas: Tomorrowland, Toontown, Fantasyland, Critter Country, Westernland, and Adventureland. Each area is funded by one Japanese company and each ride or attraction within those sections is supported by yet another Japanese business. The sign for each themed area and attraction shows its name in English, and the title of the sponsor is written across the bottom using Japanese characters. Although typical American brands such as Coca Cola and Kodak are mounted on rides at the American Disney theme parks, the Japanese approach brings the concept of ownership to a local level. Because so many of the rides are funded by small companies, when visitors come to the park from these businesses they feel a certain connection to the attractions sponsored by their company.<sup>44</sup> For example, the daily Jubilation parade, which is sponsored by Docomo, a Tokyo-based cell phone company, ends with a billboard-like float advertising this company. The abundance of local advertising on ride name placards and appearing in parades and shows speaks to the foreignness of this American theme park.

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<sup>44</sup> I attended the park with a woman who worked for a publishing company in Tokyo. Her company sponsors Toontown, so their name appears on the sign in the park. She was very excited to visit this section of the park because she feels a certain connection to this area.

Another unique aspect of Tokyo Disneyland is the idea of re-theming traditional Disney theme park rides and attractions.<sup>45</sup> This occurs for various holidays at all Disney parks; however, in Japan, these themes are more permanent, and they reflect the interests of Japanese visitors. The Haunted Mansion attraction at Tokyo Disneyland has been redesigned to display scenes from the *Nightmare Before Christmas* movie by Tim Burton. This movie, originally released in Japan in October, 1994, was re-released in October 2004; it was also released in Japan in a three-dimensional version in October 2006, 2007, and 2008.<sup>46</sup> The original attraction, which takes visitors through a mansion inhabited by 999 ghosts and ghouls, has been transformed into Jack Skellington's lair, and the storyline of the movie unfolds along the ride route.<sup>47</sup> Though some of the ride's original characters are present, scenes and characters from the movie have been inserted into every piece of the attraction. The permanent re-theming of this ride is a reflection of the film's continued success in Japan. The Tiki Hut is another example. The popularity of the Disney movie, *Lilo & Stitch*, in Japan led to the re-theming of this traditional Disney attraction. Today, visitors watch a show during which the Tiki Hut birds search for Stitch who is lost on one of the Hawaiian Islands. In addition to being serenaded by a group of animatronic birds, visitors see them discuss the whereabouts of Stitch who, during the

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<sup>45</sup> When referring to "traditional Disney theme parks rides," I am speaking of those rides that were present at the original park in California or those that are the backbone of any new Disney theme park. These include, but are not limited to, It's a Small World, The Jungle Cruise, The Tiki Room, Dumbo the Flying Elephant, The Haunted Mansion, and Pirates of the Caribbean.

<sup>46</sup> Japan was the only country besides the United States to get the re-release of the original film. See: "The *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) - Release dates," *The Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107688/releaseinfo> (accessed June 30, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Walt Disney Company, "Tokyo Disneyland Guide Map."

performance, emerges from a central structure in the Tiki Room. By changing the theme of both of these rides, the attractions are altered, and the re-theming complicates the traditional Disney experience.

Also exclusive to this Disney park is a store in Adventureland bearing the name, Chiba Traders. The official Tokyo Disneyland Resort website promotes Chiba Traders by boasting: “What is more special than a Japanesque Disney gift from Tokyo Disneyland? Here at the exotic tropical realms of Adventureland, Guests can find a treasure chest of handicrafts and toys from Chiba prefecture and around Japan.”<sup>48</sup> Chiba Traders gives guests the opportunity to purchase items from the surrounding prefecture without the experience of visiting this area of Japan. They do spend time in Chiba while at Tokyo Disneyland; however, the Disney theme park culture replaces the local culture in this section of the prefecture. By including local goods in the selection of merchandise that is for sale inside the park, guests are again reminded of Tokyo Disneyland’s location outside of the United States.

A final example of localization at Tokyo Disneyland occurs at the World Bazaar. Here, American themed restaurants, including the Great American Waffle Co. and Refreshment Corner, offer visitors American fare such as hot dogs. In the midst of these American eateries is Restaurant Hokusai, a typical Japanese restaurant serving tempura and noodles.<sup>49</sup> This eatery appeared in Tokyo Disneyland approximately one year after the park opened. As visitors from rural Japan were

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<sup>48</sup> “Tokyo Disney Resort: Tokyo Disneyland: Chiba Traders - Arts and Crafts,” *Adventureland - Tokyo Disneyland Resort*, [http://www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp/tdl/english/7land/adventure/shop\\_chiba.html](http://www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp/tdl/english/7land/adventure/shop_chiba.html) (accessed May 1, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> Walt Disney Company, “Tokyo Disneyland Guide Map.”

bused into the park, they found it difficult to adapt to the food that was offered, and in turn, did not eat anything. Obviously, this made for shorter visits and a lack of profit for the OLC. The Restaurant Hokusai was established in order to accommodate these visitors.<sup>50</sup>

The localization of Tokyo Disneyland is made obvious by the examples of Japanese culture that can be found within the park. Tokyo Disneyland functions as a site of glocalization in that it acts as a hybrid of a Disney theme park; it is not a strict copy of the American original in Anaheim, nor has it lost resemblance to a Disney theme park by becoming completely reworked by Japanese developers. In relation to the theme park, the idea of Americanization is not absolutely substitutive. The American product exists, but alterations because of the local culture were necessary and did occur. The localization that takes place at Tokyo Disneyland results in the creation of an entertainment venue that Japanese visitors claim as their own. No longer is Tokyo Disneyland viewed as an American theme park; it belongs to Japan, and the locals have made it uniquely theirs.

The success of Tokyo Disneyland is not only a result of the localization of the theme park, but also a reflection of the locals' general interest in American popular culture. For example, when the DC built Disneyland Paris, the "Imagineers" practiced anticipatory localization by designing the park to fit with its surrounding environment. The French public, however, did not want an American theme park in

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<sup>50</sup> This information regarding the addition of Restaurant Hokusai to Tokyo Disneyland comes from a conversation that took place while visiting the theme park with Japanese friends. They remembered when the restaurant was opened in the park and discussed the need at the time for Japanese food within the theme park complex.

their country regardless of the adjustments that were made in anticipation of the park's new location. Local residents erected signs stating, "Stay Home, Mickey," and Michael Eisner was pelted with tomatoes at an event in France when he announced that park's opening date.<sup>51</sup> Over the years, the attendance has slowly risen at Disneyland Paris, and Parisians have accepted their new neighbor, but this theme park seems unlikely to reach the status of Tokyo Disneyland. It does not belong to the French because they have not made it their own; they do not want to. Tokyo Disneyland has constructed a unique setting and relationship with the surrounding Japanese culture which is not found at Disneyland Paris.

#### **4. The Invasion of Stitch:**

##### **Who is Stitch, and How Does He Function in Japan?**

On June 16, 2002, Walt Disney Pictures released *Lilo & Stitch* in the United States.<sup>52</sup> Written and directed by Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois, a Coloradoan and a Canadian respectively, the plot of this film involves the actions of a genetic experiment entitled, 626. Originally created in outer space, 626 makes an escape to Earth and lands in Hawaii. Unfortunately, he cannot swim, so he soon realizes that he is stuck on the island. He is picked up and taken to the animal shelter where he is adopted by Lilo, a young Hawaiian girl, and she names him Stitch. Lilo is working through a difficult time in her life: her parents died suddenly, she is now in the care of her older sister, Nani, and a social worker is trying to take her away from her sister

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<sup>51</sup> Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> "Lilo & Stitch (2002) - Release dates," *The Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0275847/releaseinfo> (accessed March 30, 2009).



with the argument that Nani is incapable of caring for Lilo. As Lilo trains Stitch to be more civilized, he becomes a part of their family. Lilo finds that she and Stitch have something in common: he also does not have any parents because he is the result of an experiment. As in many Disney films, the two characters rescue each other in a fairy tale ending to this story about family and friendship.

Interestingly, *Lilo & Stitch* is very different from a typical Disney animated film. The characterization of Hawaiians throughout the movie is provocative, and various features of this group of people are exaggerated. Because this is an animated production, certain identifying characteristics must be utilized in the portrayal of the Hawaiian characters. These additions accentuate the stereotypical characteristics of the Hawaiian population which creates a problematic portrayal of this culture. Nani, Lilo's sister, is a good example because her character features large hips and thighs as well as darkened skin. Nani's features are meant to distinguish her as a Hawaiian, but they make her character appear disproportionate and misshapen. Although the DC has often been criticized for their portrayals of certain groups of people, *Lilo & Stitch* varies from the other Disney productions because of the film's creator and main animator, Chris Sanders. His animation is categorized by other animators working on the film as a "drip style."<sup>53</sup> Every part of the characters' bodies weigh heavy at the bottom, and the animation tends to look bubbly and rounded. In this case, his design techniques emphasize identifying traits of the Hawaiian population which looks more like a caricature of the people than a considerate rendering of a culture.

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<sup>53</sup> Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, "Special Features," *Lilo & Stitch* (Lake Buena Vista, Fla., 2002).

Another intriguing aspect of *Lilo & Stitch* which separates it from other Disney films is the ways in which the narrative aligns a Hawaiian family with aliens. To this end, the construction of family also varies in relation to other Disney productions. Stitch, an alien, ultimately becomes a member of a human family. Originally, Lilo wants to keep Stitch as a pet and seemingly cannot tell the difference between an alien and an animal. Stitch takes on a sibling role when Lilo finds that he can talk and express emotion in ways similar to humans. Oddly, the DC mixes two worlds in *Lilo & Stitch* which unites Hawaiians and aliens; this union is problematic. The traditional American family is repaired by an outer space creature. Overall, this film may appear as a typical Disney creation, but it deals with complex ideas and themes such as the representation of a culture and the non-traditional family unit.

*Lilo & Stitch* was released in Japan on March 8, 2003, almost a year after its initial release in the United States, making Japan the final location outside of the United States to receive the film.<sup>54</sup> Since the movie earned almost twenty-five million in box-office revenues in Japan, it is ironic that the film reached this country last.<sup>55</sup> This income totals approximately one fifth of the total foreign earnings.<sup>56</sup> The delayed release demonstrates that the DC did not create the film for a Japanese audience, but rather for a global one. The popularity of Japanese animation is rising

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<sup>54</sup> The fact that the film was released in Japan last may mean that it was not created with the intention that it would succeed in that country. It seems that the Stitch character was not created for a Japanese audience, and this supports my claim that Disney has been influenced by the D-T agreement in their current animated endeavors. See page 35.

<sup>55</sup> Tim Ryan, "Honolulu Star-Bulletin Hawaii News," *Hawaii Archives - Honolulu Star-Bulletin Archives - Starbulletin.com - archives.starbulletin.com*, January 14, 2003, <http://archives.starbulletin.com/2003/01/14/news/story7.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>56</sup> "Lilo & Stitch," *Box Office Mojo*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=lilostitch.htm> (accessed May 8, 2009).

worldwide so it is appropriate that the DC would model a film after this genre. Its enormous success in both the United States and Japan encouraged the DC to produce sequel films and television productions about the antics of Lilo and Stitch.

The popularity of *Lilo & Stitch* resulted in the DC's release of two other movies and television series in both the United States and Japan. In 2003, *Stitch! The Movie* was a straight to video release, and *Lilo & Stitch 2: Stitch has a Glitch*, appeared in theaters in 2005. From 2003 to 2006, the DC aired *Lilo & Stitch: The Series* on the Disney channel in the United States, and since October of 2008, *Stitch!*, another television series, has aired weekly on the Japanese Disney channel. The positive reception of the Lilo and Stitch characters extends beyond the boundaries of the United States.

Lilo and Stitch's immense popularity in Japan could be a result of the animation of the characters, which pays homage to Japanese anime and manga animation, specifically that by the famous Japanese animator and director, Hayao Miyazaki. His involvement with the DC will be discussed in a later section of this paper, but for now, it is important to recognize the ways in which the characters and plot of Disney's original *Lilo & Stitch* movie salute the famed Japanese animator. Traditionally, Miyazaki's narratives are coming-of-age stories for little girls, and "in these stories, a girl's salvation comes not from romantic love or manly rescue, but from her own confidence, bravery, and sense of wonder."<sup>57</sup> Lilo is not a young girl

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<sup>57</sup> Noy Thrupkaew, "Animation Sensation; Why Japan's Magical *Spirited Away* Plays Well Anywhere," *The American Prospect*, October 20, 2002, [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=animation\\_sensation](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=animation_sensation) (accessed March 30, 2009).

rescued by a man or romantic love; instead she tames an unruly alien into a creature that she can relate to and, in the end, considers to be a part of her family. Her character is not extraordinary in comparison to other leading Disney female characters. The narrative does not allow her any heroic feats, and she is not cast as a royal character. Instead she functions as a mechanism to integrate Stitch into American society; however, for comparative purposes, this character's demeanor is similar to the characters that Miyazaki creates in his anime works. Another allusion to Miyazaki comes from the first scene of *Lilo & Stitch*. Much of Miyazaki's work opens with scenes portraying "visual flights of fancy," referring to the depictions of aliens that he employs in his films.<sup>58</sup> *Lilo & Stitch* begins with similar sequences involving the Turo aliens.<sup>59</sup> The opening scene takes place in outer space, and the viewer is introduced to the alien scientist who created Stitch. Finally, the film references the famous Japanese animator by alluding to his movie, *Kiki's Delivery Service*. This 1989 Miyazaki film, entitled *Majo no takkyûbin* in Japanese, became very popular in the United States in the late 1990's. Kiki's Coffee Hut, in *Lilo & Stitch* alludes to Miyazaki's main character, Kiki. These references to Miyazaki exhibit the influences that the DC obtained from Japanese popular culture during the development stages for the storyline and characters for *Lilo & Stitch*. The finished product gained positive reviews and continued popularity in Japan.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Neil Young, "Lilo & Stitch," *Jigsaw Lounge*, September 27, 2007, <http://www.jigsawlounge.co.uk/film/liloandstitch.html> (accessed March 30, 2009).

Lilo and Stitch memorabilia can be purchased at convenient stores, markets, and malls throughout Tokyo, and through these outlets, these characters have flooded the Japanese consumer market. It is important to note that the majority of these products contain images and representations of Stitch, not Lilo. The alien-like qualities of this character along with its cuteness, or *kawaii*, appeal to many sectors of the Japanese consumer market. Lilo's character references Miyazaki; however, the features of Stitch fulfill the type of character Japanese buyers obsess over.

Many other instances offer evidence of Stitch's popularity in Japan. In 2006, Tokyo Disneyland was invaded by Stitch. Guests were encouraged to spot Stitch all over the park including looking for painted splats, blotches, and designs. Along with this celebration was a daily show entitled, "Hulihuli Ohana Bash." This performance showcased Stitch and friends, including Lilo, who danced and sang on the stage in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle.<sup>60</sup> As addressed in the Introduction, Stitch's role at the Tiki Hut was implemented during these festivities, and his show continues today. In this way, Tokyo Disneyland acted as a haven for Lilo and Stitch fans, as well as yet another example of the DC as an impressive synergistic company.

The Lilo and Stitch phenomenon continued even after Tokyo Disneyland ended its special events showcasing the popular characters. Starting in October 2008, the DC aired *Stitch!* exclusively on the Japanese Disney channel. To complete this project, the DC worked with Madhouse Ltd., a Japanese animation company based in

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<sup>60</sup> "Lilo & Stitch's Big Panic: Find Stitch! - Special Events - Tokyo Disneyland - Joe's Tokyo Disney Resort Photo Site," *Welcome to Joe's Tokyo Disney Resort Photo Site*, <http://www.jtcent.com/disneyland/special/spelas/index.html> (accessed March 26, 2009).

Tokyo.<sup>61</sup> Disney made some alterations to the original Lilo and Stitch cohort in order to appeal to regional tastes. These included changing the Lilo character and the setting of the narrative.

In the Japanese television series *Stitch!*, Lilo, the Hawaiian girl character, is replaced by Yuna, a young Japanese girl. Yuna is a strong female character. She is a master at karate, but she only uses it in order to protect her friends. Yuna's appearance looks like those of traditional anime females. Japanese anime and manga girls have strong facial features, specifically a hairline defined by sharp angles. They also have large eyes which are disproportionate to their faces. Typically Disney females are more rounded and soft. A comparison between Lilo, Yuna, and Chihiro, from Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, is useful to represent how Yuna acts as a bridge between Japanese anime cartoons and Disney programs.<sup>62</sup> Her presence in *Stitch!* shows the transformation of a Disney production into a Japanese anime. The change from Lilo to Yuna gives this cartoon the ability to compete in the local Japanese anime television market. Yuna also acts as a reminder of the relationship between the *Lilo & Stitch* movie and Japanese popular culture.

Another variation in this television series is the location of the story. In the original Lilo and Stitch series, the characters reside on the island of Kauai in Hawaii. The Japanese version occurs on a fictional tropical island in the Japanese southern

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<sup>61</sup>Hiroko Tabuchi, "Disney Recasts 'Lilo & Stitch' in Japan," *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, March 7, 2008, [Factiva](http://global.factiva.com.proxy.wm.edu/ga/default.aspx). Swem, Williamsburg, <http://global.factiva.com.proxy.wm.edu/ga/default.aspx> (accessed March 13, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> See figures 3,4, and 5 on page 67.

archipelago of Okinawa.<sup>63</sup> The history of this area is interesting in conjunction with the DC's creation of this television series. Following the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, the island group was owned by the United States government. This arrangement continued until the early 1970's. Although the islands were returned to Japanese administration in 1972, the United States government continued to hold a strong military presence in this area. Today, many Americans continue to populate the Okinawa military base.<sup>64</sup>

By setting *Stitch!* in a prefecture of Japan that has exchanged hands between the United States and Japan in the recent past, the television series references the American presence in Japan. It also asserts Japanese ownership. The fact that Yuna and Stitch reside on an island which was a part of a land transfer between the United States and Japan is not dissimilar to the ways in which the DC asserts its power in Japan even though its presence may be veiled by the OLC.

Since his first Japanese appearance in 2003, Stitch has been a popular commodity in the local consumer market. Taking the form of film, television, paper media, and various commodities, the character has established itself amongst familiar anime and manga characters in the region. It is necessary to take a step back and to analyze how the DC came to create this character and film which differs greatly from the "classic Disney" animation. The DC's actions in the late 1990's is the likely cause for this new style of animation and narrative.

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<sup>63</sup> "Disney, Madhouse to Make *Stitch!* Show for Japanese TV," *Anime News Network*, March 6, 2008, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2008-03-06/disney-madhouse-to-make-stitch-show-for-japanese-tv> (accessed March 31, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Matthew Allen, "Okinawa, Ambivalence, Identity, and Japan," in Michael Weiner, ed., *Japan's Minorities* (New York, 1997), 188-205. 188-189.

## **5. Disney and Japanese Animation: Anime, Manga, and the D-T Agreement**

To understand how the Lilo and Stitch characters and their narrative work within Japanese anime culture, it is necessary to examine why this type of entertainment is popular in Japan and what makes it different from American animation. In Japan, animation is everywhere. It is used for television programming, commercials, local advertisements, and even directions on ATM screens.<sup>65</sup> Japanese anime and manga are a part of daily life in Japan. Susan Napier classifies anime works as including “everything that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action films – romance, comedy, tragedy, adventure, even psychological probing of a kind seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television.”<sup>66</sup> In the United States, viewers regard animation as cartoon situations; however, Japanese audiences find anime entertainment comparable to live action films. In fact, *Spirited Away*, a 2002, Miyazaki production, became the highest grossing movie in Japanese film history.<sup>67</sup> Although Japanese animation deals with the “fantastic,” the themes range from those appropriate for young children to those more suitable for mature adults. This is the main factor of separation between American and Japanese cartoons.

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<sup>65</sup> Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture has Invaded the U.S.* (New York, 2006), 207.

<sup>66</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York, 2001), 6.

<sup>67</sup> Allen Johnson, “Worldwide, Asian Films are Grossing Millions. Here, They're Either Remade, Held Hostage, or Released with Little Fanfare,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 3, 2005, <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/02/03/DDGHFB40EG1.DTL> (accessed March 31, 2009).



The situations that anime and manga entertainment offers provide Japanese readers and viewers with the opportunity to escape from their daily lives. Some characters that appear “normal” on the surface are actually very dark and dramatic individuals. Many of these characters have hidden powers or knowledge; numbers of them are also immortal. Their stories provide anime and manga writers with a vehicle to discuss life lessons. Eri Izawa finds that messages about struggle and the interdependence between individuals as well as teamwork are the main focuses of anime storylines, especially those that are considered romantic anime.<sup>68</sup> Izawa also asserts that anime “provides an escape from the pressures for conformity and academic and job performance that Japanese seem to suffer more than their share of.”<sup>69</sup> By reading or watching stories about fantastical worlds and characters, a Japanese audience leaves behind daily burdens.

In Japan, both anime and manga are considered a part of the popular culture scene. Manga refers to graphic novels and comic books which are used for entertainment or even, education. For example, one manga explains the Japanese economy.<sup>70</sup> Manga conquer a variety of subject matter that appeals to young children as well as adults. This wide range of manga topics ensures that numerous individuals read the media, and it has become a welcome form of expression.<sup>71</sup> Manga and anime act as separate entities, though their mediums relate to each other. Many anime productions are based on a specific manga, but are re-worked for television or movies

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<sup>68</sup> Eri Izawa, “The Romantic, Passionate Japanese in Anime,” in Timothy J. Craig, ed., *Japan Pop! Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture* (Chicago, 2000), 138-53. 146-150.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>70</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

so much so that the connection to the original manga is lost.<sup>72</sup> Napier suggests that “the ‘culture’ to which anime belongs is at present a ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture in Japan, and in America it exists as a ‘sub’ culture.”<sup>73</sup> It appears that mainstream American culture is not ready to supplement its innocent Disney-esque animation with the explicit drama and sexuality of Japanese anime and manga. However, in the United States, American-produced late-night animated cartoons for adults have become more popular in the last decade. For example, *Family Guy* and *American Dad* are two adult-themed animated productions which have become popular and hold continuous spots in the late night television line-up. These shows do not look like Japanese anime and manga, but their themes are certainly more advanced than typical DC productions. With programs such as these, American animation is shifting towards Japanese anime and manga.

Although the United States may not be fully prepared to accept Japanese animation as a part of mainstream popular culture, the DC was ready to get their share of the anime and manga revolution as early as 1996. The Company’s agreement with a Japanese animation company in the latter part of the twentieth century established a position for the DC which allowed them access and production rights to the works of one of the top animators in Japan. This relationship resulted in Disney productions such as *Lilo & Stitch* which were undoubtedly influenced by Japanese films. Throughout *Lilo & Stitch*, the Company used techniques of Japanese animation - whether knowingly or not - which produced a visual symbol of the mixing of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.,4.

American and Japanese popular cultures. One of the most notable outcomes of this arrangement was the DC's new position in the Japanese consumer market. The Company had led the market for many years, but because of their financial arrangement with the OLC, they were unable to benefit from the full amount of profits from Tokyo Disneyland. However, their new relationship with a Japanese corporation would bring opportunities to compensate their lost revenue.

In the 1980's several poorly dubbed and edited versions of Hayao Miyazaki's films were released in the United States causing Miyazaki to vow to never again allow foreign companies to access and alter his work.<sup>74</sup> In July 1996, however, he changed his attitude. This date marks what is referred to as the D-T agreement, an arrangement between the DC and the Tokuma Group. A press release from Studio Ghibli translated to English summarizes the 1996 D-T agreement:

As reported in the media, the Tokuma Group, consisting of Tokuma Shoten Publishing Co. Ltd., Studio Ghibli Co., Ltd. and Daiei Co. Ltd., will form an alliance with The Walt Disney Studios for the international distribution of its motion pictures and video games. They have also agreed to expand their cooperation in the development of multimedia in the future... With Disney's commitment to maintaining the quality of the original titles, there will be no changes to the music and sequences in the foreign language versions. It is our great pleasure to be able to offer superior standards while making available for the enjoyment of audiences outside Japan these very high quality works.<sup>75</sup>

The most important provision of this agreement was that Disney was not allowed to edit content from the films.<sup>76</sup> This allowed Studio Ghibli to ensure that Miyazaki's

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<sup>74</sup> William C Raymer, "D-T +10: The Legacy of the Disney-Tokuma Deal," *Online Ghibli*, August 28, 2008, <http://www.onlineghibli.com/spe/disney-tokuma.php> (accessed March 31, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> The implementation of this clause is notable because, traditionally, film corporations such as the DC use relatively successful foreign films and re-make them into American films. The new films enjoy a

work would not be altered, and their films would be produced for foreign cultures in the most accurate ways possible.<sup>77</sup>

Miyazaki's *Kiki's Delivery Service* was the first Japanese film released by the DC in America. The voice cast included "A-listers" such as Kirsten Dunst, Phil Hartman, and Debbie Reynolds.<sup>78</sup> This 1998 release marked the beginning of the contemporary Japanese animated film phenomenon in the United States and, because of the D-T agreement, the DC gained recognition as the creator of this new cinematic venture.

In 2002, Disney produced *Spirited Away*, another work by Miyazaki. This release date corresponds with that of the first Lilo and Stitch movie, and the parallels continue beyond their production dates. Daveigh Chase, the voice of Lilo in *Lilo & Stitch* as well as the subsequent Lilo and Stitch films and television series, also starred as the voice of the lead character in the English version of *Spirited Away*. By providing American audiences with the same character voice for the Disney movie as well as the Japanese film, Disney aimed to capture their previously established

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wider distribution because of the power of the American company; however, the local stars are replaced with American actors and the plots are altered significantly. See Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 88.  
<sup>77</sup> I pause to address one of the members of the Tokuma Group: Daiei Co. Ltd. As previously noted, the Daiei, working under the company name of Dream Park Inc. opened Nara Dreamland in 1961. Although Daiei began as a supermarket company, they expanded to include shopping malls, amusement parks, and even some anime films and publications. This is not dissimilar from the role of the DC in the United States which owns and operates television stations such as ABC and ESPN, and dominates the consumer market with merchandise, clothing, and themed entertainment venues. Thirty-five years later, the DC formed an alliance with a company who tried to replicate their successful California theme park. Less than ten years later Daiei sold Nara Dreamland, and in 2006, the park closed indefinitely. Interestingly enough, Disney found a way to befriend its Japanese competitor and created a business venture which will yield a greater profit in the future for each of the parties involved.

<sup>78</sup> Raymer, "D-T +10: The Legacy of the Disney-Tokuma Deal."

audiences and begin to direct them towards a new market for their reworked Japanese animated films.

The 1996 D-T agreement functioned as a way for Disney to gain a greater presence in the Japanese anime and manga market, and allowed the Company to transition their own original films into a genre that thrives in markets worldwide. For the past sixty years, Disney operated in a “fairy-tale/fantasy box” producing “Disney classics” such as *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Little Mermaid*.<sup>79</sup> With *Lilo & Stitch*, however, the DC offers a science fiction story; “*Lilo & Stitch* uses a form of storytelling associated with adults and...raises the Western animated film beyond something dismissed as for the young only.”<sup>80</sup> This concept echoes the purpose of Japanese anime and manga animation as discussed earlier. Is it possible that the rising popularity of Japanese animation caused the DC which has traditionally dominated the family entertainment market to change their methods? The D-T agreement was Disney’s first step towards welcoming a new type of movie genre. Breaking from the Company’s traditional animation and narrative, *Stitch* is representative of a glocalized character and storyline.

## **6. The Complexities of Stitch:** **An Examination of the Character**

Characters’ names are generally meaningful within the context of a narrative, and *Stitch* is no exception. It is necessary to examine this rudimentary aspect of the

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<sup>79</sup> Arin Murphy, “The Alien Has Landed,” *Framespersecond*, March 16, 2003, <http://www.fpsmagazine.com/comment/lilo.php> (accessed March 31, 2009).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

character in order to understand his function in *Lilo & Stitch* and the way that he metaphorically represents the relationship of exchange between the DC and Japan. This section answers the question, “Why Stitch?” in an attempt to determine the reasons behind the DC’s naming of this character and to show the meanings of this name.

As previously described, the plot of *Lilo & Stitch* involves two orphaned sisters living in Hawaii. To understand the significance of Stitch’s name, it is necessary to provide a more detailed description of the film’s narrative. Lilo, the younger sister, falls into the care of her older sibling, Nani after their parents’ deaths. They are watched by a child services social worker because the department fears that Nani is unable to care for Lilo, and it happens that Lilo is always causing a problem when the child services agent shows up to check on the girls. After Lilo adopts Stitch, the upsets grow even more out of control because of Lilo’s youth and Stitch’s unruliness, and the child services agent orders that Lilo be taken from Nani on the grounds that Nani is not providing sufficient care. Stitch runs the risk of being taken away as well; he is trying to avoid the aliens from his home planet who have come to reclaim him and take him back to outer space. To complicate things, Lilo gets captured by the aliens that are trying to catch Stitch; however Stitch rescues her, asserting the strength of their new family. In the end, Lilo is allowed to stay with Nani, and Stitch becomes a permanent addition to their home. Nani’s friend, David, also stays with the girls, and with him, they take the form of a typical family: Nani and David playing the part of the parents and Stitch and Lilo as the children. Stitch ultimately acts as the binding that repairs their family.

As the film ends, Lilo, Stitch, Nani, and David play together on the beach. The next frame shows the viewer a photograph of Lilo, Nani, and their parents also playing on the beach. In this scene, Lilo tapes a picture of Stitch onto the photograph of her parents which suggests his new position in their family. Stitch's new presence in this image literally joins Lilo's past and present.

By understanding Stitch's function in the movie, it is possible to see how his character mends Lilo and Nani's family; he literally stitches them back together, and he helps them to create a new family of which he is also a member. The name Stitch coincides with his purpose in the film, and it also extends beyond the movie to the representation of Japanese and American popular culture.

Stitch the character, as previously addressed, is highly regarded in a market that is inundated with Japanese anime and manga characters. The abundance of Stitch merchandise available in Tokyo is telling of his popularity, but this character does more than reap large profits for the DC. He represents the fusing of American and Japanese popular culture, and this concept is demonstrated by his name.<sup>81</sup> This character has come to embody the recursive process of influence between Walt Disney Studios and Japanese animation. The DC and Japan have a long history of association and influence in terms of popular culture productions. The literal meaning of his name symbolizes this relationship.

The animation produced by Walt Disney acted as the beginnings of the long set of interactions between the DC and Japan. Walt Disney, born in 1901, paved the

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<sup>81</sup> There is not a word that translates in Japanese to mean "stitch." The name "suticchi" which is what Japanese call the Stitch character is a literal translation of how the name sounds in English.

way for Japanese animators such as Osamu Tezuka and Hayao Miyazaki, and although their animation differed greatly, all of them created with the same medium.<sup>82</sup> Thus Walt Disney initiated the popular world of animation as we know it today, and it was Osamu Tezuka who took it a step further and made it Japanese.<sup>83</sup>

Osamu Tezuka is hailed as the inventor of modern anime style.<sup>84</sup> Growing-up in the 1930's, he was enamored with Walt Disney's work, and Yoshihiro Shimizu, who worked with Tezuka for eleven years, states, "the US influenced him dramatically."<sup>85</sup> He had his own style of animation, but he always had a passion for Disney stories and illustrations. He used to copy the films line by line while sitting in movie theaters. He would then create books and sell them, illegally, on the streets of Japan. Shimizu asserts that Tezuka copied the animation because he had a great appreciation for Disney's work.<sup>86</sup>

The DC never filed lawsuits against Tezuka for his illegal reproductions, but in 1994, the Company did release *The Lion King*. Rumors flooded the media that the movie was a direct copy of Tezuka's *Kimba the White Lion* which was released thirty years earlier.<sup>87</sup> The parallels between the two films are hard to overlook, but it seems that Tezuka's studio is well aware of the situation. Shimizu states that it would be useless for their small company to sue such a large corporation as Disney, and besides, Tezuka copied Disney many years ago and sold his books street side, so the

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<sup>82</sup> Drazen, *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Anime*, 253.

<sup>83</sup> Tezuka was an admirer of Walt Disney and it is most likely that he was influenced by America's great animator. See Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 16-17.

<sup>84</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



situation can be viewed as an even trade.<sup>88</sup> The exchange between Tezuka and Disney marks the beginning of the relationship between the DC and Japanese animation.

Japanese popular culture scholars believe that recursive influences, or a “constant-cross pollination,” occurs between Japanese anime and western popular culture.<sup>89</sup> Susan Pointon states, “It is impossible to ignore the constant cross-pollination and popular cultural borrowing that complicate and enrich anime texts...Despite their Japanese overlay, many of these videos pay...homage to sources as diverse as American television cop shows of the seventies.”<sup>90</sup> This suggests that exchange between United States and Japanese popular cultures have taken place for many years and will continue to affect products and animation in the future. The DC and the Tokuma Group are another instance of this cross-pollination through the distribution of Hayao Miyazaki’s works.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Miyazaki’s films became very popular in Japan. The DC joined with a Japanese animation company through the D-T agreement in 1996 in order to gain the rights to dub and distribute Miyazaki’s films. Beginning with *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, the DC has since distributed thirteen of Miyazaki’s works.<sup>91</sup> The popularity of these films around the world is one of the main influences that led to the DC’s creation of *Lilo & Stitch*.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>89</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> “Studio Ghibli - The Official DVD Website,” *The Official Home Page for All Things Disney Home Disney.com*, <http://disney.go.com/disneyvideos/animatedfilms/studiohibli/flash.html> (accessed May 1, 2009).

Stitch the character and his story in the 2002 Disney film offers a mix of Japanese animation and narrative with Disney design and storylines. Specifically, the DC is influenced by Miyazaki, and this is apparent throughout the film. Miyazaki's films can assert complex ideas because Japanese anime traditionally deals with complex themes.<sup>92</sup> However, the DC does not market itself as a company that provides advanced theming, and it had to create a story and a character that fit with the traditional characteristics of the Company's animated films.<sup>93</sup> In fact, Disney relies on its wholesome family entertainment image so much so that "executives routinely excise out of the films any scenes that might damage the reputation of the Disney brand."<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, four years after the DC released its first dubbed Miyazaki film, Disney animators took a similar route with their narrative and animation and produced a movie with complex ideas concerning family structure and the portrayal of a population.

In both Miyazaki films, *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away*, the main character is separated from their family. Likewise, Disney yields this familiar story in *Lilo & Stitch*. Kiki, in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, is a witch who must leave her family for a year when she turns thirteen. She appears with her family at the beginning of the movie, but leaves almost immediately. Her parents are not seen until the end of the film when they read a letter that they received from Kiki. Similarly, Chihiro's parents

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<sup>92</sup> This idea was addressed in the Disney and Japanese Anime section. See also Rieko Okuhara, "The Censorship of Japanese Anime in America," in Mark I. West, ed., *The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki* (Lanham, Md., 2009), 199-208.

<sup>93</sup> Disney animation typically involves sanitized and simplified renderings of history. This is characterized as "candy coated" animation in Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 249.

<sup>94</sup> Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 331.

are turned into pigs at the beginning of *Spirited Away*, and she has no contact with their human figures until they are united at the end of the movie. *Lilo & Stitch* has a comparable scenario; Lilo's parents are seen in a photograph at the beginning of the narrative, and to end the film, the same photograph appears with the addition of an image of Stitch that is affixed to the original photograph.

Miyazaki's colorful nature animation is also reflected in the setting of *Lilo & Stitch*. Miyazaki has been described as "an artist whose films call for a mindful awareness to the lived environment and vanishing wilderness."<sup>95</sup> Disney mimics Miyazaki's techniques by providing viewers with beautiful animated scenes from Hawaii. Crashing waves, blowing palm trees, and luscious forests make up the background of *Lilo & Stitch*. Different from other Disney films, the images of nature in *Lilo & Stitch* become the main component of the film. Some sequences involve scenes of Hawaii which are void of characters forcing the viewers to focus on the backdrop of the film.

Science fiction is a popular genre of Japanese anime, and Miyazaki is praised for his creation of aliens for films such as *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Stitch is also an alien. He is conceived in outer space, and the beginning of the Disney movie depicts flying aliens, space air crafts, and the inhabitants of this space world.

It is very likely that the DC was influenced by Japanese anime in the creation of the Stitch character and the *Lilo & Stitch* film, but the manipulation continues a

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<sup>95</sup> Nathalie op de Beeck, "Anima and Anime: Environmental Perspectives and New Frontiers in *Princess Monoke* and *Spirited Away*," in Mark I. West, ed., *The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture* (Lanham, Md., 2009), 267-284. 267.

step further with the replacement of Lilo and the transfer of the location of Hawaii to Okinawa in the Japanese Disney Channel show, *Stitch!*. Here, the DC's Lilo and Stitch fall into the hands of Japanese animators who are given the opportunity to redesign, to some extent, the characters that were modeled after animation from their country. The DC provides the idea, and Japanese animators create the narratives.

Through this description of the *Lilo & Stitch* film and Japanese animation, my purpose was to exhibit how the name "Stitch" literally represents the intermingling of American and Japanese popular culture. Since Tezuka was influenced by Walt Disney, Japanese anime and manga has been "global" since it began. Later, the DC copied the techniques of Japanese animation, most notably with *The Lion King* and *Lilo & Stitch*. Both of these films were globally distributed. The stitching together of Disney and Japanese animation resulted in hybrid characters and stories. The Stitch character and his story symbolize the cultural exchange of the animation industry, and his name embodies the merging of techniques.

### **6.1 *Stitch!*, *Lilo & Stitch*, and the Stitch Character in Japan: Ownership, Cultural Exchange, and Representation**

Lilo and Stitch are uniquely situated in a market that is overwhelmed by kawaii characters. However, certain aspects of the first film and these characters allowed this Disney production to stand out in Japan amongst a massive collection of local animated media and commodities. Existing within *Lilo & Stitch* are various allusions to the relationship between the DC and Japan as well as a main character that is very much aligned with Japanese animation. These instances will be explored in a latter part of this section. First, in order foster a greater understanding of the ideas

of ownership, cultural exchange, and representation as exemplified by the Stitch character and the narrative of *Lilo & Stitch*, it is necessary to study *Stitch!*.

*Stitch!*, the Japanese television show, merits a closer look in relation to the inspection of the Stitch character. The many complexities of this show offer further indication of this character's relationship to both American and Japanese popular cultures. *Stitch!* provides an arena for the understanding of Japanese ownership in relation to Disney products and characters while continuing the web of cultural mingling between the local and the global.

Originally, Lilo and Stitch films and the Disney Channel television show were set in the Hawaiian Islands; the setting for *Stitch!* changes to the Japanese islands of the Okinawa prefecture. The DC would perhaps justify the Japanese location as similar to the American setting by noting that they are both island groups of a larger country, arguing that Okinawa is to Japan as Hawaii is to the United States, but the change in location along with the reworking of the characters also exemplifies Japanese influence and an assertion of Japan's ownership of this Disney creation. Okinawa also represents a site of cultural hybridity that dates to the Occupation and is reasserted through *Stitch!*.

*Stitch!*, directed and designed by Japanese animators, is also distinctly Okinawan. The opening song and other music throughout the show are sung in an Okinawan dialect by a local band. All of the shows take place on a made-up island in Okinawa prefecture. Many of the characters also speak in local dialect. Although part of Japan, this region has its own distinct culture. Large influences from Okinawan

culture are apparent in this television show; *Stitch!* exemplifies a hybrid creation resulting from a blend of American, Japanese, and Okinawan influences.

Okinawa is unique in that it represents a continued presence of America in Japan. Matthew Allen recognizes the American influence in this region: “Twenty-seven years of American rule had brought about increasing hybridization of cultures...American popular culture, the English language, American media, and American military culture all served to influence the nature of Okinawa under American rule.”<sup>96</sup> This occurrence is mirrored in *Stitch!*. The television show symbolizes Japanese manipulation of a Disney product, much like the American influence of the culture in Okinawa in the middle of the twentieth century.

*Stitch!* exemplifies the local adaptation of the Stitch character in Japan and asserts a sense of Japanese ownership of him. In a conversation with Japanese friends during my time in Japan, I was informed that Stitch was a Japanese construction. They also stated that the Stitch character was designed by a Japanese animator. Later, I found this to be false, but this conversation provided a platform for interpreting the meaning of this character in Japan. Japanese consumers feel that Stitch is original to their country. They believe that one of their people created this popular Disney character. They have come to understand Tokyo Disneyland as their own, so it seems likely that the DC would ask for Japanese assistance with this animation that appears so similar to that produced in their country. This slight mistake made my by friends in

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<sup>96</sup> Allen, “Okinawa, Ambivalence, Identity, and Japan,” 194.

their understanding of the origins of Stitch reveals the complex notion of ownership that Japanese consumers feel for the Disney brand.

Stitch and his friend Yuna represent cultural diversity, hybridity, and localization. They are the one of the most recent products of in the Japanese-DC recursive influence process, but the exchange between the United States and Japan, in terms of animated features, has occurred since the early twentieth century. The physical appearance of the Stitch character is reminiscent of other Japanese animated figures. The narrative of *Lilo & Stitch*, also acts as a symbol of the relationship between the United States and Japan as well as the DC and Japan in the post-occupation years.

The traffic of animation between the United States and Japan has made it possible for viewers in both countries to enjoy each other's popular culture for almost a century. According to Dave Smith, the chief archivist for the DC, the first Mickey Mouse cartoons were shown in theaters in Japan in 1931.<sup>97</sup> *Snow White*, the DC's first full length film, was released in the United States in 1938 and made its way to Japan by 1950.<sup>98</sup> It was not until the 1960's that a Japanese cartoon, *Astro Boy*, became popular in the United States. The exchange, until this date, was mostly one-sided with the DC producing animation that proved successful in both the United States and Japan. However the next decade, brought the Japanese anime, *Speed Racer* which enticed American viewers once again, and Japanese animation was on its way to

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<sup>97</sup> Smith, "Re: your inquiry."

<sup>98</sup> "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," *The Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029583/> (accessed May 1, 2009).

becoming more prevalent in the United States.<sup>99</sup> This back and forth continues today with the Lilo and Stitch productions being the most recent success from the DC side of exchange.

The appearance of the Stitch character makes him a sensation in the Japanese market. He is a kawaii character, he alludes to Japanese animation, and he is not human. Stitch was created by Disney animators, and Disney is a global brand. His features were influenced by Japanese anime, specifically the animation of Miyazaki, adding a local aspect to his appearance. Hiroki Azuma argues that many characters in Japanese otaku culture are the result of combining popular elements from recent otaku culture. In Japan, otaku refers to males, generally between the ages of eighteen and forty, who fanatically consume, produce, and collect comic books (manga). Otaku characters refer to the animation present in the anime and manga consumed by otaku.<sup>100</sup> These characters are not different from those referenced in this essay. Otaku characters are created from a database of characteristics such as eye type or facial expression. The result of this type of character is that each has a similar characteristic to the other. Stitch is comparable to Pikachu, a *Pokemon* character, Jiji, the cat from *Kiki's Delivery Service*, and Soul Evans, the main character in *Soul Eater*.<sup>101</sup> Stitch, Pikachu, and Jiji have large exaggerated ears. Also, Stitch and Jiji have large eyes which are common among anime and manga human characters as well. Stitch's large teeth separate him from Pikachu and Jiji and give him a dramatic element. They are

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<sup>99</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 243.

<sup>100</sup> Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Tokyo, 2001), xv.

<sup>101</sup> See figures 6, 7, 8, and 9 on pages 68-69.



comparable to Soul Evan's teen in the Japanese manga, *Soul Eater*. The Stitch character is comprised of database elements that include characteristics from both animal and human anime and manga personalities. The elements he is made of work to detract from the American origins of the character. Stitch's features are the result of the long relationship of exchange between American and Japanese popular culture; his characteristics exhibit the influences that each culture has had on the other, but he is not reminiscent of American animation such as the traditional Mickey Mouse. He does not look like the typical Disney character, and this is reflected by the individuals that obsess over the character. Judging by the amount of products in Tokyo which feature his image, he is most popular in the country of the locale he embodies.

The storyline of the film and the references to popular culture also allude to the relationship of exchange between the United States and Japan over the past fifty years. The trade of animation techniques between the two countries stems from a fascination with the popular culture produced in each region; *Lilo & Stitch* highlights two instances of exchange. The references used also contain metaphorical meanings and allusions to both Americanization and globalization.

The film includes numerous references to Elvis Presley. Elvis is an iconic American figure, and Lilo decides that Stitch should mimic him in order to learn how to be a model citizen. The Japanese-inspired character gets dressed-up like the singer in an attempt to become what Lilo deems as civilized. In the end of the sequence, Lilo is unsuccessful in her venture; however, by the conclusion of the movie, Stitch does become a refined character.

A few metaphors and conclusions can be drawn from these scenes of the film.

First, Lilo's attempt to shape Stitch is very similar to the ways in which the DC reworked Japanese animation in *Lilo & Stitch*. She tries to make Stitch into her version of a model American. With this film, the DC creates its own American version of Japanese anime which proved to be a success in Japan. Throughout the process of reforming Stitch, Lilo asserts that Elvis is the ideal individual to mimic in order to achieve the status of a proper citizen. Is she metaphorically suggesting that Elvis, an icon originating in America, is the ideal state for individuals – that a glamorized American pop figure is representative of a model citizen and the best the United States has to offer? The humor comes from the fact that Lilo does believe that Elvis, a dead white American from the mainland, is an ideal figure. Ironically, this also shows how she is a victim of Americanization. Instead of choosing someone from her culture for Stitch to mimic, her choice comes from the American mainland and is someone who appears very different from her. She allows Elvis to replace a Hawaiian figure. Stitch's attempt at becoming Elvis goes awry; however he manages to become civilized by the end of the film. This shows that Stitch could develop into a reformed character on his own instead of relying on the American influence of Elvis. The use of Elvis in this manner borders on exemplifying American imperialistic thought – that a white male pop figure from the United States represents an ideal individual – but the scenes ultimately provide humor when Stitch fails at the task of copying an American who was in his prime over half a century ago. The use of Elvis also highlights an American global icon and shows how two individuals from different backgrounds can celebrate this common popular culture celebrity. Although Stitch is not familiar with the singer, he immediately likes Elvis' music. In a

continually globalizing world it is necessary to connect through various outlets, and popular culture offers a venue for this interaction as exemplified by *Stitch and Lilo*. Finally, Elvis acts as another draw for a Japanese audience. The DC did not necessarily construct *Lilo & Stitch* for the purpose of promoting it in Japan (the late Japan release date speaks to this conclusion), but Japanese consumers are certainly familiar with this icon, as noted earlier, and this familiarity undoubtedly added to the popularity of the film. The use of Elvis Presley acknowledges a global music star while constructing an underlying narrative of globalization and American superiority.

The film also references another moment of popular culture exchange between the United States and Japan: the Godzilla character and films. *Stitch* builds San Francisco, California out of books and toys from Lilo's room and then destroys the fake city. He looks like a Godzilla character as he wreaks havoc over the toy metropolis. In 1954, *Gojira*, Japanese for Godzilla, was released in Japan by the Japanese company, Tojo.<sup>102</sup> Two years later, an American version appeared entitled, *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!*. In this film, the narrative was altered and new scenes were added with American actors. The sequence of exchange involving the Godzilla character is complex in that the original film and character were developed in Japan, but the American version is also an original in that some controversial allegories involving nuclear technology are deleted and new scenes and actors appear in the film.<sup>103</sup> After the American production, Tojo proceeded to make numerous sequels based on the Americanized Godzilla character. Today, Godzilla is recognized as

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<sup>102</sup> Epstein, *The Big Picture*, 131-132.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

originating in Japan, but most of the Japanese Godzilla films are based on ideas and plots from the reworked American version. Dissimilar to the DC's dubbed Miyazaki films, the makers of the American *Godzilla, King of Monsters!* tampered with the themes and narrative of the film. Allowing the Japanese inspired character in *Lilo & Stitch* to mimic an original Japanese creation reminds viewers of *Gojira* and references the influences that American and Japanese popular culture and animation have gained from each other.

Finally, the *Lilo & Stitch* plot is also reminiscent of the DC's relationship with Japan. In this metaphor, Lilo symbolizes the DC and Stitch acts as Japan. Lilo adopts Stitch much like the DC adopts the Japanese consumer market. The DC brings Japan into their global umbrella of distribution, and by the 1980's the Company has even placed one of their theme parks in the region. As Lilo and Stitch's relationship evolves, Stitch becomes part of Lilo's family. As the interactions between the DC and Japan advance, Japanese animation is dubbed and produced by Disney, making Japanese popular culture a part of the global Disney brand. At the end of the film, Stitch rescues Lilo. I assert that Japan has rescued Disney. Tokyo Disneyland is extremely successful, and while speaking with Professor Masako Notoji, she revealed that during a recent visit to Disneyland in California, she found the park to be run down and even dirty. Based on this observation, she feels that Walt Disney's original mission for his theme park is living on, not in California, but in Japan. It appears that Japan has preserved Walt Disney's dream, and continued his purpose at Tokyo Disneyland.

By exploring various aspects of *Lilo & Stitch, Stitch!*, and the Stitch character,

it is possible to see why Japanese consumers feel a sense of ownership towards this Disney creation. The inclusion of popular culture references in the *Lilo & Stitch* narrative also remind both Japanese and American viewers of the continual interest that each population has in the other's popular media. The allegorical reading of the film's plot also yields an understanding of the DC's relationship with Japan. By analyzing the character, film, and Japanese television show, it is possible to see the complexities of these Disney productions and how they relate to Japanese animation and culture.

## **6.2 Stitch:** **Global Distributer**

I have recognized how Stitch acts as a symbol for the interactions between America and Japan, and the DC and Japan. I examined how he represents the recursive nature of cultural influences between these two countries. However, Stitch's role of global distributor of the localization occurring at Tokyo Disneyland is also an important aspect of this character.

As described in the section entitled "The Tokyo Disneyland Experience: Revealing the Local," the theme park acts as a site of glocalization because it provides the ideal setting for the interaction of local and global cultures. I am interested in the local influences that are found there, and refer to their presence as the localization of a Disney theme park. Tokyo Disneyland was made by and for the Japanese. Although the OLC was both guided and restricted by the DC, Tokyo Disneyland is ultimately owned and operated by this Japanese company. Raz refers to this process as the black ship of Americanization. He characterizes Tokyo Disneyland

as a black ship, meaning “an exported, hegemonic model of American leisure and popular culture that ‘conquered’ Japan.”<sup>104</sup> Raz also states that, “[I]f Disneyland is a black ship, then it is the Japanese who are riding and steering it, not the Americans.”<sup>105</sup> Finally, he notes the Japanese control of the theme park. The creation of the Stitch character is similar to the localization of the Disney brand present at Tokyo Disneyland. The DC intentionally utilized Japanese techniques to produce *Lilo & Stitch*. The film contains allusions to Japanese popular culture making it a hybrid construction of a global and foreign media. Because *Lilo and Stitch* productions are marketed worldwide, the film and characters are able to capture the same globalization that occurs at Tokyo Disneyland, but the film asserts this phenomenon on a global level.

The ways in which the Stitch character and the plot of *Lilo & Stitch* act as representations of Japan and the United States have been previously described. Now, I suggest that the global distribution of Stitch commodities and the 2002 film, assert the localization that occurs at Tokyo Disneyland. This character whose visual image is comparable to Japanese anime and manga acts as a global assertion of the Japanese influence on the DC. Through interactions with Japan, Japanese popular culture has shaped the original importer: Disney. The details of the Stitch character exemplify this manipulation.

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<sup>104</sup> Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*, 6 .

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

*Lilo & Stitch* is available in over forty countries; this gives the entire world an opportunity to see the influences that Japanese animation has had on the DC.<sup>106</sup> Known for what can be called an obsession with American commodities and ideas, Japan now acts as a building block for the Disney empire. The worldwide popularity of Japanese anime and manga has led to the DC's imitation of this successful animation. The *Stitch* character is an outcome of this replication.

Japan built and developed Tokyo Disneyland, and the country has completed a similar task with *Stitch!* the television show. Designed and directed by Japanese animators, *Stitch!*, metaphorically speaking, is a televised version of Tokyo Disneyland. The localization process advances a step further with the addition of *Stitch*'s Japanese friend Yuna. At the time of this project, this cartoon airs exclusively in Japan, but I suspect that it will not be long until Americans want a taste of *Stitch* Japanese-style.

The DC is a powerful global brand. Disney products, animation, and theme parks are a common thread in childhood experiences worldwide. The idea that *Stitch* globally symbolizes Japan's involvement with this brand is extremely important. It is thought that the construction of Tokyo Disneyland is what made Japan a part of the global cultural economy.<sup>107</sup> A mere twenty-five years later, it is Japan who is influencing the Company that led them to the world market of popular culture and animation.

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<sup>106</sup> “*Lilo & Stitch* (2002) - Release dates,” *The Internet Movie Database*.

<sup>107</sup> Personal Interview with Professor Masako Notoji.

## **7. Japanese Animation in the United States** **Increased Popularity Over the Past Decade**

Thus far, this essay has focused on how products of American popular culture function in Japan. Equally important, however, are the ways in which Japanese popular culture works in the American marketplace. Although Japanese animation is not the number one selling commodity in the United States, its presence has been felt for many years. The DC employed techniques of Japanese animation for *Lilo & Stitch*. It was not too much of a risk to create something with Japanese aspects because Americans had been exposed to Japanese animation since at least the 1960's, and Japanese anime and manga are growing in global popularity. When considering Japanese influence in *Lilo & Stitch*, it is necessary to explore the history of Japanese animation in the United States and its current function in the American consumer market.

Evidence of Japanese animation in the United States, in the form of televised cartoons, dates back to the middle of the twentieth century. Although the cartoons were altered significantly for American viewers, their Japanese origins remained recognizable. *Astro Boy*, created by Osamu Tezuka, enticed American viewers in the 1960's while *Speed Racer*, by Tatsuo Yoshida followed suit, gathering American fans by the 1970's.<sup>108</sup> These manga turned television cartoons launched the American craze for Japanese animation. Successors such as *Sailor Moon* and *Pokemon* followed suit in the late 1990's, revealing that it took Americans almost fifty years before they could recognize that their tastes in animation were becoming more Japanese.

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<sup>108</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke*, 243.



Traditionally, in the United States, animation is regarded as children's fare. As addressed in an earlier section, Japanese consumers view this media in a different manner. Roland Kelts comments, "If you live in Japan for an extended period, you're likely to forget that you are constantly confronting cartoon characters – until you leave. When I return to the United States, I am instead confronted by models and movie stars."<sup>109</sup> Anime and manga characters become the subjects for advertising in Japan. Where Americans insert famous individuals to promote products, Japanese employ animated figures. They have cafes open for twenty-four hours, packed with shelves upon shelves of manga. Japanese consumers spend countless hours in these venues reading and discussing manga characters. Large television screens lining buildings in downtown Tokyo flash animated characters. From my experience in Japan, I find that Kelt's statement is not an over-exaggeration – cartoon characters are literally everywhere.

Is it possible to imagine this same animation phenomenon taking place in the United States? Years ago, many Americans would have scoffed at this idea, but today, and throughout the past ten years, cartoon characters, specifically those from Japan, may be leading us to a similar looking society. American animation, in particular that produced by Disney, has held strong in the Japanese consumer market from the 1950's through the beginning of this century, but it is Japan's turn to become a front runner in the world of animation. Although Japanese animation has been present in the United States for many years, since the late 1990's it has flourished in

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<sup>109</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 207.

popularity, and it is possible that the next fifty years will lead to more American localization of Japanese animation.

The influx of Japanese anime and manga in the United States during the late 1990's is difficult to overlook. In 1997, TokyoPop, a distributor, licensor, and publisher of Japanese anime and manga, opened an American headquarters in Los Angeles, California.<sup>110</sup> A year later, after the signing of the D-T agreement, the DC dubbed and distributed its first Miyazaki film, *Kiki's Delivery Service*. In 1999, Disney released another Miyazaki movie, *Princess Mononoke*. In the latter part of the decade, Japanese animation had begun an unstoppable entrance into the mainstream United States consumer market.

The year 2002 saw the launch of Japanese animation in the form of magazines and graphic novels. *Shonen Jump*, or *Boys Jump*, a Japanese manga magazine, debuted in the United States in 2002 and continues to enjoy success in the American comic market today.<sup>111</sup> Also during this year, American comic publishers noted an explosion in their graphic novel sales. They almost doubled their profits from the previous year.<sup>112</sup> It appears that the addition of Japanese manga invigorated comic enthusiasts across the United States in the early part of this century.

By late 2002, the Anime Network launched in the United States. It was a “cable channel showing only Japanese titles, 24/7...promising viewers ‘the newest

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<sup>110</sup> This company's other location, which opened in 1996 is in Tokyo. It opened the same year that the D-T agreement was signed.

<sup>111</sup> Kaoru Misaka, “The First Japanese Manga Magazine in the United States,” *Publishing Research Quarterly*, Winter 2004: 23-30. [JSTOR](#). Swem, Williamsburg. keyword: Japanese; animation; manga. (accessed May 4, 2009). 26.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

and hottest shows, directly from Japan.”<sup>113</sup> This network also had a “video-on-demand” aspect which allowed viewers to purchase specific anime which was not currently airing on the network. In 2008, the Anime Network discontinued its 24/7 linear service; however the “video-on-demand” is still available. Some of their shows can now be viewed on their website, and other channels such as FUNimation carry several of the anime programs that appeared on the Anime Network.<sup>114</sup> Although the network did not succeed, Japanese cartoons have made their way into mainstream American networks. At the time of this project, the Cartoon Network broadcasts numerous Japanese anime including *Naruto*, *Pokemon*, and *Bakugan*.<sup>115</sup>

An official American acceptance of Japanese animation came in 2003 when Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* earned the Oscar for “Best Animated Film.” The movie beat *Lilo & Stitch*, *Ice Age*, *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*, and *Treasure Planet* for the honor.<sup>116</sup> *Lilo & Stitch*, the DC first attempt at an anime-inspired film, was overshadowed by the Company’s dubbed version of a Japanese original production. Giving Miyazaki’s film this award symbolized the popularity of Japanese anime in the United States, and Hollywood’s embrace of this type of media. The Oscar represented Americans’ changing tastes in animation.

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<sup>113</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 20.

<sup>114</sup> “Anime Network’s 24/7 Linear Service Discontinued,” *Anime News Network*, January 5, 2008, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2008-01-05/anime-network's-24/7-linear-service-discontinued> (accessed May 5, 2009).

<sup>115</sup> “All Shows: Check Out Ben 10, Chowder and All Your Favorite TV Shows Cartoon Network,” *Cartoon Network: Free games and online video from shows like Naruto, Pokemon and Ben 10!*, [http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/tv\\_shows/all\\_shows/index.html](http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/tv_shows/all_shows/index.html) (accessed May 8, 2009).

<sup>116</sup> “IMDb: Academy Awards, USA: 2003,” *The Internet Movie Database*, [http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Awards/Academy\\_Awards\\_USA/2003](http://www.imdb.com/Sections/Awards/Academy_Awards_USA/2003) (accessed May 8, 2009).

Japanese animation has infiltrated American popular culture through industries other than film, television, and paper media. In 2001, the British virtual band the Gorillaz debut album achieved platinum level status in the United States.<sup>117</sup> Their lead guitarist is a Japanese teenage girl character named Noodle who supposedly arrived from Japan in a FedEx box.<sup>118</sup> In 2004, the band Linkin Park used Japanese animation in their music video for *Breaking the Habit*. They employed TokyoPop to create a manga for this production. The most recent example is that of Kanye West's song, *Good Morning*. The 2008 music video for this song brings to life Kanye's "Dropout Bear" designed by Japanese artist Takashi Murakami for the *Graduation* album cover.<sup>119</sup> With the publicity from popular, hip, and "cool" figures such as musical artists, Japanese animation is quickly becoming the new trend in American popular culture.

Although Japanese animation has been available in the United States for many years, its popularity increased throughout the past decade. However, the Hello Kitty phenomenon of the 1970's which arguably continues today cannot be overlooked. In fact, Hello Kitty, more so than *Astro Boy* or *Speed Racer*, is credited with initiating the craze for Japanese popular culture in the United States. When the Sanrio Company created Hello Kitty, it aimed to develop a character that could compete with

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<sup>117</sup> "Artist Biography: Gorillaz," *Billboard - Music News Magazine for Fans and Music Executives - Music Search*, <http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/bio/index.jsp?pid=440071> (accessed May 8, 2009).

<sup>118</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 19.

<sup>119</sup> "New Kanye West Video Directed by Takashi Murakami," *Art Observed*, August 28, 2008, <http://artobserved.com/new-kanye-west-video-directed-by-takashi-murakami/> (accessed May 8, 2009).

those manufactured by Disney.<sup>120</sup> Sanrio was successful. By 2000, Hello Kitty items were distributed through McDonald's Happy Meals in the United States.<sup>121</sup>

Today Hello Kitty can be found on merchandise ranging from high fashion purses to every day items such as pencils. Kathy Merlock Jackson argues that, through Hello Kitty, "Americans came to embrace what was desirable in Japan."<sup>122</sup> Arguably, more so than the commodities such as those produced by Sanrio, it was the D-T agreement in the late 1990's that led to the modern increase in the popularity of Japanese animation in the United States. When the DC distributed Miyazaki films in the United States, a trusted American corporation presented the foreign Japanese product and showed their support of the media. Hello Kitty was popular in the 1970's, and the trend continues today, but it was the DC's acceptance and promotion of Japanese popular culture that elevated anime and manga in the United States consumer market. The DC is a respected company in the United States and its approval and promotion of a product carries a lot of weight with American families. Another downfall of the Hello Kitty character is the limited range of appeal. The character is geared towards female consumers. In order for Hello Kitty to be credited with initiating American interest in Japanese popular merchandise, the character should interest a broader scope of the American population. For the purposes of this essay, Jackson's Hello Kitty assertion is not a valuable argument.

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<sup>120</sup> Kathy M. Jackson, "Hello Kitty in America," in Mark I. West, ed., *The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki* (Lanham, Md., 2009), 25-40. 27.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 32.

Are Americans going to see a localized Asakusa Hanayashiki constructed in the United States in the near future? This is likely, but more Japanese animation is certainly on the way. Did the DC anticipate the United States current fascination with Japanese media, or did the DC help to initiate this trend? Is *Stitch* a product of this prediction? Kelts observes:

Unlike Disney icons such as Mickey, Donald, Dumbo, or Nemo, a mouse, duck, elephant, and clown fish respectively...Pikachu is an animated representation of precisely nothing we know in our physical world, introducing Americans to just one aspect of Japanese popular culture's creative freedom.<sup>123</sup>

*Stitch*, too, is representative of “nothing we know in our physical world.” In this way, Disney's *Stitch* arguably assisted in propelling American consumers towards a fascination with Japanese media. Not only is this character popular in Japan, but he bridges American and Japanese popular culture. Recently, Japanese animation has taken off in the United States, and the DC, through *Stitch*, cannot be overlooked as aiding in this trend. The DC showed American consumers its interpretation of Japanese animation. The popularity of *Lilo & Stitch* in the United States parallels the rising interest in Japanese anime and manga in this region. American curiosity in modern Japanese popular culture is growing and the front running company supplying the United States with Japanese animation is none other than a local, Disney.

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<sup>123</sup> Kelts, *Japanamerica*, 17.

## **8. Conclusion**

When Chiharu Kawasaki approached the DC in the early 1960's, he hoped to work with the Company to develop a Walt Disney theme park in Japan. Although his first attempt was denied, eventually, the DC was convinced that the construction of a theme park in Japan might be the starting point for the global expansion of their amusement venues. Kawasaki believed that Japanese visitors would embrace the park as their own, and that is exactly what they did.

The DC attempted to make a replica of their original theme park in California, but with the Oriental Land Company supplying the funds, there were times when the DC was overruled in their plans. Tokyo Disneyland, at first glance, appears to be a copy of American Disney theme parks, but a closer look reveals the occurrences of localization that take place at this entertainment venue. In the end, however, the aspects of local influence allow Japanese consumers to assert ownership of the park, and their repeat visits make this American transplant one of the highest grossing theme parks in the world.<sup>124</sup>

What Kawasaki did not know when he approached the DC was how instrumental the Tokyo Disneyland theme park would be in the expansion of the popular culture exchange and relationship between the United States and Japan. Both American and Japanese consumers had been interested in the animation produced by each country, but with the construction of Tokyo Disneyland, Japanese visitors were able to experience American animation in the forms of rides, shows, and “live”

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<sup>124</sup> Jeffers and Rubin, “TEA/ERA Attraction Attendance Report 2008.”

characters, and the Disney brand was submitted to manipulation by Japanese culture. With the addition of Tokyo Disneyland, Japanese visitors could have an “American” experience without leaving their country, and by frequenting the park, they began to feel ownership of this American import.

Since the late 1990’s, the exchange of animation between American and Japanese companies has increased dramatically. Americans are becoming more interested in Japanese anime and manga, and consumer tastes are leaning towards Japanese products. Japanese anime and manga companies have locations in California, Japanese animated films are now dubbed and distributed for American audiences, and American music superstars are using Japanese animation in their videos and on their album covers. The exchange of popular culture between the United States and Japan has been taking place for many years, but it is during the past decade that mainstream American society has finally begun to embrace Japanese animation.

The influencing, mingling, and exchanging of animation techniques and popular icons currently culminates with the development of the Stitch character. Not only does this alien creature embody the localization of Tokyo Disneyland, but he acts as the global symbol of the interactions taking place between Japanese and American popular cultures. Through the physical appearance of the character, and also through his story, Stitch represents the change and development that the DC has embraced over the past decade of involvement with Japanese animation.

In Stitch, fans can recognize both physical and personality characteristics found in traditional Japanese anime and manga. They can identify nods to both Hayao



Miyazaki and Ozako Tezuma as well as the pieces of Japanese database animation that make-up the Stitch character. Japanese Disney enthusiasts can expect complex themes traditionally accredited to Japanese animation. The immense popularity of Stitch in the Japanese consumer market speaks to these likenesses, and the continued production of animated media showcasing this character credits its ability to integrate and succeed in the foreign marketplace.

Tokyo Disneyland and Stitch result from American and Japanese popular cultures mixing together to create new products which are laden with aspects from each country that influenced their development. The localization at Tokyo Disneyland cannot go unnoticed, and the influences from Japanese anime and manga in Stitch's animation and narrative are also difficult to disregard. Stitch symbolizes the major aspects of localization occurring at the theme park. The DC distributed the first Lilo and Stitch film worldwide, and the Stitch character broadcasts the influences that the DC has received from Japan, the same influences that are found at Tokyo Disneyland. Although many view Tokyo Disneyland as another result of the Americanization of the world, the theme park exemplifies a more complex process. No matter how much the DC tried to stay away from localization at Tokyo Disneyland, aspects from the surrounding culture manipulating the park were unavoidable. Tokyo Disneyland is a hybrid product of both American and Japanese popular culture. Stitch was intentionally created by the DC with Japanese aspects. The triumph of Tokyo Disneyland, with its Japanese influences, was enough reason to believe that a Japanese inspired character would be a sensation. This character represents a mix of

local and global cultures which produced a personality that functions successfully in both the United States and Japan.

The influential Disney-Japan relationship is still in its beginning stages. As Americans become more comfortable with Japanese animation, I am certain that more and more American animated productions will take on Japanese characteristics. It is also possible that, with this change, American animation will thrive to a greater extent in areas outside of the United States because of the rising popularity of Japanese anime and manga throughout the world. As noted earlier, Disney scholar Professor Masako Notoji believes that Walt Disney's dream for a family-style theme park is living on at Tokyo Disneyland instead of at the original theme park in Anaheim. She finds that it is now in the hands of the Japanese consumers to continue the "Disney magic."<sup>125</sup> This continuing relationship brings us to the most current outcome of the exchange between American and Japanese animation: *Ponyo*.

This summer, the United States welcomed a very famous Japanese visitor, Hayao Miyazaki. He flew to Los Angeles, his first trip to America in over five years, in order to introduce his newest film, *Ponyo*. In July 2009, *Ponyo* debuted at the annual Comic-Con convention.<sup>126</sup> Scenes in this film appear eerily similar to another Disney classic, *The Little Mermaid*. This is not surprising since both narratives are based on the original Hans Christian Andersen tale. What is to be made of the DC distributing another company's rendering of a story it produced twenty years ago?

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<sup>125</sup> Personal Interview with Professor Masako Notoji.

<sup>126</sup> Alex Billington, "Interview: Writer, Director and Animator, Hayao Miyazaki," *Firstshowing.net*, August 10, 2009, <http://www.firstshowing.net/2009/08/10/interview-writer-director-and-animator-hayao-miyazaki/> (accessed August 10, 2009).

The Danish fairy tale has now been reworked by both the United States and Japan, and again translated for American audiences.

*Ponyo* is representative of many of the same arguments I posed for the *Stitch* character, and it shows the continual exchange between a corporation and a foreign culture. It will be interesting to see the outcome in terms of ticket sales and profit of this movie in American theaters; the results will either credit or discredit my claims that Americans have a growing taste for Japanese animation.

In many American commercial industries, Japanese influence is an important part of their development and production. The business of popular culture in the United States is also beginning to look more Japanese. Right now, however, the DC ultimately has the final say on the animation it produces for the United States, but a few more productions similar to *Lilo & Stitch* will have American consumers thinking that they are watching a re-worked Japanese film. In terms of the popular culture industry in the United States, we are in the midst of a changing consumer market, and either knowingly or not, the DC, an extremely successful, American born corporation, is becoming increasingly Japanese.



Figure 1. Map of Disneyland in Anaheim, California  
 From: <http://www.disneydreamer.com/disneyland/disneylandMapLarge.jpg>



Figure 2. Map of Tokyo Disneyland  
 From: <http://www.mickey-mouse.com/images/tldmap.gif>



Figure 3. Chihiro

From: <http://www.tbray.org/ongoing/When/200x/2003/05/28/Chihiro.png>



Figure 4. Yuna

From: <http://www.oimf.jp/en/program/special/images/disny04.jpg>



Figure 5. Lilo

From: <http://disney-clipart.com/Lilo-Stitch/characters/Lilo-Pelekai6.jpg>



Figure 6. Stitch

From:

[http://animatingthecyborg.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/17\\_lilo\\_und\\_stitch\\_500\\_375\\_the\\_disney\\_channel1.jpg](http://animatingthecyborg.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/17_lilo_und_stitch_500_375_the_disney_channel1.jpg)

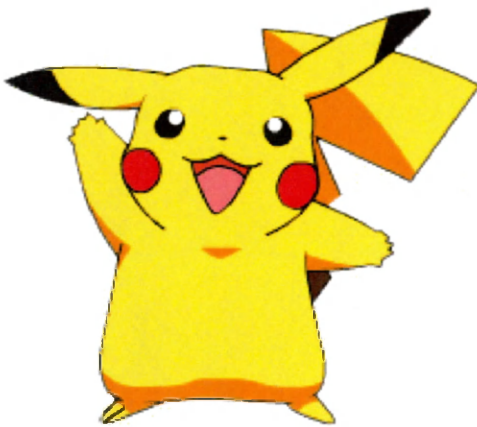


Figure 7. Pikachu

From: gamespot.com



Figure 8. Jiji

From: [http://images.absolteanime.com/kikis\\_delivery\\_service/](http://images.absolteanime.com/kikis_delivery_service/)



Figure 9. Soul Evans

From: <http://www.japanator.com/~japanator/elephant/ul/3383-550x-souleater5.jpg>

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