



***Kazuo Ishiguro'nun Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı (1986) Adlı Eserinde Endüstri Olarak Kültür  
Culture as Industry in Kazuo Ishiguro's An Artist of the Floating World (1986)***

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## Culture as Industry in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986)

### Abstract

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Kazuo Ishiguro's works generally explore the function and meaning of art for individuals in society. He emphasizes the subjectivity and volatility of fragmented individual memory as a counterpart to collective memory, as seen in the case of Masuji Ono in "An Artist of the Floating World" (1986). The story is narrated by Ishiguro's unreliable and resentful protagonist, Masuji Ono. The reader learns that Ono was once in the service of the Japanese imperial government, contributing propagandistic paintings and teachings during the Imperial period.

In this essay, I will argue that Ishiguro attempts to reveal the deception within an entire nation, where the traumatized collective memory of the post-war period collides with the individual and subjective memory of the self-deceiving Masuji Ono. Specific examples from the text will support this argument. To illustrate the fragmented and disturbed public memory, I will examine the changes in Japanese society and culture depicted in Ishiguro's novel. These observations will be drawn from Ono's grandson Ichiro's cinematic experiences, providing insight into the Americanization process in occupied Japan. This analysis is conducted in light of Adorno's theory of the "culture industry."

**Keywords:** Kazuo Ishiguro, *An Artist of the Floating World*, Theodor Adorno, culture industry, Americanisation.

## Kazuo Ishiguro'nun *Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı (1986)* Adlı Eserinde Endüstri Olarak Kültür

### Öz

Kazuo Ishiguro'nun eserleri toplumlarda sanatın birey için işlev ve önemine dikkat çekmeye çalışır. Ishiguro, *Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı (An Artist of the Floating World, 1986)* adlı eserinde Masuji Ono karakteri aracılığıyla bireysel hafızanın toplumsal hafızaya kıyasla öznel, kaypak, anlaşılması zor oluşuna vurgu yapar. Hikâye, Ishiguro'nun güvenilemeyen ve kabuğuna çekilmiş anlatıcısı Masuji Ono tarafından aktarılır. Anlatıda okuyucu geri dönüş tekniğiyle Ono'nun bir zamanlar propagandacı tabloları ve öğretileri ile emperyalist Japon hükümetine hizmet ettiğini öğrenir. Ishiguro bir ulusun yanılması okuyucusuna Ono'nun şahsi ve öznel hafızası ve savaş sonrası travmatize olmuş toplumsal hafızayı yan yana koyarak sunmaya çalışmaktadır. Öznel hafıza ve toplumsal hafızanın uyumsuzluğu, yer yer çelişkileri hafıza kavramının aslında başlı başına sorunlu varlığını da gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu makale anlatıdan bazı örneklemelerle bu çetrefilli birey toplum ilişkisini irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ishiguro'nun eserinde ele alındığı kadarıyla Japon kültüründe ve toplumunda meydana gelen değişiklikler Ono'nun torununa, Ichiro'ya, dair örnekler üzerinden değerlendirilecektir. Bu örnekler parçalanmış ve tahrip olmuş toplumsal hafızayı açıklama konusunda faydalı olmakla birlikte Ichiro'nun sinematik tecrübesi ile işgal altında kalmış Japonya'nın Amerikanlaşma sürecini ortaya koyar. Ichiro'nun sinematik tecrübesi ise Theodore Adorno'nun 'kültür endüstrisi' bağlamında ele alındığında çok farklı okumalara olanak sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kazuo Ishiguro, *Değişen Dünyada Bir Sanatçı*, Theodor Adorno, kültür endüstrisi, Amerikanlaşma.

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### INTRODUCTION

Kazuo Ishiguro's works generally revolve around the function and meaning of art for individuals in society, and he emphasizes the subjectivity and volatility of fragmented individual memory as a counterpart to collective memory as in the case of Masuji Ono in *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986). The story is narrated by Ishiguro's unreliable and resentful narrator Masuji Ono, whom the reader learns was once in the service of the Japanese imperial government with his propagandistic paintings and teachings during the Imperial period. In this essay, I will argue that Ishiguro attempts to show us the deception of an entire nation in which the traumatized collective memory of the post-war period collides with the individual and subjective memory of the self-deceiving Masuji Ono through specific examples from the text. In order to show the fragmented and disturbed public memory, the changes in Japanese society and culture depicted in Ishiguro's novel are examined and observed using examples from Ono's grandson Ichiro's cinematic experiences, which show us the Americanization process in occupied Japan in light of Adorno's theory of the "culture industry."

Ichiro, Ono's only grandchild and his only connection to post-war childhood, is obviously exposed to a different and foreign culture mediated through comics and film productions, as post-war Japan had to distance itself from everything "Japanese" in order to be more democratic and demilitarised in the American sense. The way the medium of film is inserted into the novel shows us that art in some ways has the power to change, to construct, and to shape not only individuals but society itself, albeit at a gradual pace. The propagandistic aspect of art was already known to the world in the 1940s. Theodore Adorno placed art and its power of manipulation at the centre of his studies and used it to develop his theory of the "culture industry." Ichiro, Ono's seven-year-old grandson, was born around the same time that World War II began, and he spends his childhood in occupied Japan after the war; in seven years, much has changed in Japanese society. One must remember what occupied Japan means. It means a demilitarization process; it means a democratization process of Japan at the hands of the United States; it means breaking away from Japanese traditions and modernizing in a Western way. This dilemma of Japanese society – on the one hand, trying to forget a national catastrophe; on the other, building a new identity with an emphasis on individualization and Westernization - can be observed in Japanese cinema of the aforementioned period. Ishiguro introduces his readers to this Japanese dilemma through the characterization of Ichiro, who grew up with American notions of individualism, American heroism, and non-Japanese ways of life. His heroes are not samurais or ninjas, but cowboys and American sailors; he pronounces English words, displays boisterous and rude manners toward elders; imitates cowboys and American cartoon characters known to be racist and propagandistic; despises the Japanese monster movie, calling it "all made up". How collective memory comes into conflict with individual memory can be observed in Ono's meandering narrative, which is full of "floating" words and flashbacks, leading the reader to question him as narrator as he reads.

### Historical Context

The years 1948-49 in Japan are historically very important to understand the idea of the "New Japan" and the role of film products in shaping this "New Japan" through their power of construction, which is now known as the result of what we call cultural imperialism. Japan experienced a catastrophe that caused a long-lasting collective national trauma. On August 6, 1945, an atomic bomb destroyed the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, a second plutonium bomb, even larger than Hiroshima's, was detonated over Nagasaki. Hundreds of thousands of people, soldiers and civilians, were vaporized, incinerated in horrific firestorms, drowned in rivers, poisoned by radioactive contamination and waste, and torn apart by infrastructure implosions. The effects of this fallout continue for many generations. For the lucky or unlucky survivors, a special Japanese word has emerged: Hibakush. The word literally means "people affected by the blast" and refers to the surviving victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 who were irreparably exposed to radiation from the bombings. (Deamer, 2014, p. 5)

After these atomic bombings, the Japanese film industry suffered greatly under the U.S. occupation, as strict sanctions were imposed on the industry to remove traditional Japanese elements from all films, leaving Japanese cinema without Japan. The occupation, which lasted from 1945 to 1952, was dominated by an American leadership under General Douglas MacArthur as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Powers (SCAP). The American government, which had Hollywood at home, was very aware of the power of mass media and cinema to manipulate a society; therefore, it was among the first measures they took against Japanese cinema:

On the day of the arrival of the occupation forces, the Information Dissemination Section (later the Civil Information and Education Section, or CIE) was established and began to control media by propaganda and censorship. By October 1945, the CIE exercised preproduction censorship of film projects and scripts by checking translated materials submitted by film companies, as well as postproduction censorship by checking completed films. All films to be screened in Japan—including foreign films, feature films, 16 mm documentaries, and educational films—had to be cleared by both civilian and military authorities. This double censorship officially started in January 1946 and continued through June 1949 when ... the Film Ethics Regulation Control Committee was established. (Saito, 2014, p. 328)

The demilitarization and democratization process of Japan was to proceed rapidly with U.S. intervention in Japanese cinema. In order to control the Japanese film directors, some guidelines were written, which they called 'bulletin'. "Details of the American code were listed in a series of bulletins aimed at making a new kind of 'national policy film', one diametrically opposed to the wartime product, but just as unrealistic. The idea behind the bulletins seemed to be making of Japan into an ideal America, and to this end directors responded as best they could" (Richie, 1990, p. 42). Through these broadcasts, they tried to create an American style with an optimistic, fast-paced, and modern way of life. "Kissing, for example, was a democratic custom hitherto absent from the Japanese cinema" (Richie, 1990, p. 43), and it was a taboo for Japanese society until then. The traditional Japanese bow, for example, was excluded from Japanese films because it seemed undemocratic to the American government. So, it would not be an exaggeration to say that all these sanctions have resulted in Japanese films without real Japan.

Japanese cinema without Japan, much like the American Hollywood film, was a result of advancing globalization and cultural imperialism. As Andrew Ali Ibbi states, the Hollywood film "is "the American ideological medium of mass communication; it has influences to the movie industries" throughout the world. "This process is called Hollywoodization, in which Hollywood affects the movie industries in Asia adopt the production style dressing, or even imitate the name of Hollywood" (2013, p. 95). The American film industry is like an octopus whose tentacles stretch across the globe. (Brook, 2018, p.1) Japan is not literally colonised, but its culture is colonised by Americanization, American cultural imperialism. Keeping Adorno's culture industry in mind, one must ask how cinemas, cinematic and visual productions such as cartoons and comics function in society. Movies are considered another form of cultural imperialism. What American values were propagated through these popular American films such as those in Ishiguro's novel Lone Ranger, Popeye the Sailor, Humphrey Bogart as an American cultural icon, etc.? In general, we can claim that the traditional white culture is the leading culture not only in America but almost everywhere in the world, which is called 'WASP' culture (White Angle-Saxon Protestant Culture). Mainstream American culture is actually a mixture of Christianity, capitalism, consumerism, and democracy, and through globalisation and the Hollywood film industry, these values are being carried to other countries, such as Japan in our case.

In addition to the sanctions imposed by the U.S. occupation forces, the production of films about the war and the atomic bomb was not financially viable for Japan because it was so wounded, defeated, and beaten. The film industry in post-war Japan therefore faced a kind of obvious stagnation. It was hard for them to visualise a national trauma that they wanted to forget forever. A nation that could not refer to these catastrophic events and sufferings in its film productions due to the American censorship applied to Japanese cinema was built up with the excuse that it needed to reform cinema. "The first Japanese film

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to deal with the nuclear event was Ito Sueo's *The Effects of the Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (1946). The nearly three-hour film consists of documentary footage of the destroyed cities and the surviving 'hibakusha'" (Deamer, 2014, p. 7). Yet, again, it lacks Japanese; it lacks emotion; it lacks a representation of the tremendous suffering of an entire people. How can a film or any other form of artistic production capture such an event as the atomic bomb? Is it possible to recreate the scenery? How can Japanese people make films to fairly treat an event that is the source of a national post-war trauma? A nation with an unresolved trauma seems unable to convey its experience on screen. As cited in Deamer's *Deleuze, Japanese Cinema, and the Atom Bomb: The Spectre of Impossibility*, "Abe Mark Nornes describes that the Japanese screen is haunted by 'the 'spectre of impossibility'; in the face of such horror, the possibility of 'representation' can seem unattainable" (Deamer, 2014, p. 8). As a source of great frustration, years later Japanese cinema produced many monster films that pointed to the still existing national post-war trauma. *Godzilla* is the first of these monster movies to be imitated and copied over and over again.

There is a special genre 'for Japanese monster movies called "kaiju" that began with *Godzilla* (1954). "Over the last six decades, *Godzilla* has appeared in a total of 30 films, positioning itself as the most prominent monster character in the world of cinema" (Dosen, 2015, p. 121). *Godzilla* the monster, with its radioactive footprints, is the symbol of the American nuclear threat and Japan's postwar national trauma. For this very reason, we should examine Ichiro's understanding of the monster film in the novel. Who is the monster? Who does it represent? In her analysis of *Godzilla* as a reminiscence of postwar trauma, Anna Dosen asserts, "*Godzilla*'s dark, scaly skin is often referred as of those of the atom bomb survivors, and its gigantic size calls attention to numerous Japanese casualties of war" (2015, pp. 122-123). As mentioned earlier, the bombing survivors suffered terrible burns, and their clothes stuck to their skin and became inseparable. "The notion of a body as a place of memory" (Dosen, 2015, p. 122) is the way trauma pushes itself to the surface in sanctioned Japanese cinema and society. "Positioning *Godzilla*'s body as a site of remembrance, a walking monument, the memories of the nuclear attack and the fallen soldiers in the South Sea battle become alive" (Dosen, 2015, p. 123). Ishiguro uses the same method to refer to the national trauma: He does not insert anything directly about the atomic bombs, but hints at them. The dialogue between Ono and Ichiro about the monster hides the trauma behind it. Ichiro calls it "a prehistoric monster," "lizard-like." The image of the monster in Ishiguro's novel reminds the reader of the recent past, which all the characters want to forget as soon as possible, except Ono with his retrospective state of mind.

It would be an anachronism to draw parallels between Ichiro's monster movie and *Godzilla*, but studying Japanese cinema, I could say that this could be no other character than *Godzilla*, the first representative of post-war Japanese monster movies. Obviously, Ichiro does not take him seriously. He often says he's made up; who can believe that? It's so funny that it's made up. But when Ono asks him to draw the poster, Ono is surprised at how detailed he is in transferring the poster onto the sketchpad. From this, we conclude that he is attracted to the poster and remembers every detail. Ichiro insists on watching the monster movie, but he takes a raincoat, which Ono could not understand at first, to cover his face when the monster appears on the screen. If we say that the monster's "dark scaly skin" represents the burnt Japanese people and Ichiro stays away from this sight, we can say that Ichiro alone has to cope with the memory of a great war against his own country because his parents make the past intangible for Ichiro. Thus, he can be representative of Japanese youth who do not have the courage to face the deeply buried national trauma. The denial of the recent past creates a rift between two generations, Ono and Ichiro. Ichiro is also, in a sense, an artist who creates something on his sketchpad that visualises the national trauma by drawing 'the "prehistoric monster." He brings to light the collective traumatic memory as an artist. "In each of Ishiguro's novels, there is a turn away from pivotal and traumatic episodes, whether historical events, such as the atomic devastation in Nagasaki, or private betrayals, or the lack of courageous action, passivity in the face of fascism" (Walkowitz, 2001, p. 1050). No one talks about the atomic bombing directly collective self-censorship.

Even more interestingly, the monster movie almost causes a family crisis. Noriko insists on going to a duck garden and resents Ono's interference with an invitation to the family outing for the movie. Setsuko does not want to offend her father, but does not want to go. The addition of the monster movie could refer to the difficulty the Japanese have in facing their past and surviving the post-war trauma. The poster drawn by Ichiro, Noriko's cancellation of the family outing for the film, and Ichiro's resistance to not seeing the monster, all of these details surrounding the monster film and its poster could point to the question of New Japan and the extent to which this project will succeed. "Godzilla's body serves as a motif for uncovering a deeper understanding of the Japanese world" (Dosen, 2015, p. 122). It is indeed very ironic when we say that Godzilla represents Japan's national trauma, then we come to the point, as I said, that the younger generation does not have the courage to deal with their country's recent past in a certain way.

In addition to Ichiro's experience with the monster movie, we are presented with several other influences of Americanization in Ichiro's reading and viewing habits: Popeye the Sailor as a cartoon character, Lone Ranger as a cowboy movie, Humphrey Bogart as an American cultural icon in the film industry, most famous for gangster movies and film noirs. Through the culture industry, Ichiro learns about American cartoons, movies, and heroes rather than Japanese ones. Adorno reminds us that the individual is not the king, not the subject, but the object of the culture industry. Ichiro is not the subject but the object of his cinematic experience. For Adorno, cultural products are not only for profit, but also produce consumers for the needs of the capitalist system. Popeye the Sailor introduces us to a hero, a soldier in the naval forces who consumes cans of spinach to gain the strength to defeat his enemies. The spinach he consumes does not come from the fields or the gardens, but from the factories. It is the result of the assembly line of the culture industry and the capitalist system. Through this cartoon, cans of spinach become desirable; they are bought and consumed, not because they are needed, but because they are presented as necessary by the culture industry. If we are to briefly mention what Adorno means by "culture industry," it is in itself reproductive with the goal of more and more leisure, as it protects its own existence by promoting artificial emotions and desires. Adorno and Horkheimer first mentioned the "culture industry" of mass culture 'in their joint work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the concept of which Adorno later discussed in detail as the "culture industry" that emerged as a result of mass production and the monopoly of mass culture. The liberating power that Enlightenment gives to the mind of the individual leads to greater domination, and this domination can be observed in every particle of the culture industry without having to hide it. Adorno speaks of the dramatic change that culture, the individual, and art undergo in an environment created by the mass media – television, radio, cinema. The mass media have served to convey and disseminate knowledge and communication, at the same time creating an illusion of democracy. For Adorno, cinema and radio do not necessarily prove to be art or artistic; they proclaim themselves to be industry rather than artists and reject any criticism of their artistic merits. Adorno speaks of the "absolute power of capitalism, "in which "the inhabitants as producers and consumers are drawn into the centre in search of work and pleasure; all living units crystallise into well-organized complexes. The striking unity of microcosm and macrocosm presents men with a model of their culture: the false identity of the general and the particular" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1993, p. 1). Adorno reminds us, "Automobiles, bombs, and movies keep the whole thing together until their levelling element shows its strength in the very wrong which it furthered. It has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1993, p. 1).

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We see the dichotomy of "traitor" and "loyal." Those who were loyal during the war are seen by the new generation as traitors who have led the nation astray. Yesterday's traitors, the disloyal, are today patriotic and wise, courageous. This is not unrelated to the issue of Americanization, if we recall the particular episode of Popeye the Sailor entitled "You're a sap Mr. Jap" (1942). It is one of the most famous propagandistic American cartoons of the post-war period, which was banned shortly after its publication. It shows Popeye fighting against the Japanese marines. As an extension of capitalist consumer society, spinach is canned in factories where the idea of heroism is buried by the culture industry. In the cartoon, Popeye is a marine who is alone on a ship and encounters a small Japanese boat. The Japanese man proposes a peace pact to him, but deceives him in many ways. The cartoon shows a rather stereotypical portrayal of the Japanese: they all wear glasses, assuming that many Japanese are weak-sighted because of their small eyes; they have big white teeth almost sticking out of their mouths, reminding us of the story of the wolf and the girl in the famous fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood", where the wolf has big teeth just to eat the girl, as he says. In the course of the plot, the Japanese prove to be sneaky con artists, presenting Popeye with a bouquet of flowers with a hidden scorpion. They use bombs and firecrackers – a reference to the aggressiveness of Imperial Japan. The Japanese flag is sunk into the sea with the entire ship after the naval commander commits suicide by drinking gasoline and consuming lots of firecrackers; the scene can be read as an overgeneralization, a simplification of "suicides for honour," which are seen as a kind of Japanese tradition for when a warrior fails, mockingly. The East is seemingly viewed in an abstract way in Popeye. Ichiro seems to accept the Popeye cartoon despite its anti-Japanese bias because, as Adorno asserts, "The man with leisure has to accept what the culture manufacturers offer him" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1993, p. 3).

### **Conclusion**

In short, the world is changing, "floating" and eluding, as indicated in the title of the novel. Japan, however, is undergoing one of the most dramatic changes in its history. In this study, the grandson Ichiro and his attitudes, reactions to the elderly and life in general have been elaborated to some extent in light of his cinematic experiences. What role does he play in this changing social life of Japan? Does he represent the childhood of occupied Japan? If we remember that he is only eight years old in 1949, we could say that he was born with the beginning of the war; he was born at a time when everything was dense and ambiguous and tended to usher in dramatic changes for Japanese society, such as those later referred to as infants, babies, during the period of U.S. occupation. He is a kind of bridge for Japan between its traumatic past and the upcoming future. The solution must be in the hands of Ichiro.

Japan is not literally colonised, but its culture is colonised by Americanization, American cultural imperialism. We see in the novel the Western style of Noriko's narrow house, Ichiro's knowledge of English words, his love of spinach, the imitation of cowboys jumping and shouting boisterously, bad and rude manners like the characters have in gangster movies or in film noirs. There are also newly built department stores. In one of them we see Ichiro and Ono having lunch, and Ichiro is hungrily eating spinach. Noriko's father-in-law, Dr. Saito, asks Noriko about her idea for a new department store in one of their conversations, which shows us that the image of department stores is new to post-war Japan. The entertainment district, which we discussed as a floating world, is now a business centre with tall buildings and white-collar office workers, most of whom work for American companies. In this particular scene where Ono observes these office workers, it is clear that Ono has a certain distaste for the younger generation as they are obviously in denial about their past. He is aware of the present situation where middle-aged people like his own daughters Noriko, Setsuko and his sons-in-law are trying not to accept the imperial past as their own. In this way, Japan loses its rootedness and becomes an infant, a baby just beginning life. Ichiro

does not idolise Japanese heroes, not even the mediaeval ones, but American cowboys and cartoon characters. He makes fun of monster movies, calling them completely made up and unbelievable. Even at the age of 8, he has a hard attitude towards his own culture. Ono at the end of the novel has these thoughts in his mind. The new generation is in danger of losing its pride in being Japanese, and it will be lost in the booming capitalist system at the hands of U.S. cultural imperialism. They are not only constructing buildings or roads in occupied Japan, but also a new culture based on a consumerist, capitalist system. All these details bring us to the point that we have a new Japan, symbolised mainly by Ichiro, which is no longer rooted in the imperial past and has been more Americanized by cultural imperialism. Ichiro is exposed to a different culture in every way. The way cinema is inserted into the novel shows us that art somehow has the power to change, construct, and shape.

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