

Title	The war without Asians : Raymond Chandler's Asian motifs in The blue dahlia
Sub Title	
Author	西山, 祥(Nishiyama, Sho)
Publisher	慶應義塾大学大学院文学研究科英米文学専攻『コロキア』同人
Publication year	2024
Jtitle	Colloquia (コロキア). No.45 (2024.) ,p.35- 50
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	米文学
Genre	Journal Article
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN00341698-20241220-0035

慶應義塾大学学術情報リポジトリ(KOARA)に掲載されているコンテンツの著作権は、それぞれの著作者、学会または出版社/発行者に帰属し、その権利は著作権法によって保護されています。引用にあたっては、著作権法を遵守してご利用ください。

The copyrights of content available on the KeiO Associated Repository of Academic resources (KOARA) belong to the respective authors, academic societies, or publishers/issuers, and these rights are protected by the Japanese Copyright Act. When quoting the content, please follow the Japanese copyright act.

The War without Asians:
Raymond Chandler's Asian Motifs in *The Blue Dahlia**

Sho NISHIYAMA

Introduction: Chandler's Portrayal of Asia

In Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled novel series, the protagonist Philip Marlowe, a private detective, does not seem to want to see Asians. For example, in Chandler's second novel *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), the detective sees a nameless Japanese gardener working in a white family mansion in the plot of the case investigation. However, the gardener has no particular reason to appear but remains as part of the background from the detective's perspective. Nevertheless, Asians appear to have retained hidden nuances throughout the Marlowe series. For example, in his third feature novel entitled *The High Window* (1942), he mentions that Elisha Morningstar, an antique coin dealer, has "a sort of dry musty smell, like a fairly clean Chinaman" for no apparent reason (*The High Window* 46), and the rare coin that the detective is looking for is in a box marked "Made in Japan" (74).

Chandler's Asia is euphemistically represented by superimposing images of Asians on whites or employing objects instead of people to imply the presence of Asians. Historically, *The High Window* coincided with the Pacific War, which began with Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Most of his novels are set in Los Angeles, California, where the anti-Asian movement was on the rise. Although Marlowe's first-person point of view does not mention everything, at least some Asians must be in his world.

It is not difficult to see Chandler's racist tendencies in his works: At the beginning of *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe meets Moose Malloy, a large white man searching for his ex-girlfriend, whom he left eight years ago, on Central Avenue in Los Angeles. Malloy is enraged that the street, once crowded with whites, is now a black neighborhood and that none of the blacks present know her. He murders the bar's black owner and flees. Despite Marlowe witnessing this scene, he gradually begins to sympathize with Malloy's situation as the story unfolds, and in the end, he defends him against another murder.

"I'm not afraid of you. You're no killer. You didn't mean to kill her. The other one—over on Central—you could have squeezed out of. But not out of beating a

* I deeply appreciate the ongoing guidance and support of Professor Hisayo Ogushi and Professor Mitsushige Sato of Keio University, which has been instrumental in my research. I am also grateful to Professor Emeritus Takayuki Tatsumi of Keio University for providing me with invaluable advice.

woman's head on a bedpost until her brains were on her face. . . . You didn't mean to kill her—did you?"

His eyes were restless. His head was cocked in a listening attitude.

"It's about time you learned your own strength," I said. (*Farewell My Lovely*, 274)

At this point, the detective does not seem to regard what Malloy did to the black man as murder. However, while Malloy disregards the black man's life, Marlowe defends him suggesting that another murder by Malloy—in which he broke into the woman's house and strangled her to death—is an act of negligence rather than intentional. Here, the detective's discriminatory attitudes toward African Americans are evident.¹ Hence, they are depicted as "aliens," while Asian Americans are not even portrayed in the first place. Under these conditions, is there any way for the reader to see what the first-person narrator cannot or does not want to see?

Between 1943 and 1949, Chandler worked as a scenario writer in Hollywood, during and after World War II. In his screenplay of the 1946 film *The Blue Dahlia*, which won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, no Asian characters appear. Although the film focuses on the feelings of alienation and loss experienced by soldiers returning home, it can be said that the events they experienced during the Pacific War were subtly in the film. The effects of the war can also be seen in the film's production environment: The film was planned in 1945 at Paramount Studios, and because the lead actor, Alan Ladd, was scheduled to serve in the Army for about three months, the film was shot at an unusually fast pace (Luhr 45). Moreover, the original culprit changed from one of the returning soldiers to a hotel detective due to naval censorship.² This paper begins by analyzing Raymond Chandler's screenplay and exploring the symbolic meaning he attached to the blue dahlia. Then, by examining Chandler's script alongside the final film, we can reveal how the film crew of that era interpreted and portrayed or omitted Asian influences. This attempt invites us to reconstruct how Chandler's perceptions or misperceptions of Asia were received by the audience and readers of his time.

¹ George Brooks argues that the detective Marlowe's interest and empathy as a white man are reflections of shared alienation among white men. Brooks states, "*Farewell, My Lovely*'s opening scene typifies the displacement and alienation Marlowe feels in a rapidly changing, and modernizing Los Angeles." (Brooks 21)

² On January 17, 1946, Chandler sent a letter to James Sandoe discussing how the script had been altered during production. (Brucoli 132)

1. A Story of Loss: A Screenplay Analysis

In Chandler's screenplay, Navy Lieutenant Commander Johnny who has just returned from the war, is accused of murder but tries to prove his innocence. He returned to Hollywood with his two war buddies, Buzz and George, and was reunited with his wife, Helen. However, she sold their house and is living in a hotel cottage, partying and drinking every night, and having an affair with Eddie Harwood, the owner of The Blue Dahlia nightclub.

During a dispute between Johnny and Helen about her issues, he learns that their five-year-old son was killed in a car accident caused by Helen's drinking during his duty. He leaves his wife at the cottage and meets Harwood's wife, Joyce (played by Veronica Lake) in heavy rain. The next morning, he finds out through the radio that Helen is shot and killed. Johnny is suspected of the murder and later escapes with the help of Joyce. Eventually, he confronts Eddie, Helen's paramour, and proves his innocence. It is also revealed that the detective working for the hotel was responsible for the murder of his wife. The film closes with a scene in which George, Buzz, and Johnny go back to the bar for a drink after the case is solved.

This scenario depicts the sense of loss and alienation experienced by the soldiers after returning home. Johnny had a wife, a son and a home before the war. However, his wife sold their home, she has no longer feelings for him, and he lost his son in a car accident. Moreover, the interactions between Buzz and George reflect their preoccupation with their lost homes. Although there is temporary residence after returning to Hollywood, both have no clear future. When Buzz returns home to their apartment in a disoriented state, George asks him, "Forget where you live?" (40), to which Buzz replies, "Guess I got lost" (41). After George expresses concern, Buzz irritably questions himself, "Why wouldn't I be all right?" (41); Buzz seems to be suffering from PTSD, having lost the ability to control his anger and impulses. Here, the notions of "forgetting one's home" and "getting lost" signify the loss of home as well as the loss of memory. Chandler wrote the story based on the loss experienced by the returning soldiers.

The screenplay does not specifically convey their duties during the war. The setting is Hollywood, the place where Chandler actually inhabited and continuously used as a backdrop in his novels. However, the enemies they faced during the war are indicated through the characters' lines. Johnny, Buzz, and George, who are returning soldiers, were assigned as combatants in "the South Pacific" (11), and there is a line mentioning that Johnny flew "Liberators" (15) during his mission. Here, Liberators refer to the Consolidated B-24D Liberator, a large bomber used by the U.S. Army Air Force. This bomber has also been used

by the navy as an anti-submarine patrol aircraft. It was employed in air raids over mainland Japan during World War II.

Buzz, who experiences shell shock, plays a crucial role in the development of the story. In the opening scene where the three men are talking in a Hollywood bar, Buzz reacts to the music coming from the jukebox by grimacing and saying, “We gotta have that monkey music in here?” (5). He starts an argument with a marine who plays music, whether to turn off the music. Owing to shrapnel injuries sustained in the war, Buzz has a metal plate in his head above his ear, and he suffers from after-effects such as confusion and violent tendencies when exposed to loud noises or strong stimuli. Johnny intervenes when the marine attempts to attack Buzz.

JOHNNY: Sharpshooter?

MARINE: Uh-huh?

JOHNNY: [*Indicating the Marine's sharpshooter's badge*] Can you get them all in the black at five hundred?

MARINE: [*Surprised*] I'm not that good . . .

JOHNNY: Good enough to kill a few Japs, aren't you?

MARINE: [*Grudgingly*] I guess so.

JOHNNY: Fine. We left some for you. (*The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay* 6-7)

Here, the script contains the word “Jap.” Based on historical facts, it can be inferred that they were stationed on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. Japan occupied the Marshall Islands in 1914 during World War I, which became a Japanese mandate. Later, during the Pacific War, the U.S. Navy defeated the Japanese forces in the Battle of Tarawa and subsequently occupied the area on behalf of America. In other words, they were on a mission to “liberate” the Marshall Islands from Japan. Thus, it is clear that their enemies were Japanese.

Additionally, the blue dahlia, which is also the title, does not solely symbolize death but also connects Buzz's suffering from war-related trauma. Helen's lover, Harwood runs the nightclub called “Blue Dahlia.” Again, flowers are displayed in a vase in Helen's bungalow. When Buzz witnesses Helen plucking the petals of a flower one by one on the night of the incident, he overreacts when he witnesses Joyce performing the same gesture in Harwood's nightclub office. This reaction triggers his distress, compounded by the recurring “monkey music” that echoes in his mind.

Joyce keeps pulling at the petals of the blue dahlia. She has torn off a couple already and dropped them into a waste basket or ashtray beside her. This catches Buzz's attention.

BUZZ: *[Excitedly to Joyce]* What are you doing that for?
JOYCE: *[Surprised]* Doing what?
BUZZ: I don't like it! I don't like what you're doing to that flower! *[His voice rises steadily]* Say, that's funny, isn't it? It's that same tune—all day long they keep playing it in the apartment next door—. . . *[Oblivious to all but his thoughts]* No—it wasn't next door either. It was someplace else. And the music was right in the room with us—and she kept pulling at those flowers—just like you were doing— (*The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay* 109-10)

In this scene, Buzz becomes agitated by the band music with bass drum sounds similar to those from the jukebox at the beginning. Seeing the blue flower plucking causes confusion, leading him to make a false confession in front of the police and the detective. In other words, the blue dahlia functions as a plot device that, when combined with the “monkey music,” stimulates and repeatedly aggravates Buzz's war wounds. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “blue dahlia” is “[u]sed as the type of something rare, sought after, or unattainable.”

As previously mentioned, the blue dahlia had their petals plucked out and scattered, causing Buzz's confusion. At this moment, he may have been reminded of scenes he witnessed on the battlefield in which fighter planes and human bodies were torn apart and scattered. Alternatively, the act of plucking the flower symbolizes Buzz's own memory fragmentation without coherence. However, memories of the battlefield continue to harm him as long as he remembers them. It can be inferred that the blue dahlia, unattainable for him, is something he is willing to let go of. Confronting the flower, which is associated with the hallucinated “monkey music,” awakens Buzz's war injuries and, as a result, jeopardizes his position in his society. Thus, it can be inferred that the flowers are indirectly connected to Japanese enemies.

Helen, who received blue dahlia flowers from her lover, is killed, whereas Harwood, the owner of the nightclub “Blue Dahlia,” dies in his own men's gunfire. At the climax of the story, the policeman shoots the private detective Newell, who is the real culprit, while attempting to escape. The scene also takes place at Harwood's nightclub. After the case is solved, the three soldiers succeed in proving their innocence and are freed from the symbolic blue dahlia of death. Finally, they reflect on a series of events as they look at the exterior of the nightclub.

Buzz: Kind of tough night for the orphans, wasn't it, Johnny?
Johnny doesn't answer.
George: Why don't we mosey on home?
Johnny: Let's.

They start walking abreast, CAMERA PRECEDING THEM. (*The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay* 126-27)

Buzz refers to himself and his two war comrades as “orphans.” This signifies that as they experience a sense of “not having a home” following their return to America, they begin to walk towards “home” again after surviving their ordeal at the Blue Dahlia.

The final scene shows the neon light in the shape of a blue flower is turned off. Looking at it, the three head out to the bar for a drink.

LONG SHOT—THE FRONT OF THE BLUE DAHLIA SHOOTING ACROSS THEIR SHOULDERS. Suddenly the lighted neon sign goes out—first the words, then the flower.

JOHNNY: [*Slowly*] The Blue Dahlia.

BUZZ: Funny how without the lights—

GEORGE: Did somebody say something about a drink of bourbon?

The boys look at each other and grin. They turn and FACE THE CAMERA. They start walking TOWARD IT. The music rises to a crescendo. As their three figures fill the screen—

FADE OUT:

THE END (*The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay* 127-28)

Therefore, it can be interpreted that *The Blue Dahlia* is a story about men who are back from the battlefield, struggling with war trauma and a sense of loss. As the neon light of the flower fades, they start to find a new home, as death no longer plays a role in the story. Although they end up unharmed, they neither regain what they have lost nor resolve their feelings of loss or alienation caused by the war. The final scene of the three going out can be set as a recurring scene because they were also drinking at the beginning of the scene; the effect of the war suffers them repeatedly, even after solving the case. *The Blue Dahlia*, then, suggests that there is no way to overcome this loss.

However, until now, the analysis has concentrated on Chandler’s screenplay, not on the film itself. During the creation and release of the film, numerous changes were made in the script. By the time the film reached the audience, it underwent a multitude of processes, including interpretation by actors and production staff based on the director’s and producer’s instructions. This also involved setting props, costumes, sounds, acting, cinematography, and editing. How was the symbolic meaning of the blue dahlia, as envisioned by Chandler, interpreted and expressed in the final film, *The Blue Dahlia*?

2. Props Indicating Asia: A Film Analysis

The film, directed by George Marshall, differs from Chandler's original screenplay, written in March 1945. While the screenplay ends with the three men going out for drink, the film concludes with Johnny uniting with Joyce, Harwood's ex-wife, and a kiss. This difference can be attributed to the conventions of Hollywood movies at the time.³ Indeed, Veronica Lake, who played the role of Joyce, was known for her roles in screwball comedies where couples overcome chaos to find happiness.⁴ However, what is more significant here is that their kissing scene does not undermine the symbolic meaning Chandler attaches to the blue dahlia; rather, it reinforces it. With this conclusion, Johnny "liberates" Joyce from Harwood and ends up with her. This parallels the returnees' successful "liberation" of the Marshall Islands from the Japanese forces. It fits for the story about a man who has triumphed over the blue dahlia.

Other changes occurred when the screenplay was adapted for the film. Terminologies such as "Sharpshooter" and "Jap," were removed from the film. For instance, in the opening bar scene of the screenplay, the marine operating the jukebox is a sharpshooter who talks about his ability to kill several Japanese soldiers (6). In the film, the scene is altered so that the marine apologizes to Buzz after seeing the metal plate on his head. Also, there is a scene where Johnny is asked, "What were you flying, sir?" to which he replies, "Liberators." In the film, this question is posed by Eddie Harwood, a man involved in an affair with Johnny's wife. The discussion regarding the type of aircraft is subsequently discontinued. On the other hand, in the screenplay, the question is asked by the pianist who was at the party in his wife's bungalow. In the script, the pianist asks Johnny, "What were you flying, sir?" and Johnny replies, "Liberators." The pianist then says, "Low-level stuff, huh?" and Johnny nods, to which the pianist murmurs, "Nothing tougher, they tell me" (15). Johnny was flying at a low level, which meant that he was operating in a dangerous environment, in which the pilot himself was susceptible to attacks from the ground, indicating the perilous conditions he faced.

All these words would easily remind the audience of the specifics of soldiers' missions during the war. By removing these elements from the adaptation process, the contours of the

³ Luhr mentions the difference between the film's ending and the screenplay's. "The screenplay's ending is much more consonant with the patterns established in the narrative: the three friends have gone through another horror together, and one has lost a good deal" (Luhr 52). In contrast, the film's conclusion follows a typical Hollywood formula, where the hero and heroine are brought together and face a fresh start.

⁴ For example, Preston Sturges's film *Sullivan's Travels* (1941) features a movie director and an aspiring actress (Lake) who masquerade as impoverished individuals.

enemy became blurred. It appears that the impression of the Japanese soldiers, which Chandler indirectly depicts as lingering trauma for the soldiers, is further diluted in the film.

However, in terms of the filmmaker's situation in Hollywood, Tom Williams states the following;

In some ways, the war was an opportunity Hollywood was keen to embrace. Not only did it offer new ways to make money, but it was also a chance to change the public perception of cinema. . . . These Japan-bashing films signaled Hollywood's intention to become the voice of the people. (Williams 204)

Since the outbreak of World War II, anti-Japanese films such as *Little Tokyo, U.S.A.* (1942) and *Wake Island* (1942) were released and filmed as a mass medium that not only reflected American public opinion but also served as propaganda. Chandler, who subtly depicted Asian threats in his novels during this period, wrote a script for *The Blue Dahlia*. Given this fact, it is reasonable to think that studio executives may have had political intentions. They could have extended beyond the expected entertainment value of film noir. In an era when anti-Japanese films were actively being produced, mentioning the Japanese military in the film should not have been problematic for producers such as John Houseman or studio executives. In this case, does *The Blue Dahlia* truly obscure the threat of the Japanese?

Obviously, the experience of the servicemen in the South Pacific is not depicted in the film. However, in the final scenes, if the audience closely observes the background of the office in the nightclub "The Blue Dahlia," where the characters gather, they will notice motifs intertwined with Asia. Figure 1 shows a vase with blue dahlia on the left side of the image. In addition, there is a female statue on the right side. Finally, there is a metal water pitcher along with a pair of animal figures in the foreground to the right. Shortly after, the club owner and Helen's lover, Harwood, and Buzz and George, enter the office. Buzz and George confront Harwood, on a two-on-one standoff. They stand near the vase, whereas Harwood stands near the statue and figurines.

These props are not mentioned in the script and were likely not intended by Chandler. This can be interpreted as manifestations of Orientalism associated with decadence. Even though it is difficult to identify the statue itself with a specific Buddha or deity, the female statue resembles Benzaiten (弁財天); a goddess with roots in Hinduism, representing a deity of music and eloquence. In Japan, Benzaiten was syncretized with Uga, a deity associated with wealth, and was also worshipped as a god of prosperity (Mitsuhashi 125). The placement of this Benzaiten statue in the nightclub office frequented by the wealthy, alongside the "monkey

music” that Buzz refers to, symbolizes both music and wealth. The pairs of animal figurines are likely to be komainu (狛犬), guardian beasts traditionally placed at the entrances of shrines and temples in Japan. Komainu, which were introduced from China through the Korean Peninsula to Japan, were used as protective charms to ward off evil spirits (Uesugi 120). In Japanese shrines, komainu are typically positioned on either side of the main hall. The placement of komainu figurines beside the entrance door to the office in the “Blue Dahlia” can be interpreted as a similar protective measure. Assuming that the film production staff used Asian artifacts as props while being aware of the historical and religious contexts of Benzaiten and Komainu, this interpretation becomes plausible.



Figure 1. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:14:21)



Figure 2. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:14:23)

However, considering that these Asian artifacts are employed to create an atmosphere of malevolence in the villain Harwood’s lair, their placement alongside the blue dahlia flower vase on the screen is even more significant. It is also relevant to consider why the nightclub was named “The Blue Dahlia.” As previously mentioned, the term “blue dahlia” implies “something unattainable,” but the combination of color blue and the name of a flower evoking an Oriental image was foregrounded by the Belgian cartoonist Hergé before Chandler. In his fifth *The Adventures of Tintin*, he features an opium den in Shanghai called “Blue Lotus.” Hergé’s use of the lotus, an Asian plant, provoked the image of Chinese blue porcelain and created a setting for Asian malevolence.⁵ Similarly, in *The Blue Dahlia*, the blue flower can be interpreted as an Oriental symbol. Thus, the nightclub “The Blue Dahlia” serves as a representation of an Asian lair of evil within the narrative.

⁵ It depicts an intense battle between the leader of the underworld, Mitsuhiro, a secret agent of the Japanese army stationed in China, and Tintin. Tintin uncovers a Japanese conspiracy in Shanghai from 1931 and dismantles a drug smuggling ring.



Figure3. Replica of Kichijoten 「吉祥天立像（模造）」 関野聖雲模作、東京国立博物館所蔵。文化遺産オンライン、bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/534320. Accessed 3 Aug. 2024.



Figure4. Wooden Koma-inu (Guardian Lion-dog) 「木造狛犬」 奈良国立博物館所蔵。文化遺産オンライン、bunka.nii.ac.jp/heritages/detail/195093. Accessed 3 Aug. 2024.

At this point, it is significant that it is not the protagonist Johnny, but Buzz and George, who infiltrate the Asian den of evil. This is because his memory is lost in the story of the loss. When Buzz is suspected of killing Helen and Johnny demonstrates Buzz's shooting skills to prove his innocence, the Benzaiten statue plays an important role. Helen's body has a gunshot wound that suggests that a gun was pressed against her chest, but Buzz is known for his long-distance shooting and does not use such a method. At this point, Johnny holds a lit match and tells Buzz to shoot it. When Buzz successfully extinguishes the flame with a shot from a corner of the room, it serves as evidence that clears his name. Initially, in this scene, the Benzaiten statue is visible against the background of Buzz and the police officer. However, immediately after Buzz successfully shoots out the match's flame, the camera angle shifts, positioning Buzz and others in a way that hides the statue, causing it to disappear from the frame. The disappearance of the Benzaiten statue, along with its association with evil and the blue dahlia,

visually represents Buzz overcoming the trauma of war. Even though his memory is so confusing that he is unsure whether he committed the murder, his marksmanship skills remain ingrained in his body. Asian ornaments suggest that he is coping with his trauma by erasing the existence of the Japanese from his memories.



Figure5. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:27:57)



Figure6. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:28:11)

Similarly, Komainu, the guardian statues, play a crucial role in the scene where Newell, the murderer, tries to escape. As he stands between the vase of dahlias and the Komainu while attempting to exit the office, he is shot by the police right at that spot. At this moment, the mouth of one of the beasts is opened, and its head is turned upward toward Newell. Although the camera position is almost the same as when Harwood first brings Buzz and George into the office, the positions of the characters and Newell are slightly different. Because Newell stands slightly closer to the camera than the others, the two beasts appear to look up at him. Originally, Komainu in Japanese shrines were believed to keep evil out of sacred spaces. However, in the film they take on the role of trapping Newell, the embodiment of evil, within the space of evil itself.



Figure7. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:27:57)



Figure8. *The Blue Dahlia* (1:28:11)

Although references to Japan were removed from the script's dialogue, they still appear in the film as background props in crucial scenes of the plot. The film's production and props staff,

upon reading it, clearly perceive Asian threat embedded in it. They also reveal the exclusionary attitude towards Asians that characterized Hollywood as a whole at that time.

3. From a Story of Loss to a Story of Conquering Loss

Murakami points out that the representation of Asians in films since the 1910s has often been distorted. The depictions of Asians, such as the Chinese detective Charlie Chan and the Japanese spy Mr. Moto, have presented an ambiguous “Oriental” image in a tangled manner. She notes that during World War II, Hollywood studios rapidly produced anti-Japanese films where the Japanese repeatedly appeared on screen as “inhuman beasts and as a fanatical group that worships the Emperor” (106). In 1940s films, “Japanese” characters were often played by Asian actors of Chinese or Korean descent, or by white actors in makeup. Consequently, film studios’ practice of mixing the cultural features of Japanese people with those of other Asians is represented in *The Blue Dahlia* by the statue whose exact identity—whether it is Benzaiten or another Buddhist motif—is unclear, and by a pair of Komainu, both with their mouths wide open.⁶ What matters here is not the precise identity of these objects, but their significance in being displayed in a room belonging to someone who collects “Asiatic items.” Crucially, these Asian motifs are associated with villainous characteristics.

The elements that determine a film include not only the intentions of the screenwriter, the directors, and producers. Project-related constraints related to the project also shaped the perception of the final film. Matthew Bruccoli, who published Chandler’s script, discusses how the script was altered during production. As in a letter dated January 17, 1946, to mystery critic James Sandoe, Chandler states;

What I wrote was a story of a man who killed (executed would be a better word) his pal’s wife under the stress of a great and legitimate anger, then blanked out and forgot all about it; then with perfect honesty, did his best to help the pal get out of a jam, then found himself in a set of circumstances which brought about partial recall.
(Bruccoli 132)

In his original conception, Chandler intended Buzz as the culprit. Buzz would have lost his memory of the murder of Helen due to war trauma and would have actively cooperated in the investigation, thus complicating the case. Chandler explains that the change in the murderer to

⁶ Komainu are typically counted as a pair with one having an open mouth and the other closed, but in the film, both have their mouths open.

Newell during the film's production was due to censorship by the U.S. Navy. A plot involving a serviceman killing someone for trauma from fighting the Japanese in WW II was unacceptable. Had there not been a request for change from the navy, solidarity among the three returning soldiers would have been lost, and the theme of their loss would have been even more pronounced. Nevertheless, despite significant alterations to the script, the film hints at Japan as a trauma through the use of Asian motifs in its props.

At the same time, the film is not merely a story of loss but also portrays the process of overcoming that loss. This script embodies the war through terms like "Jap" and "Sharpshooter," symbolizing what the blue dahlia represents—namely, the loss of home for the returning soldiers: In contrast the film describes not only the way Johnny frees Joyce from Harwood but also the way, as Buzz extricates himself from a difficult situation, the Asian-themed props are hidden behind the soldiers and become invisible. This shift altered Chandler's theme regarding the loss of the script. The film portrays returning soldiers who have already fought against Japan and come back traumatized, as they now confront an Asian lair of evil in their homeland, challenging the war's trauma in the form of a revenge match. By presenting Asia as something that can be hidden or conquered through props and their arrangements, the film reinterprets it as a story of overcoming loss and trauma.

Conclusion: Chandler's War and the Absence of Asians

As mentioned earlier, in the Philip Marlowe series, the private detective Marlowe never directly confronts Asians. Instead, he hints at their presence by incorporating a Japanese gardener into the landscape, introducing a white character who smells "like a Chinaman," or hiding important coins in a "Made in Japan" box. Looking at his works from the period when Chandler temporarily gave up novel writing and started working as a screenwriter, readers cannot help but notice allusions to the Japanese as American adversaries. This threat is maintained through props even during film adaptation. This representation mirrors Chandler's approach to his novels, in which he subtly suggests the presence of Asians without depicting them directly. The filmmakers clearly recognized Chandler's nuanced approach.

Why did Chandler choose to depict Asians indirectly? This inquiry extends beyond *The Blue Dahlia* and encompasses all of his works. Biographically, Chandler served during World War I as a British soldier. After joining the Canadian Gordon Highlanders in 1914, he was sent to the front lines in France in 1917, where he experienced trench warfare (MacShane 27-29). Biographer Frank MacShane notes: "For Chandler, as for most soldiers brought so quickly to the front, his experiences were too overwhelming to digest. He rarely spoke of his service in

France, saying that it was a nightmare he preferred to forget” (MacShane 28-29). Additionally, by the end of the war in 1918, he received flight training from the Royal Flying Corps (Williams 67). Given that George, Buzz, and Johnny are all Navy pilots, like the author himself, it is plausible to consider that Chandler based the characters’ circumstances on his own experience.

It should also be noted that Japan was not a direct enemy during World War I; at that time, the enemy Chandler fought against was the German army and Japan was an ally of Britain. However, considering that the soldiers in the film were fighting on the Marshall Islands, it becomes clear that Chandler was insistent on setting Japan as the enemy country. As mentioned in the previous section, the Japanese forces occupied the Marshall Islands during World War I. This place was subsequently captured by the Americans after their victory over Japan in the Battle of Kwajalein during World War II. When the war resumed, Chandler observed the war as an American citizen. At this point, Japan was primarily viewed as an enemy of the nation.

Marling observed that by 1912, when Chandler moved to California, there was already a strong prejudice against the Japanese people.

The conservatives and the Progressives did share some opinions, which Chandler adopted. Chief among them was a prejudice against minorities, especially the Japanese. Opposition to all kinds of Asians became a reflex action for most Californians; separate schools were established and Asians were effectively segregated. . . . Despite their increasing numbers, minorities were exotic oddities to the white majority, who lived in distant suburbs and seldom saw them. (Marling 29)

More than 30 years before *The Blue Dahlia*, Chandler witnessed anti-Japanese sentiment when he moved to California.⁷ In 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which led to the internment of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast. Since Little Tokyo, a Japanese district, was only a short taxi ride away from Hollywood, Chandler would have witnessed Japanese Americans disappearing from the town, leaving behind their homes, restaurants, and small shops. In this context, Asian characters with speaking roles are rarely found in his novels and that *The Blue Dahlia* features only Asian-related props. This reflects the absence of Asian Americans Chandler observed in the U.S. when he wrote the script.

There are two possible explanations for this indirect representation of Asian populations. On the one hand, the writer with military experience chose to avoid portraying individuals who

⁷ Similarly, Erica Lee points out that even before the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, there were movements to exclude Japanese Americans, with daily newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* reporting on the perceived threat of Japanese invasion (Lee 203).

were present but not acknowledged. Nonetheless, this understanding does not account for why they exist euphemistically in Marlowe's and the other characters' views. He may have omitted all Asian-related elements but did not. On the other hand, he intentionally avoided depicting Asians to mirror the social reality of their absence during the time he was writing the script. By 1946, however, Japanese Americans who had been interned began to return to their homes in Los Angeles. From this point onward, Japanese people must have started reappearing in the city.

Considering his background and historical context, neither explanation alone fully accounts for his portrayal of Asians. The complex interplay between his reluctance to acknowledge the presence and the environmental reality of the disappearance of the Japanese from his city shaped his depiction of Asians. This nuance is not fully apparent when Marlowe's novels are read. Therefore, *The Blue Dahlia* provides crucial insights into Raymond Chandler's nuanced views on Asians, uncovering the literal and rhetorical aspects of his perspective.

Bibliography

- “American Concentration Camps.” *Densho: Japanese American Incarceration and Japanese Internment*, 10 Nov. 2021, densho.org/learn/introduction/american-concentration-camps. Accessed 9 Aug. 2024.
- “Blue Dahlia, N.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford UP, June 2024. doi.org/10.1093/OED/5758234238. Accessed 2 Aug. 2024.
- The Blue Dahlia*. Directed by George Marshall, written by Raymond Chandler, performed by Alan Ladd and Veronica Lake, Paramount Pictures, 1946.
www.amazon.co.jp/gp/video/detail/B09KR3ZYYP/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r. Accessed 2 Aug. 2024.
- Brucoli, J. Matthew. “Afterward.” *The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay*, Southern Illinois UP, 1976.
- Chandler, Raymond. *The Blue Dahlia: A Screenplay*. Edited by Matthew J. Brucoli, Southern Illinois UP, 1976. 小鷹信光訳『ブルー・ダリア』マッシュュー・J・ブラッコリ編、角川書店、1988 年。
- . *Farewell, My Lovely*. 1940. Vintage Books, 1988. 村上春樹訳『さよなら、愛しい人』早川書房、2009 年。
- . *The High Window*. 1942. Vintage Books, 1992. 村上春樹訳『高い窓』早川書房、2016 年。
- . *Raymond Chandler Speaking*. Edited by Dorothy Gardiner et al, H. Hamilton, 1962.
- “Consolidated B-24D Liberator.” *National Museum of the United States Air Force*, www.nationalmuseum.af.mil/Visit/Museum-Exhibits/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/196286/consolidated-b-24d-liberator. Accessed 2 Aug. 2024.
- Hergé. *The Blue Lotus*. Farshore, 2012.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality*. Edited by Will Norman, Verso, 2016.
- Lee, Erika. *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*. Basic Books, 2019.
- Lee, Robert G. *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Temple UP, 1999.
- Luhr, William. *Raymond Chandler and Film*. F. Ungar, 1982.
- Marling, William. *Raymond Chandler*. Twayne Publishers, 1986.
- MacShane, Frank. *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler*. Columbia UP, 1981.
- Merrill, Robert. “Raymond Chandler’s Plots and the Concept of Plot.” *Narrative*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1999, pp. 3-21. *JSTOR*, [jstor.org/stable/20107166](https://www.jstor.org/stable/20107166). Accessed 1 Sept. 2023.
- Trott, Sarah. *War Noir: Raymond Chandler and the Hard-Boiled Detective as Veteran in American Fiction*. UP of Mississippi, 2016.
- Williams, Tom. *A Mysterious Something in the Light: The Life of Raymond Chandler*. 1st ed., Aurum Press, 2012.
- 上杉千郷『狛犬事典』戎光祥出版、2001 年。
- 三橋健『日本人と福の神 七福神と幸福論』丸善株式会社、2002 年。
- C・W・ミニッツほか著『ニミッツの太平洋海戦史』実松譲ほか訳、恒文社、1962 年。
- マイケル・グリーン『アメリカのアジア戦略史 建国期から 21 世紀まで 上』細田井雄一ほか訳。勁草書房、2024 年。
- 村上由見子『アジア系アメリカ人 アメリカの新しい顔』中央公論社、1997 年。
- 『イエロー・フェイス ハリウッド映画に見るアジア人の肖像』朝日新聞社、1993 年。