

FROM SCREEN TO PAGE:
JAPANESE FILM AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT, 1931-1959

by
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores to what degree Japanese film accurately reflects the scholarly accounts of Japanese culture and history. It analyzes how four elements of Japanese culture, loyalty, gender roles, foreigners, and the environment, are depicted on screen in films from the 1930s to the 1950s. While there are overt examples and messages regarding loyalty and gender in film, instances of foreigners and the environment are less evident, and in some cases even absent. However, just as much information can be gleaned from their absence. By measuring the scholarly accounts against the films, a conclusion can be drawn regarding the accuracy of historical accounts. This thesis argues that facts historians and other scholars present are consistent with the images on screen. It also makes the case for the increased use of film as a historical document, demonstrating that films are rich resources for analyzing societies and cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

Japanese film from the 1950s has produced some memorable images. Whether it is the crazed rantings of the thief Tajomaru in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* or the monster destroying Tokyo in Ishiro Honda's *Gojira*, Japanese cinema has left a lasting impression. But there is a lot more behind those images. Japanese film, like any cultural product, reflects the culture in which it was produced. *Gojira* is not just a monster laying waste to a city, but a commentary on environmental and nuclear politics. Film is therefore a relevant piece of evidence for scholars to analyze Japanese history, society, and culture. It can also be used to analyze scholarship.

This thesis will explore to what degree Japanese film accurately reflects the scholarly accounts of Japanese culture and history. It will focus on how loyalty, gender, foreigners and the environment are depicted in 1930s and postwar film. By analyzing film's representations of those four subjects, it will be possible to get a panoramic view of Japanese society. A conclusion can then be reached by comparing that view with what historians have said about the pre and postwar eras.

This thesis argues that for the most part, film and scholars depict the same history. As James McClain examines how the 1939 Film Law enforced *kokutai* (or national polity) ideology in cinema, Kenji Mizoguchi's *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* (1939) praises self-sacrificing loyalty. Historian John Dower looks at the changing role of women, Yasujiro Ozu examines arranged marriages in *Equinox Flower* (1958). Because

of the parallels between film and scholarship, this thesis also argues that historians should use motion pictures as evidence more often.

Where this thesis differs from previous scholarship is in its comparison of two different eras and two different narratives. It is a combination of general histories, film histories and the films themselves. While other works have analyzed Japanese film and culture, there has been no inquiry into the use of film as evidence. Furthermore, there has been a good deal of analysis on historical films and whether or not they portray a past event accurately.¹ This thesis looks at the films as historical documents themselves, arguing that scholars should be using them to make sure they themselves are reporting the past accurately. Because of this, this thesis will fill a gap in historical scholarship.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: the first section includes the introduction and discussion of sources, followed by the historical context. The context section will begin in 1868, with the Meiji Restoration, and continue up until the early 1930s. A history of film up through the 1950s will also be covered. The thesis moves from there to the main body of analysis. A chapter is devoted to each subject, and will follow a basic pattern. First is what scholars say about the subject's role in 1930s Japanese society. This is followed by the films' depiction of that subject in the 1930s. This two-part process is repeated for the postwar era. The 1930s films range from 1931-1939, and the postwar films 1946-1959.

There is very little discussion about the war itself as the paper concentrates on society before and after the war. The reason for this is three-fold. First, films from the

¹ Examples of this can be found in Robert A. Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

early 1940s are difficult to access. Second, popular culture took a hiatus during the war, as the entire Japanese population was mobilized for war. Films were not made as frequently, they often were meant to support the war effort, and viewing them became difficult as Allied bombing destroyed theaters. Third, the war was an impetus for change. Japan went from a militaristic national defense state to a democratic-republic in a matter of weeks. Whether or not society and culture changed with the politics is one of the matters explored in this thesis.

A note on the Japanese names. Since an American audience will be reading this thesis, the Japanese names are listed with the family name last (i.e. Akira Kurosawa instead of the Japanese form Kurosawa Akira).

Discussion of Sources

As this work is a synthesis of different aspects of Japanese history, culture, and film, its sources are diverse. They range from Marius Jansen's comprehensive history of modern Japan, to Noel Burch's oft-quoted work on Japanese film theory, to the films themselves. This section is divided into four segments to present the sources and their validity more clearly. The first covers general Japanese histories; the second section covers the featured aspects of Japanese culture that supplement general histories; the third section details the works written about Japanese film; the final part analyzes the films themselves.

Four general histories of modern Japan were used for this thesis. Marius B. Jansen's *The Making of Modern Japan* is meticulous and comprehensive.² It covers

² Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000).

Japanese history from the establishment of the Tokugawa state (early 1600s) to the late 1990s (the book was first published in 2000). Its strength is in the details it offers on the many major individuals and political situations that played a hand in Japanese history. This in turn means it lacks somewhat when it comes to a history of the masses. As this thesis studies an aspect of popular culture, it is important to understand the history of the ordinary Japanese citizen, as they helped to shape popular culture.

In this aspect, and complementing Jansen, James McClain's *A Modern History of Japan* and Paul Varley's *Japanese Culture* fill out Japanese history.³ McClain's *Modern History* also begins with the Tokugawa State and continues on until the late twentieth century; however, he tends to put more focus on the lives of everyday Japanese. His work provides detailed glimpses into how the daily lives of the Japanese people changed and shifted over time. In turn, he places less emphasis on the dominant individuals. Varley's *Japanese Culture* focuses almost entirely on culture, both mass and bourgeois. His work spans the whole of Japanese history, and in covering the culture leads the reader through major events of that history.

These three books create a well-rounded picture of Japanese history. A fourth volume, Carol Gluck's *Japan's Modern Myths* was also consulted briefly in the discussion of the rise of the Meiji state (1868-1912), the foundation for the events of the 1930s and 1950s.⁴ However, in all four, discussions of Japanese cinema are lacking. Of the four, Varley's *Japanese Culture* devotes the most time to cinema. However even his

³ James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), Paul Varley, *Japanese Culture*, 4th ed.. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000).

⁴ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

work tends to gloss over it, only highlighting the 1939 Film Law and a few films by Kurosawa. These histories discuss the impact of literature much more than they do film, which highlights the problem of ignoring film as a useful historical document. While literature has been around longer than film, and has the advantage of the authors being able to explicitly state their beliefs, but film has its own unique ways of displaying culture, some of which will be explored in this thesis. General Japanese histories could benefit by looking at films as they do popular novels; what they would discover is a rich source of material.

Furthermore, as these works are general histories, they lack in some of the specific details needed to analyze pre- and postwar cinema. Therefore, these sources are supplemented by a number of scholarly studies that focus on the four aspects of Japanese culture (loyalty, gender, foreigners, and the environment) that this thesis concentrates on. *Embracing Defeat*, by John Dower, provides a multi-dimensional picture of life in postwar Japan.⁵ It analyzes how loyalty, gender and the role of foreigners developed in this significant time during Japanese history. Dower's work is crucial to understanding the transitions Japanese society underwent as the world they had known for close to fifteen years came crashing down around them. Dower is also careful to examine different parts of society, allowing for better understanding of how culture developed during this time.

Two chapters in *Recreating Japanese Women 1600-1945*, examine the role of women in pre and post war Japan. Yoshiko Miyake's "Doubling Expectations:

⁵ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of WWII*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999).

Motherhood and Women's Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s", studies the two roles Japanese women were expected to fill during that time, and what it meant for them. William B. Hauser's "Women and War: The Japanese Film Image" looks at wartime and post-wartime films that feature women and war to uncover "attitudes toward women" in Japan.⁶ Both these works, while brief, offer deeper insights into the role of gender in Showa Japan (1926-1989). In pointing out that women were expected to use their bodies to benefit the nation, either through child-bearing, working in the factories, or after the war as prostitutes, these works (as well as Dower's) help to explain some of the crucial plot developments of pre and postwar films. However more scholarship that specifically examines how Japanese women regarded marriage in the postwar era would be beneficial.

Two different genres on Japan and the environment were helpful for this thesis. The first was a collection of studies examining Japan's environmental record, that is the ways in which the Japanese utilized and impacted the environment during these times. The two most beneficial studies were Norie Huddle, Michael Reich and Nahum Stiskin's *Island of Dreams: Environmental Crisis in Japan* and William Tsutsui's article "Landscapes in the Dark Valley: Toward an Environmental History of Wartime Japan".⁷ Both works looked at how the environment suffered and flourished in wartime and

⁶ William B. Hauser, "Women and War: The Japanese Film Image" in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. Edited by Gail Lee Bernstein. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁷ Norie Huddle, Michael Reich with Nahum Stiskin, *Island of Dreams: Environmental Crisis in Japan*. (New York: Autumn Press, 1975) and William Tsutsui, "Landscapes in a Dark Valley: Toward an Environmental History of Wartime Japan". *Environmental History*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Apr. 2003), p. 294-311.

postwar Japan. And while this thesis focuses on prewar and postwar Japan, it is important to understand what impacts WWII had upon the environment in order to understand the Japanese postwar era context.

The second genre focused on how the environment and nature as ideas were understood by the Japanese public. The two most beneficial studies on this were David Edward Shaner and R. Shannon Duval's 1989 article "Conservation Ethics and the Japanese Intellectual Tradition" and Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland's *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*. These works offer discussions on Japanese concepts of the environment and nature.⁸ Scholarship on Japan and the environment is limited. As the field of environmental history itself is young, gaps in the historiography are not surprising. Most of the works focus on either environmental conditions before and during the Meiji times, or from the 1960s onward. Little attention is given to the immediate postwar years, and next to nothing on the 1930s. Part of this could be due to lack of data from this era. Another reason might be that scholars just assume the environment was destroyed in the military buildup, and have put off researching it more thoroughly.

While scholarship on the gender and environmental history of Japan is still growing, there are numerous publications on Japanese cinema. The foremost authority on Japanese cinema is Donald Richie. His 1982 book with co-author Joseph L. Anderson, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, set the standard for Western scholarship on

⁸ David Edward Shaner and R. Shannon Duval, "Conservation Ethics and the Japanese Intellectual Tradition". *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall 1989), p. 197-214 and Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland, eds, *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*. (London: Curzon Press, 1997).

Japanese film. He followed it up with numerous articles and other books, including his 2001 volume *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*.⁹ He personally interviewed most of the great Japanese directors, including Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu.

However, there are other helpful studies on Japanese film. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, another Japanese film scholar, divides Western scholars/writers of Japanese film into two branches: historical and theoretical.¹⁰ Richie, according to Yoshimoto, is one who “takes up the historical study” of Japanese cinema, as he has good command of the language and culture.¹¹ Those who tend to lack these attributes often are theorists, looking at the film from stylistic and theoretical viewpoints. Noël Burch’s *To the Distant Observer* is the preeminent (although published in 1979) theoretical work.¹² In it, Burch argues that Japanese cinema was undermined by the democratization of the postwar era, and the real golden age of film was during the prewar years. While his interpretation is important in that it differs from the bulk of scholarship on Japanese cinema, his argument seems slightly faulty. If democratization can impact film, can’t militarism? Filmmakers seemed

⁹ Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie, *Japanese Film: Art and Industry*. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1982) and Donald Richie, *One Hundred Years of Japanese Film*. (New York: Kondansha International, 2001).

¹⁰ Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, “The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order” in Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds., *Japan in the World*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 347.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Noel Burch, *To the Distant Observer*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

to have more freedom to create the films they wanted (especially after Japan regained its independence in 1951) under the more democratic postwar era.¹³

Two other works examined do not fit into either the historical or theoretical categories. The first is Tadao Sato's *Currents in Japanese Cinema* and the other is *Picturing Japaneseness* by Darrell William Davis.¹⁴ Sato is the proclaimed "common man's ally" to film viewers, as he analyzed and wrote on Japanese cinema from the framework of a native Japanese film critic.¹⁵ Holding no degree or formal training, his critiques and essays on Japanese film attempt to relate life to film, often using his own experiences in postwar Japan as a basis for understanding. He is an "eyewitness" to the shift in Japanese film and culture. This is beneficial because it provides an insider's interpretation of Japanese films as they were released. Sato is able to highlight parts of Japanese culture as it is shown on film that an outsider might miss. On the other hand, *Picturing Japaneseness* tries to combine both history and theory, as Davis examines what he terms the "monumental style" of Japanese cinema, which he defines as characterizing films that were the essence of the Japanese lifestyle and a backlash against the Westernization of Japanese cinema.¹⁶ While Davis' work is similar to this thesis in that it examines culture as it is displayed through film, it concentrates on a certain style of film

¹³ Keiko McDonald. "Popular Film" in *Handbook of Japanese Popular Culture*. Edited by Richard Gid Powers and Hidetoshi Kato. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 113.

¹⁴ Tadao Sato, *Currents in Japanese Film*. (New York: Kondansha International, 1982) and Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Sato, 10-11.

¹⁶ Davis, 4.

from the 1930s. In doing so, it misses out on films from the 1950s that also exemplify the Japanese lifestyle (specifically those of Yasujiro Ozu).

These film studies offer differing pictures about the history and development of Japanese cinema. Like with the subject of Japan and the environment however, there is little recent scholarship on Japanese cinema. This is somewhat disappointing but at the same time it can be advantageous, as the works are closer to the actual release dates of the films, thus offering insight into the Japanese film world as it developed.

The films themselves constitute the bulk of the primary sources used. Twenty-six films shot between 1931-1939 and 1946-1959 were viewed. Most of the films were by three of Japan's most prominent directors, Akira Kurosawa, Yasujiro Ozu, and Kenji Mizoguchi. However, one or two works each by Kon Ichikawa, Ko Nakahira, Ishiro Honda and Keisuke Kinoshita, were also included in the selection. The films range from comedies to dramas, war films to family pieces. More attention is given to the films individually in the analysis section of the paper; however, a word must be said as to the film selection process, why these specific films were used, and the constraints created by this limitation. The primary reason for why *these* films were chosen is they were the films accessible. First, a great number of the works from the period in question were lost or destroyed. Second, the author was limited to works located in the United States. While a number of other films are housed at film depositories and museums in Japan, only so many are accessible in the United States. Effort was made to watch as many of the available films as possible. Because of the large body of scholarship already written on it, only one film, *Seven Samurai* by Akira Kurosawa, was intentionally omitted.

The consequences of being limited to these films are two-fold. First, it forces speculation as to whether or not one has a genuine picture of Japanese culture. Have these films captured the true essence of Japanese prewar and postwar culture? Second, however, one has to take into account that there is a reason these films have survived, and are pervasive enough to be brought to American audiences. The latter of these two consequences itself offers possible insights into Japanese culture. Are these snapshots of Japanese culture “designed” to be seen by Western audiences, and if so, what does that mean for historians and scholars? The implications of this dilemma will be further discussed later in the thesis. First, however, we must look at the historical context from which these films arose.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The roots of the events in pre- and postwar Japan lay in the late 1860s, at the foundation of Meiji Japan. In January 1868 the Tokugawa shogunate, which had ruled since 1600, fell to disgruntled daimyos (military generals). The shogunate had signed a treaty with the United States fourteen years earlier that had proved disastrous to the Japanese economy. The daimyos restored the emperor to political power, bringing back imperial rule from a 700-year hiatus. They couched the imperial rule under the guise of democracy, promising voting rights to part of the population. The emperor issued a Charter Oath in March 1868 that sought to create a stronger, independent Japan. One means of accomplishing this was through the second point of the Oath. It asked Japanese to unite to carry out the affairs of the State. Within a decade, and with very little bloodshed, the government was effectively centralized, and people began to identify themselves as members of a Japanese nation.¹⁷ Japan then proceeded to industrialize and build up its military power. In what is often called the Meiji Miracle, within 30 years Japan became a modern, unified nation. This was demonstrated in its defeat of China in 1895 and Russia in 1905.

The Meiji emperor died in 1912; however, the system that he represented was strong enough to endure his passing and his son, designated the Taisho emperor, took control of the country. The period under his rule was dubbed the Taisho democracy.

¹⁷ Jansen, 349.

Slightly weaker (both mentally and politically) than his father, the Taisho emperor lacked the persona of a strong leader and the government experimented more with democracy. Political parties and unions grew stronger. People protested for the right to vote because, like the early United States, only a small percentage of Japanese males were accorded the vote.¹⁸

Despite growing tensions with the West, Western culture flourished in Japan. This was not only evident in the style of dress and short bobbed haircuts the women wore, but also in the literary and art world, as Japanese people sought to explore Western styles of writing and painting.¹⁹ And it was true of the cinematic world as well. The 1920s saw a growth in not only Western films being distributed in Japan, but also in Western film styles and shots.²⁰

Once again, the death of the emperor in 1926 and the installment of his son Hirohito (the Showa Emperor) ushered in a new era in Japanese politics. Japan's relations with the West continued to sour. Despite its assistance during WWI and subsequent requests to expand its empire in Asia following the Great War, Japan was repeatedly denied this chance by the Western nations. Noting this hypocrisy, as well as the racism and ill treatment of its citizens abroad, Japan sunk deeper and deeper into an anti-Western and anti-democratic ideology. A few key events from 1928 to 1931 brought militarism into the forefront. The first was the Japanese Army's assassination of the Chinese leader

¹⁸ McClain, 317.

¹⁹ Varley, 285, 288.

²⁰ Keiko McDonald, "Popular Film" in Richard Gid Powers and Hidetoshi Kato, eds., *Handbook of Japanese Popular Culture*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 101. McClain, 409.

in Manchuria in 1928. While the civilian government had wanted to expand Japan's empire into China, it was taken aback by the army's sudden and unapproved action. However the government was not in the position to hand down punishment, as its position was weaker than the military's, which increasingly blamed the democracy set forth by the previous era for Japan's problems. This was further compounded by a 1930 naval conference in London, where Japan was denied equality by the West by the reinforcement of the lower ratio of ships it could build (three for every five the West built).²¹

In September 1931, the army once again superceded the government and ignited an incident in Manchuria. This led to the army effectively taking over the territory, renaming it Manchukuo, and establishing a puppet government by which it ruled.²² The West was quick to condemn the actions of Japan, and did so publicly in an October 1932 meeting of the League of Nations. This outraged Japan so much that it promptly withdrew from the League.

But as Japan headed toward militaristic rule, its silent film industry flourished. Film arrived in Japan in 1897, with Lumiere's Cinematographe, and in 1899 Shiro Asano and Komada Koyo produced the first Japanese motion picture.²³ Taking most of the plots from popular novels of the day, film companies such as Shochiku and Nikkatsu slowly began moving the films away from the traditional story lines based on the highly stylized *kabuki* plays, which often involved dramatic singing and dancing. The *jidaigeki*, or

²¹ McClain, 317.

²² Varley, 296.

²³ Richie, *One Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, 17.

historical period film, also came into its own in the 1920s. Often based around the exploits of samurai, these films proved extremely popular, eclipsing the *gendai geki*, or contemporary themed pieces.²⁴

The *jidaigeki*'s golden age came to end with the arrival of sound in the 1930s.²⁵ Although there had been attempts since 1902 to make a sound film, Heinosuke Gosho's *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine*, released in 1931, was the first successful talkie.²⁶ The early years of the 1930s saw the advent of the *shomingeki*, or films of the middle and lower classes, often a mix of comedy and drama. These most often followed the lives of salary men, a theme common in Japanese film. And while borrowing heavily from Western technology and style, Japanese studios and artists began to experiment with their own film styles.²⁷ The 1930s also saw the rise of two of Japan's preeminent directors, Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi, as well as the arrival of the production company Toho in 1936. But as the 1940s loomed in the distance, Japan and its film industry found themselves amidst shifting sands.

Much like other parts of society, the Japanese film industry underwent changes during the postwar years. The 1939 Film Law was considered mute, and almost immediately studios released films critiquing the war effort. Part of this new attitude was

²⁴ McDonald, 102-103.

²⁵ McDonald, 103.

²⁶ Anderson and Richie, 73.

²⁷ For further reading on Japanese film styles of the era see David Bordwell, "Visual Style in Japanese Cinema, 1925-1945" *Film History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1995) and Kathe Geist, "Narrative Style in Ozu's Silent Films" *Film Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Winter 1986-7). Varley, 318.

due in some extent to the censorship laid down by SCAP, which forbade the themes of nationalism, patriotism, feudal loyalty and antidemocratic attitudes, to name a few.²⁸ American movies also returned to Japan and cinema was able to flourish thanks to encouragement by SCAP.²⁹ The revival of American movies also allowed Japanese filmmakers, the most notable of these being Akira Kurosawa, to experiment with new styles and techniques. Still others, like Yasujiro Ozu, sought to maintain a Japanese style to film. Whatever the style, Japanese film entered what most scholars considered to be its “golden age”, meeting success both within and outside Japan.³⁰ And for outsiders it provided a glimpse into Japanese society and culture.

²⁸ Varley, 318.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The foremost of scholars in opposition to this notion is Noel Burch, who argues that the golden age of cinema was really found in prewar Japan. See his *To the Distant Observer*.

THE REDIRECTION OF LOYALTY

At the outset of 1932, Japan found itself in an unprecedented situation. It had successfully created a puppet state, Manchukuo, and its military was continuing to gain power. The public, unaware of the power-struggle between the army and government, supported the creation of Manchukuo, sold to them as a “national defense state.”³¹ The public also treated the Japanese ministers who abandoned the League of Nations as heroes, lauding their actions. But they were most likely unaware of the militarism that would take over their nation within seven short years. It took a willful campaign by the government and army to see this through.

By December 1933, the Japanese government “committed to a policy which proposed to neutralize the influence of the Soviet Union, the Nationalistic government of China, and the Anglo-American nations by a diplomacy rooted in the arrogance of Japan’s military forces.”³² The government was aided in part in its quest to convince the Japanese people of this by external forces. The Great Depression had taken hold of Japan much like it had the rest of the world, just as Japan had recovered from a 1923 earthquake. Furthermore, the West’s actions and attitudes mentioned in the previous section helped to solidify people’s mistrust of democratic governing.³³ As the 1930s rolled on, political parties began to wane and liberals and moderates found themselves

³¹ Varley, 297 and Jansen, 586-7.

³² Jansen, 596.

³³ McClain, 456.

ousted from public office and chastised by the government and society. Some liberal groups, sensing the shift in the climate, willingly changed tactics. Yoshiko Miyake points this out in her article on the double expectations of women, noting that feminists changed their fight for social and political power to rights and care for mothers.³⁴

But the Japanese government could not rely on external factors alone. So in 1937, they published *Kokutai no hongii*, or “Cardinal Principles of the National Polity.” The tract, issued by the Ministry of Education, took the traditional concept of *kokutai*, or national polity, further than their Meiji predecessors, who had initially resurrected it to help unify Japan. *Kokutai*’s roots were in the late Tokugawa period, when Neo-Confucian scholars sought to construct a “hierarchically structured” state.³⁵ The leaders of the Meiji restoration used this notion in their unification of the country.

The notion of *kokutai* therefore was not entirely new for the Japanese public in prewar Japan. The new rendition, *Kokutai no hongii*, began by highlighting the divine origins of the emperor, who was said to be a direct descendent of the sun goddess. It placed the emperor at the head of the “Japanese family,” and stressed the people’s loyalty to him. The uniqueness and marvels of Japanese society were discussed. But above all, the document asked the Japanese people to be willing to sacrifice anything out of loyalty to the emperor and Japan. This document, along with the external forces and pressure

³⁴ Yoshiko Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work Under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s” in Gail Lee Bernstein, ed. *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 274-77.

³⁵ Varley, 233.

from the government helped to solidify what McClain calls a “blind nationalism” of the Japanese people.³⁶

The film industry was not left untouched by this push towards conformity. As the decade wore on, films shifted from those of the *shomingeki* to ones that stressed the virtues of national polity, called *kokusaku* films. Studios and filmmakers were left alone for the most part, until the film censorship law was enacted in 1939. While some degree of censorship had always been placed on the film industry through various laws enacted throughout the 1920s, the new law sought specifically to tie the *kokutai* ideology into films.³⁷ The impact of this law can be clearly seen when comparing films of the early 1930s to one made in 1939.

Loyalty in Prewar Films

The first few years of the 1930s saw the popularity of the *shomingeki* peak. Loyalty to the state or emperor did not appear to surface to an obvious degree in these earlier films. This is exemplified in three films by Yasujiro Ozu, all featuring the everyday man and his family. All the films have a degree of comedy, and while at times sad, have happy endings.

The first, released in 1931, was *Tokyo Chorus*.³⁸ It focused on the father, salaryman Okajima, and his plight to recover from unemployment. After being fired for questioning his boss’s actions, Okajima is faced with maintaining appearances while

³⁶ McClain, 470.

³⁷ Davis, 64.

³⁸ *Tokyo Chorus*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 90 minutes. Shochiku, 1931. DVD.

supporting his family. He runs into trouble a number of times, such as when he fails to purchase a bicycle he promised his son, or when his wife sees him advertising for a café, an act she considers embarrassing. He eventually finds a job, although not in Tokyo, with the help of his old teacher, and the family is once again complete.

Loyalty is a small undercurrent in the film, and it is obviously not the main message. Okajima is disloyal to his boss in questioning him, although his questioning seems like the right thing to do, but his loyalty in helping his old teacher start his café is rewarded with a job. Furthermore this act of being loyal upsets his wife. Because of the different takes on loyalty, as well as its minor role, it is clear the film is not really meant to convey any reinforcing thoughts regarding it.

Ozu's *I Was Born, But...*, released in 1932, is a comedy that follows the struggles of two young brothers to come to terms with their father's place in society.³⁹ New to the



Figure 1. The brothers from *I Was Born, But...*⁴⁰

³⁹ *I Was Born, But...* Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 90 minutes. Shochiku, 1932. DVD.

⁴⁰ This image, along with the others found in this thesis, was taken directly from the film itself, a snapshot of what was on-screen.

suburbs, the boys have a hard time fitting into their peer group, although they are eventually able to take over as “leaders,” commanding the loyalty of their classmates. Feeling quite confident, they are horrified when they witness their father, Yoshii, playing the fool to the comic relief of his boss. Although their father attempts to explain their station, they say that he should be the boss, and promptly refuse to eat in protest. The father and sons eventually reconcile, the father asking them to do better than he has.

Once again, loyalty is not an overt theme. Yoshii remains loyal to his boss, and the kids play a game that involves loyalty to some degree, but the main concern is the family relationship and the boys coming to terms with their father’s place in society. Family cohesion seems to be the message in this film, demonstrating that the pressure to include loyalty in film had yet to reach the industry.

The same can be said for Ozu’s *Passing Fancy*, released in 1933.⁴¹ Kihachi is a single, illiterate father to Tomio, his only son. Kihachi and Tomio seemed to have an inverted relationship, the son being more responsible and smarter. Kihachi becomes enamored with a much younger woman, Harue, who in turn fancies his friend Jiro (who is closer to her age). Kihachi eventually accepts this, encouraging the relationship between Harue and Jiro. Jiro still ignores her advances. After hard times fall on Kihachi, and Tomio is teased for having a stupid, good for nothing father, they fight, each hitting the other. Kihaci apologizes to Tomio for being useless, and they come to terms with each other. Kihachi gives Tomio money to help him feel better. Tomio, rather irresponsibly, spends all the money on candy and becomes very ill. Not able to afford the

⁴¹ *Passing Fancy*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 100 minutes. Shochiku, 1933. DVD.



Figure 2. *Passing Fancy's* Kihachi and Tomio

doctor's bill, Jiro, in order to circumvent Kihachi's pride, ends up borrowing money from the barber, whose business has prospered. Jiro promises to pay him back by working in Hokkaido and sending him his wages. Kihachi learns of this plot and will not let Jiro go, saying he has to be responsible. However, in the end, Kihachi cannot leave his son and the family stays together, the barber forgiving the debt. If there is any loyalty to be found in this film, it is merely between Kihachi and his son, although this only comes toward the latter third of the film.

Like *Tokyo Chorus*, *Passing Fancy* demonstrates the transition from the *shomingeki* films to the *kokusaku* pictures of the late 1930s and early 1940s. The film is about the family staying together, and the son achieving more than his father, hardly a uniquely Japanese trait. While there are small suggestions of it, loyalty has yet to overtly manifest itself in film. However, the family cohesion displayed in these three films might

be a sign of the push for *Japanese* cohesion, which will be discussed in more detail further on in the chapter on foreigners.

A significant difference in attitudes toward loyalty can be seen in Kenji Mizoguchi's 1939 *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*.⁴² This film also serves as a bridge between the loyalty and gender categories discussed in this paper. Set in the 1880s, *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* tells the story of Kabuki actor Kikunosuke attempting to follow in his father's footsteps and become a great actor. Unfortunately, he is horrible at his trade, but no one, with the exception of Otoku, the family's wet-nurse, will tell him that. Otoku's honesty charms Kikunosuke. Fearing a potential relationship between the two, and the ensuing scandal, Kikunosuke's family fires her. Not allowed to marry Otoku, Kikunosuke leaves the family home, dedicating himself to becoming a good actor. One year later Otoku meets up with Kikunosuke, promising to help him with his career, and they proceed to live in a common-law type marriage. Over the years, Kikunosuke hones his craft and Otoku pours herself into supporting him. Eventually, he does become good, and is offered a chance to rejoin his father triumphantly, however without Otoku at his side, who stays behind so that he may be accepted by his family. Surprisingly, Kikunosuke's father accepts Otoku, as he realizes how much help she was in making his son great. He urges Kikunosuke to go see her, although he finds her on her deathbed. She tells him she does not mind dying, because he is finally a great actor and his father took him back. He leaves to join a parade for the actors, promising to return. The last shots are interspersed with him greeting his fans while she dies.

⁴² *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. 142 minutes. Shochiku, 1939. VHS.

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums was an overt example of *kokutai* loyalty. Kikunosuke wanted to become a great actor so that his father would have no regrets about passing on the family name to him, even if this meant leaving his father. He worked hard to hone his craft, sacrificing the comforts of an upper-class lifestyle. Upon returning to his father a success, his father in rewards him for his loyalty, by acknowledging the bond between him and Otoku. More impressive is Kikunosuke leaving the dying Otoku to be in the actor's parade, realizing the importance of it to his family and fans. Despite his love for his wife, he puts his grief aside for his craft. Surely this was meant to impress upon citizens the importance of loyalty and sacrifice to the state. With its Confucian roots, the *kokutai* ideology described the Japanese nation as one family, and the emperor was the figurative father, the head of the family. Just as a child was to be obedient and loyal to their father, so should the Japanese be obedient and loyal to their emperor. When audiences saw the obedience of the Kikunosuke to his family, they were to mirror it in their own lives. Despite their fear, sorrow, or love, they must be ready and willing to come to the aid of Japan and the emperor. The film earned an award for its representation of the family system, which points to the governments' attempt to reinforce the *kokutai* ideology through popular culture.⁴³

Author Darrell William Davis considers *Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* to be the greatest example of the monumental style of Japanese cinema. He points out that it is a "sacralization of Japanese identity" and reinforces the hierarchical family structure.⁴⁴ Furthermore it was a conservative call "in its definition of the empire/family along purer,

⁴³ Davis, 68.

⁴⁴ Davis, 108.

straighter lines of the ancien[t] regime.”⁴⁵ Like music and other parts of popular culture, films such as *Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* looked to the past to help reinforce the present. The war with China and *Kokutai no hongii* had had two years to sink in, amidst mounting tensions with the West. Reverence for the emperor and Japan was beginning to gain strength. Films reflected this call for sacrifice and loyalty, in stark contrast to their earlier predecessors.

The growth in both the production and popularity of the *kokusaku* films demonstrates the further integration of the *kokutai* ideology into everyday popular culture. As the Japanese inched closer to war with the West, the government needed as much public support as it could drum up. These efforts were met with success, as in 1941 the public enthusiastically embraced the attack on Pearl Harbor and the beginning of the war with the U.S.⁴⁶ But after four years of losing battles and the loss of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians, public opinion shifted. By the end of the war, the Japanese people were disheartened and longed for an end to the war.⁴⁷ The *kokutai* spirit had waned. But as far as the postwar Occupational Forces were concerned, it was not gone.

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese public gathered around radios and heard something they never had before: their emperor’s voice. The man for whom they had sent their sons, fathers and brothers into battle, slaved away at factories, and sacrificed everything they could, was now telling them Japan had surrendered unconditionally. The

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Varley, 302.

⁴⁷ Varley, 303.

emperor's address tried to assuage the people, telling them they had fought valiantly but the enemies' military might was too much to handle, especially with the advent of the nuclear bomb. In order to save the Japanese nation, and even civilization itself, the government had decided to capitulate.⁴⁸

Author John Dower points out that as the Japanese people listened to the emperor's radio address, most of them did not understand it, as the emperor spoke a highly formal version of Japanese.⁴⁹ It took educated listeners, radio translators and the media to disseminate the message into colloquial Japanese. Such was the gap between the emperor and his loyal subjects. Still, it was an unprecedented event and one that marked a shift in Japanese society. Despite the carefully couched phrase "having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial state," the *kokutai*, the relationship between the Japanese Imperial State and its subjects was forever changed.

World War II had been a costly affair for the Japanese. Most of the major cities had been bombed, and Japan lost close to 3 million of its people.⁵⁰ Millions were homeless and injured. Despair took over, as the country was faced with hunger and disease. While some turned to corruption and the darker side of life, creativity and resilience were also present.⁵¹ However most Japanese gritted their teeth and pushed forward with an attitude that helps explain their rather swift recovery, reminiscent of the Meiji Miracle.

⁴⁸ Imperial Rescript in Jansen, 660-1.

⁴⁹ Dower, 36-7.

⁵⁰ Dower, 45.

⁵¹ McClain, 530-2 and Dower, 44.

But they were not alone in their recovery. They were guided by the Allied forces under the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers, or SCAP. Despite its name, SCAP proved to be largely an American affair, led by General Douglas MacArthur. Working closely with members of the Japanese government, the goal was to rebuild Japan in a democratic fashion, removing and preventing the growth of another militaristic leadership. Thousands were purged from their wartime jobs, and hundreds were tried for war crimes. The state religion, Shinto, was dismantled. The emperor, Hirohito, remained untouched as part of the plan to make the transition to democracy smoother. He did however have to recant his divinity, which he did on January 1, 1946. The language was somewhat ambiguous however, and while it pleased SCAP officials, it did not exactly close the door on the emperor's divinity.

That did not get in the way of the Japanese people embracing democracy. They did so far better than their government officials, excited for the opportunity of new freedoms and possibilities.⁵² While it made for a smooth transition, it brought into question the Japanese people's devotion to their emperor. What happened to *kokutai*? By late 1946 the concept began to die off in literature, with the rising publication of the *nikutai*, or flesh novels.⁵³ In praising the flesh, one was praising the individual, putting one's self above the group. This appeared to mark a transition from the *kokutai* group oriented society to one of individuals.⁵⁴

⁵² Dower, 84.

⁵³ Dower, 157.

⁵⁴ Varley 337-8.

But it was not that simple. Hirohito himself remained blameless for Japan's role in World War II, SCAP willingly leaving him as the symbolic head of state. In doing this, he remained an "incarnation of racial purity as well as cultural homogeneity."⁵⁵ This reinforced the ideas of harmony and social cohesion, pitting them against the rising tides of individualism.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that public devotion to the emperor himself seems to have largely been a façade.⁵⁶ The Japanese easily cast off the emperor-worship that had supposedly plagued their society. While the majority still wanted the throne to remain intact, their reverence and adoration had waned. Their emperor had become a symbol of the democratization of Japan, which they seemed satisfied with.

This façade, along with the other erosions of the *kokutai* spirit, are evidence of a pattern in Japanese history. The quality of being loyal was ingrained in Japanese tradition. All that changed was who, or what, one was loyal to. It had shifted with the end of the Tokugawa era, at the beginning of the Showa era, and again at the onset of a democratic Japan. But where one's loyalty should reside was no longer explicit. As Japanese society struggled to answer this question, its endeavors were translated on to the big screen.

⁵⁵ Dower, 278.

⁵⁶ Dower, 302-3.

Loyalty in Postwar Films

Akira Kurosawa's *Scandal*, released in 1946, looked at the harshness of postwar society.⁵⁷ In doing so, it subtly explored the question of loyalty. *Scandal* is the story of a well-known painter and an actress who get caught up in a scandal when they are photographed together. While the meeting was innocent, the tabloids turn it into a media frenzy, linking the two as lovers. The painter, Ichiro, sues the paper for defamation of character, trying to make the point that the press should not be allowed to get away with its actions. Miyako, the actress, eventually joins him in the suit. A lawyer, Hiruto, appears at Ichiro's door, saying he would be happy to represent him. Hiruto has a sick child, who is bed-ridden with tuberculosis. While well meaning, Hiruto gets caught up in the problems in his life, and takes a bribe from the paper's publisher to throw the case. As time goes on, it becomes clear to Ichiro that the older man has been compromised, but he continues to have faith in him, saying he can be a good man. At the end of the film, Hiruto's daughter dies, leaving him grief-stricken, as she encouraged him to be a better man, and forgave his bad deeds. In order to bring meaning to her death, he ends up confessing his misconduct to the court, and Ichiro and Miyako win their case.

Scandal is about shifting loyalties. Hiruto approaches Ichiro saying he will take his case because the world "no longer distinguishes from right or wrong." It becomes clear however that while Hiruto believes this, he cannot help but be defeated by it. Caught up in his own problems, he shifts his loyalties from the right to the wrong. This mirrors Japanese society, which also got caught up in its own problems following the end of the war. Some in society shifted their loyalty to what was wrong, and took advantage

⁵⁷ *Scandal*. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 105 minutes. Shochiku, 1946. DVD.

of the bleak situation. Others, like Hiruto's daughter and Ichiro, pushed on, believing society could be good. And in the film, they met with success. The faith his daughter and Ichiro placed in him allowed Hiruto to realize he has put his loyalties in the wrong place. With their help he was able to change, to do good. There was hope for him to become a better man, just as there was hope for society to become better too. All it had to do was remain loyal to what was right and what was good.

It would seem that here loyalty and morality are inextricably linked. But given the context, this should not be surprising. The film was released less than a year after the end of the war. Not only was postwar society bleak, with large-scale corruption, but the *kokutai* ideology linked to the costly war was also fresh in the memories of the Japanese. For almost ten years, blind loyalty had led to what was now seen as a blight on history, in which immoral acts had occurred. Yet during the war "good" Japanese supported the war, while "bad" ones questioned it. The link between morality and loyalty was merely a continuation from the 1930s and early 1940s.

Other films looked at the more blatant aspects of loyalty, focusing on the role of loyalty in the postwar family. Yasujiro Ozu directed two such films. The first, *Late Spring*, was released in 1949.⁵⁸ The second was *Tokyo Story*, released in 1953.⁵⁹

The first in a long line of seasonally named films, *Late Spring* focuses on the relationship between a father, Shukichi, and daughter, Noriko. Shukichi is a widower, and Noriko, although of marriageable age, still lives with and takes care of him. Concerned for her future, Shukichi attempts to get Noriko married, which proves

⁵⁸ *Late Spring*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 110 minutes. Shochiku, 1949. DVD.

⁵⁹ *Tokyo Story*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 135 minutes. Shochiku, 1953. DVD.



Figure 3. *Tokyo Story's* Tomi and Noriko

difficult, as she wishes to remain with him out of devotion and loyalty. So he concocts a story that he himself is getting remarried, and will no longer need her to help care for him. While the separation is hard, she does marry and leaves the home. He is left alone at the end, sitting in an empty house.

Tokyo Story looks at the family unit in postwar Japan, as seen through the eyes of the two parents, Shukishi and Tomi. They visit their children in Tokyo, only to be pushed aside as their children find their lives too busy to spend time with them. The only one who cares is their daughter-in-law, Noriko, now widowed. The parents eventually elect to go home early, and upon their return Tomi falls ill. The children make their way to the parent's house, and Tomi passes away. However, much like before, they quickly leave, only Noriko staying longer to help Shukishi with the transition period. He acknowledges her loyalty, giving her a watch and in a sense releasing her from her obligation to their family. She leaves and Shukishi begins a new chapter in his life.

Ozu's films provide a very sentimental look at loyalty. He praises the loyalty that both Norikos exemplify. Their characters are easily likable, and are shown a great deal of empathy. One wishes for daughters such as them. He contrasts them with other siblings in *Tokyo Story*, so concerned with their modern day lives that they no longer have time for their parents. However he does draw a line, demonstrating that loyalty to family can go too far. When it hinders the security and happiness of the child, it is time for both parties to part ways. Both Shukichi and Shukishi come to terms with this, as they let go of their respective Norikos.

Ozu seems to be searching for a balance in family loyalty. He does not want it to be detrimental, but he also chides a complete lack of it. And considering the release dates of both films, he could be trying to apply this balance to the larger Japanese family. Loyalty to Japan was taken too far with the advent of *kokutai* and the militarism that pervaded Japanese society throughout the 1930s and early 40s. On the same token however, it does not mean that the Japanese should be so quick to abandon it altogether. Donald Richie, an authority on Ozu, does not offer any thoughts regarding Ozu's beliefs on loyalty specifically, but makes the point that Ozu consistently celebrated "the traditional virtues of Japan."⁶⁰ Ozu's films featured restraint and simplicity.⁶¹ In this context, society must learn to find a balance in loyalty, much like the films' fathers had to, in order to be successful in the postwar world.

⁶⁰ Donald Richie, "The Later Films of Yasujiro Ozu", *Film Quarterly* 13, No. 1 (Autumn 1959), p. 18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being, released in 1955 by Kurosawa, paints an entirely different picture of family loyalty.⁶² *I Live in Fear* seeks to demonstrate the madness of an atomic world. Kiichi Nakajima lives in constant fear of another nuclear attack, and seeks to move his entire family (mistresses included) to Brazil, the only place he deems safe. His family, not wanting to disrupt their lives, seeks to have him declared insane. The court moderator, Dr. Harada, watches, fascinated, as the tale unfolds. The court declares Nakahima insane, and after his family once again refuses to go with him, he burns down the family foundry. In the end we see him in a psychiatric ward, where his family and Dr. Harada visit him. Nakahima's psychiatrist tells Harada that he feels oddly anxious when he sees him, and wonders if "he is crazy, or are we who can remain unperturbed in an insane world, the insane ones?"⁶³

With the exception of his youngest daughter, Nakahima's family feels little loyalty to their father. They are far more concerned about their livelihoods, and have no intention of even considering moving to Brazil. They go as far as denying Nakahima access to his money. The irony is that up until he burns down the foundry, Nakahima is far from crazy. At most he is overly paranoid, but he has the best of intentions. He merely wants to keep his family safe. So the family's push for declaring him mentally incompetent seems like it is going overboard.

⁶² *I Live in Fear: Record of a Human Being*. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 103 minutes. Toho Co., 1955. DVD.

⁶³ Ibid.

Donald Richie sees the film differently, more as a lesson in personal responsibility and the role of the individual in society.⁶⁴ For Richie, individual will is thwarted by traditional society, which is represented by the family. While this is a good point, Richie does not offer any analysis as to Kurosawa's answer to this. What does the film suggest is to be done about the problem of the individual vs. society?

Like Ozu's films, *I Lived in Fear* was seeking a balance in family loyalty. Despite his good intentions, Nakahima was asking a lot of his family to pack up and move to Brazil. On the other hand, his children were out of line when they tried to declare him mentally incompetent. The tragic ending of the film possibly could have been avoided had both sides had done things a little different. Nakahima realizes this with the help of the man helping him move to Brazil, but by the time he begs the family it is too late. Had he initially asked instead of ordering, it is possible a solution could have been worked out. Both Nakahima and his family crossed lines when it came to loyalty. Their story served as a warning to others who thought of doing the same.

Perhaps the most moving film about loyalty released in the postwar era was Kon Ichikawa's *The Burmese Harp*.⁶⁵ The film is set in the last days of World War II and the beginning of the postwar era. Mizushima is a soldier in Burma, and while there learned to play the Burmese harp. He and his brigade use it to send signals, as well as diffuse

⁶⁴ Richie, *One Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, 167.

⁶⁵ *The Burmese Harp*. Directed by Kon Ichikawa. 116 minutes. Nikkatsu Corp., 1956. DVD.



Figure 4. *The Burmese Harp's* Mizoguchi bids farewell to his friends

intense situations. Shortly after the beginning of the film the war ends and the British place them in a POW camp. The British select Mizushima to try to get other Japanese troops to give up, but he cannot convince them that Japan surrendered and is almost killed in their last ditch effort at war. He is looked after by a Buddhist priest, but leaves him to get back to his brigade. Along the way though, he is by confronted the thousands of dead Japanese soldiers left unburied. Horrified, he disguises himself as a priest and begins to travel the countryside burying the soldiers. In the end, he decides to stay behind in Burma, as his fellow soldiers return to Japan without him. He leaves them with a letter, saying he cannot return home while so many Japanese lay unburied. It is his task to bury them.

While there is little doubt Ichikawa is paying tribute to the thousands of families who never received their sons' bodies, he is also examining the role of loyalty in a time and place where loyalty was everything. Above all, the Japanese soldier embodied the spirit of *kokutai*. Once again, that spirit could be taken too far, exemplified in the film by

the troops who refuse to believe the Japanese have surrendered. But that did not mean that the fallen should be forgotten. While it is understandable that the soldiers would be eager to get home, what was to become of those who never made it to that point?

Ichikawa was most likely also addressing the lack of respect for returning veterans. Japanese soldiers were not welcomed home with open arms. They symbolized Japan's militarism and defeat.⁶⁶ And as stories began to emerge of the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers, they sank further down in public opinion. The loyalty once offered to the military and soldiers was gone almost overnight. In its haste to move forward, Japan left a good many behind. *The Burmese Harp* offers up the argument that while one may not agree with the *kokutai* spirit any longer, it does not mean that one cannot remain loyal to fellow human beings. Ordinary Japanese people, just like the soldiers, got caught up in the militarism of the 1930s. But to turn their backs on them was just as much of a crime. Like Kurosawa's *Scandal*, *The Burmese Harp* asked for a loyalty to what was right.

In the end, postwar Japanese cinema still embraced the idea of the loyal Japanese citizen. But it asked for both a balanced loyalty, and a loyalty toward what was right for humanity. Loyalty was an attribute that could not be removed from Japanese culture, so it had to be channeled in the right direction.

⁶⁶ Dower, 59.

ABOVE ALL A WIFE: GENDER IN JAPANESE FILM

Attitudes towards loyalty were not the only ones mirrored in prewar cinema. Gender roles, specifically women's roles, were also a popular theme. Like other parts of prewar society, women saw their roles shift in a manner that benefited the state. Despite the traditional patriarchal family system that had been in place since the Tokugawa era, the Taisho era had been a moment of relaxation regarding women's roles. Women were learning to be more independent and to pursue careers.⁶⁷ A small feminist movement had arisen. Although it did not meet with success its very existence demonstrated a change in the atmosphere.

But as Japanese society entered into the 1930s, and militarism began to grow, women suddenly found themselves caught between two positions. The first was a return to the role of *ryosai kenbo*, or "good wife, wise mother." The phrase, coined at the beginning of the Meiji era, was meant to epitomize what a Japanese woman should be. It was in line with *kokutai* ideology, and allowed the Japanese State to address a growing problem: the lack of soldiers. As the government grew closer to war with China, it was apparent they would need bodies to help maintain Japan's growing empire. So they impressed upon women the importance of staying home to have children. They offered women the chance to use their bodies to serve the state.

⁶⁷ McClain, 347.

But as Yoshiko Miyake points out in her article “Doubling Expectations”, it was not the only way Japanese women could serve the state.⁶⁸ If they were not having children, they could work in the factories, filling positions left empty by men. While the government was hesitant to cut into the population growth, there was an increasing need for workers in the factories that were supplying the war effort. Women therefore, were meant to fill two roles: mother and worker.

Notwithstanding the new attention from the state regarding the apparent value of women, this did not signal a change in women’s rights. Working in a factory was far from being the “career woman” of the 1920s. Women were paid less, worked extremely long hours, and lacked the training and preparation needed for the jobs, resulting in numerous injuries.⁶⁹ And as Miyake points out, women “did not choose either of these roles on their own.”⁷⁰ They were manipulated by the state, and found help in no one, including the feminist groups. The feminists retracted (most likely from the increasing pressure felt by all political groups) and began to push for mothers’ rights. While this was helpful in some sense, it only reinforced the authoritarian ideology held over women. Miyake states the feminist movement’s compliance with the state is evidence of the extended power the government had during the prewar era.⁷¹ This shift in women’s roles is clearly reflected in the films of the 1930s. Three films by Mizoguchi, *Osaka Elegy*,

⁶⁸ Miyake, “Doubling Expectations.”

⁶⁹ Miyake, 284-86.

⁷⁰ Miyake, 269.

⁷¹ Miyake, 277.

Sisters of the Gion, and the previously discussed *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, demonstrate the prevailing beliefs of the period.

Gender in Prewar Films

Mizoguchi released *Osaka Elegy* in 1936.⁷² A telephone operator, Ayako, becomes a mistress to a company president, and subsequently his friend, to help her family.⁷³ All the while she is in love with her friend, who eventually proposes. She attempts to forge ahead with this relationship, but it ends in a debacle when her scorned lover arrives with the police claiming she stole money from him. Her family, despite now being better off from her help, ousts her and she leaves. Ayako meets a doctor who has been a steady background character throughout the film on a bridge and tells him her illness is delinquency. She asks him how this can be cured. He says even he does not know the answer to that. The film ends with her walking off, an unsure future ahead of her.

Elegy portrays an interesting picture of gender. Ayako's family members, despite enjoying their debts being paid, are quick to disown her. Compounding the situation is the older brother, who has no idea how his debts were paid off. He merely assumes his sister was enjoying prostituting herself, and is quick in his judgment. However, at the same time, it is clear Ayako's future is dismal, as she is delinquent with no hope of redemption. Essayist Tadao Sato points to *Elegy* as an indictment by Mizoguchi of male sin.⁷⁴ However, it appears if Mizoguchi offers up a more dichotomous picture. While

⁷² *Osaka Elegy*. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. 71 minutes. Daiichi Eiga, 1936. DVD.

⁷³ Her brother's university tuition is due, and her father is in debt.

⁷⁴ Sato, 80.

there is some empathy towards Ayako, and men certainly deserve blame, the message at the end is clear: it would be best to avoid this situation all together, for once you cross the path into delinquency, there is no going back. It is also clear that there are limits to the sacrifices a Japanese woman is supposed to make for her family. While her body, both through physical labor and motherhood (as pointed out by Miyake) can be used as a tool for the state, her purity is not an option. She is now, it is implied, useless as a help to either her family or the state.

Another of Mizoguchi's "women of misfortune" films, also released in 1936, was *Sisters of the Gion*.⁷⁵ This story features two sisters living in Tokyo. Both of the sisters are geishas, which are professional entertainers and hosts. The older, Umekichi, has been with a customer for quite a while and is content staying with him and helping him out, despite this making her poor. Her younger sister Omocha, is a bit more ambitious however, seeking to elevate her and her sister's life by taking on richer clients, even if it means abandoning the old ones. Omocha does not like her profession, or men for that matter, as they only consider women playthings. Her machinations finally lead to trouble when a scorned customer throws her from a taxi. Umekichi tells her that's what you get for treating men the way she did. Omocha replies that even "something like this won't make me give into men." Ironically, Umekichi's long-time customer also leaves her after his wife got him a new job in the country. Omocha points this out, although Umekichi says she does not regret it and can hold her head high. Omocha says that's wonderful, but

⁷⁵ *Sisters of the Gion*. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. 69 minutes. Daiichi Eiga, 1936. DVD.

it does not mean she will get any piece of the happiness her ex-lover now has. Omocha closes the film lamenting

“if we do our job well, they call us immoral. So what can we do? What are we supposed to do? Why do we have to suffer like this? Why do there even have to be such things as geisha? Why does the world need such a profession? It’s so unfair. I wish they never existed. I wish they never existed!”⁷⁶

Sato says that *Sisters* is another of Mizoguchi’s films indicting men’s misuse of women.⁷⁷ And for the most part this holds true. Both sisters seem at the mercy of the men they serve, despite their attempts to work either against or with the system. And Omocha’s lament is powerful, a stunning way to end the film. On the other hand, she has apparently chosen this life and the consequences that come with it, something her sister seems to have come to terms with. Perhaps by offering up two different portrayals of the geisha, Mizoguchi is asking his audience to take a deeper look at this classic symbol of Japanese society. What will the role of the geisha, a long-standing tradition in Japan, be in the modern world? As gender roles shift and change with time, where do women and geisha fit into society? The answers are ultimately left up to the audience.

The same could not be said for *Last Chrysanthemums*. Here the role of women is explicitly clear. Otoku is the epitome of the pre-war Japanese woman. She sacrifices herself for the good of her husband, and in a sense the nation, which benefits from his great acting. She worked herself to death in order to support his acting career. In correlation with Miyake’s article, it would have been improper for Otoku to bear Kikunosuke children, as his family or society did not acknowledge their “marriage.” So she aided him in a way that she could, by working. Furthermore, she did it willingly and

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Sato, 80.

without regret. Unlike the ambiguity of *Sisters of the Gion*, *Last Chrysanthemums* leaves no doubt as to how the audience should feel. Women should want to be like Otoku, and men should want a wife like Otoku. This shift in attitude by the same director in three years strongly suggests the social conformity and *kokutai* ideology taking hold of Japan.⁷⁸

But like loyalty, women's roles had to be redefined at the end of the war. The Allied occupation and democratization of Japan brought about swift changes in women's rights. In 1946, women were accorded the right to vote for the first time in Japanese history. Furthermore, the feudalistic family system that had given authority to the men and favor to the oldest son was abolished. Free choice in marriage and new job and equal educational opportunities were also granted. This led to an obvious change in married life and terms of sexuality. While a woman would still be expected to be a devoted wife and mother, she had more freedom in whom she married. She also often had greater financial security and was given more respect for her position. "Good wife, wise mother" was no longer the catch phrase of the day. Women also had more opportunities prior to their marriage. They extended their education and would often work in an office for a few years. Dower also points out that women were now allowed to enjoy sex, as long as it was in marriage, as a number of books on the subject became quite popular.⁷⁹

One group of women who found their position radically changed after the war were prostitutes. Called *panpans*, they found themselves called to serve their new government immediately following the war's end. Fearing an onslaught of crazed

⁷⁸ Davis points out that in 1940, Mizoguchi himself was the liason between the film industry and government, and head of the association that helped keep the industry in check, preventing subversive influences from appearing in film. 66.

⁷⁹ Dower, 162.

occupational forces, the government began recruiting *panpans* to serve the troops.⁸⁰ The call for their services was in language similar to that of the pre-war requests for loyalty. They were told they would be saving the millions of other women from potential savaging and hence would be serving their nation. The project eventually flopped, due to high disease rates, but the *panpans* continued to consort with GIs. This led them to being viewed as an example of the Americanization of society.⁸¹ They were in touch with the wealth and power of democracy and America, as they were the ones who had access to the Americans. The Americans often paid them with American goods from the local PX, and the goods were often in high demand on the black market. It was an odd relationship-to be at the bottom but closest to the top.

The redefinition of women's roles in society happened throughout the 1950s. There were little changes, small improvements here and there. But while it was a little hazy what changes were acceptable, it was clear what ones were not. This was demonstrated in the films of the postwar years.

Gender in Postwar Films

It was clear that the end of the war signaled a change for Japanese women with the 1946 release of Kurosawa's *No Regrets for Our Youth*.⁸² Spanning a ten-year period beginning in 1933, *No Regrets* follows Yukie Yugihara as she wades through the growing militarism and repression of the era. Yukie's father, a professor, is expelled from Kyoto University. She ends up marrying Noge, one of her father's old students, a leftist

⁸⁰ Dower, 124.

⁸¹ Dower, 138.

⁸² *No Regrets for Our Youth*. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 110 minutes. Toho Co., 1946. DVD.

sympathizer who runs an underground newspaper while working for the government.

Eventually they are both arrested. After some time in prison, she is released.

Unfortunately, Noge dies in prison. Grief-stricken, she resolves to visit his parents.

Persecuted for Noge's actions they are forced to farm at night. Initially, they are indifferent and cold toward her, especially as she insists on farming during the day.

Overtime, and despite the ongoing malcontent of the surrounding village, Yukie and her in-laws grow to respect each other and have some measure of success in farming. At the end of film, the war has ended, and Yukie remains with her in-laws to help them and their village out.

Strong, opinionated and resilient, Yukie gave a face to the modern Japanese woman. Some scholars claim that Yukie was representative of feminist independence.⁸³ And while Yukie is independent and spirited, it was in her role as Noge's wife in which she truly came into her own. Her strong-willed devotion and loyalty to her in-laws helps reconcile them with their dead son. In choosing her, he demonstrated he could make the right choice. It is also during this time that Yukie finally matures, growing out of the adolescent behavior she was prone to. It is as a wife and a widow that she learns her greatest lessons. This is not a critique of feminism, but merely a realistic look at society. While she may have gained voting and other rights, the modern Japanese woman was still destined to be a wife and a mother. However, this did not signal the end. Like Yukie, they could still become the person they wanted to be.

⁸³ Hauser, 303.

Director Yasujiro Ozu also tackled marriage and the role of the wife in a number of his films. In his 1951 film *Early Summer*,⁸⁴ Ozu tells the story of a family seeking to arrange a marriage for their daughter, Noriko. At 28, it was time for Noriko to marry, although she seems perfectly content in her single status. The family finds a 40 year old gentleman who is well off, and seen as a good match for her. However Noriko is not impressed, and instead seeks to marry a childhood and family friend. The family has reservations, as does the groom it seems, as he is a widower with a small child and will be moving away soon. But his mother is extremely pleased by the situation, and in the end Noriko's family concedes.

The film ends with a sad tone. Part of this comes from the parents' realization that their family is now separated by distance. But it is possible that they are also mourning the death of an idea. While arranged marriages were not always the perfect situation, they served the purpose of bringing security to the future. This was the parent's motivation in *Early Summer*. They wanted their daughter to be taken care of, and sought the best arrangement for her. When she took this on herself, and provided an alternative that was not so bright, it was obvious why there was concern. But society was changing, and they were inclined to give in to Noriko. Ozu provided a glimpse of a society as it was struggling to change with the times. His empathy towards the parents in *Early Summer* indicates that Japan was not embracing new cultural norms as easily as it appeared. This is reinforced by rejection of Ozu's works by some of the younger generation.⁸⁵

But by 1958, Ozu, and possibly Japan, was having different thoughts about arranged marriages. That year he released *Equinox Flower*, which took the issue of

⁸⁴ *Early Summer*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 125 minutes. Shochiku, 1951. DVD.

⁸⁵ Richie, "The Later Films of Yasujiro Ozu", 18.



Figure 5. Hiramasa from Ozu's *Equinox Flower*

arranged marriages head on.⁸⁶ In *Equinox Flower* Hiramasa, a company director, is faced with the changing times. His oldest daughter, Setsuko, is of marriageable age, and he seeks to arrange a marriage for her. She on the other hand has already met the man she wants to marry. Hiramasa refuses to give his consent for the marriage. The situation is compounded by the fact that he is inconsistent in his overall feelings on unarranged marriages. He blesses others while at the same time denying Setsuko's. In the end, Setsuko pushes ahead and marries the man of her choosing. Hiramasa attends the wedding, but does not smile, signaling his disapproval. In the end he is prodded into visiting them in their new home in Hiroshima, suggesting he has come to terms with things.

Once again, Ozu looked at how society was coming to terms with the passing of arranged marriages. This time though, his empathy was toward those who sought to

⁸⁶ *Equinox Flower*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 118 minutes. Shochiku, 1958. DVD

marry for love. One of Hirayama's friend's daughter stopped speaking to him after he balked at her unarranged marriage. Hirayama's wife fears the same if they do not allow Setsuko to choose her husband. While this could come across as a form of blackmail, Ozu instead paints it as an unnecessary byproduct of the older generation's stubbornness. Hirayama's hypocrisy becomes a sticking point. Ozu stresses that one either embraces change, or one does not. There is no middle ground. The director does allow his older characters to mourn the loss of the old ways at a class reunion, but once the mourning period is over, it is time to move on.

Ozu's struggle with changing society is further evident in his 1957 film *Tokyo Twilight*.⁸⁷ The story centers on a father and his two daughters. The oldest, Takako, returns to the family home contemplating divorce from her husband. The youngest, Akiko, still lives at home, but is confronted by the problem that she is pregnant. The girl's mother is absent. The father attempts to provide guidance, although he is unaware of the precise problem Akiko faces. Akiko ends up having an abortion. She is also taken in by the police for being out too late. During this time, the girls' mother surfaces. Takako knows that she left the family after having an affair, but Akiko was under the impression she was dead. This proves to be too much for Akiko. She is sure she is the product of her mother's affair, that her blood is tainted and she can never be a good person. Although her mother swears the father who raised her is her real father, Akiko cannot be assuaged. After fighting with her boyfriend, she is hit by a train (it is unclear whether this was intentional on her part), and later dies from the wounds. Takako blames

⁸⁷ *Tokyo Twilight*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 141 minutes. Shochiku, 1957. DVD.



Figure 6. *Tokyo Twilight's* Akiko after the train accident

her mother, who moves away once again so as not to cause problems. Takako decides to reunite with her husband, to give her daughter two parents, and the father is left alone.

The film demonstrates the complications of a changing society. First, it appears that Takako's father encouraged her marriage. She had wanted to marry someone else, but married her father's choice instead. While she claims that it was nothing, her father regrets pressuring her now that the marriage is falling apart. Once again, critique of arranged marriages surfaces. However, it is not as black and white as it comes across. In Takako's decision to return to her husband the audience is reminded that one can choose to make a marriage successful. Furthermore, and the overall theme of the film, the preservation of a whole family unit is in the best interest of everyone.

The latter message is made explicitly clear through the character of Akiko. Takako constantly reminds her father that Akiko never knew a mother's love, and that is why she is the way she is. Her father claims he tried his best, but acknowledges that he

was not very successful. The confirmation of her parentage also points to the fact that her behavior was a product of her environment, and not her blood. She could have been better if only she had had a mother present growing up. This would appear to be a warning to audiences. Women still need to be wives and mothers; the future depends on it. As Japan entered into a modern era, and women's roles began to shift, society needed to be careful in allowing those roles to change too much.

Ko Nakahira's 1956 film *Crazed Fruit* offers another look at the disenchanted youth of postwar Japan.⁸⁸ The story follows two brothers, Natsuhisa (Nat) and Haruji, on their summer break. Nat, the older of the two, is also the more worldly, spending his free time with girls and his mischievous friends. Haruji on the other hand falls in love-at-first-sight with a girl, Eri, seemingly as innocent as him. But Nat discovers she is not as clean-cut as she might seem. She is married to an American, and has quite the checkered past. He blackmails her into sleeping with him, and to his surprise he becomes infatuated with her. Eventually, Haruji discovers the betrayal and seeks revenge, killing both Nat and Eri.

Eri is far from the classic Japanese heroine. She does not relish her past relationships and savors the innocence of her and Haruji's relationship. But she also has a hard time splitting from Nat. While she has one or two opportunities to call it quits, and come clean with Haruji, she does not. She also has no problem hiding and lying about her trysts.

Eri is far from the quiet, rather well behaved women of Ozu's films. And the other women in *Crazed Fruit* are not much different. They have little respect for authority, and are not afraid to stand up to the men surrounding them. Perhaps the most

⁸⁸ *Crazed Fruit*. Directed by Ko Nakahira. 86 minutes. Nikkatsu Corp., 1956. DVD.

intriguing element of *Crazed Fruit* is that Eri and the other women seem unapologetic for the way they are. While Eri is not necessarily proud of her past, she is not sorry for it either. It is simply the direction her life has taken.

Despite the independence and boldness of the women in *Crazed Fruit*, the men still treat them like objects. Nat and his friends decide to play poker with girls instead of cards. Whoever brings the best “hand” (i.e. three girls) to a party wins. Even Eri’s American husband, while kind, seems to regard Eri as a plaything. He visits her when he is not in the city, but is out of touch when it comes to the reality of their marriage.

Furthermore, it is also clear that the girls’ autonomy is not exactly approved of by the society. In one scene, two older women stand outside a house gossiping about the “looseness” of the girl inside. Even though one of the women owns the property, she is afraid to enter for fear of what she might find. Eri’s violent death serves as an even greater warning of the consequences of a reckless lifestyle. She should have made efforts to have found fulfillment elsewhere. *Crazed Fruit* offers a good picture of the complexities facing postwar Japanese women, especially for the younger generations. While they may have gained some independence and rights on paper, in the real world they were still facing an uphill battle.

Gender roles in prewar film mirrored the shift back toward the role of “good wife, wise mother”, that had become somewhat relaxed during the Taisho years. After the war, SCAP attempted to do away with the feudalistic family system, and met with some success. Women in postwar film had a say in whom they married, and had jobs outside the home. Still, marriage itself was not optional, and women should take care in their frivolity, lest they end up like Akiko or Eri.

NEGATING THEIR PRESENCE: FOREIGNERS IN JAPANESE FILM

The growth of the Taisho democracy between 1912-1926 also meant the growth of foreign cultural influences in Japan. Western movies, dress, and literature became in vogue. But as Japan moved into the 1930s, the atmosphere shifted. *Kokutai* emphasized a loyalty to the state, which in turn implied a divorce from foreign ideas and cultural objects. Scholar James McClain points out that while Western music and film were popular at the beginning of the decade, as the problems in China increased, “patriotic and war-related songs increasingly dominated the airwaves.”⁸⁹ Songs from the Meiji Era (another moment of national cohesion) also enjoyed resurgence.

A popular novel written in 1933 also demonstrates the growing xenophobia. *In Praise of Shadows*, by Junichiro Tanizaki seeks beauty in all things Japanese.⁹⁰ He compares Western and Japanese architecture, writing implements, films and other cultural aspects. He acknowledges that the Japanese might be further behind in technology if it were not for the West, but that the Japanese have suffered as well. He cites cinema as an example. He points out that the Japanese use Western technology for filmmaking because they did not invent it first. But that means while Western technology is therefore well suited to Western arts, Japanese arts are at “a great disadvantage,” as

⁸⁹ McClain, 464.

⁹⁰ Junichiro Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*. (Stony Creek, Connecticut: Leete’s Island Books, 1977.)

they have no technology that can highlight their unique aspects.⁹¹ Tanizaki continues to highlight the differences between Japanese and Western culture, concluding that the Japanese culture is superior because it is *Japanese*. Western culture is designed for and by Westerners, therefore it is better suited to them. The same is true for Japan. According to Tanizaki, Japan needed to once again look inward.

Tanizaki's words were inspiring, and added to the growing nationalism. Despite this however, the Japanese had a hard time abandoning Western cultural imports. They turned to things like dance halls, miniature golf, and Western films to escape from the intense militaristic atmosphere.⁹² It was harder to let go than either the public or the government imagined. Eventually though, the *kokutai* ideology and growing militarism prevailed. Radio came under government control in the late 1930s and dance halls were closed in 1940.⁹³ Nationalism helped push conformity onto the Japanese, and successfully encouraged xenophobia.

Foreigners in Prewar Films

This sentiment is observable in films from the era. Despite their other differences, Ozu's and Mizoguchi's films do share one thing: the exclusion of foreigners. There is little mention of anything related to Western culture. The plots center around traditional Japanese symbols, such as the geisha or kabuki. But it is through the propping up of the family unit, the bond between the members despite differences and hardships that demonstrates a push toward the cohesion of the Japanese as a people and society. In

⁹¹ Tanizaki, 9.

⁹² Varley, 298.

⁹³ McClain, 464 and 467.

Passing Fancy, Kihachi lets go of his pride and returns to his son. A similar situation happens in *Tokyo Chorus*, when the family stays united despite difficult and embarrassing times. Father and sons come to an understanding that brings peace back to the family in *I Was Born, But...* In the *Last Chrysanthemums*, the triumphant reunification of father and son is the culmination of Kikunosuke and Otoku's hard work and sacrifice.

In Japanese prewar cinema, family unity signaled national conformity. Even before the *Kokutai no hongu* in 1937, and the 1939 Film Law, the Japanese were finding ways to encourage an inclusive society. Popular film was one means of doing this. It reinforced the growing xenophobia in Japanese society. And here is where the irony lies for some scholars.⁹⁴ At a time when Japan was seeking inclusion, and xenophobia was increasing, it was doing so through Western technologies and cultural imports. Japan was likely able to reason this by arguing a distinct "Japaneseness" to their cinema, something which scholars continue to debate.⁹⁵ Regardless, it would appear that despite their best efforts, the Japanese could not completely rid themselves of the West. Since the first opening of Japan by Matthew Perry in 1853, their paths were inextricably linked. This culminated in World War II, and the resulting occupation by Western forces, what McClain calls "the second opening" of Japan.

The role of the Occupied Forces (as well as other foreigners) in changing Japanese society was complicated. On the one hand, they brought democracy and new freedoms, two things ordinary Japanese were eager to experience. They also brought with

⁹⁴ Davis, 38 and previously cited Varley, 298.

⁹⁵ See Bordwell, Burch, Davis and Geist.

them aspects of their own culture, most notably mass consumption.⁹⁶ Much like Americans in the U.S., the Japanese public began to attempt to acquire items they saw as essential to the “Japanese Dream.” In the 1950s it was the electric fan, washing machine and electric rice cooker. Mass culture helped fuel the drive for mass consumption, as advertisements on screen and in print reminded the Japanese what they were missing.

Still, Japanese society remained somewhat closed off. True to tradition, the Japanese once again began importing Western technology, improving it and exporting it.⁹⁷ They also attempted to maintain “racial purity,” leading to a number of fights between non-Japanese Asians and Japanese citizens.⁹⁸ It culminated in exclusionary language being placed into the new Japanese constitution, severely limiting the rights of resident aliens.⁹⁹ And while Occupational Forces were allowed to consort with the *panpans*, other aspects of Japanese culture remained off-limits to the troops.¹⁰⁰ At other times, the Americans themselves were “Japanized,” participating in royal duck-hunts and finding pleasure in the host country’s many tributes offered up. Much like they had in the past, the Japanese quickly mastered the aspects of American culture they wished to have, and then quietly returned to being Japanese.

⁹⁶ McClain, 524.

⁹⁷ Varley, 334.

⁹⁸ Dower, 143..

⁹⁹ Dower, 394.

¹⁰⁰ Dower, 154.

Foreigners in Postwar Films

Remarkably similar to prewar cinema, what is most noticeable about foreigners in postwar film is that there are none. Despite a quarter million American troops in Japan during the Occupation, they are markedly absent in film.¹⁰¹ Foreigners only appear onscreen in three of the twenty-six films viewed. Part of the reason for this is SCAP authorities tried hard to keep Occupational Forces out of motion pictures while they were there.¹⁰² However this does not explain the lack of foreigners after Japan regained its independence in 1951, especially as American forces remained in Tokyo through the duration of the Korean War. Even when foreigners are on screen, their roles are minimal. We meet British troops in *The Burmese Harp* (so not actually on Japanese soil), foreign scientists arrive to offer their opinions in *Gojira*, and a clueless American husband is in *Crazed Fruit*. The British are portrayed as decent for the most part, although their role is very small. And *Gojira's* foreign scientists are merely shown coming into a hearing and sitting down. *Crazed Fruit* offers the most veiled interpretation. Eri's husband is oblivious to his wife's true feelings and exploits. Natsuhisa and Haruji's friends also make sly references to the ignorance of Westerners. While the Americans were impressive initially, arriving as triumphant conquerors, their role in the setup of the post-war government and their presence on the whole in Japan had grown thin.

¹⁰¹ Dower, 34 and 431.

¹⁰² Dower, 432.



Figure 7. Gojira lays waste to Tokyo

Despite their overall physical absence, foreigners did have a major presence in postwar cinema through their technological and cultural imports. This appears most notably in two films. The first is Ishiro Honda's *Gojira*, known in the West as "Godzilla."¹⁰³ The classic movie monster emerged in Japan in 1954. *Gojira* tells of how the monster came to be, and ultimately meets its end (although leaving room for sequels). Gojira begins attacking boats in the ocean, and eventually a town in an island off the coast of Japan. A paleontologist, Yamane, is brought in to study Gojira, and concludes that the monster was awakened from deep pockets inside the ocean floor by American nuclear testing. Yamane sees Gojira as a unique creature, and does not share in the main opinion that it should be destroyed. Gojira attacks and destroys Tokyo, and it is clear that none of the conventional weapons can harm him. So Yamane's daughter calls upon another scientist, who has invented a weapon that sucks the oxygen out of water, killing

¹⁰³ *Gojira*. Directed by Ishiro Honda. 98 minutes. Toho Co., 1954. DVD.

everything in it. He is hesitant to use it, however, because he is scared it will fall into the wrong hands. In the end, he sacrifices himself and detonates the weapon, killing Gojira.

Gojira examines the impact of foreign actions on Japan. It is American nuclear testing that caused Gojira to arise from the depths, reiterating the destruction of atomic weapons. And it is up to the Japanese to find a solution for this. As previously mentioned, American and other Western scientists are called in to consult on solving the problem, but they are never given a chance to speak on screen, and it is implied they had nothing to offer. Only the Japanese, having invented a terrible weapon of their own, are able to finally conquer the monster, most likely not only saving Japan, but other parts of the world as well.

But the critique of foreign actions does not stop there. The Japanese scientist who invented the weapon that kills Gojira is initially hesitant in using it. He realizes its power and does not want it to be misused, which he assumes it eventually will be. In the end, only by destroying himself can he be assured the future is safe. His struggle seems to be a critique of the use of the atomic bombs on Japan. The Americans had a powerful weapon that could have potentially saved lives, but now the world has to live with their invention and its dire consequences. By sacrificing himself, the Japanese scientist has learned the lesson. His is a powerful weapon, and could save lives, but is it worth the cost? The answer in the film is no; but more poignant is who is giving the answer. It is not the foreigners who realize this simple truth, but the Japanese. It is the Japanese who wisely use their own terrible weapon. It is the Japanese, then, who hold the key to a more peaceful future. The question is will they listen?

Gojira is one of Japan's first science fiction films, and comes out at a time science fiction was beginning to be a popular genre in America as well. For Americans, science fiction films carried a deeper message of foreign invasions, mirroring the rising Cold War fears and sentiments. While *Gojira* does not hold to quite the same tone, it is similar in that it encourages Japanese audiences to look inward for solutions. The outside has created enough problems; it is up to the Japanese to address these wisely.

Historian William Tsutsui draws similar conclusions in his homage to the movie monster.¹⁰⁴ For Tsutsui, *Gojira* paints Japanese science as “good”, and it eventually “triumphs over bad American science.”¹⁰⁵ He also points out the soundtrack, which carries patriot themes, creating a tone of anti-American resentment.¹⁰⁶ While the numerous *Gojira* sequels might have taken on a cheesier nature, the original remains a complex film with morals and messages.

Japanese audiences find complications with foreigners of a different sort in Ozu's 1959 *Good Morning*.¹⁰⁷ A remake of his 1933 classic *I Was Born, But...*, Ozu's *Good Morning* took the story a little deeper. This time the two brothers, Minuro and Isamu, refuse to eat when their parents will not buy them a TV set. Their father scolds them, telling them they talk too much. The boys reply that really it is the adults who talk too much, chitchatting about nothing. The boys promise each other they will not talk until

¹⁰⁴ William Tsutsui, *Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 35.

¹⁰⁷ *Good Morning*. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 118 minutes. Shochiku, 1959. DVD.



Figure 8. Minuro and Isamu refusing to eat in *Good Morning*

their demands are met. While this is merely amusing to the parents, it causes a buzz in the neighborhood when the neighbors assume their silence means their parents are unhappy with the neighbors. The parents do end up purchasing a TV set, in order to support one of the neighbors, and the boys resume talking. The family unit is once again happy. The neighborhood also returns to normal (for the most part).

Good Morning can be interpreted as a critique on the Americanization of Japanese culture. The mass consumption that seemed to grab hold of society is proving to be an impediment. The boys' desire for a television leads them to question the small chitchat they observe their parents and neighbors taking part in. The parents say it is customary, and attribute it to their age, saying they will understand as they get older. By focusing in on this rather minute detail in everyday life, Ozu is warning against an erosion of traditional customs. This is demonstrated in the small debacle the boys' silence causes in the neighborhood. Their older neighbors read a great deal into it, while the boys are

seemingly clueless as to the effects of their scheme. The younger generation, confronted by the culture of mass consumption, is ambivalent to the destruction it is having on traditional customs. In the end, the boys get their television, a possible hint that the technology itself is not so bad. Instead, *Good Morning* serves as a comical warning to audiences: they are to be wary of the great things American culture has to offer, for they do not come without a price.

The physical absence of foreigners from prewar film reinforces the growing xenophobia in 1930s Japan. However, their similar absence in postwar film is more surprising, as they only appeared onscreen a few times, despite increase of foreigners residing in Japan. Notwithstanding this, foreign cultural imports in the form of atomic technology and television is addressed and critiqued. While Japanese society and culture did not display the same xenophobia it did before World War II, it was still wary of foreign influence.

DIRECTING NATURE: THE ENVIRONMENT IN JAPANESE FILM

According to author Kenneth E. Wilkening, between the beginning of the Meiji era (1868), and the end of World War II, environmental problems in Japan “were like tiny dust devils in a vast plain of industrialization.”¹⁰⁸ It was not until the late 1950s and 60s that environmental issues gained national recognition. The one notable exception is the Ashio Copper Mine incident.¹⁰⁹ Beginning in the 1880s, residents who lived near the mine began to notice the effects of the mine’s pollution. The discharges impacted the local water, soil, vegetation and people. The residents complained and opposition to the mine rose up. After a protracted battle, the mine eventually installed pollution controls, some twenty years later. The last settlement with pollution victims was reached in 1974.

Apart from this incident, little attention was paid to the environmental problems industrialization was causing. When there was some movement or legislation toward curbing the effects of pollution, it was linked to “human health and livelihood, not ecological impacts.”¹¹⁰ While the link between humans, disease and the environment is relevant, this distinction does signal that the environment itself had taken a back seat to

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth Wilkening, *Acid Rain Science and Politics in Japan: a History of Knowledge and Action Toward Sustainability*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2004), 95.

¹⁰⁹ For more detail see F.G. Notehelfer article “Japan’s First Pollution Incident.” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1, no. 2 (1975): 351-383.

¹¹⁰ Wilkening, 95.

industrialization. This was only punctuated by the military buildup during the 1930s. Films made during this era reflect this.

Environment in Prewar Films

Like with foreigners, what is noticeable about the cinematic view of the environment in 1930s films is the absence of it. Most of the scenes are set inside a home or building. If the characters are outside, it is usually while traveling to or from school and work. Seemingly no attention is paid toward nature. Author Paul Varley argues that the *shomingeki* films of this era demonstrate that the overall sense of the Japanese being within nature. The simple drama of a peoples' lives "unfolding within their natural surroundings", the little intricacies of life and daily interactions, reminded people of the cycles of life.¹¹¹ However this line of thinking is a bit off the mark. While the Japanese did see themselves as being within nature, they also saw themselves as capable of acting "against nature from the outside."¹¹² And act they did. During the 1930s little attention was given towards the environment except that it was harnessed for war. One of the motivations for moving into Manchuria and China was to harness resources.¹¹³ And Manchukuo was heavily industrialized after coming under Japanese control.¹¹⁴ The mobilization for war was costly to the environment, both in Japan and China.¹¹⁵ It seems

¹¹¹ Varley, 292-93.

¹¹² Asquith and Kalland, "Japanese Perceptions of Nature", 10.

¹¹³ Jansen, 580

¹¹⁴ Jansen, 588.

¹¹⁵ Tsutsui, "Landscapes in a Dark Valley", 395.

more likely that the absence of the environment in 1930s film is not signaling a Japanese contemplation of nature, but a command of it.

Things did not change much after the war. During World War II, the Japanese laid waste to an already fragile environment. While the war had given part of the Japanese environment a chance to recover, it had been detrimental to other parts of it.¹¹⁶ It had also had an effect on people's attitude toward nature. War mobilization had called for sacrifices from both the people and the environment. Now, at war's end, the Japanese were called to mobilize for democracy, to rebuild a newer and better Japan. Once again, sacrifices had to be made. The United States helped Japan in its postwar industrialization, encouraging the building up of infrastructure, trade partnerships, and home industry.¹¹⁷ By the mid-1950s Japan was on its way to being a global competitor.

But it did not come without costs. The Japanese people found themselves faced with "noxious air, soil and water chemical wastes" polluting communities and the environment.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, a good part of the pollution was impacting urban communities, something rather new to Japan. While most of the protests against and actions taken to correct these problems occurred in the late 1960s and 70s, they did not go completely unnoticed until then. The most famous incident occurred in Minimata, at a chemical plant. For decades, fishermen had levied complaints against the factory's

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 306.

¹¹⁷ Jansen, 727-28.

¹¹⁸ Jeffrey Broadbent, *Environmental Politics in Japan: Networks of Power and Protest*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19.

pollution of local waters.¹¹⁹ They had been duly compensated and would sink back into obscurity. But beginning in 1953, citizens began to notice odd behavior both in animals and people. It was initially suspected that a disease had broken out, and the victims were ostracized and quarantined. It was not until 1956 that the disease became more understood and therefore accepted. It characteristically attacked the central nervous system, leaving the victims bedridden, prone to lashing out uncontrollably, sometimes resulting in death. The exact cause was still unknown, and while heavy metal poisoning was suspected, it was not until 1959 that officials highlighted mercury as the problem metal. It was also at this time that they laid blame to the factory.

The incident raged on into the 1960s and was only the beginning of the pollution problems facing Japan. Massive and rapid industrialization had turned Japan into a “polluter’s paradise.”¹²⁰ Early efforts were made to legislate the pollution in the 1950s, and while some success was evidenced in municipal governments, national legislation did not pass until the early 60s.¹²¹ While Japan has since made numerous attempts to curb its pollution, the immediate postwar years saw unbridled degradation of the environment.

Environment in Postwar Films

While the environment was absent in prewar cinema, it had a greater presence in postwar film. One possible explanation is that advancements in technology allowed for more outdoor sets. Another is that people were more aware of their environment because of its degradation. The idea that the Japanese were in command of nature continued into

¹¹⁹ Huddle, Reich, Stiskin, 104.

¹²⁰ McClain, 593.

¹²¹ Wilkening, 122-3 and Huddle, Reich and Stiskin, 292-3.

the late 1950s, as environmental destruction persisted while they rebuilt the country. But during the 1950s, a dawning took place in which citizens slowly became aware of what was going on around them. More simply, the condition was becoming so bad one could not help but notice. Unfortunately it wasn't until the early 1960s, with the outbreaks of disease like that in *Minimata*, that the Japanese finally acknowledged the impact their industrialization had on the environment and took measures to control it.¹²² But because of the growing awareness in 1950s, the environment had a greater presence in postwar cinema.

Overt critique of Japan's actions against the environment only occurs in one film, *Gojira*. But nature as a metaphor is more common. An example of this is *Rashomon*, released in 1950. Perhaps one of Kurosawa's best-known films, *Rashomon* is the story of a murder told from four different viewpoints.¹²³ The fact that a gentleman was found dead in the woods is about the only detail that stays constant throughout the film, as the different participants in the story have different stories about how it happened. Three of the stories, those of the great thief Tajomaru, the wife of the gentleman, and the gentleman himself (whose version is told through the help of an exorcist) are told at the inquest into the death. A woodsman who claims to have witnessed the entire incident tells the fourth account. He recounts the entire tale to a priest while waiting for the rain to stop. The woodsman is clearly spooked by the entire ordeal, and upon hearing the tale, the priest says he has lost faith in man. At the end of the film however, he and the priest

¹²² Wilkening, 122-3.

¹²³ *Rashomon*. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 88 minutes. Daiei Production Co., 1950. DVD.



Figure 9. *Rashomon's* Tajomaru, the wife and gentleman (in the background)

find an abandoned baby, which the woodsman offers to take in. This unselfish act restores the priest's faith in humanity.

Much of *Rashomon's* action takes place in the woods. It is there the gentleman and his wife are attacked. The woods are deep, often dark and overgrown. They are also maze-like, allowing both the characters and the audience to get somewhat disoriented. This disorientation plays into the multiple story lines of the film, as the viewers are unsure whom they should believe. The wild woods are the antithesis of the nature the Japanese are comfortable in. It is the idealized nature, the managed nature, that the Japanese find pleasure in, and *Rashomon's* woods are far from idealized.¹²⁴ It is therefore appropriate that such an unsettling story should be set into such an uncomfortable place.

Kurosawa offers a contrast to the woods in the courtyard where the inquest is held. Covered in pure white rock, the courtyard represents order and management,

¹²⁴ Asquith and Kalland, "Japanese Perceptions of Nature", 15.

something the court is supposedly offering. There is slight irony here however, as it becomes clear that the court has little idea about what really went on in the woods, being faced with three accounts of the same story (they never hear the woodsman's version). Although merely a setting, *Rashomon's* environment helps reinforce the film's plot, playing into the audience's cultural concepts of nature. At the same time, the film challenges those concepts. The court's representation of environmental order was flawed. Was it therefore possible to have order and management over the environment? Had the Japanese convinced themselves they were in control of nature, only to be fooled, not getting the whole story? As environmental degradation continued to occur for years after the film's release in 1950, it is inferred audiences continued to believe in the concept of control.

Ozu also did this, but in a different way. Seven of Ozu's postwar films (he made fifteen in all) feature one of the four seasons in the title. Chronologically they are *Late Spring* (1949), *Early Summer* (1951), *Early Spring* (1956), *Equinox Flower* (1958), *Late Autumn* (1960), *The End of Summer* (1961), and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962) (*Equinox* indicating either spring or fall). In his essay, Peter Ackermann argues that the four seasons are often prevalent in Japanese poetry, literature and music. One of the reasons for this is that they represent a visualization of change and order, life and death, and the renewing of cycles.¹²⁵ While this thesis only focused on the three such films released in the 1940s and 1950s, all deal with the change in the family structure, either due to marriage, infidelity or death. By film's end, at least one of the main character's

¹²⁵ Peter Ackermann, "The Four Seasons: One of Japanese Culture's Most Central Concepts" in Pamela J. Asquith and Arne Kalland, eds. *Japanese Images of Nature: Cultural Perspectives*. (London: Curzon Press, 1997), 40.

perceptions of life have had to change in order to continue on. It is appropriate then, that the films are seasonally titled. The seasons and cyclical nature of the natural world were mirrored in Japanese life. Just as nature went through changes, encountered death, birth, and renewal, so did the characters in Ozu's films. This seems to reinforce the notion of the Japanese within nature, as suggested by David E. Shaner and R. Shannon Duval, instead of the interpretation that they commanded it.¹²⁶ Just like nature, they experienced cycles and change. The daughter leaving the family home, while sad, is as inevitable as the transition from summer to fall.

Ackermann also points out that references to nature in Japanese culture drive home the importance of correct thoughts, beliefs and relationships.¹²⁷ As Ozu sought to capture the postwar Japanese family, reoccurring themes arise that seem to suggest Ozu is attempting to push his audience in the direction of a modernizing society. Among these themes are finding love in marriage (often times before), not hampering the younger generation down with feudalistic loyalty, and learning to let go. By titling his films with seasonal themes, it is possible Ozu was directing his audience to take his messages seriously, leading them down the "correct" path in the often chaotic postwar world.

But postwar film did not always have such couched representations of nature and the environment. Two films dealt with the environment in a more direct way. The first was Kurosawa's 1952 film *Ikiru*.¹²⁸ Watanabe is the chief of a city department, and

¹²⁶ David Edward Shaner and R. Shannon Duval "Conservation Ethics and the Japanese Intellectual Tradition." *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Fall 1989), p. 197-214.

¹²⁷ Ackermann, 50.

¹²⁸ *Ikiru*. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 143 minutes. Toho Co., 1952. DVD.



Figure 10. Watanabe swings on the playground he helped to construct in *Ikiru*

merely plods along through life. However, upon being diagnosed with cancer, he is mortified when he realizes he has wasted his life. After trying to drown his sorrows in drink and partying, he still finds himself empty. He finally comes to understand the meaning of living, and we see him accomplish this through flashbacks at his funeral. While not always conspicuous, central to the plot is the mothers' request to turn a neighborhood cesspool into a playground. The cesspool has become mosquito infested, and poses a hazard to the children, some already sick. Despite their initial complaints, they are met with bureaucratic red tape until Watanabe comes to their aid. Having accomplished his task, he dies happy, knowing he lived meaningfully.

Although released one year earlier than the first reported cases of the Minimata sickness, *Ikiru* demonstrates that by the early 1950s urban Japanese were already beginning to face environmental problems, and voice their complaints about them. While this is not the main point of the film, it is evidence of Japanese society becoming aware

of the environmental destruction caused by massive industrial and urban growth. It is an elucidation that while there wasn't necessarily a shift in actions to combat pollution, there was an acknowledgement of its results.

However, they could not have been ignorant to the environmental messages of the second film, Ishiro Honda's *Gojira*. *Gojira* itself is a byproduct of environmental destruction. Once again, the Japanese find themselves at the mercy of an atomic world, seemingly powerless to stop it. And while it was not the Japanese who did the nuclear testing, it is implied they did not do much to stop it either. Similar to Kurosawa's *I Lived in Fear*, *Gojira* critiques the apparent ambivalence toward atomic technology, despite Japan's suffering because of it. The prevailing idea of the time, and not only in Japan but throughout the world, was that environmental destruction in the name of science and progress was acceptable. *Gojira* attempts to challenge this, and takes on a very anti-nuclear tone. This is made clear at the end, when professor Yamane says that if they continue to allow nuclear tests "it is possible another *Gojira* might appear somewhere in the world again."¹²⁹

Another aspect of the film that reinforces consideration of the environment is professor Yamane's attitude toward *Gojira*. Often portrayed as one of the few level-headed characters, Yamane does not seek to destroy *Gojira*. He claims it is unique and should be kept alive, although he never really explains how, in order to be studied. Yamane is in a sense fighting for nature itself. As progress and growth continue, nature is suffering, and the possibility of losing unique parts of it is likely. *Gojira*'s destruction is actually a sad moment in the film. *Gojira* appears to be suffering, and the soundtrack

¹²⁹ *Gojira*.

reinforces the sorrowful feeling. Gojira's death is tragic in that it is a byproduct of humanity's impact on the environment. The monster is faultless for the mayhem it causes. Should humans be so surprised when nature reacts badly to its destruction? *Gojira* is addressing the Japanese idea of acting against nature. The film is asking them to take a different approach when it comes to the environment, lest the environment bite back.

Prewar Japanese cinema reflected the attitude of commanding nature, which had triggered widespread environmental degradation from the 1860s until World War II. This command of nature did not change during the 1950s, although Japanese society was becoming acutely aware of the damage it had caused. *Ikiru*'s cesspool and the monster Gojira are examples of this. Conversely, Ozu used nature as a metaphor to drive home key ideas and the cycles of human life. Regardless, as the Japanese began to grasp their increasing problems, the environment had a larger presence on screen.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to explore if historical scholarship accurately reflected pre- and postwar Japanese film. It did so by examining four different aspects of Japanese culture: loyalty, gender roles, foreigners and the environment. The films proved to be rich sources, and divulged a number of details about these elements

First, while it took a decade or so, the government was successful in integrating *kokutai* ideology into prewar Japanese society. The shift away from the *shomingeki* genre to films like *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* is evidence of this. However it was impressive how quickly film makers abandoned *kokutai* ideology upon the war's end. While part of this was encouraged by the censorship put forth by SCAP, the Japanese embraced certain aspects of democratic government. Postwar films explored loyalty between family members, soldiers and humanity. This rather sudden transition from the militaristic *kokutai* to a broader, more democratic fidelity indicates that loyalty was permanent, but erratic. Loyalty would always be a part of Japanese society, but it shifted with the winds.

Women in prewar society were expected to demonstrate the “good wife, wise mother” prescriptive roles resurrected from the Meiji era. But there was a limit to the sacrifices they could make. Their bodies were meant for having children or working in the factories. Ayako's efforts to help her family in *Osaka Elegy* by becoming a mistress went too far. Otoku's devotion to Kikunosuke in *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* was what prewar society was looking for.

Gender roles became less clear with the advent of women's suffrage and SCAP's abolishment of the feudalistic family system. Filmmakers explored this throughout the postwar era. From the devoted Norikos in Ozu's films to the provocative Eri in *Crazed Fruit*, postwar films covered the entire scope of women's roles. In the end, the message was clear. While the discontinuation of the feudal family system was good, women still belonged in the home. She might have a choice in whose wife she became, but a woman should still be a wife.

Foreigners were curiously absent in both prewar and postwar film. Out of the twenty-six films sampled, they did not appear on screen at all in prewar cinema, and only three times after the war. This affirms the push for national conformity in the 1930s. But it is curious they are not more visible in postwar cinema, considering the number of occupation forces in Japan. But if one looks carefully, Western influences can still be found. *Gojira* and *Good Morning's* critiques of American science and mass consumption are evidence of this.

Finally, film somewhat exhibited the Japanese idea that nature was something to be acted upon. It is absent in prewar movies. In postwar cinema, it starts as a wild, unmanaged setting in *Rashomon*. But by the mid-1950s, nature bites back and ends up destroying Tokyo in *Gojira*. The 80-year cycle of environmental mismanagement and degradation had caught up with the Japanese. Their attitude toward the environment was going to have to change.

The analysis of these four aspects of Japanese culture as they were depicted in Japanese films between 1930 and 1960 substantiates historical narratives. The facts historians present are consistent with the images on screen. However, more reliance upon

film as historical evidence would be beneficial to future scholarship. Authors do cite some films, but more attention is given to printed novels and literature. Film has numerous layers for analysis, and a particularly rich film can offer insights into a variety of cultural aspects. General histories of Japan would be richer if they were to consider *Sister of the Gion's Omacha* or *Crazed Fruit's Eri*. Film captures the sentiments of the time, offering up a visual picture of history.

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Early Summer. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 125 minutes. Shochiku, 1951. DVD.

Equinox Flower. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 118 minutes. Shochiku, 1958. DVD.

Gojira. Directed by Ishiro Honda. 98 minutes. Toho Co., 1954. DVD.

Good Morning. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 118 minutes. Shochiku, 1959. DVD.

I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 103 minutes. Toho Co., 1955. DVD.

I Was Born, But... Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 90 minutes. Shochiku, 1932. DVD.

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One Wonderful Sunday. Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 109 minutes. Toho Co., 1946. DVD.

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Sisters of the Gion. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. 69 minutes. Daiichi Eiga, 1936. DVD.

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Tokyo Story. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 135 minutes. Shochiku, 1953. DVD.

Tokyo Twilight. Directed by Yasujiro Ozu. 141 minutes. Shochiku, 1957. DVD.

Twenty-Four Eyes. Directed by Keisuke Kinoshita. Shochiku, 1954. DVD.

Ugetsu. Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi. 97 minutes. Daiei Studios, 1953. DVD.

APPENDIX A

Timeline: Japanese Politics, Literature and Film 1853-1959

- 1853 Matthew Perry “opens” Japan up to the West
- 1868 In January, disgruntled daimyos overthrow the Tokugawa shogunate;
In March the daimyos issue the Charter Oath and bring back imperial rule;
Meiji era begins
- 1880s Ashio Copper Mine pollution begins to gain attention
- 1895 Defeat China in the Sino-Japanese War
- 1897 Lumiere’s Cinematographe arrives in Japan
- 1899 Asano and Koyo produce first Japanese film
- 1905 Defeat Russia in the Russo-Japanese War; Japan is now seen as a modern,
unified nation
- 1912 Meiji Emperor dies; new emperor is crowned and Taisho era begins
- 1917 Ordinances “governing” cinema are put into effect
- 1920s Western art, literature, music and film began to grow in popularity; rise of
the popular *jidaigeki* films
- 1921 The literary basis for Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s *In
a Grove*, by published
- 1923 In September, an earthquake levels most of Tokyo
- 1926 Taisho emperor dies; Emperor Hirohito is crowned and Showa era begins
- 1928 Japanese army assassinates Chinese leader of Manchuria
- 1930s Advent of the *shomingeki* films
- 1930 London Naval Conference; Japan denied equality regarding ship
construction
- 1931 In September, occurrence of the Manchurian “Incident”; Japanese army
takes over territory and renames it Manchuko; establishes a puppet
government
- 1931 First successful Japanese talkie, *The Neighbor’s Wife and Mine*, premieres
- 1932 In October, the West publicly condemns Japan in League of Nations
meeting; Japan withdraws from League in protest
- 1933 In December, the Japanese government commits to a militaristic foreign
policy
- 1933 *In Praise of Shadows* is published
- 1937 Government issues *Kokutai no hongii*, or “Cardinal Principles of National
Polity”
- 1937 *Roei no uta*, or the “Bivouac Song”, fixated on death, is published
- 1937 Marco Polo Bridge incident marks the beginning of war between Japan
and China
- 1939 Film censorship law enacted
- 1940 In October, dance halls and jazz bands are banned
- 1941 On December 7 the Japanese navy bombs Pearl Harbor
- 1945 On August 15 Japanese surrender
- 1946 In January Emperor Hirohito recants his divinity
- 1946 Rise of *nikutai* literature, or flesh novels
- 1946 *Kanzen naru Kekkou*, or “The Complete Marriage” reaches the top-ten
bestseller list
- 1949 Monthly magazine *Fufu Seikatsu*, or “Married Life”, is published for the
first time

- 1951 Japan gains independence from SCAP under the San Francisco Peace Treaty
- 1951 Release of first Japanese color film, *Karumen kokyo ni kaeru* (Carmen Comes Home)
- 1952 Sakae Tsuboi's novel *Twenty-Four Eyes*, the basis for the movie of the same name is published
- 1953 Citizens of Minimata begin to get sick
- 1956 The novel *Crazed Fruit*, by Shintaro Ishihara, is published
- 1959 Mercury pollution recognized as the cause of Minimata disease

APPENDIX B

Director Biographies and Partial Filmographies

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHIES AND PARTIAL FILMOGRAPHIES¹³⁰ISHIRO HONDA¹³¹

Born in May 1911. Initially studied art. Fought in World War II against China. Got his start in film by working as an assistant director to Akira Kurosawa. He is most famous for introducing the world to Godzilla, as well as other famous science-fiction monsters Rodan and Mothra. He also worked on science-fiction television shows. Toward the end of his career he again collaborated with Akira Kurosawa, most notably on the film *Dreams*. He died in February 1993.

A Story of Co-Op (1949)

Gojira (1954)

Godzilla, King of the Monsters (U.S. Release) (1956)

Rodan (1956)

The H-Man (1958)

Mothra (1961)

King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962)

Mothra vs. Godzilla (1964)

All Monsters Attack (1969)

Terror of Mechagodzilla (1975)

Collaborations with Kurosawa include (but not limited to) *Stray Dog* (1949), *Ran* (1985), and *Dreams* (1990)

KON ICHIKAWA¹³²

Born in November 1915. Film career began as an cartoonist in the animation department for J.O. Studio (which eventually became Toho Company). Eventually made his way into directing feature films. His first film was *A Girl at Dojo Temple*, released in 1946. He

¹³⁰ Due to the prolific careers of most of the directors, partial filmographies featuring their most-well known films are given. Also, unless otherwise noted, the information for the biographies and partial filmographies comes from a combination of Donald Richie's *One Hundred Years of Japanese Cinema*, his work with Joseph Anderson, *Japanese Cinema: Art and Industry* and the Internet Movie Data Base (imdb.com).

¹³¹ Ishiro Honda's Official website, <http://www.ishirohonda.org/>

¹³² "Director Ichikawa, 92, dies." *The Japan Times*, February 14, 2008. <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20080214a2.html>

became well-known outside of Japan with his 1956 film *The Burmese Harp*. He also directed another anti-war film, *Fires on the Plain* (1959). He also made documentaries and adapted a number of well-known Japanese novels, including Junichiro Tanizaki's *Kagi* and Natsume Soseki's *I Am Cat*, onto the big screen. He was married to screenwriter Natto Wada. He died in February 2008.

A Girl at Dojo Temple (1949)
Pu-San (1953)
The Burmese Harp (1956)
Fires on the Plain (1959)
Kagi (1959)
Tokyo Olympiad (documentary) (1965)
The Tale of Genji (1966)
Visions of Eight (documentary) (1973)
I Am Cat (1975)
Gokumon-to (1977)
Eiga Joyu (1987)
47 Ronin (1994)
Inugamike no ichizoku (2006)

KEISUKE KINOSHITA¹³³

Born in December 1912. Trained in photography before joining Shochiku Productions.

Directed Japan's first color film, *Karumen kokyo ni kaeru* (Carmen Comes Home), released in 1951. Won two golden globes, one for *Twenty-Four Eyes* (1954) and the other for *The Rose on His Arm* (1956). Awarded with the Order of the Rising Sun in 1984 for his contributions to the film industry. Died December 1988.

Ikite iru Magoroku (Magoroku Is Alive) (1943)
Karumen kokyo ni kaeru (1951)
Twenty-Four Eyes (1954)
The Rose on His Arm (1956)
Yorokobi mo kanashimi mo ikutoshitsuki (Times of Joy and Sorrow) (1957)

¹³³ "A Satirical Eye on Japan: Keisuke Kinoshita, film director; born 12 December; died 30 December 1998." *The Guardian*, January 5, 1999.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,,322133,00.html>

The Ballad of Narayama (1958)
Spring Dreams (1960)
Koge (1964)
Big Joys, Small Sorrows (1986)
Chichi (1988)

AKIRA KUROSAWA

Born March 1910. Perhaps Japan's most well known director. Originally studied art, but became an assistant director in 1936. Directed his first film in 1943, titled *Judo Story*. He broke onto the international scene with his 1950 film *Rashomon*, which won took the top prize at the Venice Film Festival. *Rashomon* is often credited with introducing the world to Japanese cinema. Western filmmakers adapted a number of his films, including *Seven Samurai* (1954), which became *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Yojimbo* (1961), which became *A Fist Full of Dollars* (1964) and *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), which inspired *Star Wars* (1977). He enjoyed renewed success with his 1985 film *Ran* and 1990 release *Dreams*. He died in 1998.

Judo Story (1943)
No Regrets for Our Youth (1946)
One Wonderful Sunday (1947)
Drunken Angel (1948)
Stray Dog (1949)
Rashomon (1950)
The Idiot (1951)
Ikiru (1952)
Seven Samurai (1954)
I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being (1955)
The Hidden Fortress (1958)
The Bad Sleep Well (1960)
Yojimbo (1961)
Dersu Uzala (1975)
Ran (1985)
Dreams (1990)
Madayo (1993)

KENJI MIZOGUCHI

Born in May 1898. Came from lower-class circumstances, and his sister was eventually sold as a geisha. Studied graphic arts, and held a job as a advertising designer. Got into film initially as an actor but eventually became a director with the Nikkatsu Corporation. His first film, *The Resurrection of Love*, was released in 1923. His “women of misfortune” films helped to push him into the spotlight, beginning with *Sisters of the Gion* (1936). His 1939 *The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums* was considered one of his best, although his films dropped in popularity during and after the war. However, he gained resurgence with his 1953 film *Ugetsu*, which took the Silver Lion prize at the Venice Film Festival. His 1954 film *Sansho the Bailiff*, was also well received.

Mizoguichi died in 1956.

The Resurrection of Love (1923)
Sisters of the Gion (1936)
Osaka Elegy (1936)
Story of the Last Chrysanthemums (1939)
The 47 Ronin (1941)
The Victory of Women (1946)
Women of the Night (1948)
Ugetsu (1953)
Sansho the Bailiff (1954)
Street of Shame (1956)

KO NAKAHIRA

Born in January 1926. Known for examining more risqué parts of Japanese society.

Unsatisfied with the production companies, he moved to Taiwan. Died in September 1978.

Crazed Fruit (1956)
The Assignment (1959)
Aitsu to Watashi (He and I) (1961)
Akai Gurasu (Red Glass) (1966)
The Spiders on Parade (1968)
Summer Heat (1968)

Konketsuji Rika (Rica) (1972)

Konketsuji Rika: Hitoriyuku sasuraitabi (Rika 2) (1973)

YASUJIRO OZU

Born in December 1903. Joined the Shochiku Film Company in 1923 as a cameraman.

Directed his first film, *Zange no Yaiba (The Sword of Penitence)*, which was released in

1927. Earned acclaim with his 1931 *I Was Born, But...* Served in China during World

War II. Following the war he continued to make successful films, including the first film he made after his army service, *Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family* (1941). His films

of the 1950s are often considered his best, and include his masterpiece *Tokyo Story*

(1953). He often worked with screenwriter Kogo Noda, and consistently examined the

Japanese family in his films. While Kurosawa is seen as the most “Western” of Japanese

directors, Ozu is often considered the most “Japanese”. He died in December 1963.

Zange no Yaiba (1927)

I Flunked, But... (1930)

Tokyo Chorus (1931)

I Was Born, But... (1932)

Woman of Tokyo (1933)

Passing Fancy (1933)

A Story of Floating Weeds (1934)

An Inn in Tokyo (1935)

Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (1941)

There Was a Father (1942)

Late Spring (1949)

Early Summer (1951)

Flavor of Green Rice Over Tea (1952)

Tokyo Story (1953)

Early Spring (1956)

Tokyo Twilight (1957)

Equinox Flower (1958)

Good Morning (1959)

Drifting Weeds (remake of his *Story of Floating Weeds*) (1959)

Late Autumn (1960)

Early Autumn/The End of Summer (1961)

An Autumn Afternoon (1962)

APPENDIX C

Corpus of Films Reviewed for Thesis

The Burmese Harp, 1956.

Directed by Kon Ichikawa.

Starring Shoji Yasui and Rentaro Mikuni

A Japanese soldier decides to stay behind in Burma at the end of World War II.

Crazed Fruit, 1956.

Directed by Ko Nakahira.

Starring Yujiro Ishihara, Masahiko Tsugawa and Mie Kitahara

Two brothers fall for the same girl resulting in tragic consequences.

Early Spring, 1956.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chikage Awashima and Takoko Fujino

Bored with his life, a married salary-man has an affair with a co-worker.

Early Summer, 1951.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chishu Ryu, Setsuko Hara and Haruko Sugimura

A family deals with their daughter's choice in whom she marries.

Equinox Flower, 1958.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Shin Saburi and Ineko Arima

A man must come to terms with his daughter choosing her own husband.

Gojira, 1954.

Directed by Ishiro Honda.

Starring Takashi Shimura, Akira Takarada, Momoko Kochi and Akihiko Hirata

Awakened by nuclear testing, a monster lays waste to Tokyo. (Released in the U.S. as Godzilla)

Good Morning, 1959.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chishu Ryu, Koji Shitara and Masahiko Shimazu

A remake of his 1932 film *I Was Born, But...*, two brothers refuse to speak when their parents won't buy them a television.

I Live in Fear: Record of a Living Being, 1955.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Toshiro Mifune

Fearing another atomic attack, a man seeks to move his family to Brazil.

I Was Born, But..., 1932.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Tatsuo Saito, Mitsuko Yoshikawa and Hideo Sugawara

Two brothers refuse to eat after witnessing their father kowtowing to his boss.

The Idiot, 1951.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Masayuki Mori, Toshiro Mifune and Setsuko Hara

Based on Dostoevsky's novel of the same name, a man who had a nervous breakdown returns to his hometown and becomes involved with two women.

Ikiru, 1952.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Takashi Shimura

A dying man tries to find meaning in his life by getting a playground built.

Late Spring, 1949.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chishu Ryu and Setsuko Hara

A father lies to his daughter so she will get married.

No Regrets for Our Youth, 1946.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Setsuko Hara, Denjiro Okochi and Susumu Fujita

A woman marries a leftist sympathizer during the war, resulting in a harsh life.

One Wonderful Sunday, 1946.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Isao Numasaki and Chieko Nakakita

A couple attempts to enjoy their Sunday in postwar Japan.

Osaka Elegy, 1936.

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi.

Starring Isuzu Yamada

A girl becomes a mistress to a company president leading to her family disowning her.

Passing Fancy, 1933.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Takeshi Sakamoto and Tokkankozo

A single father falls in love with a younger woman, all the while trying to raise his son.

Rashomon, 1950.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Masayuki Mori, Machiko Kyo, Toshiro Mifune and Takashi Shimura

Four different perspectives of a crime in the woods.

Scandal, 1946.

Directed by Akira Kurosawa.

Starring Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura and Yoshiko Yamaguchi

A painter and an actress sue a magazine over the publication of a false story.

Sisters of the Gion, 1936.

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi.

Starring Isuzu Yamada and Yoko Umemura

Two geisha sisters have different perspectives on their profession.

Story of Floating Weeds, 1934.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Takeshi Sakamoto, Choko Iida and Hideo Mitsui

A traveling actor tries to reconnect with his son and old flame.

The Story of the Last Chrysanthemums, 1939.

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi.

Starring Shotaro Hanayagi and Kakuko Mori

A man is aided by his common-law wife in his quest to become a great actor.

Tokyo Chorus, 1931.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Tokihiko Okada, Emiko Yagumo and Tatsuo Saito

A man tries to find work and keep his family together after being fired from his job.

Tokyo Story, 1953.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chishu Ryu, Chieko Higashiyama, Setsuko Hara and Haruko Sugimura

A couple realizes their children have become too busy for them while visiting them in Tokyo.

Tokyo Twilight, 1957.

Directed by Yasujiro Ozu.

Starring Chishu Ryu, Setsuko Hara and Ineko Arima

As a father tries to guide his two daughters through their relationship problems, their mother reappears after years of being absent.

Twenty-Four Eyes, 1954.

Directed by Keisuke Kinoshita.

Starring Hideko Takamine

A teacher's relationship with her students over a period of two decades.

Ugetsu, 1953.

Directed by Kenji Mizoguchi.

Starring Masayuki Mori, Kinuyo Tanaka and Machiko Kyo

While trying to sell his pottery, a man becomes involved with a mysterious woman.

APPENDIX D

Major Japanese Film Companies 1912-1960

MAJOR JAPANESE FILM COMPANIES- 1912-1960¹³⁴

Nikkatsu Film Company	Formed when the company absorbed four others in 1912; dismantled in 1941 but resumed production in 1953
Shockiku Film Company	Formed in 1920; one of two major motion picture companies to survive a nation-wide reconsolidation in 1941
Makino Productions	Formed in 1923, when Shozo Makino left Nikkatsu to form his own company; mostly likely dismantled in 1941
Toho Company	Formed in 1936 with the merging of three studios (Takarazuka Theater, J.O. Studio, Photo Chemical Laboratory); one of two major motion picture companies to survive a nation-wide reconsolidation in 1941
Dai-Nihon Eiga (Daiei)	Formed in 1942; spinoff of the Shinko Kinema Company
Shin-Toho Company	Formed in 1947 when actors and other employees broke away from Toho Company and formed their own
Tokyo Eiga Company (Toei)	Formed in 1951
Daini Toei	Formed in 1958; a subdivision of Toei in charge of the <i>chanbara</i> , or low-budge samurai films

¹³⁴ Keiko McDonald, "Popular Film" in *Handbook of Japanese Popular Culture*. Edited by Richard Gid Powers and Hidetoshi Kato. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).