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REVIEWING THE PAST:

THE USES OF HISTORY IN THE CINEMA OF JAPAN, 1925-1945

A dissertation presented by

Sean D O'Reilly

to

The Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of

History and East Asian Languages

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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Re-viewing the Past: The Uses of History in the Cinema of Japan, 1925-1945

Abstract

In this thesis I use historical films to construct a social history of Japan's tumultuous interwar and wartime periods. I analyze filmic depictions of the Bakumatsu period (1853-1868), Japan's rocky transition to modernity, from the perspective of the audiences of 1925-1945, an era in which societal interest in representations of the Bakumatsu period soared.

Methodologically, I use close visual analysis but move beyond an aesthetically-minded film studies approach to raise issues of audience reception, war and society, empire, sexuality and gender, censorship, urban spaces and popular culture in modern Japan. I have thereby intervened in the existing scholarship, which has either largely ignored films or focused overmuch on film's aesthetic merits. I seek to reclaim films, especially popular films, as historical sources. Close visual analysis illuminates aspects of visual texts that a solely historiographic approach might overlook. And a 'history-as-experience' focus on the audience, and the history of the period in which a given visual text was produced, is critical to the process of historical contextualization. The body of films I analyze offers vital evidence of then-current socio-cultural conditions and perspectives on history.

I analyze commercially successful films, produced from 1925 to the war's end, in five chapters, on revisionism, comedy, serial history, hate the enemy films, and romances, respectively, and highlight the ambivalence of each type over the significance of the Bakumatsu period. Despite increasing pressure on the film industry to produce deadly serious hegemonic narratives supportive of the state and later the war effort, the hit films I examine contain many potentially subversive undercurrents. Their box office success indicates that covert resistance to Japan's militaristic course won favor with audiences. Those who lived through the 'dark valley' of 1925-1945 used Bakumatsu films to create a popular culture that was lighter in tone, and more resistant to state goals, than prior research on interwar Japan suggests.

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A Note on Copyright and Name Order

The Japanese Copyright Law (*Chosaku kenhō*) of 1970 stipulates in Article 52 that copyright shall expire 50 years after publication for anonymous printed materials and, in Article 54, that copyright shall expire 70 years after publication/distribution for motion pictures. As such, all of the screen captures taken from the films analyzed herein, and the various printed graphs and data tables taken from *Eiga junpō* and so forth, are, as of 2015, in the public domain.

Japanese names have been given in the standard order of family (last) name followed by given (first) name, except for individuals of Japanese nationality who are active in English-language scholarship, in which case these names are given in Western (first, then last) order. Macrons for Japanese terms have been included in all cases except for widely used terms like Tokyo (rather than Tōkyō), Kyoto, and so forth.

Glossary of Key Abbreviations and Terms

ELS: extreme long shot (landscape-focused shot that renders humans tiny in the frame)

LS: long shot (a camera position of sufficient distance to show a person's full body)

MLS: medium long shot (when a person is visible from the knees up in a shot

MS: medium shot (sufficiently close to show a person from the waist and up)

MCU: medium close-up (close enough to show a person from shoulders up)

CU: close-up (a shot near enough to show the human face in considerable detail)

ECU: extreme close-up (usually of just one feature, i.e. hands or eyes, in great detail)

ASL: average shot length, the average number of seconds per shot in a given sequence

Long take: a single uninterrupted shot of considerable temporal length

Shot/reverse-shot: the most common type of continuity editing showing two speakers in succession; after showing the first speaker, usually over the shoulder of the second speaker, there is a cut to a shot (often a reaction shot, showing the effect of the first speaker's words on the second speaker) of the second speaker, similarly framed as an over-the-shoulder shot.

180 degree rule: a basic but not inviolable principle of classical continuity editing, dictating that in any scene, for example a shot/reverse-shot sequence of two speakers, the camera must stay, in order to avoid viewer confusion over who's who, on one side of the axis of action.

Bakumatsu: "End of the Shogunate," referring to the chaotic final years of the Tokugawa *bakufu* (Shogunate), generally accepted to be 1853-1867~9 but expandable thru the 1877 Seinan War.

kangun: "Imperial Army", largely Sat-Chō forces fighting for the Emperor against the Shogun.

kinnō: pro-imperial faction, i.e. those who supported, first, the anti-foreigner, and then the anti-Tokugawa Shogunate side during the Bakumatsu and the Boshin War of 1868-9.

sabaku: pro-Tokugawa or "supporter of the Bakufu", i.e. those who supported the Tokugawa side during the Bakumatsu and/or fought for the Tokugawa in the Boshin War of 1868-9.

Sat-Chō: Satsuma and Chōshū, the two most powerful 'outer' (*tozama*) domains in Tokugawa-era Japan's domainal (*han*) system; longtime rivals, they forged a secret alliance in 1866 that was instrumental in toppling the Tokugawa Shogunate. They dominated the Meiji-era state.

shishi: loyalists or "men of high purpose," these were imperial (*kinnō*) patriots, initially xenophobic expulsionist extremists (assassins and terrorists) and later in the Bakumatsu period more pragmatic, shifting their target from foreign nations to their own Shogunate.

sonnō jōi: "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarian," *shishi* slogan of the Bakumatsu era.

tōbaku: "Topple the Bakufu", imperial patriot rallying cry of the late Bakumatsu identifying the Tokugawa shogunate as their primary obstacle to social (and military) progress.

Introduction

Why Analyze Popular History Films from Japan? Goals and Stakes

While struggling to come to terms with the nature and properties of my chosen discipline of history, I stumbled across Hayden White and Robert Rosenstone's musings on the nature of history in an age dominated by audiovisual media. This encounter was to inform my subsequent interest in Japanese history as seen—and made—on film. White and Rosenstone wrestled with an insoluble problem, the most basic formulation of which is simply, how should one write history? In particular, how does one use written words to describe historical films, and without falling into either the untenable position of seemingly apolitical description, the quixotic Rankean quest for objectivity—perpetuating the fiction that history consists merely of a kind of subject-less reportage of various facts—or an excessively poetic, self-reflexive register?[1]

There is no easy answer to these questions, but Hayden White's notion of the intransitive middle voice carries great appeal.[2] Using such a voice, the historian is essentially charting a middle ground between the two historiographical pitfalls described above. I resolved to adopt, as best I could, this sort of middle register, neither highbrow and detached nor too radical in style; I found what few experiments there have been in merging historical narratives stylistically with a fiction writing mode too self-consciously avant-garde a register to be useful.[3]

Yet all of the above has to do with form; the issue of content remained. Was my chosen topic, namely prewar and wartime filmic representations of Japan's Bakumatsu period (1853-1867, the conflict-torn era in which Japan first began its transition to modernity), even an

[1] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 227.
[2] For a more detailed explanation of what this curious term 'intransitive middle voice' means, see White, "Historical Enplotment and the Problem of Truth", in Friedlander ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation*, pp. 47-51.
[3] That is, the radical form of such essays tended to draw almost all of this reader's attention away from the actual content they purported to analyze. See for example Munslow et al ed., *Experiments in Rethinking History*.

appropriate area for research into Japanese history, as opposed to film history narrowly defined? What is the relationship between a given period's popular culture and the notions of history contemporaries of that period might have held? The body of films I had selected to analyze, a collection of largely similar historical dramas set in the Bakumatsu, the sort of pop culture, low-brow entertainment (*goraku*) films ordinary people loved and critics universally denigrated at the time, certainly was not worthy of study on purely aesthetic grounds. There are few auteurist glimmers of genius among these films' makers; the sort of films I wanted to analyze were much closer to 'mindless action' than 'cerebral masterpiece'. Could my analysis reveal anything of value to anyone other than enthusiasts of lowbrow historical films?

The work of two key pioneers of cultural and reception studies, Stuart Hall and John Fiske, convinced me that the answer was yes. Firstly, their very popularity indicates these films resonated with prewar Japanese audiences,[4] incidentally unlike many of the exceptional Japanese films that have won the lion's share of scholarly attention, films which were often not particularly popular with Japanese audiences.[5] And secondly, as both Fiske and Hall have persuasively argued, creators of media products do not have a monopoly over the meanings produced by those who consume them. Since meaning is at least partially (and, for Fiske, more or less entirely) in the eye of the beholder, a steady stream of movies encoded with similar interpretations of the Bakumatsu—or in other words, a morass of what to Adorno and

[4] This theoretical position on popularity was endorsed in wartime Japan, as well, by theorists like Ueno Kōzō in his 1933 debate with Iwasaki Akira, who as a Marxist was deeply suspicious of popularity as index of a film's social utility for the audience. See Gerow, "Critical Reception: Historical Conceptions of Japanese Film Criticism," in Daisuke Miyao ed., *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, p 68.

[5] Perhaps the most famous example of this 'exceptional-and-therefore-unpopular' phenomenon is Kurosawa Akira's *Rashōmon*, not a box office disaster but no hit with audiences or critics (overall it received mixed to negative reviews; see Kyoto shinbunsha hen, *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi*, p. 178) when released in 1950, placing an anemic fifth in Kinema Junpō's "Best Ten" list for 1950 (see *Kinema Junpō besuto ten 80-kai zenshi*). Unless one's mode of analysis is aesthetic (by which logic the question of whether *Rashōmon* is worthy of study has nothing to do with the film's reception, and is all about whether the film text is a formal masterpiece), it is hard to see what inferences may be drawn from a film like *Rashōmon* about Japan or cinema-going audiences in 1950, since the movie never developed the widespread popularity necessary for conversion to popular culture in the Fiskean sense. Conversely, its post-Venice surge in domestic popularity *does* illustrate something about 1951 Japan.

Horkheimer would doubtless seem all too similar cultural products and cinematic apparatus filled with an oppressive dose of ideology—would have been decoded in a variety of ways by the audience, and would have spurred the audience to produce a wide range of different meanings.[6]

Films are not entirely under the control of anyone on the producers' side. Censors cannot fully shape the preferred readings, and neither can the directors—and even the viewer, free though s/he may be to make meaning from the filmic text, is never totally free of the influence of the hegemonic forces that created the film. In short, films do not have a single author, and nor do they have only a single valid subject position (which would imply that audiences are homogenous, or, as Louis Althusser might say, homogenized by the very act of viewing, or being interpellated by, a film).[7] John Fiske's conceptualization of the act of reading an audiovisual text, and the existence of what has been called 'nomadic subjectivity',[8] can protect against stumbling into the fallacy of a homogenous audience, but the filmic text does "make sense of" the viewer in a specific way, influencing the range of possible interpretations and subject positions. Film, therefore, is an historical source rich in ambiguity and in contestation.

Interwar and wartime Bakumatsu films have an added component. Not only do they shed light on the era in which they were made, their explicitly historical content always constitutes an interpretation of the Bakumatsu's significance to the present day and an argument about identity, about national subject-hood, that is fundamental to the imagined community of the present. Those seeking to understand the widespread (though by no means universal) outward support among Japanese imperial subjects for Japan's increasingly militaristic nationalism, especially

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[6] Fiske is more positive than Hall about the types of meanings readers of a(n audiovisual) text can produce, and claims that the creator of a given product may not have much ability to limit those meanings (though I do not wish to suggest that Fiske was naively or effusively optimistic about 'resistance' by active readers of audiovisual texts). For how readers are decidedly not 'cultural dopes', see for example Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, p. 78, and on why such oppositional meanings are critically important in any analysis of popular culture even if they do not necessarily translate into overt political action such as visible street protests or the like, see ibid., p. 106.
[7] Althusser, " Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Evans and Hall eds., *Visual Culture: a Reader*, p. 320.
[8] Fiske, *Television Culture*, p. 82.

after 1931—but also the astonishing alacrity with which many Japanese shed their nationalistic views in the wake of defeat in 1945—would do well to examine the films of this period, and especially the Bakumatsu films, not because analysis of such films will reveal psychological 'causes' of growing militant patriotism among the population, but because they can provide insight both on nationalistic fervor, which we might identify with the censor-approved preferred readings of these films, and on what other interpretations and subject positions these popular filmic texts could offer their viewers.

The body of popular history films set in the Bakumatsu, in short, served as one of the few forums of the public sphere in which even passive resistance to the rhetoric and logic of Japan's militarism was possible. They offered escapist entertainment, but merely by resisting the increasingly strident demands of the government and pro-state quasi-official ideologues like film critic Tsumura Hideo to eliminate vapid entertainment altogether, the presence of entertainment value itself constitutes a sort of passive transgression. As a powerful outlet for regular people to continue to dream of romance and other forbidden pleasures increasingly denied in contemporary life, these films created a bit of "wiggle room" for viewers to renegotiate their relationship to the state, and even their gender roles.[9]

Such films as I analyze in the following chapters are generally not, in the filmic texts themselves, sites of active resistance against the hegemonic view of Japan's destiny. People exiting the theater after viewing one of these films never literally took to the streets in protest of the government's policies—but as Fiske points out, resistance does not have to be active and overtly political to be significant. The Bakumatsu films are polysemic: due in part to the very nature of film as capitalist enterprise, there is always too much meaning present in them, and in the experience of watching them, for the dominant ideology to control them completely. Japan's

[9] Evidentiary support for this claim can be found in chapter five.

film industry, which was never nationalized, never directly under the government's control (in contrast with, say, radio broadcasting at this time), faced in their money-making quest the same problem today's films and TV programs encounter: whether to design a film with great appeal to a specific audience or demographic group (young boys, middle-aged women, etc.) or create a film intended to appeal to as wide and heterogeneous an audience as possible. And the best way to accomplish the latter was to include elements, like for instance flashy chanbara (sword-fighting) sequences or romantic sub-plots, that 'freeze the narrative', elements, in other words that contributed little or nothing to the hegemonic political thrust of the film but were certain to please some of the potential demographic groups likely to go see it. And they had to do all of this while keeping enough of a focus on the preferred reading to placate politically minded nationalists—and the censors themselves, who were also part of the multiple audiences.[10]

The censorship apparatus of the state was hardly all-powerful when it came to attempting to control popular culture by shaping subject positions and readings of Japan's films. As box office returns show, audiences, even in the war fever of the late 1930s and early 1940s, simply were not interested in seeing films whose propagandistic aspirations were too obvious, or whose tone was too pro-state and moralistic.[11] The preferred readings of such texts were too transparent, their encoded messages too heavy-handed. What most audiences wanted was not, to use Roland Barthes' terminology, 'readerly' texts, nor avant-garde and difficult to decipher 'writerly' texts, but instead texts that combined the accessibility of the former with the creative potential of the latter, in short what Fiske has called 'producerly' texts, whose polysemy could furnish audience members with the tools to make their own meanings.[12]

[10] Hiromu Nagahara has argued that some official censors of popular culture products in prewar and wartime Japan were themselves openly fans of the medium they censored, meaning their work was a labor of love. Nagahara, p. 7.
[11] See Furukawa 2003 (p. 170) for an account of national policy films and their frequent failure at the box office.
[12] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 83.

This dissertation examines several such producerly filmic texts, analyzing their hegemonic readings but also suggesting what other resources these polysemic texts could offer audiences. It is not about the events of the Bakumatsu, nor is it primarily intended to be a myth-busting exercise, a 'fact-check' of the legends of the Bakumatsu shown on screen. Of Paul Cohen's three keys of history, namely history as event, experience, and myth, it is the latter two that interest me most, because it is in myth that the uses of the past become clear in the experience of everyday life.[13] So it is the myths and legends of the Bakumatsu, not the 'reality' of the Bakumatsu itself, that is of central importance, because what I am after here is ultimately to recover a sense of history as lived experience. History is fundamental to the formation of identity—a shared sense of belonging, the ultimate imagined community. Contestations over a given nation's history, and on strategies for representing that history, are therefore of great interest from a history-as-experience mode of analysis.

This dissertation, then, concerns the lived experience of the interwar and wartime periods for subjects of the Japanese empire. There have been many studies of different aspects of life during these periods, but most of them focus on some aspect of the emerging middle class. While the topic of the middle class is appealing for comparative reasons, and that class undoubtedly had a social influence far beyond its share of the national population, studies on Japan's interwar middle class still face a serious hurdle when seeking to make more general arguments about the lived experience of the period: just 12% of the population were members of the middle class in 1925.[14] What about the other seven-eighths of the people—was there any aspect of interwar-era life that could hope to illuminate virtually everyone's experience of the interwar and war years?

[13] See Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, for an explanation of these three registers of history (in the context, for Cohen, of the Boxer Uprising, but equally well applicable to Japan's mytho-histories).
[14] Louise Young, *Beyond the Metropolis*, p. 5.

My answer is the cinema, the single most popular and wide-reaching medium from the 1920s thru the early 1960s. Not everyone in interwar Japan was middle-class, not by a long shot, but practically everyone went to the movies. And not everyone carefully read their history textbooks in school, but virtually everyone, especially those living in urban areas, saw films about Japanese history. Moreover, as theorists like Rosenstone have pointed out and officials in Japan had begun recognizing even in the early interwar period, historical films emotionalize history, personalizing it for the viewers in a way that textbooks rarely can.[15] What would it have been like for film audiences, in the 1920s thru the end of the war, to see films encoded with messages about Japanese history and the significance of the Bakumatsu's ideological struggles?

Little direct data of audience reactions to given films exists for the prewar and wartime periods. To my knowledge no exit opinion polls from the wartime (1931-1945) period have survived, if indeed any were even conducted.[16] But plenty of indirect sources remain, including articles written in newspapers and film magazines, as well as evidence from the production side such as how film advertisements and programs were designed and what that design can suggest about film producers' assumptions of the likely audience for their film. Ultimately, of course, the best evidence of the experiential valences of these films will come from textual analysis of the films themselves, and what their encoded ambiguities suggest about who they aimed to please.

What close scrutiny of this body of Bakumatsu films reveals is a number of specific strategies for representing Japan's past, and a variety of potential social uses to which audiences

[15] As early as 1923, Ministry of Education officials like Yamane Mikihito were already identifying films' emotional potency as the unique characteristic of the film medium, which he and others argued made film potentially ideal for 'unintentional education' (in other words, ideological indoctrination cloaked in emotionally engaging entertainment). His misunderstanding (to my mind) about the ideological efficacy of film notwithstanding, film was already being recognized as an emotionalizing medium. See Fujiki, "Creating the Audience: Cinema as Popular Recreation and Social Education in Modern Japan," in Daisuke Miyao ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, p. 86.

[16] Earlier, in the 1910s and 1920s, there were apparently Ministry of Education surveys of the audiences for films aimed at children, but these were intended to ascertain whether the films' content was having a harmful effect on children, not to assess the range of interpretations viewers were making of that content.

might have put the films as they appropriated them into popular culture. On the strategic side, spoken dialogue is often overshadowed by wordless music and gesture, the better to enhance melodramatic engagement with history, and the films as a whole tend to feature aspects of easily grasped, almost iconic familiarity, markers of the past, like the landscape of old Kyoto, or the chonmage topknot, or the presence of megastars in symbiotic relationship with the historical characters they represent,[17] or in cases where the spoken (or intertitled, or narrated live by a film narrator) word does have prominence, the use of set phrases or clichés about the past that seem true and natural because they are so often repeated; all of these elements potentially reinforce common-sense notions of national unity.[18]

What Marcia Landy, following Gramsci, calls a commonsensical conception of the past is very similar to what Roland Barthes[19] called a myth: a version of a nation or group's history so obviously true (because everyone knows and repeats it) that it is unquestioned and becomes, in a sense, "invisible."[20] I see Fiske and Hartley's concept of the 'bardic' role of media as resonating very strongly with interwar and wartime Bakumatsu period films, particularly the notion of these films as cultural mediators composing structured messages that serve the needs of the culture and convey to members of that culture a confirming and above all a reinforcing version of themselves.[21] It is precisely this commonsensical, and therefore hegemonic or dominant, view of

[17] As Marcia Landy, following Richard Dyers, has pointed out, the use of stars in historical films fosters a homology between the historical figure and the star, with each profiting from the alliance: the star enhances the historical figure's value by adding present-day socioeconomic valences, while the historical figure adds to the star's image the patina of history. Star images are always intertextual (each star brings echoes of earlier roles to each performance but also shadows of his or her public persona in the present), meaning stars offer much added melodrama and affect. See Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*, p. 22. Stars are especially important in the context of Japanese period dramas, where films tended to be more or less star-dependent for their stories, etc. Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 336.
[18] All of these aspects correspond almost exactly to the general typology of melodramatic representations of history on film that Marcia Landy lays out in her introduction to *Cinematic Uses of the Past,* esp. p. 21.
[19] On the power of myth to move concepts from 'history' to 'nature' via depoliticized speech and repetition, see Barthes, "Myth Today," in Evans and Hall eds., *Visual Culture: a Reader*, p. 58.
[20] Landy uses this exact phrase on p. 70 of her *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (and similar phrases throughout).
[21] Fiske and Hartley, pp. 64-65. Bakumatsu films of the interwar and wartime periods fulfill all seven of Fiske and Hartley's conditions to be considered bardic media. These films also fulfill the seven social functions Fiske and

Japan's transition to modernity during the Bakumatsu that I wish to elucidate—and complicate—with my analysis, in the five chapters below, of the various genres of Bakumatsu films.

What Each Chapter Seeks to Address

Not all of the films I analyze share the same specific interpretation of Bakumatsu history. Indeed, I have organized the five chapters of the dissertation according to what I see as the five facets of the Bakumatsu. Each chapter corresponds to one of the key generic divisions—which are, respectively, revisionist tragedies, irreverent comedies, diachronic variations on a long-running theme, hate the enemy entertainment, and subversive romance—within the larger body of Bakumatsu films. In some cases, especially slapstick comedy (primarily men), Kurama Tengu (children, particularly boys), and romance (primarily women), these five sub-genres targeted relatively distinct audiences on the level of their preferred readings, and films were often marketed in a regionally specific way, emphasizing certain aspects for the urban crowds of the Kantō (Tokyo and eastern Japan) and others for the Kansai (central-west Japan). Even if films were meant to appeal to as broad and heterogeneous an audience as possible, the generic division to which each belonged inevitably shaped that film's treatment of the historical subject matter.

Hartley outline as representative of the bardic: 1) to *articulate* the main lines of established cultural consensus in terms of the nature of reality (and/or the reality of nature); 2) to *implicate* individual members [like, in this case, Bakumatsu-era figures later adored as national heroes] of the culture into dominant value-systems, by exchanging status-enhancing messages for endorsement of that messages underlying ideology (as in mythology); 3) to *celebrate*, explain, interpret and justify the deeds of a culture's individual representatives in the world, clawing back such individuals from the limbo of eccentricity to a position of socio-centrality [as *Sonnō jōi* does for Ii Naosuke]; 4) to *assure* the culture at large of its practical adequacy in the world by affirming and confirming its ideologies/mythologies in active engagement with the practical and potentially unpredictable world; 5) to *expose*, conversely, any practical inadequacies in culture's sense of self which might result from changed conditions in the external world, or from pressure within the culture for a reorientation in favor of a new ideological stance; 6) to *convince* the audience that their status and identity as individuals is guaranteed by culture as whole; and 7) to *transmit* by these means a sense of cultural membership (security and involvement). Due to their heavily conventional nature and their extreme popularity, I argue Bakumatsu films were the perfect raw materials for viewers to (re-)negotiate their relationship to the past and to present-day society; each iteration of the Bakumatsu film genre is metonymic/synecdochic in nature. Fiske and Hartley argue that, anthropologically speaking, the bardic function of this sort of endlessly repeated medium (or, in my adaptation, film genre) is essentially a kind of ritual condensation, or in other words the projecting of abstract ideas into material form. See ibid., pp. 65-68.

For example, chapter one, on valorizing history's villains and the revisionist film entitled *Sonnō jōi* (the famous xenophobic slogan of the Bakumatsu period, meaning "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians"), explores a significant shift in what constituted common sense about who should be considered the heroes and villains of the Bakumatsu. In particular, this film features the 'claw back' of Ii Naosuke, a figures heretofore vilified in Japanese history, into a position of socio-centrality.[22] But all the films discussed in this dissertation share both an investment in the Bakumatsu period as a vitally important historical turning point as well as a general commitment to the notion of naturalized Bakumatsu history, of common sense, offering the viewer a jolt of recognition: "yes, this is how it was," a sentiment itself dependent on other iterations of that same unquestioned common-sense view of the past.

The Bakumatsu past audiences saw on film in interwar Japan offered the comfort of familiarity, heavily based as it was on filmic precedents of the same historical figures, dressed in the same ways and employing the same gestures as they fulfilled their well-known roles in the period's most notable events.[23] When that familiarity was tampered with, as in the case of chapter two, on satiric depictions of the Bakumatsu period, the films could intentionally subvert these expectations for comic effect, parodically critiquing the present by undermining the past upon which Showa-era Japan was supposedly teleologically based.

To understand why historical films in general (and Bakumatsu history films are certainly no exception) tend to focus on melodrama, on affect, one need only recall that to reach the largest possible audience, it is best for film producers to select widely known episodes of history for their material—and if the major events are already known, films can produce little or no

[22] The concept of 'claw back' is a key feature of bardic media according to Fiske and Hartley; see ibid., pp. 65-66.
[23] There is also a curious sense in which history films could offer a more contemporary familiarity; Sybil Thornton has pointed out that women's hairstyles in period films (*jidaigeki*), including history films, tended to be up-to-date with the viewing present, not historically accurate to the period being depicted. See Thornton, Kindle location 351.

suspense. But the emotional power of even very well-known events depends on a given film's depictive strategies: think of the huge success of the 1997 global blockbuster *Titanic* despite viewers' foreknowledge of the dark fate lying in store for the ship and most of its passengers.

That films do not need to depend on the unknown to move audiences is true as well of film series like *Kurama Tengu*, about the fictional Bakumatsu hero and the subject of chapter three. Structurally, there are no overt surprises in the narratives of this long-repeated and ever-popular series, which are formulaic and very similar, indeed often direct remakes of earlier films, and moreover depended on already well-known source material, the serialized novels of Osaragi Jirō. Kurama Tengu is a classic strong and masculine yet asexual (*tateyaku*) heroic archetype, with abilities bordering on the superhuman; as such, the final victory of Kurama is never at all in doubt.[24] Despite the lack of suspense in *Kurama Tengu* films, or in some ways *because of* the comforting familiarity of the narratives, audiences flocked to see each new instantiation of this myth, taking pleasure from predictability rather than shock or surprise.[25]

As with *Titanic* or the *Kurama Tengu* series, so too with many other depictions of the Bakumatsu, for example *Sakamoto Ryōma* (1928), a film whose climax is the assassination of the eponymous hero—the most well-known event of Sakamoto's life. Sakamoto's death throes are covered in great length in the extant version of the film, almost four minutes of running time, and detail in the film, with only very infrequent "spoken" dialogue (via intertitles, though narrators at the time were free to embellish when and how they wished) between him and his also mortally wounded companion Nakaoka Shintarō; words, however, pale in comparison to the affective power of gesture, as the carefully controlled mise-en-scene in the final minutes of the film

[24] Gregory Barrett calls this type of *tateyaku* hero the 'Chaste Warrior'; Barrett, *Archetypes in Japanese Film*, p. 58.
[25] This issue of familiarity harkens back to Kabuki theater and the more than 100 film adaptations of Kabuki's most famous play, *Chūshingura*, which audiences went to see, not for narrative twists, but for the pleasure of discerning the far more subtle variations introduced via changes in cast (especially of Oishi) or crew (directorial flavor).

creates a powerful image of youth tragically cut down too soon. In particular, Sakamoto, played by 1920s megastar and heartthrob Bandō Tsumasaburō (or "Bantsuma", as he was affectionately known by fans), presents quite a spectacle of melodramatic excess as he thrashes around and, most affectingly, staggers to his feet by leaning on his sword (fig. 1).[26] This specific gesture, the 'gravely wounded' trope of using one's sword to prop oneself up, is one of the most oft-repeated visual tropes in all of Japanese period cinema.



Figure 1: Bantsuma as Sakamoto props himself up with his sword: *Sakamoto Ryōma* (1928), screen capture from 17:20

The one gestural trope which is almost as frequently repeated in period films (*jidaigeki*, meaning those films set temporally before 1868) as the sword-as-cane is the 'mortally wounded,

[26] Bandō was key in the transition from "old-style drama" (*kyūgeki*) to period drama, with his acrobatic and at times frantic swordplay a hallmark of the exciting new style period films offered. Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, pp. 203-5.

cannot draw one's sword' trope also featured in *Sakamoto Ryōma*. Having already been struck, Sakamoto staggers back in medium-shot and bumps over the kettle, releasing a cloud of steam as he contorts himself into an almost horizontal position while trying desperately to draw his sword (fig. 2). Like so many other victims, before and since, of the sword's violence in Japanese cinema, he fails, but his unusually strenuous effort to draw the blade emphasizes his heroic character and thus increases the melodrama of his impending death.



Figure 2: Sakamoto, wounded, cannot draw his sword despite tremendous effort: *Sakamoto Ryōma* (1928), from 16:45

As the war progressed, however, the familiar tropes of the Bakumatsu history film, including the standardized gestures of death throes and so forth discussed above, fell out of favor. This was for two main reasons. Firstly, such elements had simply become harder to include or

justify, due to increased resistance from censors and even the film world itself to the period film super-genre in general. But the most recognizable elements of period films had also become less socially useful to pro-war, pro-state critics and censors (who demanded somber political conversion and/or hate the enemy narratives) and in fact to audiences, who were now in search of new paradigms of behavior in which to find new pleasures. As such, period films had all but disappeared by 1940, and been replaced by true "history films" (*rekishi eiga*), which were supposed to be mainly educational and hortatory in nature. Some film projects in this new genre took the new national policy thrust of critics' and censors' demands more or less seriously, and the history film became one of the only film genres in which genuine hate the enemy narratives exist in wartime Japan; I discuss, and problematize, key examples of this trend in chapter four.

Yet as I argue in the fifth and final chapter, on Bakumatsu romances, many projects' commitment to the state's goals was tepid at best. Having cloaked themselves in a veneer of historical respectability, many proceed to resurrect all of the old period film-style sources of audience pleasure, especially romance. Yet these films also focused more and more on female protagonists, offering female spectators a broader and more proactive range of acceptable behaviors and roles.

Popular Culture and the Culture Industry: Theoretical Underpinnings

I am a historian of Japanese cultural history and mytho-history, whose main materials are films and film-related print sources, rather than a film historian narrowly defined. It is not so much the Bakumatsu films themselves, and certainly not their aesthetic merits as films, that are the ultimate object of analysis, but those who went to see them, and what the films can suggest about the impressions contemporary viewers may have gleaned of their own national history. As

such, I do not aim to 'myth-bust' the films, or show all the myriad ways they stray from the historical record. Robert Rosenstone and others have persuasively argued that any quest to expose the factual errors of a historical fiction film is ultimately of little use in evaluating a film.[27] The truth-value of each film's depiction of the Bakumatsu is less important for my purposes than the utility of the various myths of the Bakumatsu that they marshal as part of their historical arguments for continuity (or, especially for the parodies of chapter two, disparity) with the present.

All 'historical accuracy'-based criticisms of historical fiction film are ultimately based upon the hypodermic needle theory of cultural transmission. In this model, insidious (capitalist) power-holders jab the naive, easily duped masses (themselves in a sense created by precisely the homogenizing products they are nudged into consuming) with a powerful injection of normative ideology with every such film or other product of the culture industry. But that is not what popular culture is at all, or how it works; popular culture is the *uses* or *appropriations* by many heterogeneous people (not "the masses"), to their own ends, of the resources—including films and so forth—with which their culture presents them.[28] So even if a film were heavily infused with an ideological message designed to dupe "the people" and keep them docile, there is no reason to assume that most of those who watched the film would obligingly decode it according to the dominant or preferred reading.

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[27] This is due largely to the mismatch of mediums: historians who blast a particular film for 'getting it wrong' are presumably expecting a meticulously footnoted document which is careful to couch its interpretative stance in the unassailable armor of (supposedly) a Rankean, objective approach, and are outraged when they find that the film not only has no footnotes of any kind, but worse yet its interpretation is manifestly one-sided. Yet films are not books, and as Hayden White and Rosenstone have said, only frustration awaits if one ignores the fundamental differences in medium and expects films to behave just like books; instead, we should apply medium-specific modes of criticism to historiophotic texts like historical fiction films. See Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, p. 26.

[28] In the Japanese government, specifically the Ministry of Education, an invented concept of "the people" (used in a relatively homogenous sense) held sway in the period of analysis; this inability to recognize the heterogeneity of film audiences did not prevent officials from viewing the (to them) undifferentiated mass of Japanese subjects as distressingly hedonistic in their film consumption habits, as well as easily excitable, potentially only one step removed from becoming a mob. See Hideaki Fujiki, "Creating the Audience: Cinema as Popular Recreation and Social Education in Modern Japan," in Daisuke Miyao ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, p. 84.

Moreover, theories of the masses being brainwashed by a given film's ideology presuppose a contemporary model of viewing behavior—rapt attention, eyes glued to the screen, obediently sitting in a darkened, largely silent theater, a temple to Foucault's panoptical principle of self-discipline—that cannot be projected back onto the viewers of 1920s Japan, which offered a very different viewing experience. "Filmgoers" is something of a misnomer, in fact, since viewers were purchasing a ticket not to a specific film, but to a film program, usually 3-5 hours long, typically combining both 'modern-day' films (*gendaigeki*, referring to those films set in the present or near-present) and period films, and they could (and did) come and go as they pleased;[29] most movie theaters had dirt floors and bench-seating, often were only de jure segregated by gender until early 1931,[30] and had huge crowds packed in every available space for the really popular movies or their narrators (*benshi*), who were often as big or bigger a draw as the film itself,[31] and offered a doubtless rather distressing array of smells including food, sweat, and urine, as well as plenty of auditory and tactile distractions.[32]

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[29] Furukawa, p. 27.

[30] Gender segregation did not officially end until Jan. 1931 (though it had long been essentially unenforceable due to the exemption for married couples and the difficulty in determining who constituted a couple). See High, p. 13.

[31] A note on terminology: Tanaka Masasumi has explained that terms like *'benshi'* or *'katsuben'* (narrator) were exclusive to the Kantō, whereas in Kansai the term was *eiga kaisetsusha* (film explainer). See Tanaka, "*Jidaigeki* eiga shiron no tame no yobiteki shokōsatsu (senzen hen)," in Tsutsui ed., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nanika*, p. 28.

[32] Furukawa explains how even as late as 1937, most theaters (with the sole exception of the most up-to-date urban areas, which finally began trying to improve hygiene with concrete floors, among other tactics) still had dirt floors, and would have contained plenty of olfactory evidence of the common practice of children urinating where they stood, having been either unable (due to standing room only crowds, presumably) or unwilling to find a bathroom. Roofs were often leaky, letting in rain, further adding to the already over-stimulating sensory experience of film-going in prewar Japan. See Furukawa, p. 37. I would add that there was often a significant difference in quality and hygiene between the cities' handful of large, glitzy movie palaces devoted solely to foreign movies, and the dingier majority of cinemas, which showed only domestically produced films.
In the early days of film-going in Japan, lights in movie theaters were left on, not as in the theater to enable the audience to see the stage, but to combat the liberating anonymity of a darkened theater and enable panoptical monitoring of theater-goers by the ever-present policemen. Later trends such as those described above, as well as the quite participatory nature of movie-watching in prewar Japan (in which cries of "Matteimashita!" or "Nippon-ichi!" were frequently heard at key moments in the diegesis (or *katsuben* narration)), suggest the experience of movie-going was certainly liberating rather than oppressive. See Kamiyama Akira, p. 180, for an account of the transition to darkened theaters and its importance in the case of *Chūji tabi nikki*.

All of these factors contribute to the conclusion that films in 1920s to 1940s Japan probably could not 'convert' the audience to the hegemonic viewpoint. The power to make meaning out of a film, after all, lies with the viewer, and the preferred reading might well fail to reach the viewer at all, especially if that viewer is wandering in and out of the theater, or jostling with a raucous crowd, or negotiating the olfactory or tactile hazards of a smelly, noisy cinema.[33]

Furthermore, the film-as-brainwasher-of-the-masses theory ironically is predicated on an excessively individualistic relationship between each solitary viewer and the screen, ignoring the realities of film-going and one vitally important feature: the communal or group nature of the act. Film-goers (then as now) typically experience the entertainment of film not primarily as an individual, and still less as part of "the masses," but rather as part of a small group—we watch films with friends or family, as part of a complex and highly interpersonal social situation.[34] The idea of row upon orderly row of individual seats each isolating a hapless citizen who is then subjected to the ideological equivalent of the Ludovico technique simply does not fit the experience of movie-watching in prewar Japan—or indeed, I would argue, anywhere else.[35]

In terms of time period, this dissertation is about the uses of Bakumatsu-period mytho-history in Japan's interwar and wartime present, not about the time actually being depicted, namely the years from 1853-1867 (and a little beyond). The 1930s and early 1940s have been called Japan's "dark valley" or cultural nadir, marked by a descent into fascism and pro-war

[33] Ministry of Education officials noted that 1920s audiences enjoyed the flexibility of being able to stay only for a portion of a film, and credited low ticket prices with the viability of this practice. See Salomon, p. 68.
[34] Mendelsohn first argued this; his idea was later developed further by Fiske & Hartley, *Reading Television*, p. 85.
[35] Note also that the only extant version of *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi* of which I am aware, and on which my analysis is based, was released as a DVD transfer by the apparently now defunct company Disk Plan (ディスクプラン), in its *Nihon meisaku gekijō* series, and is 102 minutes long, or probably less than two-fifths the length of the original as experienced by the audience in 1927 Japan. Were my goal to critique the film for historical accuracy, access to so small a proportion of the original would be distressing, but since I aim to suggest ways this film, as a cultural resource, could have been used and appropriated by filmgoers in 1927 Japan, a 40% sample can suffice.

fanaticism;[36] while aspects of these accounts can be convincing, my research on popular films of this period does not support such a view.[37] 1930s and 1940s Japan was not a cultural wasteland, and its films, especially its history films, are surprisingly ambivalent about Japan's war project, maintaining a consistent and subtly subversive focus on entertainment rather than ideology.

History as Event: the Bakumatsu

Although the history of the Bakumatsu period itself is less important than its subsequent mythologization, a brief summary of that history will be helpful in evaluating its film depictions. In essence, the Bakumatsu ("End of the Shogunate") period covers the years 1853-1867, the final fifteen years of the Tokugawa Shogunate, which was doomed due to a lose-lose dilemma once American warships arrived in 1853 and returned in 1854 with demands that Japan end its seclusion and permit foreign trade. Had the Shogunate elected to fight the foreigners, as many in the country, up to and including Emperor Kōmei, vociferously demanded, there would have been little chance of victory though perhaps, like the Spanish during the Spanish-American War, fighting a quixotic war, even one where defeat was virtually certain, would at least have kept the people happy enough to ensure the prolonged survival of their form of government.[38] In any case, the Tokugawa Shogunate capitulated to American (and later all major European powers')

[36] For example, Harald Salomon's comprehensive account of Ministry of Education involvement in the film industry from the 1920s thru 1945 is entitled *Views of the Dark Valley*, and argues that Japan indeed faced cultural impoverishment due to governmental interference and so forth in the production of films.

[37] Harald Salomon's excellent work *Views of the Dark Valley* is marred by an unwillingness to take seriously the ambiguities present in films of this period, or their implications for film audiences; instead, Salomon (and he is by no means alone in this) attempts to explain any ambiguity about the war as an insidious tactic by filmmakers to create more effective, believable propaganda. See for example Salomon p. 266, on *Mud and Soldiers*. Moreover, Salomon contends that there was a shift, after the outbreak of Japan's Pacific War, in the type of films that won governmental recognition, away from the ambiguous narratives of the late 1930s and towards more straightforward or determined (what High would call "spiritist") narratives. But even if such a shift occurred within the Ministry of Education, is that sufficient evidence to describe the entire period as a descent into a dark valley? Due to their lively entertainment value and ambivalence towards the state and its war, popular history films, as I will endeavor to show in this dissertation, help counter the 'dark valley' view of Japan's wartime culture.

[38] But losing the war probably did further destabilize the already fragile Spanish monarchy, and similarly, this option, had it been adopted by the Shogunate, would not necessarily have resulted in that institution's survival.

demands and forbade anyone in the country from trying to expel the foreigners, thereby infuriating and indeed in some sense creating the group of xenophobic imperial patriots who embraced the *sonnō jōi* slogan. In 1863-1864, these same xenophobes, mainly in the powerful southwestern domains of Satsuma (featuring heroes like Saigō Takamori) and Chōshū (Katsura Kogorō, Takasugi Shinsaku), tried to put their expulsion ideal into practice, but suffered sufficiently severe military defeats at the hands of the Western powers, as well as crippling assassinations by pro-Tokugawa forces like the Shinsengumi (which weeded the movement of its most radical members), to convince the more practical thinkers among the *sonnō jōi* faction quietly to abandon the expulsionist (*jōi*) platform. Instead, they focused their anger and fear on the Shogunate, ironically blaming it for daring to open the country despite this being, in essence, exactly what they had come to accept as necessary by 1864, and what they would enact in 1868 once the Meiji government was formed.

Bitter rivals historically and battlefield enemies as recently as 1863-4, Satsuma and Chōshū were eventually united in an anti-Tokugawa alliance through the mediation of samurai (like Sakamoto Ryōma) from Tosa domain. This secret alliance sabotaged the Shogunate's 1866 military expedition intended to subdue Chōshū, leading to a series of prestige-damaging defeats for the Shogunate and ultimately to Shogun Yoshinobu's voluntary relinquishing of power one year later. The Shogunate did not go quietly into the night, however; just a few weeks later, in January 1868, forces loyal to the Shogunate clashed with the newly formed imperial army (*kangun*) of the hastily created Meiji government in the battles of Toba-Fushimi near Kyoto. After their defeat, the Shogunate rallied its supporters back in Kantō and prepared to resist the coming onslaught, fighting skirmishes near Edo thru April of 1868 and Katsu Kaishū's decision to surrender Edo castle to the imperial army and Yoshinobu's decision to forswear politics.



Figure 3: Map of the Boshin War. Copyright Hoodinski.[39]

Thereafter, the flag of the Shogunate continued to fly only in the northeast of Japan, particularly in Aizu, which suffered greatly for its prolonged resistance, and Ezo (Hokkaido), where figures like Enomoto Takeaki even went so far as to set up a rival nation, the "Republic of Ezo", of which he served as its first and only president.[40]

[39] Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boshin_war.svg#/media/File:Boshin_war.svg.

[40] Enomoto was arrested after war's end and accused of treason by the Meiji government, but mercy prevailed, and he was soon appointed to high-ranking positions in the very government he had opposed; this relative lack of victor's vengeance is one of the most remarkable aspects of the Meiji government, and helps explain its success in governing.

In the end, the Boshin War,[41] and with it all armed resistance to the Meiji government, ceased by mid-1869, as can be seen in the above map (Fig. 3), though resentment at the radical societal changes effected by that government, particularly those affecting samurai privilege, later flared into major rebellion in the 1877 Seinan (Southwest) War, centered on Satsuma and led by a reluctant Saigō Takamori. It is not unreasonable to consider this Satsuma Rebellion to be the final chapter of the Bakumatsu, the last gasp of the early modern worldview in the face of the rapid social (and military) modernization of the 1860s and 1870s.

Films depicting the Bakumatsu period usually focused temporally on the mid to late 1860s, when social chaos and by 1868 full-fledged civil war was at its peak. But occasionally they focused instead on the 1850s (Ikeda Tomiyasu's *Sonnō jōi*, chapter one), the very early Meiji period (Itō Daisuke's 1942 *Kurama Tengu*, chapter three) or the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion (Marune Santarō's *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, chapter five). These temporal departures notwithstanding, the utility[42] of the setting is much the same, as any film depicting the Bakumatsu would address anxieties over Japan's present by questioning the teleological origins of that present, namely Japan's first steps toward modernity and the concomitant struggle between tradition and Westernization—and ultimately over national identity. Inasmuch as the Bakumatsu was the crucible in which the new nation's character was forged, those seeking to understand Japan's present-day nature and course in 1920s thru 1940s Japan (and in later eras as well) could look back to that period for answers.

A note on terminology: by "Bakumatsu film" I have a specific, if rather broad, definition in mind. To qualify as a Bakumatsu film, a given film must, in its preferred reading, advance a historical argument about the significance of the Bakumatsu and Japanese history in general. To

[41] "The War of the year of (Yang) earth dragon" in the Sino-Japanese sexagenary cyclic calendar, equivalent to 1868.
[42] And the logistics; period film specialists were hired for these films, despite their pushing the temporal boundaries.

that end, the presence of historical figures, such as celebrated heroes or villains of the period, in these films is perhaps the most important condition in being labeled a "Bakumatsu film". Many of the films I discuss in the chapters to follow prominently feature historical heavyweights like Ii Naosuke, Sakamoto Ryōma and Oryō, Kondō Isami, Katsu Kaishū, Takasugi Shinsaku, and more. Even films whose main characters are fictional, such as *Kurama Tengu*, are careful to emphasize the fictional Kurama's ties to real-life leaders like Saigō Takamori. Likewise, some films, especially after the development of depictive strategies for heroic groups as most famously seen in the 1938 war film *Five Scouts* (*Gonin no sekkōhei*, dir. Tasaka Tomotaka), deal not so much with named, famous historical heroes as with key historical groups, for example the loyalist Tengutō in *Kantarō of Ina*, or the Satsuma rebels in *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*. But because all of these films, unlike the majority of the films in the period film parent genre under whose umbrella they also (loosely speaking) fall, are deeply engaged with history, and in their preferred readings seek to influence viewers' own relationships with their country and its history, the degree to which each film's story or main character is fictional versus factual is less important than the nature of their (preferred reading's) interpretation of history, and what other possible meanings audiences could have made of the filmic texts.

Now let us turn to one of the most intriguing (re)interpretations of Bakumatsu history, and rich in potential for audience appropriation as popular culture: the 1927 hit *Sonnō jōi*.

Chapter One

Valorizing the Villains: The First Bakumatsu Boom and 1927's *Sonnō jōi*

In this chapter, I analyze the causes and socio-cultural uses of the first Bakumatsu film boom, from 1925-1945, arguing that the main function in the initial stage (from 1925 thru the advent of sound in the early 1930s) was what I call the "valorizing" of the defeated pro-Tokugawa (*sabaku*) faction, and by extension their descendants. I will illustrate my argument with the 1927 critical and popular hit *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi* (*Founding of the Nation: Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians,* hereinafter *Sonnō jōi,* dir. Ikeda Tomiyasu). I will extend my source base beyond the film themselves to draw upon film-related sources, but only those secondary texts which themselves reached a wide viewership or readership.[1]

Introduction: Historical Resentment and the Social Function of the Bakumatsu Boom

The Meiji Restoration was far from a bloodless coup. Indeed, the fierce fighting of the Boshin War, which started immediately after the restoration of power to the emperor, demonstrates that it was closer to being a bloodbath. In the end, the Satsuma-Chōshū coalition prevailed, but only after devastating the hold-outs against imperial rule, especially Aizu.

Perhaps the misconception that the transition from Tokugawa to Satsuma-Chōshū (Meiji) rule was relatively peaceful stems from an overemphasis on the casualty count. It is certainly true that, proportional to population at the time, casualties of Japan's civil war were far fewer than, say, the roughly contemporaneous American Civil War. But the absolute number of casualties is an inadequate guide to how the war was and is remembered, for at least two reasons.

[1] My aim is to recover traces of popular understandings of Japanese history as shown on film. As such, I will make little mention either of avant-garde films that audiences shunned, or of film-related magazines and so forth with very small or specialized readership, drawing instead on wide-audience film magazines like *Kinema junpō*.

Firstly, unlike in the American Civil War, casualties in the Boshin War were not relatively evenly distributed on both sides of the conflict, but instead concentrated heavily among the pro-Tokugawa (losing) forces, and were particularly high in certain areas like Aizu. Resentment over the war would doubtless be more robust and likely to linger in a place like Aizu than in a domain that emerged from the Restoration unscathed.[2] Moreover, casualties were disproportionally among the educated elite (the samurai); elite survivors had the ability to make their resentment known to a wide audience by writing, or by using the networks of elites in place in many domains, which after all existed for the purpose of sharing views and information.[3]

Secondly, the number of casualties, by itself, is generally a poor predictor of how (bitterly) a war will be remembered. In the American Civil War, more Northern than Southern soldiers died, but there were fewer Southern soldiers to begin with, and more importantly the infrastructure of the South was much more heavily damaged by the war than that of the North. The same unequal distribution of the costs of war occurred in 1868-1869 Japan. Citizens of pro-Tokugawa areas devastated by the war had, therefore, even more reason than survivors in the American South not only to resent the victors but to make that resentment central to their regional identity in the newly unified state, and this is exactly what happened in places like Aizu, for which defeat was the crucible in forging a regional identity fundamentally oppositional to the needs and desires of the Satsuma-Chōshū state, in fact more oppositional in some ways than the attitudes prevalent during the actual fighting in 1868.[4]

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[2] Wakamatsu, in particular, was brutally treated by the Imperial army, and was also heavily looted. Shimoda, p. 44.
[3] According to Miyachi Masato, this sort of information-sharing among networks of elites increasingly came during the Bakumatsu to serve a political function as well, allowing people from similar stations in life but geographically distant from each other to exchange views on—and editorialize or complain about—the events of the day, especially the foreign incursions. It seems likely such networks could have continued to serve similar functions for some years into the Meiji period, and in this manner, the resentment of the vanquished may have been known to a larger part of the country (or its elites, anyway) than might be apparent at first glance. See Platt, *Burning and Building*, p. 87.
[4] Shimoda has argued that Aizu's resistance against the Imperial army was neither as ideologically driven nor as robust as is commonly supposed; commoner inhabitants of the domain had very weak 'han nationalism' and thus

In short, the history of the Bakumatsu and the Meiji Restoration mattered to people in the years immediately after the Boshin War, and it continued to matter to subsequent generations. At stake in determining the hegemonic interpretation of that history, the history of Japan's foundation as a modern nation,[5] was nothing less than the chance to define the course of Japan's future: would the country remain dominated by the coalition of victorious domains, without any input from the those of defeated domains? Would the vanquished continue to get written out of history, or would more inclusive political institutions emerge in which they, too, could flourish?[6]

The damage from—and contestation over the meaning of—the supposedly peaceful transition to the Meiji period was one of the most serious obstacles to the nascent state's preeminent goal of national unity.[7] Nor was all of the resentment on the side of the defeated. From the perspective of the victors in this civil war, the pro-Tokugawa enemy had dared to

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viewed the war as between samurai from Satsuma and Chōshū and samurai from Aizu—and the latter had more in common with their fellow samurai, earning little loyalty among Aizu commoners. "Aizu identity", consisting of endurance in the face of hardship, battlefield courage, and stubbornness, far from motivating Aizu's resistance to the Imperial army, was actually a product of their defeat. See Shimoda, pp. 33-38 on the weakness of Aizu identity vis-a-vis Craig's notion of 'han nationalism' and p. 82 on how notions of Aizu identity were forged by defeat.

[5] Satō has argued that the Bakumatsu is, in effect, Japan's second founding myth (Jimmu and the imperial line being the first), comparable to, in the U.S., the coexistence of both the mythology of the American Revolution and the founding myth of the American West (in the form of Westerns). See Satō, *Kimi wa jidaigeki wo mita ka*, p. 140.

[6] One outlet for disgruntled elites in defeated areas was the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement of the 1870s and early 1880s, but participants from such areas seldom reached prominent positions within the movement, which was dominated by partially disenfranchised and disgruntled lesser members of the victorious alliance (especially those from the former domains of Tosa and Saga). The lack of high-profile participants from places like Aizu suggests that either elites in those areas viewed the movement cynically and limited their participation, or that even enthusiastic participants in the movement from defeated areas were kept off the national stage, perhaps because it was thought inappropriate by its leaders (mostly former Tosa and, to a lesser extent, Saga samurai) to let one from a 'rebel' domain become a national symbol of popular rights. Some of the most vicious attacks or retributive acts against pro-Tokugawa forces had been at the hands of, not Satsuma or Chōshū warriors, but Tosa patriots resentful of Aizu and other holdouts. The Tōsandō army was notorious for hunting down and executing figures like Kondō Isami and Ōguri Tadamasa, in Wert's opinion due to Itagaki Taisuke's personal hatred for such enemies. Wert, p. 37.

[7] For example, if Aizu inhabitants had been too resentful of the government to serve in the military, that would have constituted a serious challenge to the state's authority. In the view of a new state struggling to enact unpopular social changes, including the conscription (or, as it was infamously if erroneously known, the 'blood' tax) edict, it was vital to devise some means to motivate the entire nation to fight and die for the state, regardless of regional differences. Fortunately for the state, as early as the 1877 Seinan War there were already some Aizuppo, largely former samurai, willing to prove their courage and patriotism in battle, perhaps in an attempt to wash away Aizu's 'shame' in defeat (that the foe was their nemesis of the late 1860s, Satsuma must have helped morale) and acquire social legitimacy by fighting in, not against, the Imperial army this time; indeed, Shimoda notes that the all-Aizu battalion in the Seinan War was so committed it suffered casualty rates 33% higher than the average for the imperial army. Shimoda, p. 75.

oppose their vision for the future of Japan, indeed had fired upon the army marching under the imperial standard.[8] But victory presented its own set of problems; the Imperial army (*kangun*) had fought in order to force the entire country to unite and acknowledge the authority of the emperor, yet how could the victors create a unified state after such fierce fighting against quite a large portion of the country?

It was a historically based cultural fissure that had no quick and easy solution, and animosity lingered in these regions decades after the Restoration, as Michael Wert has convincingly shown, even persisting beyond the end of the lengthy Meiji era itself into the age of popular cinema.[9] To agents of the government or its ideological allies among the people, one of the most appealing methods of replacing regional resentment with the far more satisfactory hegemonic narrative of national unity was the power of the cinema: that is, the power of myth.[10] Bakumatsu tales, drawing from a very exciting and widely known period of Japanese history as they did, had plenty of advantages in making the transition from serialized novels in newspapers (the source material for almost all Bakumatsu films) to the cinema, precisely due to their ability to bolster a sense of imagined community, of Japaneseness, by reinforcing a commonly held

[8] Of course, this could only have been a rhetorical position for many in the Imperial army, not genuine outrage, since the 'imperial standard' had been hastily put together by Ōkubo just days before the first battles of the Boshin War precisely to render the Imperial Army (*kangun*)'s opponents illegitimate and brand them *chōteki*. See Keene, p. 126.
[9] Wert provides a comprehensive account of rituals and other frequently used methods of commemorating defeated heroes, especially Oguri Kōzukenosuke, in his book, *Meiji Restoration Losers*.
[10] Myth in Levi-Straus's sense: the deep structure (*langue*) of binary oppositions important to the originating culture (so for post-Bakumatsu Japan, the binaries might be feudalism:modernity, old:new, shogun:emperor, Chōshū:Aizu, closed:open, etc.), and each iteration (*parole*) of the myth works to reduce cultural anxiety about the contradictions contained in the new state. In some ways, however, the Bakumatsu is an excellent example of what Levi-Straus called an anomalous category, in that the Bakumatsu period itself constituted a liminal space, a boundary of sorts between the feudal/old and the modern/new; as such, it can draw conceptual power from both sides of the binary. For a useful summary of Levi-Straus's line of reasoning vis-a-vis myth, see Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, p. 122. Note that myth in Barthes' sense also fits the case of Bakumatsu film very well: as a group, this body of films converts a particular (highly contingent) history and its interpretations into nature (teleological, natural), and their representations of history begin to carry cultural meanings as well, as in cases where the 'history' being shown consists of signifiers without any specific signifieds (e.g., a nameless loyalist (*shishi*) who possesses no specific, historic identity, allowing him to stand in for a more abstract cultural (and second-order) signified—a myth).

origin story for the nation and thus fostering a sense of ownership over national history,[11] a process which has an anxiety-reducing effect.[12]

Cultural anxiety over the meaning of the Bakumatsu and the Meiji Restoration was high from the very beginning, and has remained so throughout the entire age of cinema. In addition to the prewar/wartime and postwar surges of interest in depictions of the Bakumatsu, the relative popularity of such works as *Tasogare seibei*, whose 2002 release heralded the emergence of a third Bakumatsu boom, or the 2004 Taiga drama *Shinsengumi!*, or more recently, the 2012 live-action blockbuster *Rurōni Kenshin*, based upon the popular *manga* and *anime* series of the same name, suggests the period remains fascinating to today's audiences as well.[13] By endlessly retelling the dominant culture's version of the myth (the version in which Satsuma-Chōshū heroes vanquish anti-imperial rebels), and denying voice to alternative formulations of the Bakumatsu (for example, one in which someone like Ii Naosuke, the sworn enemy of the ultimately victorious sonnō jōi faction, is seen as a hero), the deep-seated contradictions of the modern state of Japan—whose 'unity' as a nation was wrought by force via a costly civil war—could slowly be ameliorated.

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[11] Tomita Mika has argued that Bakumatsu films were critical to the Japanese public's ability to emplace themselves in their own history due to the Bakumatsu's strong association with Kyoto, the cultural repository of memory for the Edo period, and travelogue-esque 'meisho' feel to some films like for example *Kenkyan ranbu*, a virtual tour of Kyoto. See Tomita Mika, *Jidaigeki densetsu*, pp. 138-139. Note however that *Sonnō jōi* is one of the rare exceptions, a Bakumatsu film with almost no connection to Kyoto.

[12] Isolde Standish, referencing Yomota, argues that a film made of a very well known story that everyone already knows functions as a reaffirmation of nation and one's belonging to that nation. If film can support imagined communities so well in this way, what better subject material than such a well-known national 'history' (myth) as the Bakumatsu? See Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, p. 117. See also the above note on Levi-Straus's theory of myth and their power to assuage cultural anxieties stemming from contradictions in the state.

[13] Earning over three billion yen at the box office, *Rurōni Kenshin* was the tenth-highest grossing Japanese film of 2012 if *Eiga kaibutsu kun*, which was released in November 2011, is excluded, and either fourteenth or fifteenth of all releases in 2012, easily outperforming such blockbusters as *Dark Knight Rising*. (*Tasogare Seibei* was 16th for 2002, grossing 1.2 billion yen during the worst year for Japanese films, as a share of box office returns, in the history of Japanese cinema.) Box office information for 2012 can be found at Eiren's website: http://www.eiren.org/toukei/img/eiren_kosyu/data_2012.pdf. Note, also, that since the 1980s, films can easily be seen, of course, in various home video formats, meaning that social impact of a film is undoubtedly greater than what box office figures by themselves might indicate.

The great Kantō earthquake in 1923 shook up the cinema, providing a powerful instance of creative destruction as old studios in the Tokyo area were destroyed or rendered unusable, and the rebuilding and shift to Kyoto, thereafter dubbed the "Hollywood of Japan",[14] in the wake of the earthquake accelerated trends already working to make Japan's movie industry flourish.[15] In particular, the early years after the earthquake saw an explosion in production, and popularity, of the period drama (*jidaigeki*),[16] and the resulting reconceptualization of the historical fiction film genre from a collection of unambiguous and asexual tales of heroism[17] marketed towards children, as it had been with Onoe Matsunosuke as its preeminent star,[18] remaining so at least

[14] See Kyoto shinbunsha hen, *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi*, p. 105.

[15] In 1925, the total number of movie theaters reached 813, while attendance reached 155 million (with a population of about 60 million, that's an average of 2.5 admissions per person per year). See Anderson's essay appended to the expanded (1982) edition of Anderson and Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, p. 455. Note also that in addition to a very rapid increase in attendance—Aaron Gerow points out that figures from monthly cinema attendance doubled in a mere five years, from 1918-1923, in Tokyo)—which helped lay the preconditions for the expansion and success of the Japanese film industry, an important institutional shift was underway in the early 1920s within the film industry itself, a shift from exhibitors (that is, the movie theaters themselves), who had from the beginning enjoyed much of the power in the industry as a whole, to one in which the producers/distributors (like Nikkatsu, etc.) began to dominate, forcing non-affiliated theaters to sign contracts or grant concessions in order to have access to the production company's films. Gerow has argued that this power shift, for Nikkatsu, was more or less complete by 1924. See Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 173.

[16] The first instance of this term, or more precisely 'shin *jidaigeki*' (new period drama) was in fact also in 1923, in reference to the 1923 film *Onna to kaizoku*, based on a script by the then up-and-coming auteur Itō Daisuke. The term comes from the Kabuki term 'jidai mono' (period piece), but there was some resistance to using a term like '*jidaigeki*' because of its similarity to *kyūgeki*, with which the new-style period films wished to contrast themselves, and thus the addition of 'new' to the genre name. The film itself, unfortunately lost, was hailed by critics as living up to the designation of 'new', since it apparently featured flashbacks, track-in shots and other technical innovations. See Satō, *Iji no bigaku*, pp. 156-158. It is worth noting, moreover, that this trend towards 'shin' *jidaigeki* predates the earthquake (*Onna to kaizoku* was released on July 1st, 1923), so the point here is not that the earthquake caused the genre's emergence or popularity, simply that it provided optimal conditions for the fledgling genre to develop.

[17] These films were based on kōdan folk tales, which flourished during the Meiji period before giving way in the Taishō period to much longer, more sophisticated (i.e., without the unambiguous presentation of good versus evil common to the kōdan genre) historical fiction stories serialized in the newspapers, particularly by high-profile novelists like Osaragi Jirō. This trend from oral to written literature as the basis for historical fiction films mirrors a trend within Japanese society of the Taishō period—particularly the younger generation, which had a higher literacy rate than any generation in Japanese history heretofore—towards leisure reading. Indeed, it was only from the end of the Taishō era, and the surge in people willing and able to read for pleasure, that we can really speak of "mass literature" (taishū bungaku), a process that received a big boost after *Kingu* magazine began serially publishing jidai shōsetsu (period novels) in 1925. See Tanaka Masasumi, " *Jidaigeki* eiga shiron no tame no yobiteki shokōsatsu (senzen hen)", in Tsutsui et al, eds., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nani ka* (chapter one), p. 30.

[18] Onoe was truly a megastar, despite his films being marketed mostly towards children; Tanaka Masasumi has pointed out that in November 1921, one of his films, *Kusunoki kō geki*, was shown to Crown Prince Hirohito (in place of the ailing Taishō emperor), and that word of this showing greatly increased both the popularity of Onoe's films (with the particular film in question being one of the only pre-earthquake films to survive, probably due to

thru 1923,[19] to a romance and tragedy-infused genre designed to appeal to young adults.[20] Starting in 1925, the Bakumatsu had come to preeminence among settings for films of the genre to such an extent that we may speak of a "Bakumatsu boom" in Japanese cinema.[21] This was partly due to the fact that, after the Kantō earthquake devastated Tokyo, the only remaining film production center was in Kyoto, which soon began to flourish.[22] As a film center, moreover, Kyoto had been devoted largely to *kyūgeki* (old-style dramas)[23] and after them period films, from the very beginning, leading to optimal conditions for the production of movies set in Kyoto, and Bakumatsu films were a logical choice as they are almost always set in Kyoto; even better, they were the perfect vehicles for a youthful dynamic of rebellion, which the industry calculated would best display the new-style period film's differences from older models and thus appeal not merely to children but also, or indeed primarily, to youths.[24] Apart from issues of content, it is

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enhanced interest in seeing what had been shown to the Crown Prince, and thus becoming a part of this new, illustrious imagined community), but also the prestige of the medium itself. See Tanaka, "*Jidaigeki* eiga shiron no tame no yobiteki shokōsatsu (senzen hen)," in Tsutsui et al, eds., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nani ka* (chapter one), p. 22.

[19] Tomita Mika has argued that it was not the earthquake that caused the collapse of Onoe's era (of simple good versus evil kōdan tales), but the release, two months prior to the September 1st quake, of Makino Shōzō's *Ukiyoeshi*, which to her mind was able to show characters unadulterated by European or American (filmic or story-telling) influence. As a genre, period films, having embraced both the new print culture and the culture of spectacle of the Taishō era, "baptized by modernism," were now "the apparatus of a massive popular culture which produced the history and memory of the nation" (kokuminteki na rekishi to kioku wo seisan suru kyodai na taishū bunka sōchi no *jidaigeki*). Tomita, "Makino eiga *jidaigeki*: Hansha shiau media", in Iwamoto ed., *Jidaigeki densetsu*, pp. 116, 118.

[20] Ibid., 159. Tanaka Masasumi makes a similar point but emphasizes that the newly sexualized (or romanticized) genre was designed to appeal especially to young women; see Tsutsui ed., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nanika*, pp. 26-27.

[21] Satō Tadao has demonstrated that beginning in 1925, and spiking further in 1926 (see Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 285), there was a sustained surge in production of movies set in the Bakumatsu. (One of the most well-known, and popular, was the 1925 film adaptation, by the Rengō eiga geijutsuka kyōkai, of the hit Shinkokugeki play of 1919, *Tsukigata Hanpeita*, which made a huge 70,000 yen profit during its week; *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi*, p. 79.) This surge continued thru the 1945 (and resurged after the Occupation). See Satō, *Kimi wa...*, pp. 142-5. One of the first and most intriguing-sounding examples of the boom was *Ijin musume to bushi* (1925, dir. by Inoue Kintarō and starring Bantsuma, with an all-Japanese cast despite the Caucasian roles) a lost film depicting an 1869 tragic romance between a Captain Bates's daughter and a Christian samurai, Saheita. *Recalling the Treasures,* pp. 21-23.

[22] Kyoto was ideally situated for an explosion in film production because of its embarrassment of riches in locations (especially for history films) and exhibition halls to show films, artisanal skills (of costumes, set design, etc., due to the long Kabuki tradition), and actors (from Kabuki). See Tsutsui ed., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nanika*, pp. 69-71.

[23] All the biggest names in period filmmaking—Makino Shōzō, dubbed the "father of Japanese cinema", and Japan's first star, Onoe Matsunosuke, nicknamed "Medama no Macchan" due to his tendency, inherited from his training in Kabuki—to open his eyes as widely as possible for dramatic effect during a *mie* (glare-pose), were based in Kyoto.

[24] Tanaka Masasumi argues for this desire to show youthful rebellion, along with the earthquake having made Kyoto such an attractive setting, as the key causes of the Bakumatsu boom. Tsutsui ed., *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nanika*, p. 28.

important to note regarding form that period films, even more than films set in contemporary times, were in sync with the newest worldwide developments in form and style, especially in their use of editing techniques, which in climaxes could produce a truly frenetic pace, in harmony with worldwide trends in cutting-edge editing and pacing such as can be seen in the 1923 French hit *La Roue*,[25] which was shown in Japan in January 1926.[26] There is some evidence that in addition to its advanced technical aspects, period film production was also socially progressive; for instance, the first known instance of a female scriptwriter in the history of Japanese cinema was Hayashi Yoshiko in 1925, for the first *Kurama Tengu* film.[27]

From 1925 onwards, just as Japan's domestic film industry had achieved a greater than 50% share of the overall market,[28] most major studios[29] scrambled to capitalize on a sudden spike in consumer interest for crowd-pleasing stories dealing with Bakumatsu-era historical events.[30]

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[25] David Bordwell has argued that 1920's period film action climaxes often reached an ASL (average shot length) of a mere 0.5 seconds, a truly flamboyant editing tempo rivaled only by Hollywood action movies and Soviet montage. See Bordwell, "Visual Style in Japanese Cinema, 1925-1945", in *Film History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1995, p. 19.

[26] First released in Feb. 1923 in France, the film was later re-edited by Gance into a shortened international version, which, according to an anonymous Asahi shinbun review, was slated to play in Japan on the 26th of January 1926, in time for the editing techniques and pacing to be seen by (and influence) Japanese period film filmmakers just entering the Bakumatsu boom. Jan. 18, 1926, "Shin eigahyō: Tetsuro no shirobara," *Asahi shinbun* morning ed., p. 8.

[27] There's no doubt Hayashi Yoshiko wrote the script; see, among many other sources, *Purogurammu eigashi*, p. 71 for a chirashi, from the Asakusa Fujikan in Tokyo and dating from Aug. 12, 1925, advertising Onoe's *Kurama Tengu* and listing "Hayashi Yoshiko" as kyakuhonsha. Hayashi was alleged to have been notoriously hard to please; in his otherwise favorable review of *Kurama Tengu,* Yamamoto Rokuha called her a 'nanbutsu' in a sympathetic passage on director Takahashi: "for him to be able to create such a fine film despite being constrained by Hayashi and executive producer Kōki cannot have been easy." *Kinema junpō,* no. 206 (Sept. 21, 1925), p. 38.

[28] See Anderson and Richie, p. 456. Gerow has pointed out, however, that in terms of number of reels, it was actually in 1924 that the Japanese industry achieved a greater than 50% market share vis-a-vis American films. See Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 172.

[29] Note that Makino Shōzō and his company, unlike their rival companies, produced surprisingly few Bakumatsu mono, a fact alluded to as part of a marketing appeal in *Makino*, the film fan magazine devoted to Makino eiga seisakujo and its productions. In the 25th issue, from Sept. 1927, an advertisement for the 10-reel Kurama Tengu movie *Zoku Kakubei jishi ansatsu ninbetsuchō* uses the rarity of a Bakumatsu film coming out of the Makino studio as reason for going to see it: "Bakumatsu mono no sukunai Makino ni hisashiburi ni arawareru Bakumatsu wo butai to shita kyōmi ōki monogatari." See *Makino*, p. 365. But their rare earlier efforts at Bakumatsu films had won over the critics: a review of the summer 1925 *Ikedaya sōdō* even claimed it was Makino's direction that distinguished this film from the dozens of others about the same historical event. *Kinema junpō*, no. 206 (Sept. 21, 1925), p. 38.

[30] Movie producers were obviously aware of the sudden increase in interest among the people in the romance of Bakumatsu history; in a one-page ad, appearing on page 28 of *Kinema junpō* no. 203 (Aug. 21, 1925), for the film *Shinsengumi,* the text proclaims, rather patronizingly, "recently the people have...become taken with new-style

Movie-houses began filling with straightforward retellings of the myth of the Bakumatsu and the Restoration as the heroic triumph of imperial patriots over dastardly pro-Tokugawa villains,[31] and adherents of a culture industry view[32] might be excused for worrying that with all the emphasis on this retelling of the founding myth of the modern Japanese state, the dominant code of Restoration-as-victory-for-the-nation would only grow stronger, and the victors' former enemies would remain safely marginalized.[33]

Unfortunately for would-be ideologues, however, the cinema is not well suited to the wholesale transmission of ideologically charged messages, even with a relatively relaxed censorship apparatus such as that which the Japanese film industry enjoyed in the 1920s.[34] Despite what Horkheimer and Adorno famously claimed, culture is not really, or not only, an 'industry' and its products are simply not able to convert citizens into brainwashed automatons.[35]

Kōdan monogatari about recent (*kindai*) historical events...and this film is just such a story, meaning it is truly the perfect form of entertainment for the people (hon eiga wa masa ni minshū to shite no zekkō no goraku de arimasu)."

[31] A good example is the above-mentioned *Kurama Tengu*, in which, judging from the reviews of the day, Kondō and the Shinsengumi are irredeemably evil, involved in a sinister conspiracy that is determined to murder anyone supporting the Imperial Court (a climactic moment is when Kondō strikes down the innocent loyalist hero Nakahara). Two female characters were given significant roles, one of which, Okiyo, was a fighting role. Women were also prominently displayed in a one-page ad appearing in the 206th issue (Sept. 21, 1925) of *Kinema junpō*, on page 32, an ad which relied heavily on Nikkatsu's brand-name recognition, "Teihyō aru Nikkatsu *jidaigeki*", and proclaimed "Zehitomo goikken wo kō" (It definitely invites a look!). See *Kinema junpō* no. 201 (Aug. 1, 1925), p. 26 for the anonymous plot summary, one of the only windows onto this now-lost film.

[32] See Adorno and Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry", p. 120.

[33] A typical example of this sort of straightforward good (pro-imperial) versus evil (pro-Tokugawa) tale is *Chōkon* (1926, dir. Itō Daisuke, only a small fragment extant) about a loyalist hero, played by Itō regular leading man Ōkōchi Denjirō, hunted by the Shinsengumi; the pathos is apparently all with Ōkōchi's character, and there is no hint at a redeeming nobility among enemies like Kondō. Nor was this indicative of any sort of personal animosity against the Shinsengumi on the part of Itō; just three years after the trend-setting revisionism of *Sonnō jōi*, Itō came out with his own valorizing project, *Kōbō Shinsengumi*, starring Ōkōchi as a heroic Kondō Isami, and then in 1931, he had Ōkōchi reprise the role of a sympathetically portrayed Ii Naosuke (Ōkōchi also played his illegitimate son, and the main protagonist, unwitting (and Oedipal!) patricide Niiro Tsuruchiyo—though in the hit 1931 theme song, singer Tokuyama Tamaki misread "Niiro" as "Shinnō") in his own version of the Sakuradamon Incident, *Samurai Nippon*, the first filmic adaptation of the eponymous hit novel (there have been four more adaptations since then, the most well-known in the West being Mifune Toshirō's 1965 adaptation *Samurai* (or, in English, *Samurai Assassin*).

[34] After 1925, censorship of films was centralized under the Home Ministry, but it was not until 1939 that preproduction censorship was introduced; until that point, censorship was post-production (but pre-distribution), meaning censors viewed only the finished prints. And they exercised a surprisingly hands-off approach, with the vast majority of films, especially domestic films, passing without cuts. See for example Table XI in Kasza, p. 137.

[35] For how Adorno and Horkheimer feel that the mass produced and individually indistinguishable products of the culture industry stunts viewer imagination and naturalizes what is seen as 'realistic', see Adorno and Horkheimer,

Such a view overestimates the coercive potential of an authorial 'message' and undervalues the ability of each viewer to make meaning in his or her own way, for example by decoding the message differently than its creators intended.[36] Resistance to the dominant or hegemonic view is possible—and almost inevitable, since the making of popular culture is always potentially an act of resistance against the dominant class via creative (mis)appropriation of its cultural products.[37]

For example, audiences in 1928 viewing an on-screen portrayal of ubiquitous villain Kondō Isami as noble enough to let his opponent escape (fig. 4) might have interpreted this according to the hegemonic preferred reading, namely that even such a staunch villain as Kondō can recognize the pro-imperial hero's value to the country of Japan. But many audience members might just as easily have resisted this simple view, responding more positively to Kondō himself and arriving at a negotiated reading in which both sides of the pro-imperial/pro-Tokugawa conflict were honorable and praiseworthy.[38] And some might have taken their resistance to the extreme, generating an oppositional reading in which *only* Kondō and the doomed pro-Tokugawa side are noble, rejecting common-sense views about the loyalists (*shishi*) as heroes.[39]

"The Culture Industry", p. 126. For a pithy refutation, e.g., " A homogeneous, externally produced culture cannot be sold ready-made to the masses: culture simply does not work like that....Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry", see Fiske, *Reading Popular Culture*, p. 19.

[36] Hall still believed, however, that the encoder was able to shape how the message would be received (or decoded) by the viewer, and that it was possible to prod viewers towards what he called the 'preferred reading', i.e. one decoded entirely within the dominant code. See Hall, "Encoding/Decoding", p. 98.

[37] Central to Gramsci's notion of ideology as struggle is the notion of resistance always challenging and never totally capitulating to hegemony; as such, even in Bakumatsu films which seem to be a wholehearted endorsement of the hegemonic view that the victors of the Boshin war were heroes and the vanquished were villains, we might expect to find hints of a negotiated resistance to that view, and sure enough, in Bakumatsu films produced in the 1920s, one often finds the trope of the noble enemy (especially Shinsengumi commander Kondō Isami), which involves a subtle shift of emphasis from the ultimate results of his actions (defeat, death) to the praiseworthy manner in which he acted (with honor, as a worthy opponent). See for example the sympathetic portrayal of Kondō in *Kurama Tengu* (1928), discussed in more detail below and in the chapter on Kurama Tengu.

[38] Restoring Kondō to on-screen nobility and honor is an excellent example of Fiske and Hartley's notion of 'claw back', in which the bardic function of an audiovisual medium, combined with a given (audiovisual) text, tries to nudge a marginalized figure back into socio-centrality. See Fiske and Hartley, *Reading Television*, p. 65.

[39] Terms like 'dominant code', 'preferred reading', 'negotiated code/reading' and 'oppositional code/reading' are taken from Hall, "Encoding/Decoding", p. 98. For those who might be skeptical of the possibility of oppositional readings, Fiske has pointed out several fascinating examples of marginalized groups, notably Australian Aborigines, reading certain audiovisual texts in overtly oppositional ways, for example by rooting for the Indians (Native Americans),

One of the most important factors in determining how a given viewer would have made meaning of a filmic text like 1928's *Kurama Tengu* is regional origin: a person with roots in Aizu, or anywhere in the generally pro-Tokugawa Kantō, might be culturally disposed to give a more positive reading of Kondō's actions than a person from, say, Kyoto (where the film was made, by a largely Kansai cast and crew[40]), who might have grown up hearing stories of the savagery of the Shinsengumi. Class also must have played a role; the descendants of former samurai probably had different notions of what constitutes noble behavior than descendants of commoners, and would have seen Kondō's actions in light of these cultural differences, though Satō Tadao has suggested that the sixty-year gap between the events of the Bakumatsu and the sudden rise in popularity of their filmic depictions was due to generational change[41] and what I call the "loyalist bias," in which many in Japan seemed to (want to) forget their commoner roots and act as though descended from the victorious patriots.[42]

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not the white heroes, when watching American Westerns, or for the black character in a largely white patriarchal television program like *Diff'rent Strokes*. See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 20.

[40] The film was produced by Arashi Kanjūrō Productions, located in Kyoto and centered around the Kansai-based Arakan himself. There were also three other actors with the last name 'Arashi' appearing in the film credits.

[41] There is evidence of a sort, beyond Satō's speculation, for generational change as being important to changes in patterns of popularity. In his discussion of popular hero Kunisada Chūji, Kamiyama Akira argues that Kunisada's lack of popularity during the Meiji period, and his sudden rise in popularity thereafter, was probably due to generational attachment to one's hometown (*furusato*), so wandering (*matatabi*) heroes—and this would doubtless apply also to *dappan rōnin* (samurai who left their domain without authorization, becoming lordless) like Sakamoto Ryōma—couldn't be popular until people shed their local and regional loyalties. See Kamiyama Akira, "Ninkyō mono no suimyaku", in Iwamoto Kenji ed., *Jidaigeki densetsu* (chapter seven), p. 177. Moreover, the example given below, of the Home Minister rejecting an 1889 petition to honor Ii Naosuke because Naosuke had overseen the execution of Yoshida Shōin and the Home Minister had a personal connection to Shōin, indicates the strong feelings of the generation that had personally experienced the events of the Bakumatsu; but forty years later, not a single oligarch remained in the government, and those with personal experience of the Bakumatsu had almost all died, setting the stage for a new generation who learned of the Bakumatsu primarily through popular media like film, and had no deep-seated experience-based resentments coloring their interpretations of Japan's second founding myth.

[42] This 'loyalist bias' is a nod to Conrad Totman's "Meiji bias," discussed in some detail below. Satō Tadao argues that the visual predominance of the largely Satsuma and Chōshū loyalists in filmic retellings of the Bakumatsu/ Restoration, and the near-total absence of representatives of the (non-samurai) "people," led to a slow psychological shift in Taishō and early Shōwa-era Japanese conceptions of self/identity: everyone started to act as though s/he were descended from loyalists hailing from Satsuma or Chōshū domains. Satō acknowledges that both resentment against the victors and apathy among (former) commoners towards the doings of samurai elites characterized earlier Meiji generations, and notes change did not come innocently—he points out the Meiji emperor personally intervened in elementary school education by requesting that episodes of popular resistance or protest (like the *ee ja nai ka* dancing in the late Bakumatsu, perhaps) in Japanese history be glossed over in favor of more orderly periods.

It is important to note that filmic depictions of the Bakumatsu, with their focus almost entirely on loyalists from Satsuma or Chōshū and their subsequent invitation to (or interpellation of) viewers to accept a subject position as (or in other words to become, for the duration of the film) one of those loyalists, *themselves* reinforced—indeed, may have created—the loyalist bias.[43] And once a particular representational pattern, such as a focus on the loyalists, had been established, viewers would have started to judge a given film's historicity, not according to the factual details of the plot, but according to how closely it matched the image the viewers already had in mind of that period of history, creating an ever more strongly reinforcing feedback loop.[44] This particular loop, what I have dubbed the loyalist bias, was especially useful to the cause of national unity[45] because by implying all Japanese were spiritually descended from Satsuma or Chōshū, a major cause of resentment in post-Restoration Japan—the stranglehold over the government by those two domains—could be ameliorated.[46] As vicarious victors in the

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In the end, Satō makes a generational argument in an attempt to explain the sudden popularity of Bakumatsu films, noting it was almost exactly 60 years after the events of the Bakumatsu had occurred that their filmic depictions exploded in popularity, suggesting that 60 years was sufficient for the Japanese collectively to shed resentment and begin celebrating Satsuma-Chōshū loyalists as national heroes. Satō, *Kimi wa jidaigeki wo mita ka*, pp. 145-147.

[43] For more on how film texts strongly suggest certain subject positions, see Fiske, *Television Culture*, p. 25.

[44] Fiske, drawing upon Keith Tribe's 1981 "History and the Production of Memories", explains how viewers make sense of 'realistic' representations of history on film: they experience a recognition effect, which leads them to think "that's how it was", but that effect is based not on the facts but because the film *looks like* the body of films on that topic (and thus their mental image of the period, which was formed by watching those films). See ibid., p. 30. Aaron Gerow has noted this effect among Japanese filmgoers, who grew angered, not because a film gave a fictionalized account per se, but rather when it departed from 'known' facts. See Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity,* p. 49.

[45] The loyalist (*shishi*) bias continued thru war's end and indeed into the postwar period (constituting evidence of the transwar nature of Japanese cinema; see dissertation conclusion). For example, the high-profile film *Dragon Cape* (*Ryū no misaki,* dir. Shirai Sentarō), released in early Jan. 1945 and starring Kataoka Chiezō, contains explicit dialogue about how both sides of the Bakumatsu conflict, whether delineated as pro-imperial and pro-Tokugawa, *jōi* or *kaikoku*, weren't real enemies because they "actually want the same thing but simply chose a different path," more evidence for the valorizing process at work (Kataoka's ardent expulsionist (*jōi*) character having slain a former friend and *kaikoku* proponent, he becomes the target of a revenge vendetta before eventually winning his hunters over with his sincerity). The relevant lines, which are reiterated later on, first occur towards the middle of the film.

[46] That Satsuma and Chōshū dominated the Meiji government is not in doubt. As just one simple example, Japan's early Prime Ministers were virtually all from Chōshū or Satsuma; initially they alternated, with #1 Itō and #3 Yamagata from Chōshū and #2 Kuroda and #4 Matsukata from Satsuma, but even when the sequence was interrupted, as by #5 Ōkuma Shigenobu (Saga), #7 Saionji (Kyoto), #10 Hara Kei (Mutsu) and #11 Takahashi (Edo), overall dominance by the two former domains continued for decades. From 1885 when Itō first took the office till 1918 when Hara became Prime Minister, of those 33 years almost 28 saw the highest office in the hands of Chōshū or Satsuma. And furthermore, Saga and Kyoto were both also part of the pro-imperial alliance (and 1910s PMs

Restoration, viewers could be magnanimous in victory and extend an olive branch to foes like Naosuke, acknowledging their patriotism, and enjoy depictions of the enemy's tragic demise.[47]

Yet Satō's claims, ultimately, are based upon the production side of the film industry—the encoders, rather than the decoders. Even if it were the case that movie producers were actively promoting a sort of "loyalist-centric" ideology, leading to a preferred reading in which "to be Japanese" requires the pretence of illustrious loyalist ancestry, there is no reason to believe that those actually watching such films as *Kurama Tengu* and its depiction of Kondō would obediently accept this loyalist bias. Moreover, Shimoda has marshaled plenty of evidence to suggest that regional identity continued to thrive in places like Aizu, so it is unclear the extent to which Satō's claims pertain to the entire country.[48] Perhaps the idea that 'we are all descended from loyalists' was a mindset unique to the modern metropolis of Tokyo, though even there—and even more so when considering the country as a whole—a multiplicity of subject positions would remain available to movie-goers, as suggested by the possibilities for negotiated or oppositional readings from the Kondō example above. In a nontrivial sense, there were as many meanings as there were individual viewers.

Katsura and Terauchi were from Chōshū and Yamamoto Gonbei from Satsuma). As per the generational argument, it was not until the thirty-first PM, Okada Keisuke, that Japan had its first prime minister who had been born post-Restoration (he was born in late January 1868, and was PM from 1934-6).

[47] An excellent example of the film industry attempting to capitalize on 'partiality for the defeated' (*hōgan biiki*) is the Aug. 1925 movie *Shinsengumi* (lost), which evidently relied on the melodrama of the star-crossed lovers trope for its appeal. The producers were clearly aware of the sudden increase in interest among the people in the romantic aspects of Bakumatsu history; in a one-page ad for the film appearing on page 28 of *Kinema junpō* no. 203 (Aug. 21, 1925), both stills hint at star-crossed love by showing a woman, Kayo, embracing Shinsengumi member Orinosuke, each gazing with forlorn passion into each others' eyes. The text of the ad proclaims, rather patronizingly, "recently the people have...become taken with new-style *kōdan monogatari* about recent (*kindai*) historical events...and this film is just such a story, meaning it is truly the perfect form of entertainment for the people (hon eiga wa masa ni minshū to shite no zekkō no goraku de arimasu)." This film earned quite a glowing review ("no doubt about it—this movie possesses great value") in issue 204 (Sept. 1, 1925) of *Kinema junpō*, p. 42. The acting is especially praised (except for that of the "mis-cast" Komatsu Midori) but the cinematography and direction are lauded as well.

[48] As outlined in his book, *Lost and Found*, for example when politically charged performances (at such events as funerals) of regional identity continued into the 1920s in Aizu. See Shimoda, pp. 83-84.



Figure 4: Kondō as noble enemy, but how noble? Only the audience can decide. From 1928's *Kurama Tengu*, 35:30. Note the hero treatment, with both a flattering low-angle CU of and high-key glamour lighting on the face of Yamamoto Reizaburō, who, tellingly, was known for playing heroes, not villains: Katsura Kogorō, or Kondō after his apotheosis.

This simple example illustrates the extreme difficulty in determining what "the Japanese" might have thought of a given film, and indeed, exposes the deep rifts that continued to plague "Japanese" identity for decades after the Meiji Restoration. There are many challenges associated with trying to recover hints of filmgoer reactions in prewar and wartime Japan, and many limitations affecting the evidentiary base, which consists largely of ticket sales—rather unreliable statistics, for a variety of reasons discussed in the chapter on romances—compounded by the fact that even these shaky evidentiary foundations for claims about viewer response to a given film are not available in all years, most notably in 1945. Despite these problems, however,

trying to ascertain what meanings audience members may have made out of a given film is the key to uncovering the reasons for certain films' great popularity, and other, seemingly similar films' failure to attract viewers. The question of how viewers might have interpreted a given Bakumatsu film hinges in part on whether audiences were basically content with the Japan of the present—since it was the Bakumatsu that set the course the future Japanese state would take—or whether they felt dissatisfied with the present in some way.

It is very useful to consider, then, what might have happened when an audience encountered a filmic text like the above-mentioned *Kurama Tengu* (1928). With its relatively straightforward endorsement of the hegemonic view of the Meiji Restoration as valuable progress, won though the heroic struggle of the loyalists against recalcitrant traditionalists like the Shinsengumi, did many accept that hegemonic interpretation of Bakumatsu history without any qualms, or did they find such a film to be more of what John Fiske calls a 'producerly' text, by means of which each audience member could produce a socially and culturally determined meaning for the film, a meaning, moreover, that resists simple capitulation to the hegemonic view?[49] Isolde Standish insists that movies like *Kurama Tengu*, with their unambiguous portrayals of loyalists like Kurama as heroes (augmented by the squeaky clean star personas of megastars like Arakan) and their opponents as villains, can only reaffirm the myth of an omniscient patriarchy, but such an interpretation ascribes entirely too much coercive power to the hegemonic code, and summarily discounts the possibility that audience members could resist that ideology, appropriating the polysemic films for their own (possibly oppositional) purposes.[50]

[49] With this coining of a third category of text, i.e. the 'producerly', Fiske seeks to expand upon the categories of Roland Barthes, who divided texts into readerly (easy to read and understand) and writerly (avant-garde, opaque, requiring the reader to 'rewrite' it in order to make sense of it) texts. For Fiske, producerly texts have elements of both Barthes' categories, combining the easy accessibility of a readerly text with a *potential* for creative 'rewriting'. See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 83.
[50] Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema*, p. 107.

In fact, only cultural products felt, for whatever reason, to be relevant to their users (or in the case of film, their viewers) can achieve popularity and become popular culture, as the Japanese state later discovered to its dismay when trying to foist off overly-propagandistic national policy (kokusaku) films on its audience during the Pacific War, only to find that people simply would not go see films that failed the relevance test.[51] So the task before would-be analysts of Japanese popular culture of this period is, first of all, to focus on what was actually popular and end the excessive focus on auteurist films that few went to see;[52] only then can one hope to recover traces of *why* certain films became popular and others did not.[53]

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[51] Furukawa has outlined the ways in which a film's national policy leanings were almost invariably in inverse proportion to its box office success (as a measure of its popularity). In other words, the more straightforwardly pro-state or 'fascistic' a wartime film was, the less popular. This, in Fiskean terms, is surely due to the greater difficulty in using such an ideological film as a cultural resource from which its viewer/reader can make it into popular culture (though some kokusaku eiga, notably the most popular of all, Hawaii Malay oki kaisen, may have achieved such popularity precisely because they include long scenes, such as of sports and other light-hearted 'training' scenes, that are entirely unrelated to the ideological war aims of the state). A good example is Tōhō's 1943 *Kessen no ōsora he*, which Furukawa labeled 'fascist' when he saw it; he also notes, however, that in terms of popularity, this overtly fascistic film was near the bottom for films made in 1943, an unimpressive 50th-ranked out of 63. See Furukawa, p. 195. The government also manipulated box office statistics, as with the national policy war film *Katō hayabusa sentōtai*, which was the top-ranked film by ticket sales for the first half of 1944, but only thanks to the inclusion of sales for double feature programming (in which the government forced exhibitors to show it as one of the two films, leaving wide open the question of whether filmgoers went to the theaters primarily to see this government-mandated film (unlikely) or whether some, perhaps most audience members left *before* seeing it (or arrived after it was over), having seen the other film in the double feature). Without such dubious ticket sales, when we look only at number of admissions to the individual theaters, it plummets to 12th out of 29 films for the first half of 1944. Furukawa, p. 201.

[52] One oft-studied film, Mizoguchi's 1942 *Genroku chūshingura*, was a box-office failure, so it is hard to see how this film could be taken as a representation of circa-1942 Japaneseness. See Gerow, "Narrating the Nation-ality of a Cinema", in Tansman ed., *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, p. 187.

[53] Darrell William Davis, for example, has developed a fascinating theory that some wartime Japanese films, notably the above-mentioned *Genroku chūshingura*, had a 'monumental' stylistic quality about them. But he not only acknowledges, he seems proud of the fact that such films were neither numerous, nor particularly popular: "There is little in common between the monumental style and genuinely popular cinema", a comment that seems to single out films that are *not* popular as therefore worthy of special scholarly attention. Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness*, p. 42. While attention to stylistically unusual or aesthetically masterful but (or perhaps more accurately, 'and therefore') unpopular films is doubtless a worthy pursuit on purely aesthetic grounds, for a Fiskean theorist trying to understand a given time period's popular culture itself, this scholarly thrust is off the mark, since only popular texts have the potential to shed light on the thoughts and anxieties of "the people", not avant-garde films audiences voted against with their wallets (and, in the case of Japan, with their feet, wandering out of uninteresting film programs or staying only for a portion of a program). Nor do I mean to single out Davis; since the early days of Anderson and Richie, scholarship on Japanese film has focused on films of great artistic quality and auteur studies. Such work, interesting aesthetically, cannot identify what Japanese moviegoers were thinking, or what meanings they made, when they saw films, since the films people actually went to see have been ignored as 'lowbrow' by scholarship in both languages.

Bakumatsu films, from the very beginning of the boom in 1925, were quite popular indeed.[54] But despite the trend in later scholarship to ignore popular films and focus more on little-known (or seen) aesthetic gems, in silent film-era Japan[55] prestigious film honors occasionally went to Bakumatsu films, their "lowbrow" popularity notwithstanding. For example, Japan's most famous film magazine, *Kinema Junpō*, awarded *Kaijin* ("Ashes", Murata Minoru directing), a tragedy about a supporter of Saigō Takamori in the 1877 Seinan War (the final chapter of the Bakumatsu, inasmuch as it was the last challenge to the Satsuma-Chōshū clique's rule of Japan), second place in their Best Ten list for 1929,[56] second place in the 1930 list to *Senpu jidai* (directed by Shiba Seika, an "enlightenment romance" (*kaikageki*) set in 1871),[57] and third place in their 1927 list to Nikkatsu's hit—and the central film of this chapter—*Sonnō jōi*.[58]

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[54] The notion of the 'popular', like that of 'the people', is difficult to pin down despite the seemingly persuasive evidence of box office returns, which themselves are only available from 1942 thru early 1944; for example, comedian-turned-film star Enomoto "Enoken" Ken'ichi was enormously "popular" in the 1930s, but the misogynistic tone of his films ensured he attracted largely male audiences and was shunned by female moviegoers. See Furukawa, p. 38. It may well be imagined that similar divisions among 'the people', such as class, age, and so forth, would make themselves felt to a greater or lesser extent with all films, including Bakumatsu films, further complicating analysis.

[55] The number of Bakumatsu films earning critical acclaim declined precipitously after the advent of the talkie, perhaps partly because of the oft-reported voice problems of the main period film stars, in particular Bantsuma (weak-voiced), Ōkōchi (mild stutter), and Arakan and Hasegawa (thick Kansai accents, something the film world did not begin to accept until Mizoguchi's 1936 *Naniwa ereji*, forcing these men to speak in an initially rather stilted 'standard' Japanese accent in their earliest sound films).

[56] For more on *Kaijin,* see *Recalling the Treasures of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 101-104. Note that I consider this lost film to be a period film, despite being set past the unstated temporal boundary of 1868 supposedly dividing modern-day and period films, because a) it was made at Nikkatsu Uzumasa, a period film studio, and b) its lead actor, Mimasa Yutaka, was known primarily as a period film star.

[57] See *Recalling the Treasures of Japanese Cinema,* pp. 122-24.

[58] *Kinema Junpō*, or *KineJun* as it was and is often known, from its inception had a rather uneasy ontological status, being marketed both towards casual film fans (or in other words, those who were going to see popular films like *Sonnō jōi*) and film critics (i.e., those interested in avant-garde works). This has to do with the manner in which it was founded: it began as a critical magazine (hyōron zasshi) for film students in 1919, and started producing its famous Best Ten lists in 1924, but also kept a heavy popular focus in the form of the attention given to foreign films, particularly foreign actresses (as evidenced by the covers of each issue, virtually every one of which is adorned with a famous (usually American) female film star), as well as attention to groundbreaking Japanese films, whether they were popular or for a more limited audience. For a film like *Sonnō jōi* to be selected as #3 for 1927, then, indicates that its popularity was not necessarily an obstacle to critical praise, and moreover that it was perceived as being groundbreaking in some way, a fact later film historians, it would seem, have forgotten (since the film is more or less universally ignored in the literature on Japanese film). For more on the origins of *KineJun*, see Furukawa, p. 46. Note also that in the 80th Anniversary Edition of *KineJun,* which contains their Best Ten lists from 1926 thru 2006, *Sonnō jōi* is listed not by its actual title, *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi*, but by its more politically correct (or at least less politically ambitious) shortened title of *Sonnō jōi*. See *Kinema Junpō Best Ten 80 Years Edition*, p. 15.

Case Study: *Sonnō jōi* and the changing mythologies of the Bakumatsu

Sonnō jōi presents as its hegemonic view a revisionist interpretation of Bakumatsu history that is surprisingly progressive, at least potentially. Since it is the mythologies of the film, not the filmic depiction's 'historical accuracy', that is of critical importance in recovering glimmers of the uses and meanings the audience may have made out of the experience of seeing it, I will say little comparing the 'actual' events to how the filmic version differs from them, except of course where those differences seem suggestive of a major shift in interpretation. In any case, my purpose is not to evaluate the film for accuracy, or for whether viewers were being 'misled' by the hegemonic viewpoint presented therein; my focus is precisely on the mythology being shown in (and constructed by) the film, not whether Japanese subjects in 1927 were being taught a factually (in)correct view of history as they watched it. Furthermore, the preferred reading of the film and its message of national unity notwithstanding, audiences were free to arrive at negotiated or even aberrant/oppositional readings or other appropriations, especially in such a long film (17 reels, or roughly four hours) containing such a wealth of material.[59]

Turning to the film itself, a short synopsis, or an account of what David Bordwell calls the 'referential meaning' of the film, will be helpful in orienting the close analysis to follow.[60] In its extant form, *Sonnō jōi* tells the story of the events of 1853-1860,[61] beginning with the shock

[59] Originally, *Sonnō jōi* was an incredible 4500 meters long, and even with hand-accelerated frame rates during the action sequences, the 35mm film stock on which it was printed (and as Okada Hidenori has pointed out, all such stock was imported, probably from Eastman Kodak, since no genuine domestic film stock was created in Japan until 1934, by Fuji; see Okada, "Nitrate Film Production in Japan", in Miyao ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, p. 265) would probably have had a running time, at 4500 meters, of nearly four and a half hours.

[60] In chapter two of Film Art, "The Significance of Film Form", Bordwell and Thompson suggest four categories of film meaning: referential (the plot summary), explicit (the "point" of the film, often encapsulated in a pithy quotation from the film's dialogue, like "There's no place like home" for *The Wizard of Oz*), implicit (a more symbolic interpretation of the film, as when *The Wizard of Oz* is said to be an allegory of adolescence, etc.), and symptomatic (what the film suggests about the dominant social ideologies of the time in which it was made). See Bordwell and Thompson, Film *Art: An Introduction*, pp. 62-64.

[61] The film rather confusingly conflates the arrival of Townsend Harris (which was in 1856) with the original advent of the Black Ships (1853, returning in 1854) by portraying the captain of the ship on which Harris arrives (historically, the ship was the USS San Jacinto, and its captain was Commodore James Armstrong, though in film

of the American 'black ships', outlining Ii Naosuke's rise to the penultimate position of power in the Shogunate (despite spirited opposition by political rival Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito) in response to this troublesome threat and several instances of his exercise of this power to curb xenophobic excesses or circumvent the imperial court, who are reluctant to sign a treaty with the foreigners, before culminating in Naosuke's assassination by loyalists from Mito, who were furious over his lèse-majesté in ignoring the imperial will. Speaking on Bordwell's explicit level of meaning, the primary message of the film appears to be that Naosuke, far from being a traitor, is just as much a patriot and hero as his killers; in other words, the film implicitly seeks to valorize him without vilifying his enemies the loyalists, quite a difficult balancing act, all the while maintaining a focus on samurai elites and denigrating the common folk through the symbolic demotion of Seki Tetsunosuke, the historical leader of the Mito *rōnin* (lordless men of samurai rank).[62] On the film's symptomatic or ideological meanings,[63] I will say more below.

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programs of the day his name is incorrectly given as "クローデン"; see *Purogurammu eigashi*, p. 134, for the historical introduction to *Sonnō jōi*) as iconographically identical with Commodore Perry (featuring the same hat, etc. as Perry wore, and even the actor playing the ship captain resembles the historical Perry, though the depiction of the American flag on this ship at 1:22-24 contains a bizarre inaccuracy: it shows just 12 stars, not the 31 (there being 31 states in 1853) on the infamous flag Perry flew on his flagship and MacArthur brought with him on the U.S.S. Missouri for the official surrender of World War II on Sept. 2, 1945); as such, even though technically the film begins with Harris and thus must be purporting to begin in 1856, this chronology is not spelled out.

[62] The film emphasizes the poor moral stature of "the people" in two ways. Firstly, the opening sequence shows their cowardice and panic at the advent of the foreigners. Secondly, Seki Tetsunosuke is depicted as a country bumpkin, who in one comical scene is forced by his superior comrades to spend time with a woman over his frantic protests; this scene constitutes a symbolic rejection of Seki as unfit to keep company with the men, a temporary expulsion from his homosocial peer group, an assault on his dignity—and he recognizes it as such, which is why he struggles to avoid being left with the woman. Seki is shown to be a mere rustic, useful in swaying the hearts of the gullible people but no true equal of the noble leaders who magnanimously allow him to tag along, 'real' samurai/loyalists like Arimura or Moriyama, who are portrayed as the de facto leaders of the Mito *rōnin*. Historically, Seki was elected the leader of the group despite his low (barely samurai) status, but rather than use Seki's historical role to challenge conventional conceptions of status in Bakumatsu Japan, the film reinforces existing representational codes, namely those in which the higher a character's samurai status is, the higher his moral stature—and vice versa.

[63] The extent to which social circumstances have changed from 1920s to 2000s Japan is nicely illustrated by the recent valorizing of Seki in the 2010 epic film *Sakuradamon gai no hen*, the most recent big-budget depiction of the fateful assassination. In this film, Seki (played by heartthrob Ōsawa Takao) is the protagonist, and is a deeply sympathetic figure, more so than the higher-ranking co-conspirators; also, unlike in *Sonnō jōi*, the film continues after the assassination, showing in detail what happened to the assassins, especially Seki himself.

Formally, *Sonnō jōi* is a mass of contradictions. It utilizes the most advanced techniques of the day, such as iris effects, parallel editing (cross-cutting) and tracking shots, the latter particularly in the exciting opening sequence, showing the panic of the ordinary people upon the arrival of the black ships and, by contrast, the bravery and poise of the samurai as they march down to the beach.[64] But such bursts of action are sporadic, with most of the film's running time devoted to 'conversation' shots where both actors and camera are essentially static. Here, perhaps, is the clearest example of director Ikeda's contrast with the more radical period film reformer Itō Daisuke—nicknamed Idō Daisuki ("Loves Motion") for his propensity to break the convention inherited from Kabuki and have actors walk and talk at the same time.[65] Ikeda falls back, instead, on the tried and true method of filming stationary actors sonorously declaiming (via intertitles).

Moreover, in addition to the meticulous attention paid to the film's mise-en-scene, especially costumes and sets, in an attempt at historical verisimilitude, or at least continuity with the established tropes of (Edo-)period dramas, *Sonnō jōi* attempts historical accuracy in language as well. Recreating the archaic speech patterns of 1850s samurai was not without its costs; for one thing, the choice not to include furigana above the more difficult phrases in the film's often lengthy subtitles excludes children and the semi-literate from full participation. In the world of Kabuki, Ichikawa Danjurō IX had already tried during the Meiji period to use historically accurate (as opposed to representationally familiar) language, creating a new theatrical style called 'historical action plays' (*katsureki-geki*) that, like *Sonnō jōi*, also featured accurate

[64] This contrast is instantiated on a dynamic level as well: the samurai are running down the same road but in the opposite direction as the panicked commoners. The opening sequence, which also features occasional intercutting with the Americans (including some Caucasian actors, though most are Japanese), occupies the first three minutes of the film, and also features an irised eye-line match shot (2:13-16 or so) of the American captain looking through a spyglass first at the chaotic commoners, then at the beach, on which samurai have assembled in orderly fashion.
[65] See Satō, *Iji no bigaku jidaigeki eiga taizen*, pp. 156-167 for more on "Idō Daisuki" (whose first demonstration that actors could indeed walk and talk at the same time without losing dignity was with Ōkōchi Denjirō). Critics at the time generally raved about the Itō-Ōkōchi combination, as for example Sasaki Norio's lengthy review of *Meiji gannen* (1932) in the 109th issue of Kinema shuhō, May 13, 1932. See *Kinema shuhō dai jū kan*, pp. 231-232.

costumes, but the genre failed to achieve popularity due to the audiences' difficulty in understanding what was being said.[66] *Sonnō jōi* acknowledges the difficulties of trying to present the extraordinary complexity of Bakumatsu history accurately; the first intertitle offers an apology for truncating its historical account and making it easier to understand.[67]

The key climactic event in *Sonnō jōi*, and arguably the most important event of the Bakumatsu as well, was the March 1860 assassination of the Shogunate's chief minister (*tairō* or "great elder") Ii Naosuke by disgruntled *rōnin* from Mito. Naosuke, occupying a role roughly equivalent to the prime minister of today, had followed an unlikely road to political ascendancy, living in obscurity for much of his life until suddenly inheriting the lordship of Hikone domain, then rapidly rising through the Shogunate to the highest position possible—a position, moreover, like the dictatorship of republican Rome, that was only filled during state emergencies.[68] And much like the destabilizing assassinations of prime ministers Hara Kei in 1921 or Inukai Tsuyoshi in 1932, his murder sent shockwaves through both the government and the country.[69]

The 'historical facts' of Naosuke's assassination are as follows. His palanquin and guard contingent, sixty strong, was on its way from his Edo mansion to the Sakurada gate of Chiyoda (Edo) castle, trudging through the snow on the morning of March 24th, when suddenly a group

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[66] See Keene, *Dawn to the West*, pp. 401-402. Note that such audiences would also be very unlikely to experience the recognition effect described by Keith Tribe, since Danjurō IX's plays (and, perhaps, *Sonnō jōi,* albeit to a lesser extent due to the smaller gaps in representational styles between it and the main body of films on Bakumatsu history) would have differed too much from the image many audience members would have had in mind—thanks to having already seen a body of other visually or linguistically similar versions of the tale—of the period or events depicted. See Tribe, "History and the Production of Memories", in Bennett et al eds., *Popular Television and Film*, p. 324.

[67] See 0:45 of the extant version. Note that this apologetic intertitle is overlaid on a diagonal right-to-left presentation of three giant characters forming "Kenkokushi" ('founding of the country).

[68] Nakamura, *Lord Ii Naosuke and New Japan*, p. 75. The provenance of the copy of this curious English-language book I was able to examine is telling: it is Akimoto Shunkichi's translation of Nakamura Katsumaro's *Ii Tairō to kaikō*, presented to Harvard College Library by the Lord Ii Naosuke Memorial Committee in 1910, during a burst of activity intended to rehabilitate Ii in the eyes of the nation. Specifically, Nakamura's original book was compiled and distributed as part of the effort to commemorate the statue of Ii erected, after much opposition, in 1909 in Yokohama.

[69] In the early 1920s, Ii Naosuke's assassination was explicitly compared to Hara Kei's, by none other than the 'father of parliamentary government', Ozaki Yukio; Ozaki also drew an analogy from the 1855 Ansei earthquake to the 1923 Kantō earthquake, and from Perry's Black Ships of 1853 to the Russian Revolution of 1917. See Wert, p. 92.

of eighteen men, all but one of them from Mito domain, launched a surprise attack. Hampered by the bindings on their swords (designed to protect the ornamental hilts from harsh weather), the Hikone guards reacted sluggishly, and in a flash the attackers reached the palanquin. Naosuke was stabbed, then pulled out, whereupon Satsuma-born Arimura Jizaemon, the lone member of the attacking force not from Mito, decapitated him. So serious a blow was this to the prestige and stability of the Shogunate that for almost a month they refused to admit Naosuke had died, insisting he was 'injured' but recuperating, only dismissing him from the office of Tairō in late April and, the day after his dismissal, claiming he had just died.[70]

The entire incident was over almost immediately—there is certainly no chance the attackers had time to relate their reasons to Naosuke, nor that he could have delivered a heroic speech of his own in rebuttal. Moreover, the Mito *rōnin* who attacked him were carrying a manifesto, found on the bodies of the assassins who died during the ambush, which emphasized, in no uncertain terms, that their quarrel was with Naosuke himself, and his autocratic methods, not with the Shogunate, to which they reiterated their loyalty.[71] But as we shall see below, the film version of the story presents an alternative interpretation of both the events of Naosuke's exercise of power, and the significance and motivation of his assassination.

Even in its much shortened extant form, most of the run-time of *Sonnō jōi* is not, of course, about the assassination itself, which occupies just three minutes right at the very end of the last reel. The vast majority of the story is devoted to valorizing Naosuke, taking the form of a tragedy with Naosuke as its clear tragic hero—albeit one without even the hint of a tragic flaw. Naosuke suffers a tragic fate, the film seems to argue, not because of a flaw within him, but due

[70] Murdoch, p. 701.
[71] Ibid., p. 701. Murdoch translates the relevant passage of the manifesto as follows: "Our conduct *does not indicate the slightest* enmity to the Bakufu. We swear before Heaven and earth, gods and men, that our action proceeds entirely built from our hope of seeing the Shōgunate resume its proper form, and abide by the holy and wise will of the Emperor. We hope to see our national glory manifested in the expulsion of foreigners from the land."

to being ahead of his time, and therefore misunderstood and unfairly maligned by less farsighted contemporaries. Naosuke's own words, via intertitle, go so far as to claim that dying in service to his country is no tragedy at all, but a joyous privilege.[72] He is shown as decidedly superior to other Shogunal officials, who appear to be amazed that he would risk personal injury in order to ensure Japan's survival.[73] This repositioning of Naosuke as blameless patriot is an excellent example of what Fiske and Hartley call "claw back": cinema, fulfilling its bardic role, is trying to claw the unjustly marginalized/demonized Naosuke back into a position of socio-centrality.[74]

This determination in the 1927 film to rescue Ii Naosuke from his characterization as national traitor mirrors the protracted real-life struggle by his supporters and former Hikone domain officials, in the decades after his death, to clear Naosuke's name and insist on his patriotism. Naosuke's harsh tactics during the Ansei Purge ensured he would become, and long remain, the most vilified Shogunal figure; Meiji-era attempts to get him national recognition in the form of statues or the like all ended in ignominious failure, despite the fact that the Meiji government ended up acting in perfect harmony with Naosuke's platform of opening the country and accommodation with foreign powers; in other words, the xenophobic patriots of 1860, who

[72] This astonishing speech, one of a number of smiling-in-the-face-of-danger moments for Naosuke, comes near the end of the film, in response to his wife's impassioned plea that he resign his position due to the mounting danger of assassination. He smiles indulgently and replies that all people die, but he is doing important work; to be martyred in service to the country, what greater joy could there be than that? This intertitle is on screen at 88:35.

[73] About eight minutes into the film, Naosuke is sitting deep in thought as all around him, lesser functionaries of the Shogunate urgently press him to decide whether to open the ports, as the foreigners demand, or attack the barbarians. They grandiosely proclaim that this one-word decision of his, 'war' or 'open [the ports]', could decide the very life or death of Japan itself , but also warn him that due to the rise of xenophobic (*jōi*) sentiment, a decision to open the ports will make him the target of immense hatred by such *sonnō jōi* activists. But as they all lean forward in breathless anticipation of his decision, he brushes away their timorous concerns with a brisk "Let's open the ports" ("Kaikō itasau" (i.e., 'itasō'), at 9:40). They react in shock, trembling where they sit, until he calms their nerves with a paternalistic 'settle down' motion of his arms and begins explaining his rationale and overall plan at some length.

[74] This 'claw back' function of the bardic role is the fifth function in Fiske and Hartley's now-classic delineation of the concept of bardic television, which, as I explained in the introduction, I have appropriated for the pre-television cinema in Japan as "bardic cinema". See Fiske and Hartley, p. 65.

took Naosuke's willingness to open the country as a casus belli, later ended up adopting exactly the same accommodationist stance—but without, however, ever "forgiving" the hated Naosuke.[75]

Naosuke seemed to polarize opinion; he had some champions and vocal supporters, especially locally, in Hikone, but their periodic campaigns to turn him into a national hero met with fierce resistance by a vengeful majority. One attempt to erect a statue of Naosuke in a Tokyo park even prompted the national government to pass a law restricting access to the public parks in the big cities, specifically to prevent politically ambiguous figures like Naosuke from becoming the object of popular veneration.[76] A major 1909-1910 effort for official recognition of Naosuke's service to the nation was derailed by a furious epistolary campaign by pro-Mito activists, who were concerned that venerating Naosuke would reduce the prestige of the Mito *rōnin*—enshrined as war gods and national heroes at Yasukuni Shrine—who had murdered him.[77] And sure enough, it proved impossible in practice to celebrate Naosuke as a hero without implicitly criticizing his Mito murderers; in postwar Japan, as Naosuke's popular rehabilitation continued (his original accommodationist platform had never been more relevant than during the American Occupation of Japan, after all), the reputation of the Mito *rōnin* correspondingly suffered, and they transformed in the postwar popular imagination from patriots to nihilists.[78]

Naosuke was not granted official recognition for his service to the nation until 1917, fifty-seven years after his murder, when he was finally given posthumous court rank.[79] Other ambiguous figures or potential "villains" from the Bakumatsu, notably Saigō Takamori, had been officially rehabilitated much earlier, in Saigō's case just twelve years after his ignominious death

[75] Wert, p. 77. Wert also details one petition for a statue in 1881 that was rejected by then-Home Minister Shinagawa Yajirō, who had studied under Yoshida Shōin, the most high-profile victim of the Ansei Purge.
[76] Ibid., p. 106.
[77] Ibid., p. 79.
[78] See Wert, pp. 114-115. Wert, however, claims Ii Naosuke was not successfully rehabilitated until the postwar (he is probably simply unaware of the existence of *Sonnō jōi*), whereas I argue Naosuke's rehabilitation had already been given a big boost in 1927, with the success of *Sonnō jōi*.
[79] Wert, p. 92.

as a national traitor.[80] Intriguingly, it was not until this official pardon for Saigō in 1889 that his popularity, which had always been high,[81] really began to flourish; perhaps the long-awaited rehabilitation of Ii Naosuke in 1917 was what provoked, or at least made possible, a similar rise in popular esteem for Naosuke himself, as evidenced by the popularity of *Sonnō jōi*.[82]

In any case, the increasing willingness to see Naosuke as a maligned patriot, rather than a bloodthirsty tyrant, came just in time for the resurgence in interest in the Bakumatsu—one, moreover, colored by increased interest in the vanquished—as the sixty-year anniversary of the Meiji Restoration approached.[83] *Sonnō jōi* was one of quite a number of films set in the Bakumatsu made in 1927-1928, and is unique for a number of reasons, including its great popularity and critical acclaim, but most importantly, the fact that its preferred reading of Bakumatsu history (that is, the interpretation its creators intended the audience to accept) was unusual: it was at once progressive (in rescuing Naosuke from ignominy and insisting he too was a national hero) and timid (in refusing to condemn his murderers, or indeed anyone at all) compared to other films of this period. The timing of its release, in 1927, is also significant in that criticism of straight entertainment 'swashbuckling' (*chanbara*) period films within the film industry had been mounting and reached a crescendo in 1927, making this year a turning point

[80] Saigō was officially pardoned in 1889. Ibid., p. 51.
[81] For example, Saigō, like Yoshitsune before him, became something of a King Arthur figure in the popular imagination, as legends abounded that he was not dead at all but would return to Japan in a time of dire need, leading to quite a large proportion of the late 1870s and early 1880s population believing—or hoping—that Saigō was still alive. These legends even led to an 1891 assassination attempt on then crown prince Nicholas II of Russia, by a decorated veteran of the Seinan war who feared that if, as was rumored, Saigō returned with Nicholas to Japan, the veteran would be stripped of his honors for defeating the Satsuma forces. See Mark Ravina, "The Apocryphal Suicide of Saigō Takamori", in *JAS* 9 (2010), pp. 714-715. There was even a wartime film, *Zoku minami no kaze*, which featured an indirect form of the Saigō survival legend: a man claiming to be his descendant is found in Southeast Asia, leading to hope and eventual disappointment for many in Japan.
[82] Wert details how Saigō's popularity, as measured in literature, etc., began climbing in 1889; then there was a 'boom' in (hagiographic) biographies when the first modern biography of a Japanese was published in 1895 (Wert 51). Thereafter, Saigō's popularity itself experienced a boom in 1927, the 50-year anniversary of his death (and 60-year anniversary of the end of the Bakumatsu). See Wert, p. 92.
[83] For example, Tokugawa Yoshinobu was (apparently somewhat reluctantly) interviewed at this time to get his own first-hand account of Bakumatsu events. Interest in the Bakumatsu manifested also in what we might call an archival or curatorial impulse; after the 1923 quake, concern over the preservation of documents increased. See Wert, p. 93.

away from 'mere' swashbuckling entertainment and towards a more diverse array of films, including those like *Sonnō jōi* which were attempting a hyper-accurate approach to history.[84]

In essence, *Sonnō jōi* creates a new mythology for Japan by shedding Bakumatsu history of its villains, in a more visceral, emotionally charged manner than could popular serialized novels of the era. It presents all the key figures of the history surrounding Ii Naosuke, up to and including his assassins and archrival Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, as equally patriotic, and hence blameless. In such a reading, the deaths of figures such as nonviolent patriot Hashimoto Sanai (ordered executed by Naosuke), as well as Naosuke's own death, can be mourned as tragedies, but *cannot be seen* as crimes. Naosuke, the preferred reading seems to say, did what he needed to do in service to Japan, so he should not be blamed for ordering the arrests and executions of thinkers like Umeda Unpin, Yoshida Shōin or Hashimoto Sanai during the Ansei Purge; but by the same token, the Mito *rōnin* assassinated him out of devotion to Japan, so even if their methods were extreme and their deed bloody, one cannot—or dare not—fault their motivations.

Thanks to the continuity in thought (and method) between the Mito *rōnin* who carried out Naosuke's assassination and the pro-imperial faction in Kyoto in the 1860s—the survivors of which went on to dominate the Meiji government—making a film overtly critical of the *rōnin* would have been a politically risky move. Turning the *rōnin* into full-fledged villains was not possible in the political climate of the 1920s, even if the filmmakers at Nikkatsu had wanted to do so.[85] In a climate where a wrong step could mean harsh economic consequences, those in the

[84] That is, a *katsureki*-like approach. For 1927 as turning point, see Shimura Miyoko, *Jidaigeki densetsu*, p. 217.
[85] Any suggestion that those on the winning side were guilty of error or excess was met with severe rebuke by representatives of the government, as in 1931, when a controversial epitaph for Oguri Tadamasa in his former village was revealed to say he had been 'killed without committing a crime', and the police stepped in and blocked the unveiling, claiming divine infallibility for the Imperial army (imperial army) and insisting that they simply could not have executed a man who was blameless. See Wert, p. 99.

film industry had no incentive to rock the boat by filming a politically divisive or "re-vilified" interpretation of the Bakumatsu, and every incentive to play it safe.[86]

Films that pushed the political envelope too far did in fact suffer. A notorious example of the danger of filming a potentially taboo topic is the case of Yamatai and Himiko-themed *Nichirin* (1925), the ambitious second film (their first was the film that launched the Bakumatsu boom, the 1925 smash hit[87] *Tsukigata Hanpeita,*[88] which succeeded despite decidedly mixed reviews[89]), of the United Film Artists Society (Rengō eiga geijutsuka kyōkai). No sooner had the film been released than the group found itself the target of a histrionic lawsuit (and an exhibition boycott by the big four film studios of the day, who quickly yielded to threats and intimidation) by right-wing ultranationalists, for the alleged crime of lèse-majesté, specifically for daring to design a set whose roof resembled that of the main shrine at Ise Jingu.[90] This far-right campaign against the film led to the failure and dissolution of the group, plunging its members into dire financial straits.[91] Note that this ultraconservative reaction to the film must also be seen as part

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[86] This extended to exhibition practices as well: Makino Mamoru has pointed out that once a film was approved by the censors, only that exact version of the film was permitted to be shown, or in other words, from the moment of approval no changes of any kind, whether additions or deletions, were permitted. This censorial stance naturally posed problems for the relatively common practice, especially in theaters in more rural areas, of snipping out degraded sections of film and splicing the remainder together. See Makino, *Eiga ken'etsu jihō kaisetsu*, pp. 30-31.

[87] The film was described in contemporaneous publications as "frightfully popular" (osoroshii ninki), though this very popularity led to a dispute—and the breakdown of the merger—between Makino (Shōzō) and Tōa kinema over who had the right to distribute the film. See *Kinema junpō* no. 197 (June 21, 1925), p. 11, for an account of the "*Tsukigata Hanpeita* haikyūken sōgi to Makino bunretsu," in which the "naisen" (internal struggle) is described with guilty bystander's schadenfreude as a fascinating spectacle, "like watching a fire raging in distant mountains."

[88] The climax of any Tsukigata Hanpeita film (and there were quite a few) is the moment the eponymous hero, mortally wounded, uses his own blood to write, on the temple wall, the fateful words, "shi shite gokoku no oni to naru" ("Dying, I will become a demon protector of the country"), a message that, needless to say, enjoyed renewed relevance in wartime Japan. Key for our purposes is that in death, Tsukigata became a universal and unobjectionable hero, all grievances forgotten. See Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 285 for more on *Tsukigata Hanpeita* and WW II.

[89] For example, Suzuki Jūzaburō's review of the film in the Hihyō column of the 195th issue of Kinema junpō (June 1, 1925), p. 25, is extremely critical, saying "the screenwriter doesn't have the slightest comprehension of what a moving picture is" and criticizing leading man Sawada Shōjirō for allegedly failing to act in a very "film-like" way, the cinematography as "quite stiff", and the intertitles as "useless...and hard to read."

[90] See Kyoto shinbunsha hen, *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi*, p. 79. The lawsuit never led to any prosecutions, but did provoke the financially ruinous boycott. See Toki Akihiro et al hen, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 162, and for the official censors' report on *Nichirin*, see Makino, *Nihon eiga kenetsushi*, pp. 213-219.

[91] Ibid., p. 80.

of the popular culture of the day; not all appropriations of a film for popular culture purposes will be politically progressive in nature. In this case (and in many other such cases throughout Japan's film history, including the more recent (2010) round of threats against those considering exhibiting *The Cove*[92]), the right wing in Japan was able to block widespread showings of what they deemed inappropriate material quite effectively, in essence pushing social censorship far beyond the relatively modest steps taken by actual censors. Notably, right-wing critics managed to police the visual aspects of a film in a way official censors did not, here objecting to a visual resemblance to a national symbol that censors had not flagged as problematic.

This is not, however, to say that the official censorship apparatus in prewar Japan was powerless or that it did not have a considerable effect on the development of Japan's film industry. Censors, by and large, evidently took their jobs very seriously, with *Sonnō jōi* reviewed fully twenty-one times over the course of several weeks.[93] And there were powerful indirect effects of the existence of a censorship apparatus, even one that resorted to surprisingly few interventions; as Gregory Kasza has argued, the bureaucracy's negative (i.e., punitive guidance on what sorts of films *not* to make, not positive guidance over what sorts of films one *should* make) interference in the film industry from the first real film law of 1925 meant the industry as a whole was steered away from becoming a forum for political debate, since pre-distribution censorship meant potentially subversive ideas would be quashed before anyone saw them (unlike

[92] See for example this 2010 New York Times article about the surprising effectiveness in contemporary Japan of far right threats of violence against material deemed unsuitable (here, the anti-dolphin hunting documentary *The Cove*).
[93] *Eiga ken'etsu jihō dai go kan* (Shōwa 2-nen/1927) pp. 673-702. That a single film would be examined so carefully and repeatedly is especially remarkable given the staggering scale of censorship operations by in 1927, in which censors viewed 76,810 reels of film, for a total of nearly 19 million meters. See Makino, p. 195.

print censorship, which at the time was post-publication).[94] In short, conditions were optimal for the creation of villain-less narratives.[95]

Yet while the preferred reading may insist Japan's Bakumatsu period had no villains, individual audience members would have found *Sonnō jōi* to be rich material indeed from which to create their own negotiated readings of Japanese history. For one thing, the valorizing of both sides of the conflict did not mean a viewer would be unable to identify with one side to the detriment of that side's opponents. This process of identification with on-screen characters is one of the most fundamental relationships connecting the viewer to the screen, and it is hard to avoid becoming emotionally entangled with the fate of one's chosen character; in fact, this feature of a specifically emotional engagement with history is one of the key principles of "historiophoty" (the representation of history in image rather than written word) as defined by Hayden White and Robert Rosenstone.[96] For many viewers, an emotionalized past, and an identification with either Ii Naosuke or with his assassins, would naturally lead to negative feelings about the chosen side's enemies, so it is risky to assume that simply because the film's preferred reading denies villain-hood to anyone, most viewers would actually have seen Japan's history as villain-less.[97]

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[94] See Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan,* p. 71.

[95] Occasionally a film would attempt to turn the tables on Bakumatsu history by overtly arguing that the Imperial army, not the defeated pro-Tokugawa forces, were the true villains; Itō Daisuke made such a film in 1929, entitled *Issatsu tashō den*, whose villain is one of the members of the Imperial army occupying Edo in mid-1868, but Itō had a personal, familial stake in rehabilitating the Shōgitai (a 1868 pro-Tokugawa force formed in Edo and defeated in April 1868 by the Imperial army in the battle of Ueno), since his grandfather was a member. See *Recalling the Treasures of Japanese Cinema*, pp. 109-111. But in *Sonnō jōi* there are truly no villains at all: even the Americans, although shown as provoking fear in the populace, are not demonized in the film, instead being shown as something of a neutral but powerful elemental force, a 'natural disaster' of sorts, providing the perfect opportunity for Ii Naosuke to show his foresight and wisdom.

[96] Rosenstone in particular emphasizes this medium-specific property of film contra traditional historiography: its ability to emotionalize the past. See Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, pp. 53-54. It is a shame, in this regard, that no information is available on what sort of music might have accompanied screenings of *Sonnō jōi*; music is a vitally important component in forging an emotional connection with the on-screen characters.

[97] The trend towards rehabilitating the former villains of the Bakumatsu, like Ii Naosuke or the Shinsengumi (especially its commander, Kondō Isami), was also present in popular literature of the late 1920s, notably with Shimozawa Kan's positive portrayal of the Shinsengumi in his 1928-1931 trilogy (See Wert, p. 93). However, Shimozawa was not interested in valorizing the villains of history, only in having the heroes and villains of the

Sonnō jōi was the product of collaboration between Nikkatsu's preeminent period film director at the time, Ikeda Tomiyasu, probably the director with the largest proportion of films set in the Bakumatsu of any in Japanese cinematic history, and maverick studio head Ikenaga Tsunehisa.[98] Ikenaga was evidently very receptive to Ikeda's then-revolutionary ideas—it was Ikeda who apparently convinced Ikenaga to begin using actresses in place of female impersonators (*onnagata* or *oyama*) for Ikeda's directorial debut in 1924, *Watashimori to bushi*.[99] Ikeda continued his technical innovations in his films of 1925 and thereafter, remaining on the cutting edge of film production.[100] From the very beginning, then, Ikeda had embraced the principles of the Pure Film movement, and targeted first female impersonators, then the institution of narration, in the design of his films, including *Sonnō jōi*, which features very heavy use of intertitles, one of the key tactics used in attempts to marginalize the film narrator.[101]

Nonetheless, film showings of *Sonnō jōi* were narrated, and also featured live musical accompaniment. Indeed, one of the biggest narrator stars of the day, Gotō Kōrō, who was noted for his work in period films and especially Bakumatsu films, recorded 78rpm phonograph

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Bakumatsu/Restoration switch places; by celebrating a pro-Tokugawa figure like Kondō Isami, he was able to vilify the Satsuma-Chōshū clique government, attacking their failure, to fulfill the promises of the 1868 Charter Oath.

[98] Ikeda directed quite a number of Bakumatsu films, from the very beginning of his career with *Pro-imperial reppu kōjo Muraoka* (1924) to comedies like *Yaji Kita Sonnō no maki*, *Yaji Kita Toba Fushimi no maki* (1927-8) thru his sound film output after returning to Nikkatsu, with films like mammoth epic *Ōsei fukko tanryūhen sōkohen* (1939, with an all-star cast featuring Kataoka Chiezō as Katsura Kogorō, Arakan as Sakamoto Ryōma, Bantsuma as Kondō Isami, and modern (*gendaigeki*) star Kosugi Isamu as Saigō Kichinosuke (Takamori) but unfortunately lost), right up until the very end of his career, with his only two postwar (and post-Occupation, given the ban on period films) films, *Kondō Isami Ikedaya sōdō* and *Kurama Tengu to Katsu Kaishū* (both 1953), set in the Bakumatsu. The only potential contender for the title of 'highest proportion of oeuvre devoted to Bakumatsu' is Inagaki Hiroshi.

[99] Biographical information on Ikeda (or Ikenaga) is difficult to find, as evidenced nicely by the fact that this particular information about *Watashimori no bushi* being the first Nikkatsu film to feature actresses comes from Ikeda's three-line biography on Kotobanku.

[100] Tanaka Jun'ichirō also praises Ikeda as having reached a milestone for film reform in the type of hero being depicted onscreen (and the manner of depiction). See Tanaka, *Nihon eiga hattatsu shi*, vol. 2, p. 45.

[101] Despite this impressive resume, Ikeda is almost universally dismissed (or ignored) in both Japanese and English-language scholarship as a reactionary director. See for example Anderson and Richie's incoherent claim that Ikeda was a reactionary force at Nikkatsu, remaining trapped in a *benshi*-dominated mode of storytelling and not introducing "modern" editing techniques until 1924; since Ikeda first *became* a director in 1924, one feels compelled to argue precisely the opposite, that it was only thanks to Ikeda that Nikkatsu began embracing modern filmmaking techniques. See Anderson and Richie, p. 58.

records of portions of his narration from the film for fans of the movie (or of him), some of which survive today.[102] This would seem to indicate that at least for some moviegoers, the possibility of owning a version, however brief, of the film's narration—whether out of devotion to the film, and the chance to relive the experience of watching it by hearing an audio recording of the music and narration, or out of appreciation for Gotō himself, as a star narrator in an age where the film narrators were frequently bigger draws than either movie directors or even movie stars—held some appeal, despite the film's concerted effort to limit the narrator's creative role.[103]

In any case, and despite (or perhaps because of) the fame of the narrator slated to perform his film, Ikeda went quite far in his attempt to leave nothing to the (narrator's) imagination, reproducing the dialogue so exhaustively in intertitle form that roughly 80% of the extant film consists of static LS or, more rarely, MLS tableaus of men sitting on the floor, more or less motionlessly talking (with frequent cuts to intertitles), with little editing; dynamic scenes such as action sequences are few and far between in *Sonnō jōi*.[104]

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[102] Kataoka Ichirō has pointed out Gotō rose to the height of his fame in 1926 with *Sonnō,* another Bakumatsu film. The extent to which Gotō came to be associated with Bakumatsu film can be seen in his signature line, "Higashiyama 36 mine shizuka ni nemuru ushimitsu doki, yoru no shijima wo yabutte narihibiku kengeki hibiki" ("The 36 peaks of Higashiyama [an area in eastern Kyoto] are quietly asleep at 2 AM, when the stillness of night is shattered by the echoing clash of blades"), which from 1926 onwards apparently grew so famous that it became a staple line for all *benshi* performing a Bakumatsu film. See Kataoka Ichirō, *Benshi retsuden: Gotō Kōrō 1*, available online at: http://kaitenkyugyou.blog87.fc2.com/blog-entry-8.html.

[103] Many thanks to Kataoka Ichirō, *benshi* and *benshi* historian, for giving me the chance to hear the 12-minute extant version of Gotō's performance, which was specially recorded in a studio, microphone and recording technology in the 1920s not yet advanced enough to permit live recordings of *benshi* performances in the movie halls themselves.

[104] Ikeda initially encountered major resistance to his proposed changes in filmmaking, in particular his insistence on including so many intertitles, from aging star Onoe Matsunosuke, who bitterly complained about it. Ikeda could not simply ignore Onoe's opinion, either; he had a very close relationship with Onoe (who in 1921 had discovered Ikeda when he was working as a traveling actor (*tabiyakusha*), ushering him in to a promising career at Nikkatsu, first as an actor and then a screenwriter and later director, and had even arranged Ikeda's marriage to his younger sister), so he only became free to make movies in the style he truly wished to make them after Onoe's death in 1926. Ikeda later explained, about the filming of Onoe's first true Pure Film-esque movie, *Watashimori to bushi*, that Onoe simply could not understand why he kept calling 'cut!'; Onoe also claimed these interruptions made it impossible to put any spirit into the film. See Tajima Ryōichi, "*Jidaigeki* no tanjō to Onoe Matsunosuke", in *Jidaigeki densetsu*, p. 74. It is no coincidence, then, that *Sonnō jōi* features so many intertitles (about which the young rising star Ōkōchi had no complaints, unlike what would probably have happened if Onoe had been alive to star in it).

Yet these criticisms are in a sense unfair, as they project back onto 1927 the fast-paced standards of more contemporary films, implicitly imagining a twenty-first century viewing subject becoming bored with a "slow" film that many in the 1927 audience likely experienced as quite dynamic, with exciting and frequent markers of its embrace of Pure Film principles. In other words, seeing yet another paragraph-long intertitle attempting to capture the complexities of Bakumatsu-era political thought, it is true that viewers today might roll their eyes at the film's failure to telescope these thoughts into a mode of dialogue more appropriate to the film medium, but in doing so, they risk forgetting that audiences in 1927, when narration was actually at its all-time peak, may well have interpreted the lengthy political commentary provided by the dialogue as evidence of the film's spirited assault on the institution of the narrator.[105] Indeed, the literary register of the intertitles, particularly the final intertitle, which comments quite effusively on Ii Naosuke's heroic legacy, suggests Ikeda, in keeping with his Pure Film ambitions,[106] had a well-educated, middle-class subject, one moreover quite knowledgeable about Bakumatsu history, in mind—not the sort of audience that would necessarily desire a narrator in the first place.[107]

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[105] Anderson notes that the period from 1927-1931 was the golden age of *katsuben* narration; in fact, during this period some directors apparently paced their films, while making and editing them, to better accommodate the speaking rhythms of their favorite *benshi*. See Anderson, "Spoken Silents in the Japanese Cinema," in Nolletti et al, eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, p. 279.

[106] Gerow has pointed out that Pure Film filmmakers catered to educated audiences, not "the masses". See Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 37. There are plenty of indications that *Sonnō jōi* had the same high-culture aspirations, from the dense intertitles with their archaic (i.e., historically accurate) phrases and the incredibly detailed portrayal of the period via a huge cast of named characters, some of whom (Umeda Unpin, for example) are introduced in a peremptory fashion, indicating that the audience was expected to recognize them due to their historical fame, though it is possible that such figures received a more detailed introduction in the complete version of the film.

[107] David Bordwell has argued that it was in fact the desire among audiences for an easy-to-grasp story that gave rise to the institution of *katsuben* narration: in other words, *benshi* were supposed to simplify and clarify the on-screen story, interpreting it for the audience—who presumably were incapable of understanding without a mediator. See Bordwell, "Visual Style in Japanese Cinema, 1925-1945", in *Film History* vol. 7 (1995), pp. 8-9. I am deeply skeptical of this 'audience as cultural dope' type of argument, but in any case, if we accept the idea that the primary function of the *benshi* was to aid the more clueless members of the audience in making sense of the story, Ikeda's decision to keep the movie in a high-culture register, and marginalize the *benshi* by spelling out every single line of potential dialogue, seem to suggest the desired subject position was one with sufficient education and knowledge of Japanese history to make sense of the story on his or her own.

Comments of this nature might seem to suggest two potentially hazardous avenues of thought: that films have a single author, and that the intended subject position is the only one (i.e., that audiences are homogenous). The Fiskean notion of 'nomadic subjectivity'[108] argues that no audience could be homogenous, though to be sure, the filmic text does "make sense of" the viewer by, in this case, inviting him or her to *be* a well-educated, upper- or middle-class individual, and moreover a descendent of Satsuma or Chōshū.[109] And as for authorship of *Sonnō jōi*, despite serving as, at once, the director, author of the source material (*gensaku*) and screenplay writer, Ikeda was not, of course, the sole author of the finished film. Ikenaga served as executive producer, and many others, including assistant director Watanabe Kunio and cinematographer Matsumura Shintarō, played major roles in crafting the film. It is true, however, that Ikeda had an unusual degree of latitude in shaping this film; he was Nikkatsu's star period film director at the time (though he was then in the process of losing this mantle to rising auteur Itō Daisuke), and well liked by Ikenaga,[110] and since he had written the screenplay himself, there would be no struggles between director and screenwriter for how to enact the vision presented in the script. But when discussing authorship of films, there is one other component, beyond the crew/production side, that must be taken into account: the impact of the star.

Viewers today, after spotting the instantly recognizable face of Ōkōchi Denjirō, will naturally assume that he was the preeminent star of the film, and in fact he does deliver a virtuoso performance. But he did not receive top billing for this film, partly because he was still young (30) and then only just starting to become a household name (thanks to *Chūji tabi nikki*,

[108] Fiske, *Television Culture*, p. 82.
[109] The idea of the positioning of the reading (viewing) subject, or in other words that the viewer is in some fashion "made sense of" by the text, and that texts foster what MacCabe has called 'dominant specularity', is developed in Fiske, *Television Culture*, p. 25.
[110] They were sufficiently close that, after Nikkatsu's infamous "Great Dismissal Incident" (in which Ikenaga and Ikeda, among some 200 others, were fired), Ikenaga quickly invited Ikeda to join him in the new Uzumasa Hassei Eiga (Uzumasa Sound Film) studio he founded at J.O. Studio, where Ikeda worked until later returning to Nikkatsu.

Itō Daisuke's successful trilogy, released in March-August-December 1927), and partly because he was playing the role of Ii Naosuke, much maligned villain of the Bakumatsu. Top billing went to now little-known Yamamoto Kaichi, playing Naosuke's political archrival, Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, historically a far 'safer' figure to celebrate as heroic.[111]

Sonnō jōi was heavily promoted in film magazines of the day, particularly *Kinema junpō,* starting weeks before the nationwide release date of October 1st[112] and continuing for the length of its theatrical run.[113] Analysis of these advertisements supports the interpretation that Ōkōchi was being de-emphasized, since ad after ad trumpets the film's colossal, epic scale and all-star cast, without ever showing Ōkōchi's name very prominently—if at all—in the copy or showing his face in the promotional stills; instead, the sheer scale of the film is on display.[114] Representative in this respect is Fig. 5, a two-page ad from the September 11th, 1927 issue of *Kinema junpō* which features a diagonal cascading series of six stills of prominent actors/historical figures, two of which, those on either end, show Yamamoto as Nariaki, followed by, from left, Ōkōchi as Naosuke, Onoe Tamitaro as Arimura Jizaemon (Naosuke's killer), Tanizaki Jūrō as Moriyama Shigenosuke (a loyalist arrested during the Ansei Purge), and Niizuma Shirō as Seki Tetsunosuke (a low-ranking *jōi* activist from Mito).[115] Ōkōchi, especially by contrast to Yamamoto, was not utilized much in this sort of promotional material.

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[111] Yamamoto became the top-billed actor at Nikkatsu following the demise of Onoe Matsunosuke in 1926.
[112] The finalized release date of the film was announced, with rather florid language ("it's sure to cause a huge sensation in the world of Japanese film!"), ten days in advance, in the 274th (Sept. 21) issue of *Kinema junpō*, p. 9.
[113] Data from individual cinemas as reported in *Kinema junpō* indicate that while the film had a nationwide release on Oct. 1st, some locations, especially in Kansai, continued well after the typical five- to seven-day run given to most films at that time; for example, the Kanda Nikkatsukan in Tokyo, which began showing *Sonnō jōi* on Oct. 1st, was still playing it during the week of Oct. 11, and several movie theaters in Osaka and Kyoto gave it extended runs. See *Kinema junpō* no. 276 (Oct. 11, 1927), pp. 70-71.
[114] See for example the "introduction" (*shōkai*) for *Sonnō jōi* in *Kinema junpō* no. 273 (Sept. 11, 1927), p. 62, which shows a still of Yamamoto as Nariaki and a long shot of a huge meeting hall with dozens of Shogunal retainers.
[115] *Kinema junpō* no. 273 (Sept. 11, 1927), pp. 64-65.



Figure 5: Epic scale on display in a Sept. 11, 1927 ad for *Sonnō jōi* in Kinema junpō no. 273.

It is clear this film was not being conceived of, or billed, as a star vehicle for Ōkōchi. Even the box on bottom left listing the cast emphasizes the ensemble nature of the film by its sheer size and thoroughness, and the tag-lines of the ad trumpet the "amazing cast!" of the "world-famous epic film, at last nearing completion" that "combines both the period film and modern film [*gendaigeki*] actor lineups of Nikkatsu!", a "super-epic" for which the viewer "should have tremendous expectations!".[116] The only name associated with the film that is

[116] In the original Japanese, "Miyo! Kono monosugoki haiyaku wo!" "Sekaiteki daieiga iyoiyo kansei!" "Nikkatsu satsueijo gendaigeki/jidaigeki zen'in gōdō shutsuen!" "chōtokusaku" and "zetsudai no gokitai are!"

written in a larger font than the rest is that of director/writer Ikeda Tomiyasu,[117] and in fact it is consistently Ikeda's name that is written large and bold in all the *Kinema junpō* ads for the film.[118] It seems that in the minds of the marketers, Ōkōchi was not yet enough of a box-office draw to rival even Yamamoto Kaichi, let alone then-superstar director-auteur Ikeda.[119]

Given his only middling fame, Ōkōchi was an intriguing choice for the critical role of Naosuke. It would be up to him to humanize, and thereby valorize, the hated tyrant, yet it was precisely due to his 'unnerving' and slightly villainous face, so unlike the typical stoic face of the male hero at that time, that Ōkōchi was first noticed and came to fame in the first place.[120] In fact, many of the roles he was initially offered during his tenure at Nikkatsu, from 1926-1937, were for anti-heroes with something 'monstrous' about them, not straight-laced heroes.[121] And many theorists have pointed out that the prior roles—as well as the (semi-) private lives—of stars can and do color audience interpretation of subsequent roles, giving rise to a polysemic image; in

[117] In the Kanda Nikkatsukan film program leaflet devoted (partly) to *Sonnō jōi* and dating from Sept. 15, 1927, cinematographer Matsumura Seitarō's name is also shown, though spatially it is much smaller than Ikeda's name, and no other names are mentioned. See *Purogurammu eigashi Taishō kara senchū made*, p. 131.

[118] Other examples of this trend include the two-page spread on *Sonnō jōi* appearing in Kinema junpō's 275th issue (Oct. 1, 1927), pp. 104-5, which also trumpets the ensemble cast of this "world-famous epic film" (sekaiteki daieiga), and the two-page ad in the 274th issue (Sept. 21), pp. 46-7, declaring it to be "thou mustn't miss the great epic film of our generation!" ("Miotosaruru nakare! Sekaiteki ichidai kyohen!"). The latter ad seems to be targeting women, as it displays Niizuma as Seki (who is involved in a romantic subplot) twice, and not coincidentally is the only ad to feature stills of female characters of equal size and prominence to those of the male characters.

[119] An article on page six of the Sept. 30, 1927 morning edition of the Asahi shinbun also praised Ikeda for continuing to produce these grand epics, and their "wonderful passion" in gathering such a huge cast.

[120] See Kyoto shinbunsha hen, *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi,* p. 88. My thanks to film scholar Moriwaki Kiyotada of the Museum of Kyoto for first drawing my attention to this 'kaii' or 'kaibutsuteki' quality to Ōkōchi's face (which had led to the stagnation of Ōkōchi's stage career as no one wanted to use an actor with such an unusual face) as being what attracted Itō Daisuke's interest, in our September 12, 2013 interview. See also Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 271 for more background on Itō's discovery of Ōkōchi at the Dai-ni Shinkokugeki theater.

[121] Yamane Sadao has pointed out that Ōkōchi's career at Nikkatsu during those years, in which he appeared in roughly 100 films, can be broken up thematically into three categories: the kaibutsuteki (monstrous) hero roles, the humorous hero roles (Yamane gives the example of Yamanaka Sadao's *Tange Sazen*, while by contrast Itō Daisuke's *Tange Sazen* is listed as an excellent instantiation of the kaibutsuteki quality), and the straightforward hero roles (Yamane gives the role of Naosuke from *Sonnō jōi* as an example). See Yamane, "Yamane Sadao no otanoshimi zeminaaru", insert to the *Nihon eiga kessaku zenshū* VHS edition of *Kuriyama Daizen*, n.pag.

short, stars bring a certain continuity from their on- and off-screen personas to each new role, and their own reputations can enhance, or be enhanced by, the historical figure they play.[122]

As a result, Ōkōchi's history of playing menacing anti-heroes—especially Kunisada Chūji (an underworld gambler/"knight-errant" type with a benevolent streak), the 1927 role that made him a star—would also surely have colored audiences' interpretations of his performance as Naosuke, even though, as Satō Tadao suggests, he ended up showing his versatility as an actor by portraying Naosuke as a confident and charismatic leader, a truly unobjectionable hero.[123] Perhaps Ikeda chose Ōkōchi for the role of Naosuke partly because of his polysemic star image: that hint of darkness or menace emanating from Ōkōchi's slightly unsettling face might have cushioned viewers from the sudden shock the casting of a star with a squeaky-clean image would likely have caused, allowing their sympathy for and identification with Naosuke to grow more gradually, moving from an initial position of distrust (thanks to over sixty years of historiography vilifying him) into acceptance of his apotheosis as national hero. The film's refusal to endorse incontrovertibly one or the other side of the conflict means *Sonnō jōi* functions as a sort of arena for interpretations of history to compete, a marketplace of ideas from which the viewer can choose whichever view s/he likes best.

The preferred reading of *Sonnō jōi*, a film made during the 60-year anniversary of the Meiji Restoration, amidst a climate of national unity, valorizes Naosuke to minimize intra-

[122] Richard Dyer (1979) is a noted theorist of stars and the persistence of their personas; Tessa Morris-Suzuki, writing specifically about historical fiction films, quotes Dyer to argue that the 'polysemic star image' deeply influences a given film's personalization of the past. Stars also draw audiences, of course, as in her example of Cate Blanchett merging with her role as Elizabeth I to such an extent that some go see the film as much out of devotion to Blanchett as to the historical Elizabeth, and admire the queen not only for her wisdom, as shown in the filmic version of history, but also because she *is*, in some sense, Cate Blanchett. See Morris-Suzuki, *The Past within Us*, p. 150. For Ōkōchi, Naosuke was infamous rather than famous, but in any case sufficiently well-known that portraying him would not harm his star persona as one of the so-called 'Honored Generals' (*ontai*) of the period film world, none of whom were willing to appear as no-name figures in films. It would be unthinkable, for example, to imagine a Bantsuma or an Ōkōchi agreeing to appear in a radically de-individualized film like *Five Scouts*.

[123] Satō describes Ōkōchi's performance in *Sonnō jōi* as specifically not the demonic destructiveness of a Tange Sazen, instead saying "kōzen taru haragei wo miseteiru" (he displayed a proud, triumphant force of personality). See Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 279.

national strife, while remaining careful not to demonize Naosuke's opponents the loyalists, who in the traditional historiography of the Bakumatsu were unambiguously heroic.[124] The key to valorizing the losers of Bakumatsu history is reliance on what Conrad Totman has called the Meiji bias, in which partisans of one of the "villains" of the hegemonic (i.e., Satsuma-Chōshū) Restoration-as-victory narrative try to minimize differences between the figure they champion and the victors who have vilified him or her, insisting that their chosen figure had an equal level of patriotism, reverence for the emperor, and so forth—in other words, claiming for their would-be hero an equal share in the glory of the Meiji Restoration.[125]

Yet despite adopting a Meiji bias approach to Naosuke's rehabilitation, the film cannot avoid portraying the insoluble conflict between accommodationist Shogunate (Naosuke) and extremist pro-imperial activists (Nariaki and the loyalists). In witnessing any such conflict, viewers would have been exceedingly unlikely to find their sympathies perfectly split between the two sides.[126] Indeed, as we shall see in the close visual analysis of the beheading scene below, the film isn't quite neutral in its portrayal of the conflict of personalities between Naosuke and Nariaki, betraying a subtle but significant favoring of the former via the film's use of technical codes like camera angle and position, lighting, and editing.[127] On the other hand, this subtle

[124] Ikeda and the rest of the crew would have needed to be especially careful in how they depicted the loyalists visually, since given their extensive use of intertitles—which would have made them no friends among the film narrators—they could not rely on sympathetic narrators 'salvaging' the film from ideological condemnation by adding suitably patriotic language and themes. This ameliorating function of the *benshi*, as Peter High points out, often helped reduce instances of filmmaker-state conflict in the silent era. High, p. 173. One of the most iconic examples of a narrator intervening to save a film from censorship or banning occurred during an 1897 showing of Edison's *The Kiss*; as an outraged policeman made as though to halt the screening (in what would have been the first known incidence of attempted censorship), the quick-thinking narrator saved the day by claiming that in the United States, kissing was the cultural equivalent of shaking hands! See Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, p. 51.
[125] Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu*, p. 558.
[126] This had implications for the film's success countrywide; for example, an article in the Aug. 5, 1927 issue of the *Kokusai eiga shinbun* predicted the film's box-office success would vary by region (due to lingering resentment over the Boshin War and its aftermath in defeated regions like Aizu). See *Kokusai eiga shinbun dai ichi-kan*, p. 147.
[127] This terminology of "technical codes", which shape "narrative representational codes" of narrative, conflict, character, etc., is transposed from Fiske's definitions of television codes in *Television Culture*, p. 5. They apply

championing of Naosuke would likely have been counterbalanced by an initial tendency among at least some audience members (thanks to the weight of historiography favoring Nariaki over Naosuke) to view Nariaki more favorably than Naosuke. Hence, the 'message' of *Sonnō jōi* is fundamentally ambiguous, its interpretation heavily dependent on each viewer's own preexisting views on Bakumatsu history.

Regarding the interpretation of Bakumatsu history, the film has grand aspirations. It is no mere biography; its title is not "Ii Naosuke", after all. In fact, the film's official title is *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi*, or "History of the founding of the nation: Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians." This crucial first word has attracted no attention, leading to contemporary scholarship—on those rare occasions it refers to the film at all—calling it simply *Sonnō jōi*.[128] This ignoring of the full title has historical precedent as well: ads for the film in *Kinema junpō* and even the censorship records pertaining to the film universally list its title as *Sonnō jōi.*[129]

As one of only a tiny handful of films given the censorship designation 'history film', it came in for special scrutiny, becoming one of the most heavily examined films in all of 1927.[130]

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equally well to film, especially the often serial/episodic films of prewar and wartime Japan, and Fiske himself acknowledges that films centered around iconic characters (Rambo, etc.) closely resemble TV. See ibid., p. 151.

[128] One of the only film scholars, even in Japan (in English-language scholarship essentially no mention is made of the film at all, good or bad), to reference this film is Yamane Sadao, who comments that '*Sonnō jōi* ni yotte, jidaigeki shijō ni issen wo kakusu sakuhin wo tanjō saseta' ("with *Sonnō jōi* he [Ikeda] had created a work [of such scale and importance] that [it] divides all the history of period films into before and after this work"). Note, however, that despite Yamane's acknowledgement of the epic scale of the film, he calls it merely "*Sonnō jōi*", making no mention of its grandiose "Kenkokushi" full title. See Yamane, "Kaisetsu" from the *Kuriyama Daizen* Nihon eiga kessaku zenshū VHS release, n. pag.

[129] One exception is the Kanda Nikkatsukan film program leaflet from Oct. 7, 1927, devoted to *Sonnō jōi,* which includes the full title (albeit with "Kenkokushi" written far smaller than "*Sonnō jōi*"). *Purogurammu eigashi*, p. 133.

[130] A relatively careful perusal of Eiga ken'etsu jihō dai go kan (Shōwa 2-nen, i.e. 1927) turned up only six films, out of hundreds, given the '[reki]shi' ('history') designation; the vast majority of films, including period films like the 1927 (and, as it happens, the 1928) *Sakamoto Ryōma,* etc., were classified as either 'katsu[geki]' (i.e., 'action') or 'nin[jō]' ('human interest/romance'?). Another factor emphasizing the unusual nature of *Sonnō jōi* was how often (twenty-one times, starting on September 21st and continuing almost every day thru October 12th of 1927; see ibid., p. 673-702) it was subjected to the censors' gaze; very few films were examined on quite so many occasions as *Sonnō jōi*, with only a tiny minority examined more than fifteen times and most films well under ten. That a single film would be examined so carefully and repeatedly is especially remarkable given the staggering scale of censorship operations by in 1927, in which censors viewed 76,810 reels of film, for a total of nearly 19 million meters. See Makino, p. 195.

The film is unabashed in its quest to link causally the Bakumatsu history (and especially Naosuke's actions and sacrifice) it portrays to 1920s Japan and its tremendous progress, the sociopolitical usefulness of which might explain why no deletions were officially demanded by the censors despite their repeated examinations of the film and its script.[131]

Just after Naosuke is beheaded and his killer Arimura is himself mortally wounded by a dying Hikone guard, there is a dissolve into a shot of ocean waves roiling about, then a graphic match dissolve into a Hinomaru fluttering in the wind, before an iris out effect (centered on the circle in the middle of the flag) and then a slow pan across a modern-day harbor filled with impressive modern ships. Over this panning shot the final intertitle, with its effusive but archaic language, is overlaid: "The achievements earned through countless sacrifices and priceless tears of blood shall never perish from the earth...ah, how deeply moving this is, (without equal in either) past or present..."[132] But this leaves the fundamental contradiction of the film unresolved; either Naosuke was right to open the country by signing a treaty with Harris even though he had not yet received imperial sanction to do so, and his attackers were thus in the wrong, or (as the film's final intertitle seems to suggest) Naosuke may have been right, but his death was also a sacrifice necessary for Japan to prosper as a nation, in which interpretation Naosuke becomes a scapegoat upon whom xenophobic imperial patriotism could spend its fury. To examine this contradiction further, let us take a closer look at the assassination scene itself, which occurs immediately before the final sequence described above.

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[131] There is no record of any official deletions (*seigen*) being made, but there exists the distinct possibility that (as was also common after the 1939 film law) informal advice was prodding the filmmakers towards self-censorship. The length of the film, as listed in the censorship record, varies from a high of 3122m to a low of 3003m. Clearly something was being changed to produce these slightly different versions. For a complete listing of all the instances where the film (and/or the film's script) was examined by the censors, see ibid., p. 673-702.

[132] The Japanese is "ikuta no gisei to tōtoki chinamida no kōseki ha eikyū kuchisezu...aa konjaku no kan fukashi..."

Close Analysis: The Assassination Scene, 98:58-100:14

Naosuke is not shown during the two-minute-long chanbara (sword-fighting) sequence depicting the assault by the Mito *rōnin* on his retinue at the Sakurada gate; he appears after the combat is over, emerging slowly, regally, from his palanquin and standing in MCU surveying the scene. Cut to MCU of Arimura's face as his eyes widen in recognition and he starts to move in (presumably) Naosuke's direction, then into a LS tableau of Naosuke waiting for Arimura to run up, which he soon does, from the left; the two face each other in front of the palanquin and talk (via intertitles). The ASL (less than four seconds) for this entire sixty-second sequence of the confrontation between Arimura and Naosuke continues, or in fact surpasses, the rapid pacing of the chanbara scene immediately before it, and this despite being dialogue (intertitle) heavy, with a resulting lack of dramatic movement or action, strongly suggesting that this sequence should be considered a critically important climactic moment in the film.

In both the tableau LS of the two men facing each other and the next shot, a profile shot of Arimura in MCU glowering at Naosuke over the latter's shoulder, care is taken via camera angle and positioning to give the two men equal stature—neither appears bigger or more impressive than the other.[133] There is every reason to believe this visual suggestion of similarity or equality between the two men was deliberate, since normally, shooting one figure over the shoulder of the other will make the one closer to the camera (i.e., the one whose shoulder is in the shot) look larger or taller than the one whose face is shown; controlling for such effects via adjustment to the camera angle and so forth would probably have required conscious intervention, especially when one considers the care to create a graphic match between the two figures via this intercutting between these two positions.

[133] Moreover, Ōkōchi was quite short, rumor has it just 158 cm (5'2")—he was almost certainly shorter than Onoe Tamitarō, the actor playing Arimura, so camera angles and distance to the subjects being shot had to be carefully controlled in order to create the visual effect of equality between them. See Satō, *Nihon eigashi* vol. 1, p. 272.



Fig. 6: Arimura confronts Naosuke, in a high-angle shot over the shoulder–making Naosuke seem equally big (99:12)

Following the MCU of Arimura (fig. 6) is a reaction shot of Naosuke alone (fig. 7), also in MCU, glowering right back, un-cowed, and leaning away to the right at a slight angle, making a graphic match with Arimura's positioning in the earlier MCU of him over Naosuke's shoulder and

thereby violating the 180 degree rule,[134] then a reverse-shot back to Arimura, who smiles harshly and shouts (via intertitle) "Ii Naosuke, you traitor—prepare to die!"[135]



Fig. 7: Naosuke return's Arimura's gaze, in a neutral/slightly low-angle shot that violates the 180 degree rule (99:15)

After the intertitle comes a MCU of Arimura looking determined as he lifts his sword above his head to deliver the killing blow. There is a cut back to Naosuke in the same slightly leaning posture, smiling thinly as (cut to intertitle) he says "Friend and enemy are separated by a vast

[134] This is because Naosuke appears in virtually the same position that Arimura was in the earlier shot, and facing the camera at the same angle, so their eye-lines cannot appear to match—technically they "cannot" be looking at each other. It is intriguing to consider that the principles of continuity editing are consistently used throughout the film, and are violated only here, where there is the most ideological tension: giving Naosuke the same posture (and a slightly low angle, etc.) as the loyalist hero thus is a mirroring of the ideological equation performed by the intertitle following this shot-reverse shot, in which Naosuke claims their true intentions, as regards the state, are the same.
[135] In Japanese, "Kokuzoku Ii Naosuke—kakugo sei!" The intertitle also features a 'tsu' after both 'kokuzoku' and 'sei', adding a staccato harshness to the proclamation. Note that 'kokuzoku' can also mean "rebel" (against the state); either way, Naosuke is being indicted for signing the treaty with Harris before receiving imperial sanction to do so.

gulf in ideology, but though the road each takes may be different, there is no variation in what we intend in our hearts for our beloved state; therefore speak not such words as 'traitor'."[136]

In other words, the film subtly excuses Naosuke's lèse-majesté (an unpardonable crime in the eyes of the Mito *rōnin*) when he slighted the emperor and arrogated to himself the authority to treat with the foreigners, suggesting even this action can be interpreted as good and proper given the nobility of his 'true intentions' toward the state. This interpretation of Naosuke's conduct as a rebellion against the emperor's authority was picked up on by contemporary reviewers; in a contemporary piece in Kinema Junpō, Takeda Chuya argued that Naosuke was being shown favorably despite flouting the imperial will; Takeda also commented, in reference to a scene occurring about three-quarters of the way through the extant version of the film, that it was refreshing to see him reading a foreign book in his foreign-style study.[137] This surprisingly liberal stance towards the imperial institution (since by extension Emperor Kōmei was perhaps wrong to withhold his approval for the treaty, especially insofar as the later Meiji statesmen continued Naosuke's conciliatory policy toward other nations) creates a fascinating range of readings for the film: some viewers might have reasoned that Naosuke's murder was a just punishment for his lèse-majesté yet simultaneously acknowledged Naosuke was right to open Japan (as in the trope of the loyal retainer who insists he is acting in his lord's best interests regardless of said lord's stated wishes and despite knowing that his disobedience will cost him his life), one of the insoluble contradictions of Bakumatsu period history as told by the victors—who claimed, after all, to be acting in the name of the emperor in all things.

After one more shot of Naosuke, in the same position in medium close-up, finishing his speech, there is a cut to Arimura looking completely unmoved, indeed more furious than ever as

[136] This speech is shown visually to be a quasi-poem: "shisō no sokaku kara/teki mikata to wakare/toru beki michi koso/kotonaredo kokka wo omō/shin'i ni wa/kawari wa nai.../kokuzoku nazo to/mōsu de nai zō" (plus a little 'tsu').
[137] *Kinema junpō* no. 276 (Oct. 11, 1927), p. 34.

he screws his face into a tighter grimace and brandishes his sword. But after a cut to Naosuke for a reaction shot, Naosuke shows he is different from Arimura after all. Facing imminent death, he laughs heartily and says (via intertitle) "If you desire it so much, take my head then."[138]



Figure 8: Arimura full of hate. A slightly high-angle shot though he is standing over the kneeling Naosuke (99:34).

Naosuke is presented in stark visual contrast with Arimura via their facial expressions: since death-defying courage (fig. 9) is more visually appealing than bloodthirsty hatred (fig. 8), it is difficult to see the two men as morally indistinguishable anymore; Ikeda's invocation of the Meiji bias to valorize Naosuke is augmented by a subtle endorsement here. On a technical level (for example, by giving Naosuke a low, and thus heroic, camera angle even when kneeling, but

[138] This comment, too, is shown as a quasi-poem: "Sorehodo hoshikuba, yo no kubi wo motte ike(little 'tsu')".

shooting Arimura slightly from above despite the fact that he is standing), and through aspects of the mise-en-scene, the film seems to be proposing that Naosuke is morally superior to his killers.



Figure 9: Naosuke full of courage--a low-angle shot despite the fact that he is kneeling (99:37).

There is a cut back to Naosuke, still smiling, as he kneels down out of the frame, followed by a seamless match on action from a new lower camera height, back in a LS tableau, showing him serenely assuming the formal posture (*seiza*) suitable for decapitation in front of the palanquin and Arimura leaning in close as though suddenly uncertain, and needing to confirm Naosuke is really at peace with this. But we, the viewers, need no reassurance on that score, having seen ample evidence of Naosuke's nobility of character throughout the film. This is

followed by a cut to a low-angle MCU of Arimura barking out a "Yoshi!" (no intertitle) as he raises his sword and then brings it down with all his strength.

There follows a bit of cross-cutting. Instead of showing the match on action of Naosuke's head being severed or some other aspect of the bloody deed, which in addition to presenting technical difficulties in 1927 would have harmed the dignity so painstakingly returned to Naosuke via the message of the film as a whole, there is a cut to a LS of an injured Hikone guard writhing in the snow and beginning to move closer to Arimura, then a cut back to Arimura in MCU with an expression of naked, savage joy on his face[139] as he dances around, brandishing the severed head and shouting gleefully (in an intertitle) "I...Arimura Jizaemon...have slain Ii Naosuke!"[140] Then there is a brief reaction shot of Seki and the other surviving Mito *rōnin*[141] clustered together in a LS tableau outside the castle walls, cheering for joy and waving their swords wildly at the sight, then a LS of Arimura still prancing around, into which the injured Hikone guard suddenly leaps from off-screen left, striking down from above at Arimura, who recoils in pain. There is a cut to Arimura in CU, determinedly bringing his own sword down, and then a cut to a LS match on action of the sword hitting the guard, who falls in the favored death-trope of the film, slowly collapsing with neck thrust out and back arched, as Arimura staggers. The next shot is of the surf pounding furiously (a deliberate echo of the first non-intertitle shot of

[139] This histrionic ecstasy further lowers his stature by standing in stark visual contrast with Naosuke's easy smile of just seconds earlier.
[140] "Arimura Jizaemon...Ii Naosuke wo uchitotta!"
[141] The film is careful to show exactly thirteen men here, faithfully representing the known fact that four of the attackers died during the combat. But the fate of these remaining thirteen, or even of Arimura, is not explained in the film: their mission accomplished, and the film's ideological work of tying Naosuke's sacrifice to Japan's modern prosperity now complete, showing them being hunted down—by their own Mito domain's forces—and captured (to be, eventually, executed) or committing suicide here and there would have added little to the film's story, which is not really about the Sakuradamon incident or even about Ii Naosuke (much less his attackers), so much as it is about, as the title claims, the history of the founding of modern Japan. Moreover, the message of national unity would surely have suffered if the extremely awkward position into which their attack had put Mito domain had been shown.

the film, of surf crashing on rocks heralding the coming chaos of the Black Ships' arrival), beginning the final sequence which causally ties this incident in with Japan's 1920s prosperity.

What is at stake in showing Naosuke meeting his end with such poise and nobility? Naosuke, in this scene, has taken on some of the characteristics of the standard tragic hero of the 1920s period films: a heroic lone individual facing off against an uncomprehending and hostile society (here represented by the group of assassins from Mito), a storyline that always ends badly for the hero in Japanese cinema of that period, when only his final weapon—grace and comportment in death—can nudge society in the direction he had so impotently desired in life.[142] But unlike the more nihilistic films of Itō Daisuke or Futagawa Buntarō, in *Sonnō jōi* the victorious enemy—the *rōnin*, and by extension the erstwhile xenophobic society at large—cannot be vilified, since in this evocation of Japan's founding myth one key goal is to foster national unity. And unlike other, more moderate attempts at historical revisionism, as with the narrowly positive portrayal of Kondō Isami (but not his politics or even, in fact, his troop, the Shinsengumi) in the 1928 *Kurama Tengu*, in *Sonnō jōi* it is not only Naosuke's individual character that is being celebrated, but his political stance as well—even to the extent of excusing his insult to the imperial institution.

Conclusion: the Progressive Potential of *Sonnō jōi*

In this chapter, I have argued that the valorizing revisionism of *Sonnō jōi's* depiction of Ii Naosuke was a logical and useful preferred reading for the film's makers to promote. By invoking the Meiji bias to insist the 'villains' of the Bakumatsu were as patriotic as its

[142] As the 1910s crisis over *Zigomar* showed, Japanese police and (later) the Home Ministry's censorship apparatus would not tolerate the glorification of criminals, for fear it would lead to copycat crimes and a general breakdown of morality; this is partly why both Naosuke and his murderers had to be portrayed as having the same "true intention", a political purity of purpose that transforms any potential 'crime' into a well-intentioned act of sincerity.

conventional heroes (but never implying that those heroes were themselves blameworthy), as well as what I have termed the "loyalist bias" to suggest viewers adopt the preferred subject position of 'descendent of Satsuma or Chōshū loyalists', the filmmakers encoded a message promoting national unity, erasing lingering regional resentment over defeat—as well as ire over the contemporary situation of continuing Satsuma-Chōshū dominance of the post-Restoration government. In that sense, the preferred reading of the film does serve the interests of the dominant class, and if this were the only reading available to viewers, one might be forced to conclude that politically speaking *Sonnō jōi* was ultimately reactionary despite, or indeed because of, its rehabilitation of Naosuke.

However, I have also argued that *Sonnō jōi*'s popularity—evidence of its appropriation by those subordinate to the dominant class (i.e., "the people", who are subordinate to the state and its political and socio-intellectual elites)—suggests many other meanings were made out of it, including negotiated or even oppositional readings. Many factors, including a given viewer's gender, class, age, and regional roots, could and did color his or her reading of this film, as well as 'extradiegetic' factors such as devotion to a particular film star (like Ōkōchi) or appreciation for *Sonnō jōi*'s progressive, Pure Film-inspired challenge to the institution of film narration.

Moreover, in some ways the preferred reading is itself rather progressive, even if it does partially serve the interests of the dominant class. To the ruling elites, who presumably did not care much about marginalized regions like, say, Aizu, the loyalist bias is more useful than the Meiji bias; Japan's film industry could simply have continued making straightforward good versus evil, pro-imperial versus pro-Tokugawa morality plays of the Bakumatsu and reinforcing a loyalist (descendent) subject position, promoting national unity by marginalizing or silencing the voices of the losers of the Restoration. In short, it is easy to imagine a hegemonic narrative of

the Bakumatsu that continued to denigrate figures like Kondō Isami and especially Ii Naosuke. But instead, *Sonnō jōi* took the groundbreaking step of reshaping the conventional narrative of Bakumatsu history, clawing Ii Naosuke back into socio-centrality, arguing that the true story of the pro-imperial/pro-Tokugawa conflict was one of good versus good.

Whether audiences recognized and embraced this message, or indeed constructed even more (or less) radical oppositional meanings out of *Sonnō jōi* is unclear, there being very little surviving evidence of popular reactions to the film. But its popularity is itself evidence that many people in 1927 Japan found Bakumatsu history, and specifically the story of Ii Naosuke as national hero rather than traitorous villain, relevant to their own lives. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, devoted to other film genres and somewhat later time periods of prewar Japanese cultural history, the popularity of Bakumatsu films continued unabated throughout the prewar and wartime period—if anything, the relevance of such films appears to have increased.

Chapter Two

History as Nonsense: Historical Parodies of the Bakumatsu

It is the calm before the storm: the steely-eyed samurai smiles contemptuously at a ring of opponents, slowly draws his sword and stands stock-still, ready to unleash his righteous fury in the blink of an eye. The scene is one familiar to any who have seen a few Japanese period films (*jidaigeki*), as it is a trope which appears in virtually all such films of the 1920s thru 1960s. *Enoken Plays Kondō Isami* (*Enoken no Kondō Isami,* 1935, dir. Yamamoto Kajirō, hereafter "*Kondō*"), from which the above-mentioned scene comes, is no exception, and if anything the militarism of the 'calm before the storm' trope seems especially fitting considering it was made in 1935, during a lull in Japan's 15-year war which began in Manchuria in 1931. But then, parody barges its way into the seemingly serious scene—a man with a broom approaches and asks Shinsengumi captain and pro-Tokugawa (*sabaku*) stalwart Kondō, played by comedian Enomoto Ken'ichi (known as Enoken or, even more affectionately, as *Eroken* by fans),[1] and his pro-imperial (*kinnō*) opponents to relocate their fight, since he is trying to sweep where they are fighting, and both sides sportingly agree, as though their life-and-death struggle were of less importance than the cleanliness of the marketplace.[2]

Kondō, as it happens, was (and remains) a successful parody both of the period film genre and of the history of the Bakumatsu, the period (1853-1867) in which it was set. In it, Enoken plays both the eponymous Shinsengumi captain as well as merchant-revolutionary Sakamoto Ryōma, and the film centers around Sakamoto's fate and whether Kondō will win his

[1] Enoken was seen as the king of ero-guro-nansensu culture, and thus his 'Eroken' nickname. Silverberg, p. 241.
[2] At the very beginning of the melee, two older men are playing chess in the foreground, commenting complacently on the 'serious' fight unfolding in front of them and then betting on the outcome. Before the melee begins, the opening scene of the film is faux-serious as well: a horseman races down a road, clutching a pair of high geta; but, arriving, he tosses the geta to Kondō, whose foes shift uneasily, knowing he is unstoppable while wearing them.

longstanding fight against the loyalists (*shishi*), especially archrival Katsura Kogorō. But throughout, in ways both subtle and surprisingly overt, the film conveys a great deal of sardonic apathy over these sorts of historical squabbles, parodically suggesting Kondō and Sakamoto were similar enough to have been potential allies, and counterfactually speculating about the implications of a decisive, lasting victory by Kondō and the Shinsengumi over the loyalist forces.

The persistence of parody in films such as the late 1935 *Kondō* challenges the usual explanation of Japanese history films as increasingly monumental in style during the war period, and the claim that the era of nonsense had ended by 1934.[3] Indeed, the enormous popularity of its lighthearted take on Japan's history calls into question the extent the Japanese people really supported the staid interpretations of history presented in so-called 'national policy films' (*kokusaku eiga*).[4] Its very existence belies the once-standard narrative of Japan's steady cultural decline into total war from 1931 onwards. The popularity of *Kondō* suggests the war fever after 1931, and the political terror after the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai in 1932, had not quenched the public's desire for a good laugh, and specifically for slapstick antics intended to comment on Japan's ambivalent experience of modernization-as-Westernization.[5]

[3] Driscoll (p. 170) claims the ero-guro-nansensu era is seen as having lasted from 1926-1934.
[4] Darryl Davis has charted a gradual shift "upward" in register beginning in the 1930s, from a comic to a more melodramatic "monumental" mode of screening history; see Davis, p. 81. He identifies the 'end' of parody in period films as 1933 (Davis p. 75), but this chronology ignores films like *Kondō*.
[5] Enoken specialized in intentionally 'inchiki' (phony) gags highlighting Japan's unease over Westernization, as when he played characters on stage committing seppuku to the rhythm of Western jazz (Silverberg p. 241), and his films continued this sort of gag, as well as gestures to Hollywood specifically. It is possible to see the Hollywood influence (and the use of English!) in this film as evidence of the hegemonic power of the cultural "empire" of the United States (which dominated the world's screens), making the calculated re-showing of Enoken films throughout the Japanese empire an attempt to hijack Hollywood's popularity. Originally, however, Enoken intended not to ape the West but to parody Japan's ambivalent embrace of the West.

The King of Comedy: Enomoto "Enoken" Ken'ichi

If the 1920s and 1930s in Japan was the era of the Erotic, the Grotesque, and the Nonsensical (*ero guro nansensu*) popular culture, this chapter is devoted to the nonsense.[6] *Nansensu* is what Mark Driscoll, quoting Akagami Yoshitsuke, has dubbed the logic of 'unreason,' a force that dwells in images, not words, and has no respect for laws or rules.[7] As Miriam Silverberg has shown, moreover, nonsense, especially in the hands of a performer like Enoken, constitutes a potent if always (due to the oversight of censorship) slightly displaced attack on Japan's contemporary society, and its uneasy combination of mis-matching samurai traditions and Westernized modernity.[8]

I will argue, using *Kondō* and a few parodic precursors, that nonsense history films fulfilled a vital social function in interwar and wartime Japan: in essence, they allowed viewers to mock the present in safety. The enduring popularity of parody, even in the face of wartime legal and governmental restrictions, also illustrates the power of the people, and suggests the Japanese people were not so committed to the war effort as the 'dark valley' theory of Japan's wartime popular culture implies.

Within the larger category of Bakumatsu history films, there is a subgenre of sorts: the historical parody, or in other words Bakumatsu history as comedy. This was the realm of the truly popular—at home in Japan and abroad in the territories Japan occupied as the war progressed, few films could draw in audiences like comedies could, especially the vaudeville-style slapstick films of stage legend Enomoto Ken'ichi, nicknamed Enoken.[9] Appearing in his

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[6] In her eponymous book, Miriam Silverberg argued persuasively that Japan, culturally speaking, was in an era of "ero-guro-nansensu" during the 1920s and 1930s.
[7] Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, p. 173.
[8] Silverberg, p. 241 and passim, especially chapter three of part three, on "Modern Nonsense."
[9] For example, the Makino collection (Columbia University) series six, subseries five, box 611 has quite a number of chirashi (handbills) distributed at movie theaters in Manchukuo, and although many were written in Japanese, this

first major film role in 1934, Enoken immediately took the film world by storm, winning fans country- and eventually empire-wide with his expressions (facial and verbal), gags and antics. One reason his films performed so well abroad was because the physicality of his humor meant little linguistic or cultural translation was required.[10]

Before his first starring film role, Enoken was a well-known comedic stage actor. That is to say, he was someone most ordinary people outside of Tokyo had probably never heard of and in any case would never be able to afford either the time or the money to see in person. But after he began to appear in prominent film roles, he was instantly a household name that virtually anyone was able to see thanks to the low ticket prices for domestic films and their widespread diffusion throughout all urban, and many rural, areas and populations.[11] This rapid transformation illustrates the tremendous reach of the film industry, and the much wider audience for film than for any other "mass" medium, even lowbrow, popular stage theater.

Enoken's apotheosis from stage to cinematic actor was more successful than that of nearly all other such converts. Of course, many of Japan's top film stars had once dabbled with stage—specifically, Kabuki—acting, but very few managed any success in the world of theater; in fact, it was precisely their failure in the theatrical arena that led so many to pursue a career in films, especially early in the history of Japan's film industry, when appearing in film was not yet

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should not be taken to mean he appealed only to ethnically Japanese audiences. Enoken was popular among other linguistic and ethnic groups within the Japanese empire precisely because he transcended linguistic humor and offered physical humor, or in other words movements that were comic, as Bergson would say, because they show 'something mechanical in something living.' Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, p. 41.

[10] Note that his main rival in the world of comedy, Furukawa Roppa, was markedly less popular in the conquered areas under Japan's wartime jurisdiction, probably because his style of humor was more cerebral and depended more on his verbal wit and facility with words; Enoken faced no such obstacles, since his goofy expressions required no cumbersome interpretation. Furukawa, p. 193.

[11] Isolde Standish has pointed out that Tōhō eventually came under severe fire for its series of Enoken films, not only because Enoken encouraged frivolity and irresponsibility, but also because his films were extremely popular; thus, Tōhō was guilty of profiting from the putative vulgarity of the viewing public. Standish, *A New History,* p. 144.

seen as a respectable choice.[12] Enoken is perhaps the only great interwar star of the stage to step so effortlessly into the cinematic limelight.

Enoken first appeared on the Asakusa stage in 1930 and had risen to theatrical fame by 1932.[13] On stage, he had won notoriety for parodying Chūshingura and samurai values in general back in 1930,[14] and continuing that subversive mockery with a stage version of *Kondō Isami*, which was the basis for the 1935 screen adaptation by the brand-new film studio P.C.L. (Photo Chemical Laboratory); contrary to Gregory Barrett's assertion that after this stage- and film-based parody of the samurai, Enoken—and everyone else—was prevented by the authorities from making any more films mocking the samurai, however, Enoken himself starred in another such parody, *Enoken no Kurama Tengu*, in 1939,[15] and a third, the "amazingly popular" *Enoken no Yaji Kita,* in 1940.[16]

Indeed, his film career and popularity showed surprising longevity, despite increasingly adverse legal and censorial conditions. In the twelve years from his first major film appearance in 1934 and the war's end in 1945,[17] he appeared in an impressive 41 films, 18 of them produced

[12] The best example is Japan's first true film star, Onoe Matsunosuke, who for reasons specific to the Kabuki world would have been doomed to a third-rate career in Kabuki but chose instead to gamble on the nascent film industry and struck box office gold. Many other stars, particularly of period films, followed a similar trajectory, including Ōkōchi Denjirō, a struggling stage actor whose own famous "discovery" by Itō Daisuke is recounted in chapter one.
[13] Tarumi Chie, "1940 nen bunka kūkan no Enoken to 'Songokū'," in Iwamoto Kenji hen, *Eiga to daitōa kyōeiken,* p. 239.
[14] Enoken subverted the present of 1930 at every turn with 'acharaka' (achira kara, 'coming from over there', i.e. Western in origin) irony in this intentionally 'inchiki' (phony) adaptation of Chūshingura at the *Casino Folies* theater, having characters use modern safety razors to commit seppuku and calling on one character whose head had just been axed to hold up a sign saying "unemployed" (a pun on the Japanese word 'kubi', which can mean 'head' or 'to be axed (fired)'). Silverberg, p. 238.
[15] Barrett claims no parody of the samurai, or their values, was or could be made after 1937, but he is overstating the degree of control the state actually exerted over the film industry. See Barrett, "Comic Targets and Comic Styles: An Introduction to Japanese Film Comedy," in Arthur Nolletti et al, eds., *Reframing Japanese Cinema,* p. 215.
[16] "Monosugoi ninki" proclaims the Osaka Asahi Shinbun advertisement appearing in the Jan. 1, 1940 edition.
[17] He only starred in two films in 1945, both of which were released in January. Note that he surely would have been in even more films had he not injured himself riding his bicycle into an air-raid trench in Jan., 1945. High, p. 494.

after the promulgation of the 1939 Film Law, which singled out entertainment[18] and comedy in general, and Enoken in particular,[19] for harsh opprobrium.[20]

Bakumatsu as Nonsense: *Enoken Plays Kondō Isami*

One reason censors and other pro-state ideologues disliked Enoken so intensely was the 1935 slapstick historical parody alluded to above, *Kondō*, in which he pokes equal fun at both the pro-Tokugawa and pro-imperial sides in the supposedly glorious and deadly serious struggle to reform Japan in the Bakumatsu period.[21] In the process, his parody destroys the historical idols constructed by society to that point, especially Sakamoto Ryōma, Katsura Kogorō, and—of course—Kondō Isami himself; depicting national heroes in a ridiculous, mocking way was no small transgression, then or now.[22] Moreover, a satiric parody of history[23] like that present in *Kondō* depends by nature on its audience recognizing the intention of the work's creators to

[18] In fact, even films such as *China Nights* (*Shina no yoru*, 1940) offended both censors and quasi-official critics like Tsumura Hideo, who blasted it for pandering to the masses and including vapid entertainment, thereby detracting from the political message. See for example Tsumura's review of *Shina no yoru* in the *Asahi shinbun*, June 9, 1940 (evening ed.). Right after the film's box office success, further narrative fiction film censorship restrictions were imposed. See Salomon, p. 136.

[19] Enoken (and Roppa) was the target of stiffer restrictions on comedy issued by the Naimushō in 1940. High, p. 281.

[20] Peter High has described the period from the Film Law's promulgation thru the relaxation of restrictions on comedy production in autumn 1944 as a kind of 'war on comedy,' pointing out the Film Law itself refers to films of the type Enoken was known for as "empty-headed" and "degenerate." See High, p. 493. I do not entirely agree with High's assessment that Japan's film output for these five years were almost entirely free of comedy. For one thing, Enoken himself starred in at least two post-Film Law comedies (or to be more precise, films whose primary purpose was to provide lighthearted entertainment) that were and are genuinely funny, 1940's *Songokū* and 1942's *Matteita otoko*, and feature little of the "heavy-heartedness" High claims infected almost all such wartime efforts to be funny.

[21] Sasagawa Keiko argues *Kondō*, like all Enoken films of 1930s, was Hollywood-esque, and seen as such at the time; furthermore, she notes that the Kondō being presented in the film was much happier and yet also more emotionally complicated than the sort of streamlined "anti-modern" portrayal typical from 1940 on. Sasagawa, "Ongaku eiga no yukue: Nicchū sensō kara Daitōa sensō he," in *Nihon eiga to nashonarizumu, 1931-1945*, p. 332.

[22] Gregory Barrett, following U.S. film critic Gerald Mast, claims this subversive idol-destroying tendency is integral to good comedy, and notes that subversive slapstick films were hugely popular in Japan. But he also claims that *nansensu* comedy represented a compromise with the state, who granted license to be silly but not to mock the state or the police ("Comic Targets," p. 216). Yet in films like *Kondō*, Enoken pointedly mocks the samurai in general and Bakumatsu Japan's greatest national heroes in specific, and by implication the present-day state.

[23] "Parody" is usually defined as a comical imitation of a literary style, while "satire" mocks society or its groups; here, I conceive of *Kondō*'s deployment of Japan's most famous national heroes as a parody of history itself, one that also includes many satiric elements as well, especially the anachronisms that comment bitingly on the present (1935).

exceed the surface meaning and introduce another, deeper plane of significance, whose existence generates comical disjunctions; there can be no laughter without the willing and alert collusion of the audience, in other words.[24]

Not everyone was laughing at *Kondō,* however. Japan's most famous—or infamous—film critic of the 1930s and 1940s, Tsumura Hideo, had begun his own prolific film criticism career just a few years before *Kondō* was released. While some scholars have tried to trace an evolution in Tsumura's thought into an ever narrower, pro-government definition of the proper utilization of the film medium, his early review of *Kondō* reveals that Tsumura, even in the relative freedom of the 1930s prior to the China Incident, had always felt nothing but contempt for mere entertainment (*goraku*) comedies such as this.[25] He found little to laugh about in this parody of the teleological history which sought to undermine the connection between the struggles of the Bakumatsu period, and the Meiji Restoration which resulted, and the mightier Japan of the early Shōwa period. He excoriates *Kondō* as "a failure" just like all the other Enoken movies released in 1934 and earlier in 1935, and "a filthy nonsense film that offers almost no laughs."[26] He mordantly proclaims that this film's low quality proves "we can expect no new takes on the period film" from the likes of Enoken, and registers stern disapproval for what he sees as director Yamamoto Kajirō's bumbling departure from recent efforts, like *Itazura kozō*,

[24] Marteinson, p. 118.
[25] Peter High, for example, suggests such a declensionist quality to Tsumura's thought, claiming that by near the end of the war, he truly hated Enoken films since he "could find merit only in films directly aiding the cause of the war" (High p. 494). But I would argue there was no declension or progression to speak of; even prior to the outbreak of total war with China in 1937, Tsumura had the same visceral dislike for comedy, and Enoken in particular, he evinces in 1945. He had always been an ideologue in search of a worthy national cause, and when war broke out in earnest in 1937, and accelerated in 1941, he had found the moral justification for his preexisting hatred for comedy.
[26] Tsumura Hideo (writing as "Q"), "Shin eiga hyō," in the *Asahi shinbun*, October 14, 1935, morning ed., page 7. In the Japanese, "hotondo 'warai' wo sasowanu usugitanai nansensu eiga."

which he judged to have raised the level of Japanese films.[27] He blames what he sees as the film's artistic failure on the fact the director and star were "simply too nonsensical."

Tsumura clearly disliked many aspects of *Kondō*, but its (to him) abuse of history most of all. He decried the film for "worse yet, recklessly overusing English and contemporary vernacular Japanese" (instead of accents and dialects historically accurate to the nineteenth century), and dismissed the scenes of Enoken playing Sakamoto Ryōma as mere "boondoogle" before giving his one-word summation of the film: "garbage."[28] Tsumura's harsh criticism notwithstanding, the film was heavily anticipated and bound to be a blockbuster, as Tsumura himself provides circumstantial evidence for: he notes, at the end of his review, that it was then playing at the Nichigeki, Toho's newly acquired showcase movie palace, "the largest in the Orient," where only films designed to reach the widest possible audiences premiered—and at the reasonable if somewhat higher-than-average price of 50 *sen*.[29]

Tsumura failed to mention what ads in his own *Asahi shinbun* make clear: that *Kondō* was actually being shown as part of a film program at the Nichigeki with *Le Roi des Champs-Élysées*, a French comedy starring Buster Keaton.[30] This pairing, while unusual in terms of Japanese exhibition patterns, tending as they did to segregate foreign and Japanese-made films, is logical for a number of reasons, not least because both Keaton and Enoken had a Vaudevillian

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[27] Ibid., p. 7.
[28] Ibid., p. 7. In the original Japanese, he rants, "Yori warui koto wa, eigo ya gendai zokugo wo muyami ni tsukahisugita," "sukunakutomo muyō no chōbutsu" and "gusaku."
[29] Peter High recounts some of the fascinating history of the Nichigeki (said to be the biggest movie palace in all Asia, possessing over 2000 seats and with a total capacity of 4000 people) and its Yūrakuchō surroundings, including the careful urban planning and audience studies that ironically motivated its eventual completion by a rival company: it was judged that, due to pedestrian patterns in the Yūrakuchō area, and the socioeconomic status of the people walking by it, that the best financial strategy would be relatively low prices aimed to draw in huge crowds. Once it was completed in 1933, Toho tycoon Kobayashi Ichirō launched a massive campaign to acquire it as the crown jewel to Toho's dominance of the entire neighborhood, which bore fruit in early 1935. This means that *Enoken no Kondō Isami*, release in mid-October of 1935, was one of the first Toho films to premiere there. High, p. 152. Ads such as that shown in Figure 1 below proclaim the theater as "Tōyō saidai" and note the price is 50 sen.
[30] Contemporary ads for *Kondō* celebrate this film program as "a compilation of the biggest, loudest laughs from both East and West!" (Keaton / Enoken Tōzai ni daibakushōhen!). *Asahi shinbun*, Oct. 10, 1935, evening ed., p. 6.

approach to comedy, depending heavily on physical gags for comedic effect. And as the tag lines for each film emphasize, both Enoken and Keaton were each featured in two very different roles in their respective films. Moreover, the two films in combination represented a unique opportunity potentially to expand the sort of audiences interested in only one or the other type of film, foreign or domestic.[31] The ads themselves note, as a selling point for Japanese audiences who preferred Japanese-language films partly because they were not yet used to the linguistic challenges of foreign talkies,[32] that all dialogue in Keaton's film has been dubbed into Japanese.[33] Meanwhile, the tag-line on the Enoken comedy in the same ad draws attention to the film's innovative use of Ravel's then wildly popular "Bolero" for a rumba dance and sword-fighting sequence, thereby potentially attracting audience members who had little interest in ordinary period films but plenty for Western or Western-style films; in other regions with stronger audience demand for sword-fighting spectacle, ad lines focused on those qualities of the film rather than the comedy or the score.[34] And this tailored-to-the-region marketing campaign even caught the attention of non-Japanese; *Kondō* is one of the rare Japanese-language films to have been reviewed in the contemporary English-language newspaper *Japan Times*.[35]

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[31] An ad in KineJun for *Le Roi de Champs-Elysees* emphasizes that it's in a "Japanese that anyone can understand" (dare ni mo wakaru Nihongo ban). *Kinema junpō* no. 555 (Oct. 11, 1935) p. 88.

[32] Hiroshi Kitamura has pointed out that even in the mid-1930s, the expensive infrastructural investments exhibitors had to make before being able to exhibit talkies had not yet been made by many theaters. Kitamura, p. 18.

[33] The film also caused quite a stir because it features the perennially stone-faced Keaton cracking a smile, as the *Asahi* ad breathlessly proclaims. See ibid. Incidentally, even in the 'original' French film Keaton had been dubbed into French, since Keaton could apparently speak very little French; see https://dcairns.wordpress.com/tag/le-roi-des-champs-elysees/.

[34] For example, in a handbill (*chirashi*) for the Fushimi Teikokukan (located in Kyoto, capital of the *chanbara*/ period film world and stronghold of period film popularity) dating from August 14, 1936 advertising the long-awaited advent of *Kondō*, the short description had not a word about the use of Western music or even on comedy itself, focusing instead on Enoken as "King of Popularity" and on the film—which the description notes was already a hit countrywide—as a "wonderful, pleasant sword-fighting spectacle" ("subarashiku yukai na gōka kengekihen"). Museum of Kyoto Fushimi handbill collection, folder three, sleeve 91.

[35] The *Japan Times*, Oct. 11, 1935, p. 3 has two separate reviews of the film, with each incorrectly noting Enoken plays both Kondō "Isamu" and "Katsura Kogoro" but both stressing the film's mockery of the *chanbara* trope and its related use of Western music and dance. They also note it was playing in the same program as Keaton's film. Later cinema listings in the *Japan Times* (for example the mention on page 4 of the Jan. 16, 1936 issue of the Japan Times of Enoken's *Donguri Tonbei* as part of a program with Clark Gable's "China Seas" at the Gin'ei-za) indicate

Differences between the two films in the program remained, of course, and were reflected in the very structure of the ad itself. In the half of the ad space devoted to Keaton's project, the visual and textual focus is entirely on the star Keaton himself; of all the other cast and crew only the director, Max Nosseck, is mentioned by name, and that only briefly and in the same size characters as the rest of the main body of text. *Kondō,* by contrast, celebrates Enoken, of course, but also prominently displays the name of its rising-star director, Yamamoto Kajirō, as well as cinematographer Karasawa Hiromitsu, who was already famous for his work as part of a trio with Itō Daisuke and Ōkōchi Denjirō.[36] This focus on the triumvirate of star, director and cinematographer also appears in ads for the film in the most popular film magazine of the day, *Kinema junpō*.[37]

Another ad in the pages of the *Asahi shinbun* the following evening seeks to create the impression in the readers that this pairing of films and stars is a media event of national, indeed international significance. Under the tag line "A Rare Battle Between the Two Kings of Comedy, East and West!", it proclaims "In one corner, Keaton...In the other, Enoken!"[38] But instead of the cartoonish drawing of Enoken's smiling face used in the ad from October 10th, a production still

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Enoken's films were often marketed towards a "Western film" audience, as they appear frequently in the same programs as Western films, at least in the 1930s while Western films were still widely distributed in Japan.

[36] Ibid. Note that the director's name is allocated somewhat more space than the cinematographer's. Karasawa is most famous for his immersion method of shooting action sequences; according to Satō Tadao, he would strap a camera to his body and rush into the fray to capture all the action. Satō, "Commentary" on *Talking Silents 7 DVD*.

[37] For example, the two-page ad appearing in KineJun issue 551 (Sept. 1, 1935), on pp. 224-225, lists only these three names, with Enoken's by far the biggest. This particular ad is intriguing for claiming viewers will see, in addition to "an epic battle, Enoken's fight scene of a lifetime!", the spectacle of "Kondō slashing his way, to the rhythm of the Bolero, into the Ikedaya!" referring to the Shinsengumi's most famous victory, an attack on a loyalist gathering at the Ikedaya inn in 1864; in fact, history is hopelessly confused here, since the film explicitly states its temporal setting as 1866 yet the attack on the Ikedaya occurs at the end, and not as a flashback by any means. See also a later ad from KineJun no. 555 (Oct. 11, 1935), pp. 115, which proclaims the film is Enoken's "First Period film Ever!"

[38] Technically the ad is actually using the 'in one corner' construction for the film titles, not the stars' names (or nationalities), but both titles, not coincidentally, feature the stars' names writ large, and as such, visually the 'contest' is between these two names, not the larger film titles.

of Enoken's actual face in an unusually serious expression was used, in a palpable attempt to visually link his face and persona to Keaton's stone-faced stare on the opposite side of the ad.[39]



Figure 10: Oct 11, 1935 ad in *Asahi shinbun* for the comedic film program to premiere the next day at the Nichigeki

Some of the existing scholarship on the Japanese cinema can foster the misleading impression that formal censorship by the Home Ministry was both frequent and heavily invasive in 1920s and 1930s Japan.[40] In fact, for the first three years of the 1930s only about 10% of all domestic films (feature and otherwise), and 11.5% of foreign films, suffered any cuts at all.[41] And in 1935, the year *Kondō* was released, the proportion of films with cuts had fallen to just 2%

[39] *Asahi shinbun*, Oct. 11, 1935, evening ed., page 3 (the rest of the ad text is virtually identical to the ad from the previous day).

[40] That is, the comparatively few films that were censored, compared to the enormous body of films that passed the preproduction censorship stage without incident, come in for the lion's share of scholarly attention. For example, much has been written, by Peter High, Eric Cazdyn and others, on *Nichirin*, directed by Kinugasa Teinosuke, and to be sure, it is a fascinating story of right-wing activism motivating the state's censorship apparatus to attempt a belated suppression of the film; based on stories such as this, even a reader well-versed in Japanese film history could be forgiven for concluding that censorship must have been pervasive. But as Gregory Kasza points out, a surprisingly small proportion of films made prior to the 1939 Film Law were interfered with at all (Kasza, p. 59). After that law, censorship began to take a less visible form (thanks to the 'suggestions' for changes given in informal meetings with filmmakers), which resulted in even fewer formal interventions. Meanwhile, even in the rare instance that cuts were actually demanded from a film (or rather, from the script), they tended to be a tiny proportion of the overall running length, often just a short line of dialogue or two, as the example of *Kondō* nicely illustrates.

[41] By far the most commonly cited reason for making cuts, for both domestic and foreign films, was 'sexual morality.' Kasza, pp. 60, 62.

of films inspected.[42] *Kondō*, as it happens, is one of that tiny fraction of films to have irked the censors enough for them to demand formal cuts. Moreover, it was cut in not one but three places, with corresponding cuts made to the 'explanatory script.'[43] Yet upon closer examination, out of a total length of over 2,200 meters, these three cuts removed a grand total of just six meters from the entire film, with a combined run-time of less than thirty seconds.[44] Still, a lot can happen, or be said, in thirty seconds. What, then, was in the offending passages?

The first snippet of dialogue which censors demanded be cut was prima facie a seemingly innocuous line. The offending comment, occurring in the third reel, is also very short, since at just two meters, it would have had less than ten seconds' running time. The speaker is Sakamoto 'Ryūma' (a mistake, possibly deliberate, for Ryōma, the famous loyalist entrepreneur from Tosa, and one of Enoken's two roles in the film), and he says "I can't take it no more...think I'll go visit Oryū."[45] The censors listed "morals" (*fūzoku*) as the reason for the cut, and indeed, based on the wording it is more than possible that Ryūma (or rather, the screenwriters at the Literary Division of P.C.L.) meant this "visit" to be understood by the audience as of a sexual nature.[46] But why would censors object to the implication that Sakamoto Ryōma and Oryō, the Bakumatsu's most famous couple—who according to legend were the first Japanese newlyweds ever to go on a honeymoon—might consummate their relationship? Technically, at this point in the film and in history, since the setting is just prior to the Teradaya Incident, Ryōma and Oryō were still a few days from being officially married, so it is possible censors very well-versed in the chronology of Bakumatsu history may have objected on the grounds that alluding to premarital sex could

[42] 456 of the total of 21,075 films (foreign, domestic, newsreels, etc.) inspected that year had cuts. Kasza, p. 137.
[43] The term is "setsumei daihon," from which the dialogue corresponding to the three film cuts was also struck.
[44] *Kondō*, as a 35mm sound film, could only have been projected at 24 fps, and assuming 4-perf 35mm film, the only size that could yield Japan's then-standard 1.33 to 1 aspect ratio, the run-time per meter is roughly 4.5 seconds.
[45] The original Japanese, according to the censors, was "Washi ya mō tamaran yo, Oryū no tokoro e itte koyō" (with words like 'ya' indicating a lower-class, vernacular register). Similarly, "Oryū" is an (intentional?) error for Oryō.
[46] *Eiga ken'etsu jihō* vol. 21, pp. 152-153. There are, for example, potential double entendres around both 'tokoro' ("place") and the verb 'iku' ("to go" but in Japanese also the verb for sexual climax).

disturb public morals, though that would of course depend on censors fearing that the average audience member might also know of the couple's premarital status.[47] Far more likely, however, is that censors objected to this sexual innuendo for other reasons. Either the particular censors tasked with evaluating *Kondō* were unusually priggish and decried any sexual content whatsoever, or—more plausibly—they objected to the suggestion that Japan's Bakumatsu heroes like Ryōma and Oryō could have had a loving and sexual relationship. In other words, it might have been seen to besmirch the illustrious tales of the Bakumatsu told of such heroes in textbooks and so forth to admit that they, too, were human and subject to human desires, especially in the case of Ryōma, who had heretofore been described, and depicted on screen in the many films already made about him,[48] as a masculine, gruff, and asexual hero.[49] Instead of this straightforward and unobjectionable depictive strategy, Enoken presents us with a distinctly "romantic lead"[50] style version of Ryōma, in other words Ryōma as lover-boy; but to allow him to refer too explicitly to sexual activity may have represented an unacceptable degradation of his heroic image. This reading of the censors' ruling is consistent with the love story between the two as presented in the film itself; they fawn all over each other, constantly murmuring sweet

[47] Moreover, there is no reason to believe a typical censor would have known this detail, since no objections were made to the more serious historical revisionism of the climax, in which Kondō, contrary to history, actually kills his nemesis, Katsura Kōgorō (Kido Kōin, one of the three most important statesmen of the early Meiji period).
[48] There had been at least ten (probably more) filmic depictions of Sakamoto prior to *Kondō*, even judging just from the incomplete records of the Nihon eiga dētabēsu (using keywords "海援隊", "坂本竜馬" and "坂本龍馬〃).
[49] Perusal of "morals" (*shūshin*) textbooks in use in the early twentieth century confirms that the portrayal of Japan's Bakumatsu-era national heroes was asexual (*tateyaku*-style), focused on their earnestness and sincerity; no attempt was made to humanize them, show them as flawed, or tell their 'real' life stories. See for example the account given of Yoshida Shōin's disciples Takasugi and Kusaka in a late Meiji-era third-year elementary school morals textbook issued by Monbushō: Takasugi sees Kusaka's earnest devotion to his studies and is instantly inspired to do his best, without feeling any jealousy. Needless to say, the textbook makes no mention of Takasugi's raucous lifestyle. See Monbushō chosaku, *Jinjō shōgaku shūshinsho dai san gakunen jidō yō* (Tokyo: Aikyō Risei, Meiji 38), pp. 31-33. Nor was this whitewashing of the historical record limited to textbook entries specifically in the "morals" curriculum; "An Old Man's Story" on Saigō Takamori appearing in an elementary school reader has much the same feel, emphasizing Saigō's service and neatly glossing over the entire episode of his rebellion in the Seinan war—which could be considered a major civil war—as "some trouble due to a misunderstanding." See Monbushō chosaku, *Jinjō shōgaku dokuhon hachi* (Tokyo: Aikyō Risei, Meiji 39), pp. 52-53. An adult of about 40 years old watching *Kondō* in 1935 would probably have been reading precisely this sort of textbook back in elementary school, so it would likely be the image of the Bakumatsu as evoked in textbooks to which s/he compared the filmic interpretation.
[50] That is, *nimaime* (leading man in romantic role), as opposed to *tateyaku* (masculine, solitary hero).

nothings into each other's ears using exaggeratedly cute voices and frequently punctuating this pillow talk with English words and phrases like "I love you!"[51] Given this context, it seems reasonable to view this particular 'morals' cut as being a warning, a largely symbolic reminder to the filmmakers not to push the sexual and romantic envelope quite so hard—especially where Japan's historical heroes are concerned.

The other two cuts demanded by the censors were not motivated by morals but by "public safety" (kōan).[52] In the fourth reel, there was originally a short (one-meter, or no more than five-second) scene in which a character said "Let us resolve this time of crisis" and, in the background behind him, a placard with the same message was visible.[53] Evidently, the censors felt this was too direct a reminder of Japan's own ongoing 'time of crisis' given the worsening situation in China—or indeed, too pointed a mockery of War Minister Araki Sadao's already infamous 1933 filmic lecture in ideology *Crisis-Time Japan* (*Hijōji Nihon*).[54] In similar fashion, the final cut made by censors, which occurred in reel five, was a three-meter-long (or less than fifteen-second) scene in which another politically problematic placard was visible in the background, this one reading "Strike down Traitors."[55] Although later belied in spectacular fashion by the discovery and execution of the Soviet spy Richard Sorge and his informant Ozaki Hotsumi late in the war, at this early stage the notion that a Japanese subject could betray his country was perhaps considered too improbable (and thus troubling) to countenance.

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[51] Linguistic transgressions like this (or worse still, a 'language lesson' scene between Ryōma and Oryō around minute 19 featuring him teaching her the English phrase "It is a dog," at the end of which scene she prances away and says, in English, "Goodbye!" while blowing Ryōma a kiss) would later be singled out for prohibition in the infamous "Shichi shichi kinrei" (The Seven-Seven Prohibitions) of July 7, 1940, which took "Zeitaku wa teki" (Luxury is the Enemy) as their overall slogan and banned 'foreign-influenced language' as well as 'frivolous behavior' in films. Salomon, p. 136.

[52] *Eiga ken'etsu jihō* vol. 21, p. 153.

[53] The Japanese was, according to the censors, "Hijōji wo kaishō se yo."

[54] High discusses this controversial film in *Imperial Screen*, pp. 46-47.

[55] *Eiga ken'etsu jihō* vol. 21, p. 153. The Japanese phrase was "Uragirimono wo kire." Compare to the apparently acceptable, though anachronistic, poster specifically of Katsura saying "Katsura wo kire" discussed below.

Kondō appeared quite early in the history of the talkie in Japan, as well as early in Enoken's film career.[56] Enoken, despite what is to modern ears a raspy and somewhat unappealing singing voice, had already mastered many of the techniques of vocal comedy (notably the timing of his line delivery for maximum comic effect), which helps explain his silver screen success[57]—especially considering many other major film stars, like reedy-voiced Bantsuma or stuttering Ōkōchi, were struggling mightily with the transition to sound due to significant vocal impediments and an imperfect understanding of what sort of speaking voice would play best in the talkie medium. Enoken had no such difficulty, and was soon taking full advantage of the talkie's auditory features, as was director Yamamoto Kajirō, who oversaw the inclusion of a variety of comic sound effects in Enoken's films.[58]

Yamamoto, now famous only as the mentor of Kurosawa Akira,[59] was one of the most illustrious film directors in 1930s and 1940s Japan. His skill in producing entertaining and above all modern, technically sophisticated comedies put him in high demand with cutting-edge studios like P.C.L. (later Tōhō), while pro-state ideologues also sought his technical expertise to make more successful and sophisticated national policy films, notably mega-hit *The War at Sea from*

[56] Enoken began starring in movies in 1934; as for talkies, they only succeeded in winning more than 50% market share of the domestic market in 1935, the very year *Kondō* was released, and as late as 1934, fully 75% of the films released were silent. This is due largely to the powerful opposition to talkies launched by the film narrators (*benshi*), who after all faced the end of their entire career path if talkies caught on in Japan. See Dym, p. 204.
[57] Yamane Sadao argues along largely similar lines in *Yamane sensei no tanoshimi zeminaaru* for *Enoken no seishun suikoden* (1934).
[58] Most notably in *Enoken no seishun suikoden* (1934), their first collaboration and only the sixth film produced by P.C.L.; it is mostly a talkie, but some scenes were filmed without synchronous sound, with comic sound effects added on later. In *Kondō*, sound effects have reached a new level of sophistication, especially in the fighting scene at the Teradaya around minute 29 in which Sakamoto keeps ducking in and out of a well in which he has accidentally fallen, while next to the well one of his opponents is similarly ducking in and out of sight, accompanied by amusing rising and falling "whoop" sounds; the rest of the fight also features comical sound effects, especially as enemies die.
[59] Kurosawa was clearly inspired by Yamamoto's use in *Kondō* of the lengthy Bolero sequence to include a very similar musical interlude, of the woodcutter traipsing through the woods, in *Rashōmon* fifteen years later, to the bemusement and chagrin of critics in 1950.

Hawaii to Malay (1942).[60] It might initially seem odd that in less than seven years a comedic director like Yamamoto could go from parodying the Bakumatsu, Japan's formative moment, in *Kondō* to celebrating the fruits of the Bakumatsu—Japan's table-turning military victories in 1941—in *The War at Sea*.[61] Yet even in his most pro-war films, including *The War at Sea*, Yamamoto managed to include plenty of entertainment and not a little political ambiguity, meaning there is a marked sense of continuity throughout his career, from hit comedies like *Kondō* to the end of the war and beyond.[62]

What was the experience of viewing *Kondō* like for audiences in 1935? Gender-segregated seating had been officially discontinued by this point, meaning that men and women could sit intermingled, and audiences at high-profile first-run theaters like the newly completed Nichigeki would have enjoyed a relatively odor-free experience, without the olfactory and even health hazards[63] that continued to plague less prominent cinema halls.[64] Practices common at less reputable theaters, for instance "packing-in" (*tsukekomi*, familiar to anyone who has ridden

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[60] Government officials at the Ministry of Education were still lamenting into 1937 that audiences believed a government recommendation for a film indicated the film had low entertainment value. See Salomon, p. 78.

[61] Some of this surprise at Yamamoto's much-vaunted shift of gears is due to the tendency within film studies to over-privilege the director as auteur-creator, as though s/he were not subject to powerful social industrial and institutional forces and realities. In such a reading, Yamamoto's "decision" to make pro-war films like the Army-sponsored *Uma* (Horse, 1940) disqualifies him from consideration as a true artist. This sort of analysis is less convincing in light of the growing pressure on the entire film industry to capitulate to state wishes, especially after the Film Law of 1939, and worse yet risks missing signs of ambivalence, the hidden transcripts of resistance to the state in the films themselves (as with Yamamoto's inclusion of the jazz music in *The War at Sea*).

[62] *Hawaii Malay oki kaisen* is Japan's single most successful kokusaku eiga, with its heroic portrayal of the Pearl Harbor attack in particular an astonishing display of virtuoso filmmaking and special effects, but scholarly attention has focused perhaps overmuch on the climactic propagandistic segments (which are surprisingly short in running time), ignoring the more ambiguous impression produced in the viewer by watching the entire film. For example, Yamamoto cleverly works in a diegetic excuse to let the viewer listen to and enjoy now-forbidden jazz music: the officers on the eve of Pearl Harbor have tuned in to an American radio station and are themselves diegetically hearing it. Moreover, although actual bullying (except verbal harassment by commanding officers) is not shown during the pilots' training, the strenuous and indeed harrowing aspects of the training are on full display. It seems unlikely that viewers in 1942 would universally read the film 'correctly', or in other words as the state would wish them to (accepting the hegemonic pro-war reading as opposed to a more ambivalent negotiated one).

[63] Hiroshi Kitamura notes that even in early postwar Japan, Tokyo theaters were considered so unsanitary by SCAP they were ordered sterilized, to try to reduce the risk of typhus. See Kitamura, p. 116.

[64] See Furukawa, p. 37, for an account of why older theaters, with their dirt floors and standing room only crowds for popular films, were a recipe for olfactory disaster (children unwilling or unable to make it to the bathroom often urinated where they stood, for example). Similar problems abounded in early postwar Japan; see Kitamura, p. 131.

the subways of Tokyo during rush-hour) and "flowing-in" (*nagashikomi*), were not the rule at a fancy theater like the Nichigeki, which was meant to appeal to more educated filmgoers.[65] The double-billing with Keaton's film also suggests that with *Kondō*, P.C.L. was aiming for a sophisticated audience, but the theater's prime location meant tens of thousands of commuters of all economic and class backgrounds were passing by daily. Due perhaps to some of his misogynistic antics (including rough talk and threatened violence against women) in his films from 1934 and earlier in 1935, Enoken had already polarized filmgoers in Japan; men liked him, and women generally did not,[66] so the audience at *Kondō* probably featured many young to middle-aged men.[67] Enoken's films were hugely popular abroad as well, drawing especially big crowds in Manchuria, where they were exhibited with a "voiceover" of sorts provided by a Chinese-language narrator.[68] And even the Japanese troops abroad reported preferring sappy melodramatic romances and especially Enoken comedies to straightforward national policy films; demand for Enoken films remained strong even several years after their release.[69]

What were these (mostly male) audiences hoping to see from this latest Enoken film, and did they get what they had hoped out of it? Considering the film was being touted as Enoken's first period drama, many filmgoers must have been looking forward to the amusing spectacle of Enoken in samurai garb, and the sort of antics he could use to enrich the historical setting. Those with a critical view of the present may well have been hoping for the spectacle of Japan's teleological history mocked—to poke fun at the heroes of the Bakumatsu is, after all, to mock those who ruled Japan in the Meiji period and set it on its present (1930s) course. Such viewers

[65] These two practices continued into the early postwar, when CMPE outlawed them and took steps to regulate the film-going experience itself, mandating that theaters sell only as many tickets as they had seats. Kitamura, p. 118.
[66] Furukawa describes women's dislike of Enoken as, on some level, instinctive. See Furukawa, pp. 38-39.
[67] See for example Enoken's humorous (?) threat to beat his wife in *Enoken no seishun suikoden* (1934).
[68] Furukawa, p. 193.
[69] Ibid., p. 194. I have independently verified this through perusal of handbills (*chirashi*) from the Fushimi collection at the Museum of Kyoto (see for example August 14, 1936 program from Fushimi Teikokukan on *Enoken no Kondō Isami* in binder two, sleeve 11, and Jan. 27, 1938 Fushimi Tōhō eiga gekijō shūhō in binder two, sleeve 70.)

were not disappointed, as the film portrays the entire conflict between pro-imperial and pro-Tokugawa, supposedly a critically important clash in worldviews, as the trivial work of cowardly bumblers.[70] Everything about the supposedly noble samurai, from their dress, footwear, weaponry, demeanor, and character,[71] is fair game in this film, for example in the extended sequence that Kondō and one Shinsengumi member, who turns out to be his adopted son,[72] make full use of the comic potential of that staple of samurai dress, the *hakama*, while hopping around like frogs and singing—to say nothing of the mocking implication that the noble warriors of the day had nothing better to do than play around.[73] Others may have been interested only in light-hearted entertainment, after a difficult day or week at work. And given the film's success, most or all of these various subject positions must have found the film quite enjoyable indeed.

Kondō had plenty of light-hearted entertainment to offer. In fact, it is slapstick from start to finish. It opens with a sword-fighting (*chanbara*) scene featuring Enoken as Kondō, clad in white, who defeats countless opponents, but only after a rider dashes up to deliver his *geta* sandals, without which he is, for no particular reason, unable to fight—a gag, incidentally, that shows the far-reaching effects of hit films on viewers' behavior, as it became very popular among kids all over the country, wherever the film had played, to mimic Kondō and his reliance on *geta* for his strength.[74] Soon after, Kondō is back in the Shinsengumi headquarters, contorting his face in all manner of improbable expressions as, in an eerily prescient parody of the histrionic

[70] In one early scene, Kondō (with a skull emblazoned on the back of his kimono!) announces he will train the Shinsengumi rank and file members, but has to spend quite a while persuading any of his timorous subordinates to stand and face him, and in later scenes they beg for money from a parsimonious Kondō and in general present an unimpressive front. Kondō himself is constantly engaged in buffoonery, as is Sakamoto Ryōma, and a film that makes equal fun of both sides is essentially mocking the idea of a strong distinction between those sides. The decision to match all of the fight scenes rhythmically to the non-diegetic Western-style background orchestral music also cleverly saps the supposedly epic combat of any hint of gravitas.
[71] At 54:45, Kondō screws up his face in self-pity and confides tearfully in his female companion, who was worried he cannot sleep, that "Even when I drink I can't get drunk...I feel like there's nowhere in this world I can truly sleep!"
[72] His adopted "son" Tani (Kondō) Shūhei, who was just 18 in 1866 (while Kondō was 32).
[73] This sequence occurs 31 minutes into the film, and depends for its humor on the *hakama*'s peculiar shape when its wearer is bent over preparing to hop.
[74] Furukawa p. 38.

'spiritist' pro-state film genre soon to arise, he extorts the Shinsengumi rank-and-file to train still harder.[75] During this speech, he also makes use of English loan-words like “technique,” a comic anachronism that would not have been permitted, of course, had the film been made after war with the U.S. and Britain in 1941 but was frowned upon even in the 1930s, as Tsumura's disapproving review makes clear.[76] The film's depiction of the Shinsengumi pokes fun at the noble enemy trope through which they were (by the 1930s, at least) usually understood historiographically, suggesting instead that these men were not particularly brave, skilled, or in one case, not a man at all. Kanō Sōzaburō, a semi-mythical member of the Shinsengumi later celebrated as a beautiful and desirable male youth (*bishōnen*) in Oshima Nagisa's 1999 *Gohatto* (known in English as *Taboo*), is here depicted by (and, to some degree, as) a woman, actress Hanajima Kiyoko, whose femininity is often on overt display, but none of the clueless Shinsengumi appear capable of noticing it.[77] In similar vein, Kondō at one point thinks he has cornered Katsura at last, since the palanquin going by is helpfully marked "Katsura Kogorō", and his certainty grows when he hears the occupant snoring lustily inside; but upon throwing back the curtain, he is astonished to find it is a woman doing the snoring.[78]

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[75] High chronicles the rise of the spiritist film from 1937 onwards in his sixth chapter, "The Time for Rationality is at an End," *Imperial Screen* pp. 223-264. Moreover, given *Kondō*'s history of censorship, which targeted the term "hijōji" (time of crisis) in particular, both censors and audiences may well have interpreted this sort of hortatory speech as a parody of War Minister Araki. It is worth noting also that this humorous lecture to the rank-and-file may have served as the model for very similar lectures in later kokusaku films by Yamamoto, including *The War at Sea*.

[76] Tsumura Hideo (writing as "Q"), "Shin eiga hyō," in the *Asahi shinbun*, October 14, 1935, morning ed., page 7. Later in the film a cowled loyalist hands Kondō a message from the mysterious "X 27", surely a reference to the Marlene Dietrich star vehicle *Dishonored* (1931, in which she plays superspy "X 27"), written in (slightly misspelled) Latin: Ars longa, vita vrevis [sic for 'brevis'] ("Craft is long, life is short," a Romanization of the famous line by Hippocrates), another example of linguistic transgression, as is a worried letter from Hinagiku to her "boyfriend" Kanō, which she ends with a plea for help: S.O.S., in English.

[77] Either the actress was deliberately chosen because of her high-pitched voice, or was encouraged to speak in her normal (high) register, ensuring she could never pass, in the eyes/ears of the audience, as male. "His" romantic tryst with a *geiko*, Hinagiku, thus offers quite a transgressive spectacle, one the film made no attempt to disguise, especially later, around minute 64, when "he" and Hinagiku perform a flirtatious song-and-dance routine.

[78] The woman being Ikumatsu, the famous geisha lover, and later wife, of Katsura/Kidō.

The fighting scenes are especially amusing. A nighttime battle between main antagonist (but, in history, national hero) Katsura and a number of black-clad opponents, later confirmed to be Shinsengumi,[79] ends at minute 22:30 on quite a light note when, after Katsura cuts down the final assassin, the dying man graciously holds out a cloth and wipes Katsura's sword while falling to the ground. Immediately afterwards, Katsura breaks into celebratory song.[80] Meanwhile, Sakamoto "Ryūma" and a companion have heard the commotion of Katsura's battle nearby and have watched its progress by virtue of an enormous telescope in their room at the Teradaya Inn.[81] O-Ryō, Ryōma's "lover-san", as she terms it, soon appears and they talk – in ultra-modern Japanese mixed with English – for a while before O-Ryō goes to dump some bathwater out a window and scalds one of the approaching assassins lurking just under the window.[82] His shriek opens the first of two climactic battles of the film, a parody of the famous Teradaya Inn incident of January 1866 in which Ryōma and a single companion[83] managed to fight off a wave of attackers and escape both assassination and capture.[84] In the historical combat, Ryōma made use of both sword and pistol, and in Enoken's parody of the event, the pistol is employed to maximum comic effect. Enoken's Sakamoto, having donned Western-style shoes in preparation for the coming battle, is apparently blind as a bat without his glasses, but

[79] They return to Shinsengumi headquarters in various states of injury, only to be scolded by Kondō.
[80] No surprise, since Katsura was played by frequent Enoken collaborator, and famed singer, Futamura Teiichi.
[81] This was the scene of probably the most famous clash between pro-shogunal and imperial loyalist forces during the Bakumatsu, the July 4, 1864 Ikedaya jiken (incident), in which the Shinsengumi uncovered and defeated in combat a large number of imperial loyalists who were allegedly conspiring to burn down the city.
[82] Expressions like "ima rabā-san to iun da yo" (These days everyone's saying "Lover-san", didn't you know?) reveal a distinctly irreverent, and of course anachronistic, application of language.
[83] Historically and in the film, Miyoshi Shinzō of Chōshū.
[84] O-Ryō's timely warning, after she noticed men sneaking by the room in which she was bathing and ran up to the second floor, allegedly clad only in her birthday suit, to warn them, is—according to legend—what saved their lives.

removes them for cleaning during the combat, leading to all sorts of amusing antics as he targets his friend by mistake and drives one attacker cross-eyed with all his haphazard pistol-waving.[85]

Virtually every scene provides, in addition to laughs, food for thought regarding 1930s Japan. For example, director Yamamoto skillfully splices together a shot of a Japanese-adapted Western clock in Sakamoto's room with the sound of a time-keeping chime which wakes Kondō in the next scene, using a sound bridge of the same ticking sound for each of these two radically settings.[86] When Kondō starts awake, he is surprised to hear a very anachronistic announcement and a pointed reference to the Japanese Empire: "It is currently 9:30 [PM], while in Taiwan and Manchukuo, the time is 8:30, so please adjust your watches accordingly."[87] The frequent and prominent use of English (Oryō says "OK" and, on multiple occasions, "I love you")[88] in the film is particularly noteworthy, as is the use of Western music like "Bolero" (which comically punctuates the lead-in to the climax where a long procession of geisha march in with trays of food and prepare a feast[89]) and a rumba[90] during the final battle at the Ikedaya.[91]

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[85] There is no evidence that Sakamoto Ryōma owned or used glasses, but the pistol is certainly iconic; it had been given to him a while back by none other than Takasugi Shinsaku (who might well have acquired it during his trip to Shanghai in 1862, the very trip dramatized in *Signal Fires* and discussed in chapter four). The iconographic association of the pistol with Sakamoto is so strong that the hugely popular serial novel and period film series (from the 1920s thru the 1960s) about the adventures of Kurama Tengu, a Zorro-like figure who wields pistol and sword to save children and aid the imperial cause during the Bakumatsu, might well be partly inspired by Sakamoto's fame as both expert swordsman and pistolier (see chapter three for more on Kurama Tengu).

[86] Nor is this the only noteworthy innovation on the technical side; at 60:36 there is a brief animated sequence depicting the moon as a woman's surprised face moving about and looking down on the earth, covering her ears and her face (and thus plunging the land into darkness) at the sounds of Kondō's battle with numerous pro-imperial forces, which itself is shown as a series of exciting flashes of sparks in the pitch blackness; when Kondō beats back the waves of attackers, the moon peeks out again, and the scene is thereafter lit. This dabble into animation may have been inspired by a scene in *Behind the Front* in which the hapless duo, played by Wallace Beery and Raymond Hatton, have a vision of the face of their sergeant, constantly barking orders, actually transforming into a dog's face.

[87] This sort of announcement, occurring around 54:15, is precisely the sort one might have heard while traveling by boat or plane from Japan to the empire, and is one of the most direct references in the film to the situation in 1935. One other less pointed anachronism is a food-cart outside the Ikedaya in the final climax selling such exotic goods as "shumai" (shaomai) and "wontons", neither of which could possibly have been found in 1860s Kyoto—but were ubiquitous in 1930s Japan. The loyalists are initially startled by the sound of the cart owner's recorder, but have a good laugh when they conclude that it's "just a wonton seller!"

[88] In fact, "Oryū" even nicknames Sakamoto "I love you", as in "'I love you' has come to see you, Miyoshi-san!" to which Miyoshi smiles and suggests, "better to call him 'lover-san.'"

[89] This sequence starts at minute 72.

Kondō as Parody of Bakumatsu History—and the Period Film Genre

In addition to these parodic treatments of the Bakumatsu, the film also parodies the period film genre itself. This is most clearly visible in the rumba scene when those struck down begin to dance their death throes, comically mimicking the arms-outstretched, stiff-as-a-board posture of the dying so frequently seen in period films,[92] or when Sakamoto, temporarily assuming the role of film narrator (*benshi*), declaims, in reference to a pro-imperial-pro-Tokugawa combat below his window, the famous expository catch-phrase featured in the narration for every Bakumatsu silent movie, namely "The 36 peaks of Higashiyama sleep quietly!" Similarly, the scene in which Sakamoto and Nakaoka are assassinated also carefully mirrors not so much the 'history' of the Ōmiya Incident as the countless filmic depictions of that famous event in a considerable number of period films, particularly Bantsuma's 1928 version, even down to the sequence of events, how far Sakamoto is able to draw his sword before collapsing, and so forth. Before they die, however, Sakamoto and Nakaoka go on and on, quite humorously, about how a certain Indian prophet (and Gandhi lookalike) they had met earlier was right, death by the sword really was Sakamoto's fate; and his final request, when his wife arrives, is "Say it one more time, that English expression!" When she acquiesces, tearfully saying "I...I love you, my dear!", he replies in English, "Thank you—and goodbye!" and lest audiences take

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[90] This final fight sequence, choreographed to match the rhythm of the rumba, is perhaps the ultimate expression of Bergon's notion of the comic as the mechanization of movement; the characters flop and jerk around in time with the music, looking like nothing so much as marionettes. The rumba climax has also been identified as the example par excellence of the musical-esque quality of many period films in the 1930s; see Chiba Fumio, "Jidaigeki eiga ga musical ni naru toki," in Tsutsui Kiyotada hen, *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nanika*, p. 198.

[91] There is also a sequence of cowled loyalist assassins creeping slowly closer to Kondō, their target, in time with their diegetic choral song; the scene begins at 58:01, and also features a female soloist who stops the procession in order to sing her heart out on a bridge, until the man behind her bonks her on the head and she gestures an apology and continues on her way, as well as a man who stops and sings too loudly and is shushed.

[92] Thereby visually echoing once again Bergson's classic definition of the comic as the introduction of something mechanical into an otherwise living being. See Bergson, p. 41.

this over-the-top scene too seriously, he then screws up his face, contorts his body and dives onto the ground, accompanied by amusing sound effects.

The close parody of iconic events like the Ōmiya and Teradaya Incidents suggests that the storyline, so to speak, of the Bakumatsu was well-known, as were its chief characters like Kondō, Katsura and Sakamoto.[93] Indeed, much of the film relies on audience familiarity with the personalities and iconography of the characters involved (for example, the parody of O-Ryō's real-life discovery of the approaching assassins while bathing) even to be legible, let alone funny. For Japanese of the mid-1930s, then, this history was alive and well, and deemed relevant to the present despite or, perhaps, because of its seeming distance from the troubling events then occurring (expansion in Manchuria, assassinations at home). I estimate there had already been at least eighty Bakumatsu films by the time *Kondō* appeared to parody the genre.[94]

At times, the film does begin to approach a more pointed comment on 1930s Japan, as when Kondō scolds the injured Shinsengumi members who have just returned from their attempt to kill Katsura. As Kondō continues his hortatory lecture, the film audience is shown a POV shot of the poster hanging in the room, a telling parody of the culture of wartime propaganda posters

[93] After "Oryū" brings her timely warning, Sakamoto prepares for battle—by cleaning and buffing his eye-glasses and donning his Western-style shoes in the middle of the tatami-floored room.
[94] I arrived at this number by counting the Bakumatsu films made prior to 1935 that I have personally viewed or seen advertisements for in film magazines, especially Kinema junpō, but because some might never have been advertised in KineJun at all (and I may have overlooked advertisements for others), the total is likely higher still. There had been at least thirteen filmic depictions just of Kondō and the Shinsengumi prior to 1935.

which began cropping up in Japan after 1931.[95]



Figure 11: Screen capture of anachronistic poster in *Enoken no Kondō Isami*, 34:13 (text reads "Kill Katsura--Our Troop's Honor is at Stake!")

The audience's expectations for the film were for entertainment, not historical accuracy, which is just as well, since the latter was constantly being intentionally undermined. For example, at one point Sakamoto and is walking along when he is rudely stopped by a Gandhi lookalike with a sign saying "Obstinate Old Man Visiting from India" who wordlessly unrolls a prediction:

[95] And, as noted above, occasionally the target of censors' ire, when the reference to contemporary Japan became too explicit (one of the three cuts ordered for this film was of a similar poster ordering the viewer to kill 'traitors').

"You will meet the calamity of death by the sword."[96]



Figure 12: Gandhi Lookalike Brings a Pacifist Message in *Enoken no Kondō Isami*, screen capture from 48:42

Kondō, on the hunt for Katsura, happens to be at a tea house and is ready to admit defeat yet just next door, Sakamoto, Katsura and other loyalist leaders are meeting to celebrate, quite audibly, the 'secret' alliance between Satsuma and Chōshū and their plan to topple the Tokugawa Shogunate. Kondō eavesdrops with horror on the news that Shinsengumi officer Itō Kashitarō has been won over to the 'smite the Tokugawa' (*tōbaku*) side, but just as he is preparing to barge in sword in hand, Sakamoto, later joined by Katsura, breaks into a rendition of the popular song "Lullaby in Blue" and Kondō, flummoxed by this latest development, is easily restrained by

[96] The Gandhi lookalike's scroll reads, in Japanese, "kennan no sō." He later shows the same scroll to a morally unscrupulous Shinsengumi member, Tashiro Matahachi, who says "That's ridiculous—but YOU are about to meet your death by the sword!" and with that, sends Gandhi into flight by cutting his scroll in half. (49:30). Later Gandhi is proven right after all; Tashiro is cut down by Kanō after "he" discovers Tashiro's evil deeds.

Ikumatsu from breaking down the panels to the next room. When he winces at the sound and asks what it is, Ikumatsu notes that it's "a popular song right now" by which she means, of course, popular in 1935.[97] These anachronistic and counterfactual touches crescendo soon after this musical interlude when Kondō is advised by Yamaoka Tesshū (played by the decidedly un-comical Maruyama Sadao) to befriend Sakamoto since they allegedly have similar goals, and Kondō agrees to meet, saying "It might be the Tokugawa's Shinsengumi right now, but I would like it to be Japan's Shinsengumi!"[98] The very idea of robust national unity—already a hot-button issue as the country geared up for war with China and the world—is perhaps being satirized here.

One of the most amusing counterfactual spectacles is the revisionist slant given to the final climactic battle, a comic reenactment of the Shinsengumi's famous 1864 raid on the Ikedaya, and this despite the film's care to identify the time being depicted in the film as 1866.[99] This final combat, in addition to providing ready laughs in the form of the accountant figure who uses an abacus to keep a tally of each side's members and casualties, encourages the viewer to consider, "What if the Ikedaya Incident had been decisive, and the loyalists had never recovered?" Because of the narrative structure of the film, which displaces the Ikedaya to the end, lumping it together with the successful assassination of Sakamoto and Nakaoka rather than following the chronology of history, the audience is given the strong impression that the pro-Tokugawa victory at the Ikedaya happened *after* the initial pro-imperial triumphs, reversing them, perhaps decisively. At the end of the climax, Kondō kills the loyalist leader on the grand staircase of the Ikedaya, to thunderous accolades and even party streamers from the gathered people of Kyoto.

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[97] The song, and Kondō's comedic reactions to it, can be viewed around minutes 38 thru 40.
[98] Around minute 47, he says "Watakushi wa, Tokugawa-ke no Shinsengumi wo motte, Nihon no Shinsengumi ni shitai to omoimasu."
[99] Twice, on-screen intertitles proclaim it is Keiō 2-nen (1866), and when we are first shown Sakamoto Ryōma's outlandish living quarters in the Teradaya, the second of these intertitles further specifies it is the 13th of the 4th month. He was assassinated, meanwhile, at the Ōmiya in Nov. 1867, but in the film it is before the Ikedaya assault.

In that sense, the film requires of its viewers at least basic knowledge of Bakumatsu history in order to show its humorous contrast with historical events.[100] The audience would all have known that Kondō and Sakamoto had entirely opposite goals, and surely realized that it was the celebrated Katsura, one of the Three Great Heroes of the Restoration (*Ishin no sanketsu*), and not Kondō, who historically had the last laugh, which is why inverting this hierarchical relationship is such an entertaining notion. Filmgoers could have arrived at a negotiated reading of *Kondō* in which the most enjoyable aspect of the film was precisely this sort of speculation on how Japan's present might have been different—and perhaps better—had its Bakumatsu past recorded a decisive defeat of the pro-imperial forces.[101] Alternatively, some viewers may have been left with the impression that not much separated the pro-imperial winners from the pro-Tokugawa losers in the civil strife of the Bakumatsu, a politically subversive message from the point of view of the 1930s Japanese state, considering its heavy continuity with the Meiji state that pro-imperial figures like Katsura were central in creating.

This film, then, is not merely an innocuous comedy after all if it can suggest a sort of equation between the two diametrically different political viewpoints of the Bakumatsu, and even imply that it did not really matter who won or lost these sorts of squabbles – or, perhaps, the squabbles of the 1930s, when Japan embarked in earnest on its empire-building project. But if the film was so pointedly subversive in its treatment of history, and Japan's national heroes, why did Home Ministry censors approve it almost unchanged? Part of the explanation for this surely lies in the fact that the message of mockery is not heavily dependent on any single, and

[100] On the other hand, glaring factual errors in handbill synopses of the plot suggest, once again, that the historicity of the film was not considered important. See for example the Jan. 27, 1938 Fushimi Tōhō eiga gekijō shūhō (weekly report on the Fushimi Toho movie theater), which claims "at the end of the film, both Sakamoto Ryōma and Nakaoka Shintarō are killed on the second floor of the Ikedaya," an error for the Ōmiya, where they were actually killed. This flier is also evidence that popular films like *Kondō* continued to circulate for years after their release.
[101] In fact, it may be more accurate to call this sort of counterfactual reading of *Kondō* the dominant rather than the negotiated reading, as the film itself is overtly suggesting this interpretation. The concept of a negotiated (and dominant, and oppositional) reading was developed by Stuart Hall in his now iconic "Encoding, Decoding" essay.

thus easily excised, scene; it is more the impression left by the entire film that might have presented audiences with the choice to see the story as subverting Japan's history. And the censors, judging from the rather symbolic nature of the cuts they did tend to demand at this point in time, cuts of a line of dialogue here, an anachronistic poster there, and their extremely infrequent use of the full ban, appear to have been focused on finding and removing especially objectionable elements, not on evaluating films overall. In any case, the existence and more importantly the popularity of Enoken's film demands a more nuanced view of 1930s Japan than a strictly political history, with its declensionist litany of assassinations and police crackdowns, can provide.

Comedic Precursors: the *Yaji Kita* Film Trilogy

Kondō was not created in a vacuum. In the late 1920s, there were several comedic Bakumatsu films which, in addition to being popular films and fascinating artifacts of nansensu comedy in their own right, laid the groundwork for *Kondō*'s even more successful parodic treatment of the period a few years later. Foremost among them was the Yaji-Kita series of comedies, about the two eponymous bumbling folk heroes. Under the stewardship of Ikeda Tomiyasu, Nikkatsu's star period film director until the rise of Itō Daisuke, the ever-popular fictional heroes Yaji(rōbei) and Kita(hachi) were dropped into the middle of the chaos of the late Bakumatsu period. First came the late December 1927 hit *Yaji and Kita and 'Revering the Emperor'* (*Yaji Kita sonnō no maki*, hereinafter *Revering the Emperor,* partially extant), the first ever major comedy to be set in the Bakumatsu period and to deal with historical figures and events; its success paved the way for two 1928 sequels, namely *Yaji and Kita and the Great Runner* (*Yaji Kita Idaten no maki*, lost) and *Yaji and Kita at the Battle of Toba-Fushimi* (*Yaji Kita Fushimi Toba no maki*, hereinafter *Toba-Fushimi,* partially extant), all of which had

virtually identical cast and crew, and all released within five weeks of each other.[102] All three were high-profile film projects of ten reels each, so probably over 100 minutes each depending on how fast the projectionists cranked them, and premiered in Tokyo at major first-run cinemas, namely the Kanda Nikkatsukan and the Fujikan in Asakusa.[103] In the final film of the trilogy, the two hapless bumblers are pressed into unwilling service in the imperial army (*kangun*) for the battle of Toba-Fushimi, which took place in early January 1868.

Toba-Fushimi was reviled by the critics of its day. In the pages of Kinema junpō #287 (issued Feb. 21, 1928), a young right-wing film critic named Uchida Kimio (1901-1945), who had been involved in the magazine almost since its inception, was openly contemptuous of the entire Yaji Kita series—and those who found it funny.[104] He railed, "I will say it plainly. The only thing this entire series is filled with is a continuous current of bad taste."[105] His criticism of the film reveals a great deal of prevailing views of spectatorship and culture, and film's proper place. Uchida decried as "bad taste" the vaudevillian, slapstick antics of these two buffoons, who stumbled rough-shod over the elegant, triumphant dominant narrative of the loyalists' ascension after this critically important battle. To suggest that the imperial army contained not only ardent patriot volunteers but also hapless fools without even a trace of a political motivation to their actions was to call into question the true significance of the imperial army's victory—and the Meiji government its leaders subsequently created. Since Japan's government in 1928 was the direct descendant of that Meiji government, inheriting its basic structure and its interpretation of

[102] The only new addition to the crew in the latter two films was Watanabe Kunio, who came on as assistant director (as he had for *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi* a few months earlier); the cast was largely the same except for bit parts.
[103] See the *Nihon eiga database* entry for each film for confirmation of the premieres, cast and crew, etc.
[104] Uchida had graduated from the ultra-elite Law School of Tokyo Imperial University, which had a well-deserved reputation for attracting (and helping produce) rightist, conservative pro-state ideologues, many of whom would eventually rise to influential positions in Japanese society, especially in the governing bureaucracy. Details of Uchida's life are scanty, but some basic biographical information can be found at the Hatena database here.
[105] 'watashi ha kantan ni itte shimaou. Kono eiga zenhen wo minagiru mono ha, sore ha tada, aku shumi no renzoku de aru.' See Kinema junpō issue #287 page 77, "hihyō" section, for the review of *Toba-Fushimi*.

history, a parody like *Toba-Fushimi* offered audiences the opportunity to view both past and present with the same irreverent gaze.

Film is ideally suited to this parodic role; by converting historical specificity into comedic generality (especially comic types like the rigid sergeant, incompetent soldier, etc.), and heavily relying, as Japan's nonsense films tended to do, on the priority of image over language, a parody could undermine the hegemonic view of history without ever arousing the ire of censors, who tended to be attuned more to the power of words (here, in intertitle form) than to that of image.[106] As such, film parodies of history could mock the teleological view of history whereas other language-heavy mediums like novels and so forth had little hope of success.

When Uchida spoke of bad taste, he was not attacking the filmmakers alone, but also what he saw as the low intellectual level of the populace, who flocked to see these historical parodies. In other words, he is operating from the assumption that 'the people' are mere credulous masses, easily amused by low-brow humor and without the refinement necessary to see this film for what it was: a parodic attack on the way things were in the present. But if Uchida were correct in this assessment of Japanese audience and their capabilities, it would be better for him to focus his ire on the filmmakers and try to exhort them to make more serious films that treat the subject of Japan's founding myth in an appropriately heroic register. In fact, he gives the people too little credit; the political implications of this historical parody are likely part of what made the film so popular, even compared to contemporary slapstick comedies (even, in fact, other non-historical films of the Yaji Kita series) that lacked this critical approach to Japan's history. With this sort of elitist cultural criticism, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether critics like Uchida—or, for that matter, Adorno and Horkheimer—really believe their own claims, that the people are

[106] On comedy's reliance on general types, rather than (as in tragedy) specific individuals, see Bergson, pp. 78-79. For more on *nansensu* in Japan, its creation of a (wordless) discursive space and the similarities of that space with Walter Benjamin's notion of the phantasmagoria one enters to be distracted, see Driscoll, p. 173.

powerless in the face of the ideological message embodied in the products of the culture industry, or whether they secretly acknowledge and perhaps fear the people's potential to harness the raw materials of a film to spin a new, negotiated reading out of it, one that implicitly challenges the authority of the ruling elites. Be that as it may, the success of *Toba-Fushimi* is not evidence of a politically naive populace who came only for the low-brow 'bad taste' films in this series had to offer, and if anything suggests the reverse: a politically attuned audience who found the film funny precisely because of its irreverent treatment of the hallowed myths of Japan's own recent history. Humor is always at least potentially political in nature, especially when, as with films, it is a group doing the laughing: they are united in that moment against some undesirable aspect of reality, and so laughter temporarily destabilizes the status quo.

For example, many of the surviving scenes in the extant 23-minute fragment of *Toba-Fushimi* are devoted to humorous exchanges between Yaji and Kita and their stern sergeant Yamaarashi. He is constantly haranguing them, even beating them physically, though the comic antics of actors Ōkōchi Denjirō (Kita) and Kawabe Gōrō (Yaji), cringing and rubbing their heads and so forth, defuses the tension that this implicit critique of the military of 1928 might have caused. Or does it? In the end, what viewers are left with is a very negative view of the imperial army, especially its savage and ineffective officers. Yaji and Kita are mercilessly beaten, mocked, and yelled at, but the film is structured so as to privilege their subject position; viewers identify with them, empathizing with their suffering and commiserating with them over their unfair situation.[107] But identification with the politically 'correct' rhetoric of the imperial army officers,

[107] It is true that the audience is also occasionally encouraged to laugh "at" the buffoonery of Yaji and Kita, seemingly taking them as the object or butt of the joke, and it might be tempting to view this as preventing identification with Yaji and Kita, according to the once-popular "superiority" theory of laughter (i.e., we laugh at obviously inferior people because they remind us of our superiority). But if anything, the example of Yaji and Kita, inasmuch as the audience is strongly encouraged to identify with them, exposes the weak explanatory power of the superiority theory, and lends support to Peter Marteinson's theory of laughter as a response to the perception by the audience that social reality is unraveling at the seams. To Marteinson, the object of laughter is not the on-screen

the villains of this story, would have difficult for audience members who still wished to enjoy the film's slapstick humor, which is derived from the fundamental injustice of Yaji and Kita's plight, their mechanical, knee-jerk reaction to it, and the audience's sympathetic identification with their suffering—as well as the rather sadistic pleasure available to viewers when Yaji and Kita have their revenge on the sergeant by 'accidentally' conking him on the head.[108]

When he finds them facing in the wrong direction, oblivious to their surroundings, Sergeant Yamaarashi gives them a furious tongue- (and fist-)lashing. He is so incensed at their behavior that he questions their fundamental identity as Japanese, and their masculinity as well. He screams (via intertitles) that there is no excuse for their dreadful inadequacy as soldiers, since as Japanese men, they "surely must be prepared to die!"[109] Then the camera cuts to a shot from Yaji or Kita's point of view, showing their tormentor's face in MCU as he rears back to punch them. Symbolically, the sergeant is punching the camera—the film apparatus. On the formal level too, then, *Toba-Fushimi* is unabashedly identifying with Yaji and Kita, showing us everything from their point of view (sometimes, as here, literally). This has the effect of strongly implying that the sergeant is mistaken; Yaji and Kita are indeed Japanese men, but they offer a fun, peaceful, non-militarized paradigm of Japanese identity and masculinity, one with which many in the audience could surely identify. In one later scene, Kita intervenes before the sergeant can start beating Yaji and takes that duty upon himself, exposing the absurdity of a fun-

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character at all, but the exposure of the instability of social reality; as such, when we see Yaji or Kita whack each other, for example, we are laughing at their inadvertent experience of the harsh and untenable reality of military discipline, which forces them to strike each other and be, in a sense, out of character. Marteinson insists we had better speak, not of the comic object, but always of the comic subject (who often sees the humor of his or her own situation as well). Marteinson, *On the Problem of the Comic*, p. 11.

[108] As Bergon notes, laughter is not necessarily benevolent; we laugh to see the sergeant, comical in his excesses of soldiery (on p. 85 Bergson claims nothing is more ludicrous than, say, a career soldier who is unable to speak except in soldierese, which perfectly describes Yamaarashi, a figure made still more comical given he is such a recent convert to soldier from career thief!), receive his just desserts. But we also identify somewhat masochistically with the comic pair as they are berated, and share their delight as they realize they've accidentally knocked out Yamaarashi, delight redoubled when they strike him again, this time deliberately. Bergson, p. 91.

[109] "shinu kakugo aru hazu!"

loving bumbler trying to be a soldier—Yaji is startled and sputters (via intertitle), "Hey, why are *you* hitting me?" since he too recognizes the unnaturalness of someone like themselves perpetrating violence. The scene may also conceal a deeper criticism of army discipline itself, which forces (at least some of) the Japanese to act violently even against each other, or in other words, in a manner contrary to their essential nature as represented by the peaceful Yaji and Kita.

In the film's climactic finale, the representatives of the militarized version of Japanese identity and masculinity are killed, notably the figure most emblematic of this worldview, Sergeant Yamaarashi himself. Only Yaji and Kita have survived, miraculously unharmed, amongst all the carnage, and we in the audience have the opportunity to enjoy, not only a chuckle or two at the spectacle of the contrast between their soot-covered faces in medium shot and the eerie brightness of the whites of their eyes, but also a political last laugh, as they misunderstand their situation to mean they have been killed already. This prompts them to stand up on the battlefield, all smiles and completely unaware of the very real danger, and begin waving the imperial army's flag joyously in an extended tracking shot (interrupted occasionally by close-ups of their beaming faces) of them from the side as they caper on towards the enemy, an act of "heroism" that inspires the imperial army's timorous commander to order a general assault and cements ultimate victory.[110] This sardonic note of contingency, even ludicrousness, to the battle must have pleased audiences just as much as it offended censorious critics like Uchida, especially since as was noted by officials at the time popular reception and critical reception were inversely correlated in Japan at that time, such that if a film was denounced by critics like Uchida or Tsumura it is reliable evidence the film was a popular success, and conversely, if pro-state critics praised a film (and especially if a film received official recognition

[110] This serendipitous conclusion also may have been inspired by the accidental success of the bumbling duo in *Behind the Front*, who stumble upon and manage to capture an entire company of German soldiers.

by the Ministry of Education), usually it was a box office failure, and indeed the viewing public saw such endorsements of a film as constituting evidence it had little entertainment to offer.[111]

The Case of *Revering the Emperor*

Revering the Emperor, the first experiment in this new historical slapstick comedy, followed up on writer-director "prodigy" Ikeda Tomiyasu's success with the revisionist epic *Kenkokushi sonnō jōi* three months earlier.[112] Released on New Year's Eve, 1927, to take maximum advantage of the increased leisure during the New Year's holiday, the success of *Revering the Emperor,* "Nikkatsu's first extraordinary production of 1928,"[113] inspired Nikkatsu to fund two sequels including *Toba-Fushimi*, which was released just two months later. Only about fifteen minutes of *Revering the Emperor* are extant today, out of the original ten reels, but those snippets are nevertheless enough to divine several reasons for the film's success.[114] For instance, if anything *Revering the Emperor* is even more pointedly political in its comedic style than *Toba-Fushimi*. Its mockery of the Bakumatsu conflict of pro-imperial versus pro-Tokugawa forces echoes parodically in the present of 1927, a time whose conflicts over national identity and course of action resonate somewhat with the Bakumatsu (the fanatical, strike-first expansionism of the 1920s maps onto the actively xenophobic, even terroristic loyalists up to 1864, while the more domestically focused populism of the mid-1920s partially echoes the pro-Tokugawa "reactionaries" of the late 1860s, for example). Just as Yaji and Kita are given little

[111] Fuwa Suketoshi admitted films recommended were seen by the public as lacking in entertainment value. See Salomon, p. 78. Worse yet, the act of publicizing such recommendations itself adversely affected box office results, especially in Kansai, so it was rarely mentioned in advertising campaigns. See ibid., p. 207.
[112] Ikeda was dubbed a 'shūsai' in the *Asahi shinbun,* Dec. 30, 1927 morning ed., page six, "Konshū no eiga."
[113] The film was described in advance as "Shōwa san nen no dai ikkai Nikkatsu chō tokusaku dai eiga" in a two-page pictorial ad in issue no. 282 (December 11, 1927) of *Kinema junpō*, pp. 62-63.
[114] Usually estimated at roughly ten minutes per reel of 35 mm film, it is difficult in the Japanese context to say with certainty what the average running time for a single reel was, since frame rates in the silent era could vary quite a bit due to hand-cranking projectionists and the fact the narrators would signal them to go faster or slower as the occasion demanded; still, even a low estimate of eight minutes per reel would mean a maximum of about 20% of the original length of *Revering the Emperor* survived (and likely somewhat less than that).

qualitatively to choose between the two sides, so too viewers in late 1927 may have been politically on the fence between the populism of the 1920s and the rising militarism of the right wing; only six months would pass, for instance, before the first abortive attempt by right-wing radicals in the Kwantung Army to engineer a catalyst for armed conflict in Manchuria.[115] The experience of viewing the film, with its subversive, critical view of history, offered the pleasure of passive resistance without demanding its viewers take to the streets in active protest; its message mirrored the (especially economic) pessimism of early Shōwa Japan, a pessimism that survived despite the attempted social distraction of elaborate enthronement festivities for Hirohito in 1928.

The extant fragment opens with Kita arrested for innocently humming a politically subversive song whose veiled message is the overthrow of the current government (the Shogunate), which immediately puts him at odds with the "thought police"-esque authorities. When Yaji cluelessly protests that it's a great tune which he likes too, he is also thrown into jail. The authorities indiscriminately persecute any adults—but not children—who dare to mouth the 'wrong' message, without any regard to whether the speakers really mean, or even understand, that message.[116] But to criticize one political faction, even by accident, does not necessarily imply allegiance to its rival; put another way, the enemy of one's enemy is not always interested in being one's friend. The *sonnō* ("revere the emperor") forces soon discover this truth embodied in the hapless duo of Yaji and Kita, who obviously could not care less about the *sonnō* movement or the Tokugawa Shogunate.[117] Their political apathy, however, is not quite as

[115] Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin was assassinated in June 1928, but his death did not ignite a wider conflict, much to the dismay of the hawkish members of the Kwantung Army.
[116] After passage of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925, the police in Japan were similarly empowered to track down 'errors' of speech, and ultimately thought, and punish those who did not publicly say the correct things.
[117] They rescue the loyalist Yasuda from jail after the Shinsengumi capture him, but explicitly state (via intertitle) that they have come only to pay their debt for him saving them from arrest by the police over the children's song.

innocent as it seems. As they are harassed by first one, then both sides, the viewer is encouraged to adopt a subject position that commiserates more and more with them and their always unspoken but nonetheless palpable sentiment: if only the higher ups would just leave us regular people alone![118] Surely this sentiment, too, resonated with 1920s audiences, caught between the progressive movement that won universal male suffrage in 1925 and—not coincidentally—the simultaneous victory of conservatives in passing the repressive Peace Preservation Law.

Yaji and Kita's parodic function in the 1927 and 1928 films, with its echoes of nonsense film and literature more generally,[119] is also evocative of the irreverent social role they played in the original novels by Jippensha Ikku.[120] In the films, they refuse to accept the militarization of Japan—and Japaneseness—which accelerated after the passage of the freedom-constricting Peace Preservation Law. Similarly, in *Tōkaidō chū hizakurige* (known as *Shank's Mare* in English), published in the early nineteenth century, Yaji and Kita are not only there to be mocked for their foolishness; they also at times enjoy poking fun at the pompousness and exaggerated dignity of a daimyo's alternate attendance (*sankin kōtai*) procession and using their punning skill to make fun of most everything, including those in positions of authority. Not all of author Jippensha Ikku's humor is, in other words, 'innocent' or apolitical, and neither is that of the film versions' Yaji and Kita, whose antics draw attention to the cruelty of the victors of the Bakumatsu civil war, as well as the contingency of that victory.

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[118] In one scene that survives in the extant fragment of *Toba-Fushimi*, for example, the soldiers, including Yaji and Kita, are relaxing a bit after a hard day's march, playing music and dancing, but no sooner do they begin to enjoy themselves than the hard-nosed sergeant Yamaarashi appears and, in a fury, forces them all not only to stop playing around, but also assigns them all meaningless busy-work, drawing water in a bucket-line.

[119] Itami Mansaku noted that nonsense films were not innocent fun, and lacked any positive or constructive view of society, existing only to tear down society's idols via the destructive power of group laughter. Silverberg, p. 231.

[120] Technically Jippensha Ikku wrote two novels about Yaji and Kita, though only *Hizakurige* is very well known.

Inspired by Hollywood? *Behind the Front*

These filmic adaptations of Yaji and Kita, especially *Toba-Fushimi,* also drew inspiration from Paramount's *Behind the Front,* a silent American film dating from 1926 which was very popular in Japan, perhaps partially because it was the first Wallace Beery comedy to be released in Japan with a "Yaji Kita" title.[121] The bumbling slapstick routines of the main characters in this film about conditions on the European front in World War I were being explicitly linked to the preexisting trope of Yaji and Kita stories, thereby both enhancing their box office draw through association to a familiar and still popular comedic mainstay, but also changing that comedic trope via the infusion of a new temporal (and spatial) setting. After the success of *Behind the Front* in Japan, it made sound financial sense for Nikkatsu to bankroll writer-director Ikeda Tomiyasu's Yaji Kita trilogy, because they were now part of a film series with a powerful new draw: they could lay claim to being Hollywood-style slapstick films made in the same style as *Behind the Front*.[122]

From the perspective both of the writer-director and the studio, slapstick comedy was an appealing choice. The Pure Film Movement was just then making waves by challenging the centrality of the film narrator institution to the experience of film, and the humor of slapstick is more or less universal, without a crippling dependence either on a particular language or on advanced knowledge of a specific culture. Just as the American film *Behind the Front*, after a

[121] Satō Tadao, "Commentary" to *Talking Silents 7* DVD. The title in question is *Yaji Kita jūgunki* (Yaji Kita and the Record of the [War] Campaign), as contemporary ads attest; it was the first of at least six Wallace Beery films to be released in Japan under the Yaji Kita moniker from 1926-1928.

[122] In fact, the climactic final sequence, in which Yaji and Kita, thinking themselves invulnerable because already dead, storm the enemy lines, makes an interesting comparison to that of *Behind the Front,* in which Riff and Shorty don German uniforms in order to slip back to their own lines, only to have everyone fire at them, and then inadvertently seize control of a German tank and capture many German prisoners, only to be arrested by their merciless officers for breaking the Armistice, just signed moments earlier. This confusion over who is the enemy, and indeed the difference between the 'good' and 'bad' guys, has echoes in *Toba-Fushimi*, but in the Japanese film, their bumbling is the source of the imperial army's courage and ultimate victory, not cause for court-martial, and their cruel sergeant is dead, not an easy target for petty vengeance after war's end, as in *Behind the Front*.

partial 'translation' into a cultural trope familiar to the Japanese, namely Yaji and Kita, had drawn huge crowds thanks to the broad appeal of slapstick, so too Ikeda's historical slapstick Yaji Kita films were poised to win over a broader audience including both period film and Bakumatsu history film enthusiasts on the one hand, and connoisseurs of Western-style films on the other. These two audience types rarely mingled, with their marked difference in socioeconomic status—Western films were significantly more expensive than native Japanese productions and beyond the reach of even most white-collar workers—and their often entirely separate exhibition settings.[123] It was only with projects like Ikeda's Yaji Kita films that studios could hope to draw from such a broad potential audience.

Yet why did Ikeda decide to transpose Yaji and Kita from the Edo period along the Tōkaidō, their typical setting, to the Bakumatsu period in Kyoto? What utility did the Bakumatsu setting offer that the placid Tokugawa period could not? While he may have gotten the idea to use a new spatial and temporal setting from the success of the decidedly not Edo-period/Tōkaidō yet still somehow Yaji and Kita-esque story of *Behind the Front* (set in Europe during World War I), why did he ultimately choose the Bakumatsu, among all the other options? One likely explanation is that the Bakumatsu's Boshin War, almost alone among Japan's wars, was both a technologically modern conflict (with guns, cannons, etc.) and actually occurred in Japan—unlike, say, the equally modern victories over Qing China or Czarist Russia. Moreover, setting

[123] In the 1920s, a ticket for a typical (four-hour) domestic Japanese film program, which included two feature films and other material, was remarkably cheap, ranging from as low as 2 sen for kids to an average price of 10~20 sen for adults, depending on the quality and location of the movie theater. A ticket for a foreign import, by contrast, often exceeded 1 yen, five to ten times more expensive than a domestic film and a prohibitive price for the majority of Japanese considering one yen in the 1920s was a day's wages for most, including both unskilled labor and white-collar employment; see Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, p. 149. Although many movie theaters were classified as showing a mix of foreign and domestic films, many were exclusively for foreign (mostly American) imports, especially the most luxurious movie palaces. This pronounced bifurcation of the movie-going public in Japan demonstrates that there were really two largely distinct film cultures in Japan of the 1920s and 1930s, and the only genre that was apparently able to overcome this bifurcation was (slapstick) comedy, as evidenced by the marketing campaign for *Kondō*, which made a spirited effort to win over audiences more used to foreign imports by linking the film visually and spatiotemporally (showing them together in the same program) with the Buster Keaton comedy.

the film in the Sino-Japanese or Russo-Japanese Wars, aside from creating major logistical challenges of how to recreate those locations and enemies on the studio lots, would perhaps have made the more biting aspects of political satire in these films too obvious; comedies from the time of Aristophanes have tended to displace their critiques of the present safely into the relatively distant past, and 1905 is not so very distant from 1926-7, making the 1860s a much more comfortable choice. In other words, the wounds experienced by Japanese society during the Russo-Japanese War, with its tens of thousands of war dead, were still raw, while the wounds of the Bakumatsu's civil war had faded in intensity.

Added to all these considerations were practical issues related to the nature of Japan's film industry. After the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, the contemporary drama (*gendaigeki*) arm of Japan's film industry—since it was based in Tokyo—was devastated, while period film production, based in Kyoto, skyrocketed. But the division between these two sides of the industry remained in force, and in the ensuing years, each had roughly half the domestic market share of films produced. Ikeda was one of Nikkatsu's two star period film directors, and had relationships entirely with the period film side of the industry, meaning that in order for someone in his position to make a Yaji Kita project, he would have to set it before the unofficial cut-off point of the Meiji Restoration. He brought the timeline as close to the Restoration as possible, indeed only a few days before it in the case of *Toba-Fushimi*. Theoretically he could have chosen to set the story much earlier, in the Warring States period perhaps, but such a setting would not have offered the chance to emulate the World War I war-front comedy of *Behind the Front*. In keeping with nansensu film and literature in general, which tended to focus on criticism of Japan's fraught relationship with modernity/Westernization, Ikeda begins a visual dialogue with

the audience on issues of modernity as they related to Japan specifically, especially Japan's adoption of Western-style military tactics and training.

A domestic setting had other advantages as well. Inasmuch as Ikeda wished to provide social commentary both on modernity (and thus the technologically modern war) and, in the true spirit of Jippensha Ikku, apparently wanted to use Yaji and Kita to satirize Japanese society and identity, the Boshin War, with its combination of modern warfare and domestic setting, must have had more appeal than any of Japan's wars on foreign soil. The only other possibility would have been the Satsuma Rebellion, but that might have been too politically sensitive a setting, given Saigō's uneasy ontological status in early twentieth-century Japan: he was both a national hero and a national traitor, his enduring popularity among the people such that the government, in the late nineteenth century, was forced to co-opt his legacy and focus on his heroic qualities rather than condemn his treason. Saigō remained, however, a symbol that resisted easy interpretation, and worst of all, with his larger than life aura, he would have stolen the show from Yaji and Kita. So instead, Ikeda dropped them in the middle of the conflict over the Shogunate, and avoided depicting any of the first-rank heroes of the Restoration, thereby ensuring the focus would remain on Yaji and Kita. The highest-profile historical figure in each of these films was the Shinsengumi commander Kondō Isami, but he received little screen time; the audience wanted not historical accuracy but slapstick, and slapstick is what they got.[124]

Particularly in *Toba-Fushimi*, however, Ikeda was also able to use the war front setting to make pointed fun of the hegemonic interpretation of the Bakumatsu period's history. He attempted to expose the contingent nature of the imperial victory at the battle of Toba-Fushimi and illustrate some of the less than desirable features of the victors themselves. For example,

[124] Kondō and his second, Hijikata Toshizō, do not appear at the top of the cast list and were not played by top stars, suggesting they were relatively minor characters; neither appears, moreover, in the extant fragments of either film.

viewers surely laughed to see the 'toughening' training imposed on Yaji and Kita as a penalty for lacking the willingness to die for their country, since it consisted of two lines of men forced to slap each other repeatedly in the face and was accompanied by plenty of reaction shots of Yaji and Kita wincing and so forth, but it might also have reminded them of the harsh nature of the present-day military, as well. Even more harmful to the imperial victors' image is the film's depiction of the seemingly brave, even fearless imperial commander immediately losing his nerve once the battle starts and hiding behind a tree. Considering that many of the officers in the imperial army in 1868 went on to become high-ranking statesmen in the Meiji government, and the Meiji government is the direct ancestor of the new Shōwa government, to question the imperial faction's bravery—and their fitness to lead—is implicitly to question that of their ideological descendants, as well. Laughing about it does not make it harmless or apolitical; couching these critiques in parodic and specifically 'nonsense' form (with its prevalence for the hard-to-censor image over the easy-to-censor word) surely did, however, make the film's veiled politics more palatable to the newly centralized film censorship system.[125] By displacing this commentary into the past, to the specific moment of Japan's transition to modernity, Ikeda could mock aspects of the present in a way that a film set in the present would never have dared do.[126]

Japan in 1927 and 1928, when the Yaji Kita comedies came out, was experiencing major economic turmoil. The April 1927 run on banks dealt Japan's economy a severe blow, and confidence in Japan's current course was at a very low ebb; the prevailing opinion in the late 1920s was that Japan's political leaders were not only to blame for the crisis, but had actually

[125] Before 1925, film censorship was haphazard and conducted by local Home Ministry or police officials, but in 1925 the Home Ministry issued its Motion Picture Film Inspection Regulations, mandating centralized state inspection of all films (and narrative scripts). See Kasza, p. 55.

[126] Indeed, neither of these comedies appears to have suffered any official censorship action; *Eiga ken'etsu jihō* makes no mention of either. On the other hand, in addition to the ever-present reality of self-censorship, there may have been communications of a more informal nature that affected the final version of the film; Gregory Kasza points out it was not unheard of for filmmakers to call the Home Ministry for "advice" on a scene about to be shot, though sadly there is no documentary record of these sorts of changes. See Kasza, p. 60.

been getting richer just as the people became poorer.[127] Many had doubtless had high hopes for the new Shōwa era, but were finding the reality a disappointment, not unlike that of Yaji and Kita themselves, who went to such lengths to rescue Yamaarashi Danroku, the mighty thief from *Revering the Emperor*, but ended up clearly regretting their faith in Yamaarashi, who became the histrionic super-patriot sergeant in *Toba-Fushimi.*[128] In other words, someone they had once looked up to as a natural leader had turned into a bitter disappointment, presaged in a way by his unsavory nature.[129] Given this context, the humor at the expense of the Meiji Restoration victors resonated strongly with the discontented audiences of the day, helping explain the films' success.

One other factor that must have helped both films at the box office was the success of Ikeda's historical epic, *Sonnō jōi*, discussed in chapter one. Released just a few months before *Revering the Emperor*, and starring none other than Ōkōchi Denjirō, *Sonnō jōi* helped spur a surge of interest in the Bakumatsu period, and in the losers of the civil war in particular. As such, it is no surprise that Ikeda's subsequent Bakumatsu films, especially *Revering the Emperor* and *Toba-Fushimi*, would also take a rather dim view of the victors and established heroes.

The cast of this historical slapstick trilogy was also a key box-office draw. 1927 had seen the release of Itō's *Chūji tabi nikki* as well as Ikeda's own *Sonnō jōi*, which cemented Ōkōchi's status as one of the superstars of Japanese cinema, and the trilogy also featured Sakai Yoneko, one of Japan's preeminent actresses at that time.[130] Sakai, like Ōkōchi, had appeared in *Sonnō jōi* as well, starring as the geisha Oaki, the most interesting female role in the entire film.[131] In the

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[127] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, p. 142.
[128] The humor in the third film in the trilogy, *Toba-Fushimi*, thus depends on intertextual links to the first (and presumably also the second), as Yamaarashi's bizarre conversion to patriot is as unexpected as it is amusing, considering his past of thievery and his comical terror of goyō lanterns (he faints whenever he lays eyes on one).
[129] The audience is introduced to Yamaarashi, in *Revering the Emperor*, in a decidedly unfavorable manner; he demands Yaji and Kita spring him from jail first, before they try to rescue Yasuda, or he'll shout and alert the guards!
[130] Satō Tadao, "Commentary" to the *Talking Silents 7* DVD.
[131] Oaki is the woman the sophisticated samurai use to mock the rustic Seki, who is symbolically excluded from homo-social brotherhood with them because he cannot keep his cool around women.

trilogy, similarly, she has a key role to play, namely that of Kita's sister and the fiancée of the loyalist Yasuda, creating a mutual network of obligation between Kita (and, by extension, his best friend Yaji) and the *sonnō jōi* movement through Yasuda, a scenario that helps explain how Yaji and Kita eventually end up conscripted into the imperial army by the third film.

Conclusion

What was the social function of Bakumatsu comedy films in interwar and wartime Japan? Perhaps even more than valorizing-the-villain histories told in the tragic mode, which were discussed in chapter one, comedies of this period offered the chance for audiences not only to revise, but also to subvert history. When audiences laughed at the antics of Yaji or Kita during the late Bakumatsu, or Enoken bumbling around as national icons Kondō Isami or Sakamoto Ryōma, they were able to laugh at history itself, rejecting the logic and rhetoric of a necessary and positive link between the Bakumatsu past and the Shōwa present. They mocked, with their laughter, the teleological structuring of history itself, with which they had grown accustomed thanks to the treatment of Bakumatsu history in both textbooks and in the dozens of Bakumatsu films—with their heretofore standard endorsement of the pro-imperial side as morally superior to the pro-Tokugawa faction—already in existence. By poking fun at the hallowed heroes of yesteryear, especially the pro-imperial faction whose leaders went on not only to rule Japan but to create the modern state itself, these films became a safe, because carefully displaced, outlet for some among the people to express their dissatisfaction with the present.

The high point of the Bakumatsu historical parody subgenre came with *Kondō*. After the promulgation of the Film Law in 1939, the crackdown on parodies of history, and of entertainment-focused comedy in general, grew more severe than ever. The next five years could

be described as something of a war on comedy, with very few being produced thru autumn of 1944.[132] But by the end of the war with the United States and Great Britain, even the most serious-minded bureaucrats and censors, and indeed even Diet members, eventually acknowledged the rejuvenative potential of laughter, and in late 1944 they finally relaxed restrictions on the production of comedies enough to allow a handful to be produced, admitting in so doing that entertainment for its own sake could help improve the population's flagging morale even if the political message of the individual films left much to be desired.[133] It is no exaggeration to say this official decision to allow filmmakers and studios to focus on producing pure entertainment films was a wholesale capitulation of the state in the face of the people's desire to enjoy themselves.[134] The film-going audience of Japan had by that point made it very clear, voting with their feet and their wallets, that they had little liking for overtly propagandistic movies, and gradually even the most obstinate ideologues were forced to realize that the efficacy of propaganda films depends on the consent of the viewer, so to speak. Nor was this part of any master plan by the government of Japan to hoodwink the people by forcing filmmakers to coat the otherwise unpalatable propaganda message of their films with just enough entertainment to get audiences to swallow it, in the manner of Goebbels and his pro-entertainment policies toward filmmaking in Nazi Germany.[135] What the people want, they get—sooner or later.[136]

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[132] High, pp. 492-493.
[133] Ibid., p. 493.
[134] Filmmakers had been sounding their support for the idea of pure entertainment for some time. None other than Yamamoto Kajirō had publicly declared his intent to create 'sugureta goraku eiga' just weeks before he began work on *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (1942). See Salomon, p. 171.
[135] Whereas Goebbels (who was also supportive of 'pure' entertainment film products) had argued that any given propaganda film would do well to include crowd-pleasing entertainment elements in order to sway its audience more effectively, in Japan none of the officials in the Home Ministry, the Cabinet Information Bureau, or even the pro-state faction of the film criticism world, best represented by the quasi-official Tsumura Hideo, ever showed any indication that they agreed with this idea, even late in the war. Instead, statements by these officials were consistently hard-line and disapproving of 'frivolous' entertainment, which they at least felt detracted from the film's political effectiveness, and railed against this sort of crowd-pandering by studios when they dared to include such elements. And in the capitulation of autumn 1944 described above, the government performed an about-face of sorts, conceding defeat that even mindless entertainment could fulfill a useful social function. But even then, Diet

This narrative account of the history of comedies in late wartime Japan, which emphasizes the relative absence of straightforward comedies from theaters, may sound compelling, but is it the entire story? As we shall see in subsequent chapters, comedy, particularly in historical films set in the Bakumatsu, was far more frequently present, and more conspicuous, than one might expect given the standard narrative above. If comedy had actually suffered such a severe and effective crackdown from 1939-1944, why were unabashed comedians like Enoken able to make so many films[137] during this period, many of them, like the 1940 *Songokū*, quite funny?[138] And why did contemporary advertisements for Bakumatsu romances like *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, discussed in chapter five, celebrate the presence of two comedians sure to 'draw the inappropriate laughter bursting out of you'?[139] Here, too, the dark valley theory of popular culture, if coupled with too much attention to governmental action like Ministry of Education film recommendations and too little focus on the actual popularity of films, can miss the mark.[140] In fact, things were not so dark, even in the early 1940s, that

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members, officials and even critics like Tsumura did not appear to feel it was appropriate to mix entertainment and political propaganda in the same film; rather, they simply admitted that pure entertainment films might improve morale and would therefore be allowed.

[136] In the case of Nazi Germany, much scholarly attention has focused on Goebbels as evil genius, with the decision of his "Ministry of Illusion" to allow comedies (which had a greater than 50% share of films released in 1944, for example) a supposed master-stroke in keeping the populace docile, but one wonders whether here, too, the power of the audience to shape the film product they eventually saw has been discounted. Salomon, p. 269.

[137] Including, incidentally, a popular 1940 film entitled *Enoken no Yaji Kita*, available on VHS and described in the pages of *Eiga nenkan*, somewhat disapprovingly, as "Top-ranking—if judged from the perspective of pleasing the masses." (taishū wo yorokobaseru to ifu ten de wa jōi). *Eiga nenkan Shōwa hen I, vol. 8, Shōwa 16 nenban* p. 19.

[138] In fact, one magical sequence in this film features Enoken dressed as none other than Kondō Isami. Furukawa was astonished, upon viewing it, that any Japanese film made in 1940 could have been so care-free and amusing, presumably since he had until then been an adherent of the dark valley view of popular culture; seeing it inspired him to write his book on national policy films and led to the discovery of their poor reception. Furukawa, p. 146.

[139] The Japanese term is 'shisshō', which can refer to laughter in such inappropriate contexts as at a funeral, etc., and thus the advertisements explicitly promise a transgressive experience for the audience—the ability to laugh at the gloomy present, in short. Sure enough, the two comedians begin a manzai back-and-forth routine on the subject of the main characters' arrest by pro-Tokugawa forces, leeching the scene of any political seriousness through their antics. Ad from the front matter of the July 1, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō*. See chapter five for a fuller analysis.

[140] See for example Salomon's 2011 monograph *Views of the Dark Valley*, an excellent book which nonetheless stresses the repressive apparatus of the state for controlling film production without balancing that reality with an in-depth look at some of the more subversive film genres, including historical comedies and romances.

audiences could not go to the movies to laugh; producers simply became more adept at weaving these elements into their films in ways that did not push censors into taking repressive action.[141]

After the success of *Kondō*, Enoken went on to star in another hit comedy set in the Bakumatsu, *Enoken no Kurama Tengu*, released in May 1939.[142] In it, Enoken parodies many of the conventions of this film series, including both Kurama Tengu's aura of capability and allegiance to the pro-imperial faction. The plot closely mimics that of the most popular Kurama Tengu stories, with Enoken's Kurama forced to protect children from rapacious adults, take on multiple hordes of Shinsengumi opponents, notably archrival Kondō Isami, and deal with a circular letter causing the pro-imperial faction trouble. But far from seeming particularly capable, Enoken's version of Kurama is a short, weak, constantly ill-prepared buffoon,[143] as when he faces down a horde of Shinsengumi with a pistol only to find to his chagrin that it won't fire; he hurriedly brings out another pistol from inside his kimono but it won't fire either, so he digs deep and retrieves another, only to have this one fail as well. In disgust, he hurls the gun to the floor, where it begins firing in all directions, forcing him and the Shinsengumi into a crazy jumping dance to avoid being shot and giving him the opportunity for a scampering escape.[144]

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[141] For example, the above-mentioned comedic duo in *Meijin Chōji hori*, while very amusing indeed, are on screen only for small doses at a time, not for any extended, and therefore more objectionable, routines.

[142] This was one of the only Enoken films not directed by Yamamoto Kajirō; instead, the director was Kondō Katsuhiko, a period film specialist who had recently relocated to Tōhō from Shōchiku Shimogamo.

[143] Near the end of the film, around minute 45 of the VHS version, he once again holds the entire Shinsengumi corps at bay with his pistol, only to trip and be instantly captured when he turns to leave.

[144] This entire sequence, the funniest in the entire film with the possible exception of the spectacular long-shot fight sequence (cinematographically speaking this alone is sufficient to mark it as not the work of Karasawa Hiromitsu, who was famous for his immersive shot-making in action sequences) in the climax, occurs around minutes eight to eleven of the nearly complete extant (VHS) version, and also features a humorous chase around a giant mountainous pile of jizō statues, where Kurama manages to outpace some of the Shinsengumi chasing him round and round this hill, so he stops to help one enemy up, then punches him back down again. Finally he is compelled to disguise himself as one of the statues, initially fooling the credulous Shinsengumi horde. More antics follow; needless to say, neither Kurama nor the Shinsengumi appear particularly impressive in this send-up of the mystique surrounding the storied clash between pro-imperial and pro-Tokugawa.



Figure 13: Still from *Enoken no Kurama Tengu*, showing a face-off near the beginning of the film between Kondō (left) and Kurama Tengu, whose black kimono has the name "Enomoto" clearly legible. Author's personal collection.

Enoken once again seized the opportunity to offer audiences the chance to laugh at their own history, and speculate about a less heroic conflict between the pro-imperial and pro-Tokugawa sides. And a perusal of the original script submitted to the censors indicates it was approved, despite its parodic take on history, without any changes.[145]

As we shall see in the next chapter, on the Kurama Tengu film series, this parodic take on the series and its eponymous protagonist would have been especially amusing given audience

[145] Makino collection, Columbia University, series six, subseries five, box 122 folder one has the original script. This script is also noteworthy for highlighting the filmmakers' intention to use sound effects and music at beginning of each reel as something like sound bridges from reel to reel.

expectations that Kondō be a worthy enemy[146] and Kurama be a superhero, who could face down and defeat a host of opponents, winning against all odds and only then making a victorious withdrawal—a hero, in short, who would remain steady through the tumult of the Bakumatsu past but also save them from the turbulent present.

[146] Unlike in this film, where Kondō is completely unmanned during combat when a child throws food onto the crest of his kimono, soiling it. He fastidiously insists on changing his kimono before he can continue pursuing Kurama, and later the same gag is repeated, this time when his white garb is besmirched with blood from one of his allies.

Chapter Three
Serial History: the Case of Kurama Tengu

Where other chapters take specific genres of Bakumatsu period films for their objects of study, in this chapter I will analyze the long-running film series of Kurama Tengu screen adaptations, adopting a diachronic approach in order to isolate how strategies for depicting the Bakumatsu changed over time and with the varying circumstances of the 1920s thru the 1940s. I will argue that Kurama Tengu, one of the Bakumatsu period's greatest (if quasi-fictional) heroes, was a key vehicle for the "we are all patriots" valorizing-the-villains effect we have already seen in chapter one with depictions of such figures as Ii Naosuke, continuing the social reevaluation of formerly vilified pro-Tokugawa figures like Kondo Isami, Additionally, because children were its target audience, the prewar series is likely to have had a very strong impact on the wartime generation's conceptualization of the Bakumatsu's significance.

Introduction: Presentational Heroes, Intertextual Stars

Kurama Tengu is one of Japanese visual culture's most iconic and recognizable characters of the twentieth century. The idea for Kurama Tengu came from the serialized novels of Osaragi Jirō, a successful writer whose career was rocked by the 1923 earthquake; his magazine shut down and he was forced to try his hand at a period piece (a "*magemono,*" meaning "topknot piece," *chonmage* being the male topknot of the Edo period) in order to make a living, but was surprised to find his period novels, soon serialized in *Shōnen kurabu* ("Boy's Club") magazine, huge successes despite his liberal borrowing from the plots of American and other mystery stories.[1] Osaragi soon hit upon the idea of a cowled vigilante, dubbing this shadowy champion of

[1] See Toki Akihiro et al hen, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 76.

justice "Kurama Tengu" in a reference to the myth-cycle of legendary swordsman Minamoto no Yoshitsune in the *Gikeiki*: the young Ushiwakamaru (Yoshitsune) was said to have been taught sword-fighting by the Tengu (bird-like goblins with long noses) of Mount Kurama, thus creating for the new vigilante an association of great skill with the sword but also something a bit unnerving or otherworldly.[2] The idea for the cowl was likely inspired by the 1920 Douglas Fairbanks film *Mark of Zorro*—itself based on a short story, "The Curse of Capistrano", though the story did not become famous until the success of the film—which was widely screened and well liked in Japan.[3]

Douglas Fairbanks himself was the most popular Western star in Japan during the mid-1920s, with Bantsuma the most popular Japanese star.[4] But only a half-step below Bantsuma in popularity was Arashi Kanjūrō, the successor to Onoe Matsunosuke's legacy as a sexless hyper-masculine (*tateyaku*) star for children, and Arashi (lovingly known as "Arakan"), after a slow start in 1927, reached these heights of popularity with his career-defining role: Kurama Tengu.[5]

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[2] See ibid., pp. 76-77.

[3] Satō Tadao has pointed out that masked or cowled heroes only started to appear in Japanese films in 1923, and given the popularity of Fairbank's Zorro, shown in Japan in 1921, Satō argues he was the direct inspiration for the wave of cowled heroes like Kurama Tengu who began appearing soon after, and it is likely Osaragi was inspired to write a story about a cowled hero after either hearing about or personally viewing the film. Iwamoto Kenji, in *Jidaigeki densetsu*, argues that the influence of *Zorro* on Osaragi is "akiraka"; see *Jidaigeki densetsu*, p. 16.

[4] *Kinema junpō*, no. 208 (Oct. 11, 1925), p. 19 gives a list of the results of the voting on the best foreign and domestic actors, and Douglas Fairbanks and Bantsuma each got the most votes in their respective categories, with Bantsuma almost twice as popular as the next highest vote getter, Kondō Iyokichi. The most popular choices for actresses were Lillian Gish and Okada Yoshiko (the latter now remembered solely for her infamous 1938 defection to the USSR but in 1925 the clear favorite among voters).

[5] Intriguingly, Arashi's appearances as Kurama Tengu prior to the 1928 blockbuster were in films whose titles did not yet focus attention on the eponymous hero per se, namely the *Kakubei Jishi* trilogy: the April 1927 *Kakubei Jishi*, its August 1927 sequel, *Zoku Kakubei Jishi,* and the Feb. 1928 *Kakubei Jishi kōmyō jō* (all lost). The films' ads in the pages of Kinema Junpō almost never feature the now-iconic cowled figure in the promotional stills, or even the words "Kurama Tengu" in the copy of the ads; instead, either the uncowled Kurata is shown (as for example *Kinema junpō*, no. 269 (Aug. 1, 1927), p. 44-2) or the character of Sugisaku is singled out for special attention (see *Kinema junpō* no. 270 (Aug. 11, 1927), p. 49 for a still showing not Kurata/Kurama but Sugisaku (being tended to by femme fatale Okane)). This emphasis on Sugisaku was apparently true of the films themselves, since contemporary critics blasted particularly *Zoku Kakubei Jishi* for using the role of Sugisaku to pander overmuch to the film's main constituency, young boys (see *Kinema junpō* no. 272 (Sept. 1, 1927), p. 104 for this review by 山本緑葉(Yamamoto Rokuha), which, while very critical of the direction and storyline, nonetheless highly praised Arashi's acting prowess). It seems neither Kurama Tengu nor Arashi himself had yet reached critical mass in the popular imaginary.

Kurama Tengu is the cowled vigilante alter-ego of Kurata Tenzen, a defender of the innocent, especially children, and a smiter of the corrupt. However, the film incarnation of Kurama arguably owes less to Osaragi's source material, on which it is at times only very loosely based, than it does to its star, Arakan himself. Kurama's various nuances, expressions, characteristic poses and so forth all came from Arakan, who became so closely identified with the Kurama character, and vice-versa, that other actors who later went on to play Kurama were denounced by fans as "Arashi imposters"[6] and even critics of the series scoffed at "mis-casting" in those Kurama Tengu films not starring Arakan.[7] Arakan enjoyed massive popularity well into the 1950s thanks to his thirty-year career playing Kurama Tengu.[8] His on-screen persona as Kurata/Kurama, a kindly uncle figure always on the watch for oppressed kids like Sugisaku, won him great popularity among children, a very lucrative audience[9] despite their lower ticket prices: until the outbreak of war with China in 1937 dramatically increased adult interest in going to movie theaters, kids formed 25% or more of the movie-going public.[10] As such, molding a character like Kurama—and the series star, Arakan—into a form best positioned to inherit Onoe's legacy as the most beloved movie star among kids made excellent financial sense.

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[6] Satō, *Kimi wa jidaigeki wo mita ka*, p. 117.
[7] The June 21, 1941 issue of *Eiga junpō* has a scathing review of the 1941 Daitō film *Kurama Tengu, Knight in the Rain* (*Kurama Tengu uchū no kishi,* dir. Shirai Sentarō), starring Sugiyama Shōsaku as Kurata Tenzen. See p. 64.
[8] Iwamoto Kenji mentions *menko*, a popular card game he himself played around 1950 which featured the faces of chanbara stars like Kataoka Chiezō and Ichikawa Utaemon but especially Arakan, and to a lesser extent included stars from U.S. Westerns as well. See Iwamoto, *Jidaigeki densetsu*, p. 270. This is corroborated by Toki Akihiro, who notes that during games of *menko*, and *chanbara gokko* in general, everyone wanted the role of Kurama Tengu. See Toki et al hen, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 76.
[9] There is some evidence exhibitors adapted their marketing strategies to target children reader-consumers more effectively; in a perusal of The Museum of Kyoto's extensive movie theater handbill (*chirashi*) collection from the Fushimi area in Kyoto, I noticed that the many ads for Kurama Tengu films tend to feature unusually large numbers of pictures and stills, and to include more transliterations of words in katakana or hiragana (which, unlike Chinese characters, elementary school students could read; for one of many examples, see sleeve 98 in binder two, an ad for Enoken no Kurama Tengu which writes terms like "chonmage" in katakana and "tsuketa" in hiragana), which make up a larger portion of the entire area of the ad, leaving less space for text, and interpret this as an effort to appeal to those who could not yet read (and, due to their loyalty to the character of Kurama Tengu/star (Arakan) rather than loyalty to the director/plot), would have no interest in reading) detailed synopses.
[10] Furukawa, p. 60.

The real question about Kurama Tengu is why Osaragi's work, and thus the subsequent film adaptations, chose to conceive of Kurama as a Bakumatsu figure. There were plenty of eras in which a hero like Kurama would have had his hands full fighting injustice, for example the warring states period at the close of the sixteenth century, but from the very beginning, Kurama was identified with Japan's transition to modernity—the Bakumatsu. The logic of the setting and the characterization reveals Kurama as a politically motivated vigilante, a crusader fighting to bring Japan into the modern world, opposed by recalcitrant forces like the Shinsengumi who are against modernity and thus, Japan's destiny: in a very real sense, Kurama is on the right side of history, and Kondō and his minions the wrong side. In the beginning of the series, furthermore, there is no suggestion that all sides of the Bakumatsu conflict were populated with patriots; instead, Kurama is right and his enemies, by definition, are wrong.[11] But the setting also offered, both to Osaragi and his readers and it seems to the viewers of the enormously successful film adaptations of his work, a strong parallel to Japan's present of the 1920s (and later, 1930s, 40s, and 50s): the themes of a lone hero, protector of the innocent, pitted against a coldhearted and cruel establishment, and of rampant social inequality, especially for children, resonated with readers of novel and film alike.

To please its largely adolescent audience, filmmakers working on the earliest Kurama Tengu projects in the silent era were careful to include plenty of swashbuckling (*chanbara*) action, but also a transparent 'good vs. evil' framework. After all, Kurama's morality was unimpeachable, so whoever crossed swords with him must be downright dastardly. This framing has important implications when considering the Bakumatsu setting in which Kurama Tengu is fighting for justice. He is positioned firmly on the side of the pro-imperial (*kinnō*) or loyalist

[11] Toki Akihiro et al argue that pro-Tokugawa forces like the Shinsengumi are presented in the novels as thoroughly and irremediably evil ('tetteiteki na aku'). See Toki et al, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 90. But note that in the film adaptations, at least, Kondō's image in particular is far more ambiguous, especially from 1928 onwards.

(*shishi*) forces—on the side of progress, in other words—whereas his arch-nemesis through several of his films, Shinsengumi commander Kondō Isami, is a pro-Shogunate (*sabaku*) stalwart who is therefore against progress. In the minds of children (and, possibly, adults as well) watching these films, this black-and-white portrayal of good and evil would have had political ramifications, as such children would likely grow up strongly prejudiced in favor of Kurama's allies the loyalists and against his enemies the pro-Tokugawa crowd, and therefore have a less critical attitude towards the loyalists' legacy: the Meiji Restoration and subsequent Meiji polity.

This is not to suggest that the plotlines of the movies were particularly important, however. Pop culture movies like the Kurama Tengu series were all about star power, the box office draw of having Arakan in the lead role. And megastars like Arakan, Kataoka Chiezō, Ichikawa Utaemon, Ōkōchi Denjirō and Bantsuma all received special treatment from the crews and studios with which they worked, being referred to as 'ontai' ('general' or 'chief') on set.[12] Moreover, all the major period film stars had roots in the Kabuki world, in which presentation—how one looks—is far important than what one is saying or doing; as a consequence, period film stars tended to insist that the story be subordinate to the task of them being shown in the best possible light.[13]

Nor were studios ignorant of the importance of showing their stars in the most favorable manner. Many studios cultivated their stars' images almost as assiduously as the stars themselves, the most notorious example of which, as Daisuke Miyao has convincingly shown, being Hayashi Chōjirō (who reverted to his birth name, Hasegawa Kazuo, when he moved to Tōhō) and

[12] Satō, *Kimi wa,* p. 122.
[13] Ibid., p. 135. This was sometimes true quite literally, as Hayashi Chōjirō/Hasegawa Kazuo, in particular, was careful only to be seen in glamorous lighting, and after his face was slashed following his defection to Tōhō, acquiesced to the new aesthetics of shadow, such that for any profile shots, his scarred left side was turned away from the camera and/or lost in shadow. See Miyao, p. 175. Immediately after the slashing, he is said to have cried out "kagami wo! Kagami wo!" ([bring me] a mirror! a mirror!); see Toki Akihiro et al hen, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 187.

Shōchiku, who together worked hard to ensure that Hayashi would always look glamorous.[14] Hasegawa, extremely conscious of how he looked and what would please his fans, is even known to have requested that director Kinugasa Teinosuke shoot him in such a manner as to have his drawn sword flash in the sunlight.[15] Essentially, swashbuckling period films of the silent era were both sustainers of, and themselves sustained by, star power, and the primary objective of film crews working on any project starring a megastar was to ensure the star's image remained unsullied, and that he looked heroic and larger than life, especially in the all-important sword fighting (*satsujin*) scenes; the storyline, often rather quotidian, was far less important than the mechanics of showing the star at his formidable best, slicing his way through hordes of enemies with superhuman strength and speed.

Yet how could one guarantee the stars would look sufficiently graceful, their movements impressively rapid? There was one key technique used in the exhibition of silent-era films which helped stars appear truly superhuman in speed. The projectionist would adjust the frame rate by cranking the projector faster for sword fights—which had the effect of making the stars appear to go into a new gear and leap around impossibly fast—and at the regular speed of, usually, sixteen frames per second for non-combat scenes. In fact, control over when to accelerate the frame rate was often given to the film narrator (*benshi*), who would press a button to signal the projectionist to crank faster or slower.[16]

The malleability of the frame rate in the silent era even extended to the cranking speed for entire films. Sometimes, on holidays, some movie theaters managed to squeeze in three complete film programs (each of which would take four hours or so at the normal cranking speed)

[14] Miyao documents many ways Hayashi/Hasegawa's image was carefully managed; see for example p. 91.
[15] Satō, *Iji no bigaku*, p. 256.
[16] Anderson, "Spoken Silents", in *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, p. 275.

by cranking entire programs faster.[17] This was partly to allow several different narrators the chance to perform; as is now well known, top-class narrators were celebrities in their own right, drawing major crowds and having their names written larger than the movie stars' on the posters, and indeed some directors altered the films themselves to accommodate the narrator, pacing their films in order to match the speaking speed of their preferred narrator.[18]

All these aspects of Japanese cinema during the silent era helped ensure that movie series like Kurama Tengu be all about presentation rather than narrative. Put differently, the fabula was far less important than the syuzhet. In this climate, it was not unusual for Kurama Tengu movies with stories nearly identical to earlier Kurama Tengu films to emerge just a few years apart, or for Kurama Tengu films to be literally remade just a decade or so after they first came out. The same types of stories, those featuring an imposter Kurama Tengu who must be exposed and defeated by the real Kurama for example, or the very same story, *Kakubei Jishi*, kept being revisited, and this despite a wealth of source material for all manner of disparate stories provided by Osaragi's writing.

Nor did this peculiar fixation on certain tropes and plotlines alienate the audience, because that audience was made up largely of children, who would generally stop watching Kurama Tengu movies when they reached adulthood, making way for the next generation of adolescents to delight in remakes of the very same stories they had enjoyed as kids. In other words, with an audience of children, practically the entire audience would be replaced by new fans within ten years, so there was no incentive to create new stories and every incentive to fall back on the tried and true plotlines that had won over earlier generations of children.[19] Knowing

[17] Ibid., p. 276.
[18] Ibid., p. 279.
[19] For children, the most popular individual Kurama Tengu story, as novel or film, was *Kakubei Jishi*, and as early as the 1927 adaptation, reviewers were already noting how the audience of largely children was guiding

one's audience to be mostly children also removed any incentive to include romantic subplots involving Kurama, since as Gregory Barrett notes, Kurama was conceived as almost androgynous, a hero for children, and moreover, like Miyamoto Musashi, a representative of the Chaste Warrior tateyaku archetype, who can easily rebuff women's advances.[20]

The earliest known Kurama Tengu film, from August 1925, starred Onoe Matsunosuke and is noteworthy for having the first known female screenwriter in the history of Japanese cinema; Arakan began starring in Kurama Tengu films in 1927, relatively soon after Onoe's death, and quickly inherited Onoe's popularity among children.[21] By 1928, he was one of Japan's biggest stars, and founded his own production company, Arashi Kanjūrō Productions, which handled the production of the two earliest extant Kurama Tengu films, both from 1928, *Kurama Tengu* and the partially surviving *Kurama Tengu: Age of Terror* (*Kurama Tengu: kyōfu jidai*, both directed by Yamaguchi Teppei). The former introduces the recurring rivalry between Kurama and arch-nemesis Kondō Isami, while the latter features the 'nise (imposter) Kurama Tengu' trope. As with almost all Kurama Tengu stories and films, they are set in the Bakumatsu proper, early 1860s Japan to be specific, and take place in the Kinki (Kyoto and Osaka) area.

Case Study: Kurama Tengu Films from the Late 1920s

In the 1928 *Kurama Tengu*, Kurama is captured by pro-Tokugawa forces and, in a role reversal sure to have pleased the adolescent crowd, the child Sugisaku must rescue Kurama from

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development of the on-screen story; some found this concession to audience desires shameful, while others, notably the reviewer in the *hihyō* section of the 261st issue (May 11, 1927) of *Kinema junpō*, found it perfectly fine; on page 49 the reviewer, Yamamoto Rokuha, praises director Sone Junzō for crafting a Sugisaku-centered tale "sure to please little viewers"; he also lauds Arashi's grace, and is positive about Matsuo Fumindo's performance as Sugisaku.

[20] Barrett, *Archetypes in Japanese Film*, p. 58. Toki Akihiro notes the irony that despite being famous as the sexless Kurama Tengu on screen, Arakan himself acquired quite a reputation as a playboy, often heading to Gion right after the shoot ended. See Toki et al hen, *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 78.

[21] The advertisement for this film appearing on page 27 of the August 11, 1925 edition of Kinema junpō notes the screenwriter was "Miss Hayashi Yoshiko", making Hayashi the earliest known female scriptwriter or indeed film crew member of any kind, in Japanese history.

Kondō Isami, who is on his way to the jail to kill him. At the midpoint of the film, thirty-five minutes in, is the true emotional climax: Sugisaku leaps up to prevent Kondō from crossing a bridge and makes such a passionate speech about honor and how Kurama is Japan's great national treasure that Kondō is moved by his sincerity and, with a twinkle in his eye, pretends not to know the way to Osaka, nudging Sugisaku into realizing Kondō is letting himself be misled as to which road to take.[22] This moment is the earliest extant instance of 'partiality towards the defeated' (*hōgan biiki*[23]) and the comrades-yet-enemies bond subsequently emphasized in many films between Kurama and Kondō, as patriots and men of honor. The scene explicitly identifies Kurama Tengu as a national, rather than parochial, hero,[24] and through Kondō's magnanimous response, elevates him to the same national level. This revisionist outlook on Kondō Isami as a formidable but honorable opponent is in forceful contrast to the rest of the pro-Tokugawa rabble.

Kurama Tengu is also filled with exciting sword-fighting sequences. Many such sequences display a very low average shot length (and would certainly have also had a sped up frame rate, an experiential dimension to the exhibition of the film to which we in the twenty-first century no longer have access) and a high proportion of expensive tracking and crane shots as well as dynamic camera movement from amidst the very center of the action, featuring close-ups of Arakan's feet as he acrobatically leaps to and fro. The fighting scenes, especially the ten-minute long climactic clash at the end, are filled with compositionally advanced cross-cutting and other flourishes, including obfuscatory decorative moments where opponents just killed by

[22] Sugisaku stresses he's asking Kondō to spare Kurama not for personal reasons, but for "Nippon no tame", since Kurama Tengu is "Nippon no takara da!"
[23] Literally this term means "partiality for (Yoshitsune) the 3rd-grade official", a reference to Minamoto no Yoshitsune, and the pronounced popular preference for this tragic hero over his victorious brother Yoritomo; it became such a well-established feature in tales of the medieval period that "favoring the 3rd-grade official" came to refer to any instance of sympathy for the sure-to-be-defeated underdog in a situation.
[24] Hatori, p. 13.

Kurama's blade stagger in front of the camera, blocking our view of the hero.[25] Altogether, this is a cinematographic and editing package that proclaims director Yamaguchi Teppei and cinematographer Ishikawa Tōkichi had embraced the filmmaking principles advocated by Japan's Pure Film movement several years earlier, and wished to reject the presentational aesthetics of Kabuki-inspired performance,[26] especially the dance-like, stylized ballet of Kabuki sword-fighting, replacing it with the rapid-paced and more realistic sword-fighting developed by Sawada Shōjirō and the Shinkokugeki troupe.[27]

Kurama Tengu: Age of Terror is a late 1928 sequel of sorts to *Kurama Tengu*, with the same cast and crew, including director Yamaguchi Teppei, and it consequently features many of the same storytelling flourishes.[28] Particularly noteworthy was Ishikawa's handheld camera work, especially the intriguing sideways camera angle used in a strange quasi-POV shot during the fight scene that opens the extant print of the film; the camera slowly twists back into an upright angle as it records the character falling to the floor. The theme here, and throughout the Kurama Tengu film series, is consistently on the integrity of the main characters; Kurama Tengu's integrity falls into doubt after the imposter Kurama begins sneaking around in *Age of Terror* and the true Kurama proves with his conduct, particularly his interventions to help Sugisaku and

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[25] Bordwell developed the idea of the obfuscatory decorative flourish in Bordwell, "A Cinema of Flourishes", in *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, p. 340. He argues this sort of touch implies a filmmaking is taking 'pleasure in control,' to use Gombrich's phrase, over the film medium and having mastered its possibilities.

[26] Not all such elements were rejected of course; in particular, the silent era continued to feature Kabuki-trained stars grimacing in fine 'dramatic glaring pose' (*mie*) fashion, while wearing white-based Kabuki-style makeup, and *Kurama Tengu* and Arakan were no exceptions. Indeed, Arakan could 'niramu' with the best of them, and his impossibly thick black eyebrows, painted over a starkly whitened face, look theatrical indeed in the movie's many close-ups. These conventions involving makeup largely continued until Itō Daisuke's 1930 *Kōbō Shinsengumi* dispensed with that makeup altogether to use much more realistic-looking black makeup; Satō, *Iji no bigaku*, p. 127.

[27] This new style of theater began with Sawada's 1919's performance of *Tsukigata Hanpeita* and had a significant impact on Japanese theater and cinema thereafter, inspiring filmmakers, in particular, to replace the presentational conventions inherited from Kabuki with a more frenetic type of sword fighting; see Satō, *Iji no bigaku*, p. 297.

[28] Story-wise, there's no attempt to continue on from the cliff-hanger battle just being joined and the "?" final intertitle at the end of *Kurama Tengu*; indeed, the story of *Age of Terror* has little if any connection to the earlier film, but its stylistic and cast/crew similarities make it a sequel in the loosest sense. Of course, much of the film is lost, so perhaps a stronger sense of continuity existed between the two complete films.

other innocents even to the point of knowingly walking into a trap, that he is blameless as ever, though indeed men of the same level of personal integrity like Saigō Kichinosuke (Takamori) never even begin to question Kurama's character.

Perhaps because of its heavy reliance on sped-up frame rate projection to convey Kurama Tengu's larger than life dexterity and speed, the Kurama film series, and Arakan himself,[29] experienced a rocky transition to sound—the addition of which mandates a constant frame rate—and it was not until 1938, after Arashi Kanjūrō Productions eventually folded, that the series registered another success.[30] In the latter half of the silent-to-sound transition, from 1933 onwards,[31] films which continued to be made silent commanded a steadily declining market share until finally by 1937 silent films constituted a mere fifth of new films being made.[32] It was

[29] As Yamane Sadao notes, Arakan's behavior after the merger of his company with Shinkō was rather bizarre; he earned a second-class pilot's license, bought an old German Focker plane, and spent the next nine months burning through his savings zooming around in it. The press picked up the story under the headline "Tengu, sora wo tobu", and Arakan himself noted, in his thick Kansai accent, "I found planes very interesting, and spent nine months with mine until I had not a single coin left...but as long as I have [the Kurama Tengu role], I figured I ain't gonna starve" (kore aru kagiri, meshi kui age wa omahen). See Yamane, *Kakubei Jishi no tanoshimi zeminaaru*. Arakan was later given the opportunity to showcase his passion for flight in the 1940 Marune Santarō film *Chōjin* (Birdman), about the real-life late eighteenth-century scientist and inventor Kōkichi the Paperer (Hyōgushi), who devoted his life to building a flight suit based on study of bird wings and may have been the first human ever to glide in the air. The film has quite a comical touch despite Arakan's portrayal of Kōkichi as humorless and half insane, willing to sacrifice everything, including his own son, if it means he can succeed in flying (he does, in a quite uplifting ending).

[30] Many star-centered production companies failed in the mid-1930s, partly as a result from the transition to sound, which definitely hurt business for *chanbara* films, which suddenly began showing the heroes moving only as fast as the actors themselves could move. Nonetheless, Arashi Kanjūrō Productions (affectionately known as "Kanpuro") continued making Kurama Tengu movies right up until it folded in 1937. Judging from Kinema Junpō editions covering the years 1929 thru 1937, there were at least twelve film adaptations of Kurama Tengu during those years, but only a tiny seconds-long portion of a single one of those has survived; tellingly, the Kurama Tengu films Arakan made in 1938, after he moved to Nikkatsu, are both extant and intact, indirect evidence that a greater number of copies of the print were made, and/or the print copies were taken better care of, than those made at Kanpuro.

[31] In fact, an unvarying frame rate was not the only problem facing filmmakers desirous of making the switch to talkies; Iwamoto Kenji has pointed out that everyone, from the stars (Ōkōchi Denjirō famously spoke rather pompously and sonorously, despite having a slight lisp to overcome) to the extras, had radically different modes of speaking, having been trained in wildly different contexts, so early rehearsals in films intended to be talkies sometimes ended in disaster, there being no uniformity of performing style among the cast while speaking. Iwamoto, "Sound in the Early Talkies," in *Reframing Japanese Cinema,* p. 314. Virtually none of the period film stars had a smooth transition; of them all, Arakan was perhaps the best, because he was able to code switch from his own thick Kansai accent into standard unaccented Japanese without any great difficulty.

[32] Anderson, "Spoken Silents", p. 292. Anderson notes this decline in numbers of silent films being made led directly to a steep decline in the number of narrator active in Japan; in 1937, it was just above half the number it had been (6818) at the industry high point in 1927. But he goes on to note that because silent film prints continued to circulate despite the drop in new production, even as late as 1940 there were still 1000+ active narrators.

not until the very last day of 1934 that a sound Kurama Tengu film was released, making the series a silent-era holdout.[33] But the first sound Kurama Tengu films were not major successes, and Arashi Kanjūrō Productions foundered as a result.

Shifting the Target Audience: Kurama Tengu in the late 1930s

The resurgence of the series came in 1938 (after Arakan's company was merged with Shinkō and he eventually made his way to Nikkatsu), a year that saw two hit Kurama Tengu movies. In fact, 1938 began a five-year golden age for Kurama Tengu films. In those five years, no fewer than ten films were released, some of them big box office successes.[34] First came *Kurama Tengu: Kakubei Jishi no maki* (*Kurama Tengu and Kakubei 'the Lion'* (hereinafter *Kakubei Jishi*), this latter a reference to Sugisaku and Shinkichi, the two boys Kurata frequently rescues from trouble), co-directed by Makino Masahiro and his half-brother Matsuda Sadatsugu, released in March, followed by November's *Kurama Tengu in the Fight of His Life* (*Kurama Tengu: ryūjō kohaku no maki,*[35] hereinafter *Fight of His Life*), directed by Matsuda Satatsugu alone.[36] Both of these Nikkatsu directors were very well known, especially Makino who, as the eldest legitimate son of the "father of Japanese cinema" Makino Shōzō, had had the opportunity

[33] The first sound adaptation of Kurama Tengu, with none other than Makino Masahiro in charge of the soundtrack, came in the form of the first part of a three-film series released on December 31, 1934 (the other two parts were released on January 5th and 15th, 1935). Only a thirty-second fragment of the first part, and nothing from parts two and three, survives (it can be viewed at the National Film Center in Tokyo), and unfortunately this tiny, low-quality blue-tinged fragment is missing the soundtrack, clearly having survived as part of an "omocha eiga" or toy film (it shows an uncowled Kurata fighting several enemies).

[34] For example, Itō's 1942 *Kurama Tengu* was a major hit at the box office, as I discuss below, and *Enoken no Kurama Tengu,* discussed at the end of chapter two, did well also. An Enoken film was almost a guaranteed hit—for example, two of his other 1939 films were in the top five box office earners for Tōhō in that year. *Enoken no Kurama Tengu* didn't quite place on that list, but the combination of well liked comedian and beloved vigilante was a potent one.

[35] Literally, the title means "The Dragon Rears [His Head] and the Tiger Pounces", but this metaphor of dragons and tigers is a literary allusion to fierce fighting. In addition, the dragon in the title may be a reference to Sakamoto Ryōma (龍馬 or, in simplified form, 竜馬, meaning "Dragon Horse"), whose assassination constitutes the opening scene of the film, and the tiger might be alluding to Kondō Isami's famous katana Kotetsu (虎徹, meaning "Tiger Striker").

[36] Sadatsugu was actually two years older than Masahiro but, as the son of Makino Shōzō's mistress, was not considered a legitimate son, and thus used the family name of Matsuda rather than Makino.

to begin directing while still a teenager, and both, having long wished to make a Kurama Tengu film, leaped at the chance once Arakan joined Nikkatsu.[37] *Kakubei Jishi* is also noteworthy for featuring cinematography by Miyagawa Kazuo, considered Japan's preeminent cinematographer of that period, and visually it represents a stunning step up in complexity and execution from earlier Kurama Tengu films. For example, Miyagawa's treatment of the sequence covering the Setsubun festival at Mibudera (then headquarters of the Shinsengumi) about ten minutes into the film features high-angle tracking shots and pans of the chaotic, surging crowd which are shot in such a way as to draw attention to the key characters as they try to push through the masses, using the contrasting trajectories of motion to ensure the audience does not become confused with what is happening, or who is chasing whom.

Kakubei Jishi was without a doubt one of the most well-known Kurama Tengu stories, and Arakan's most popular appearance as Kurama Tengu.[38] Arakan starred in no less than three film adaptations, including his debut film at Makino Productions in 1927, this 1938 film, and a 1951 remake.[39] Out of Arakan's forty-odd Kurama Tengu films, then, almost 10% were adaptations of this single story, and these adaptations came out every twelve years on average.[40] Despite, or perhaps because of, the very simple plot—Kurata, in addition to intervening to aid children in distress whenever he can, is helping the pro-imperial forces against their arch-

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[37] Makino Masahiro, born in 1908, directed his first film, *Aoi me no ningyō* ("Blue-eyed Doll"), in 1926, which incidentally featured his half-brother Matsuda Sadatsugu as cinematographer. Presumably because releasing a film under a first-time solo director's name was deemed risky financially, Makino Shōzō's role as overall supervisor was emphasized, and the name of a more established director, Tomizawa Shinrō, was added to the project as 'co-director'. See the Japan Movie Database entry for more information on the cast and crew of this film.

[38] Yamane makes this claim in *Kurama Tengu Kakubei Jishi no Tanoshimi zeminaaru,* n.pag.

[39] Yamane Sadao, *Kurama Tengu Kakubei Jishi no Tanoshimi zeminaaru*, n.pag.

[40] Osaragi had written dozens of stories, but this one in particular seemed to resonate with early and mid-twentieth century Japanese audiences, leading to the frequent remakes. As I argued above, repeating the same story every decade or so is not necessarily a problem if the audience is mostly children, who will stop watching Kurama Tengu films after they reach adulthood, meaning that each generation of kids could get its own version of the Kakubei Jishi story without much risk of boring the audience with well-used material, especially considering opportunities to re-view films after their theatrical runs ended were quite rare except for the most popular hits like, in the 1930s, Enoken comedies and so forth.

enemies the Shinsengumi, who use those same children Kurata has saved to lure him into a trap—it was a hit, and Arakan had never looked better (in a sound film, at least) as Kurama Tengu. He was still young enough to muster some actual speed in his movements during the fight scenes, and more importantly, he uses his gun a lot more in this film, which reduced the need for speedy swordplay.

Significantly, *Kakubei Jishi* also embodies the trend towards rehabilitating the pro-Tokugawa side, de-vilifying figures like Kondō and Okita Sōji by having even their enemies praise their honor.[41] Around thirty-six minutes into the film Kurata is speaking to two allies, one of whom is Saigō Takamori, played by Shimura Takashi,[42] who had been watching over the children until discovering that they have been kidnapped and are being used as bait; when his other compatriot, trusty servant Kichibei, wonders aloud whether might have Kondō ordered it, Arakan instantly comes to Kondō's defense, saying "That's impossible. Kondō simply isn't the sort of man who would use children so."[43]

The very next scene brings up another common Kurama Tengu trope and one connected to the gender politics of the screen discussed in chapter five: that of the socio-politically 'fallen' but still redeemable woman.[44] When Kurata tracks down the one who offered information on the

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[41] Hijikata, however, is generally not valorized, perhaps because of his infamous ruthlessness as symbolized by his 'oni taichō' (Demon [Vice] Commander) nickname.

[42] This is a good example of the deliberate heroic treatment given historical figures, as opposed to just famous actors. The diminutive Shimura is hardly an obvious choice to play Saigō, famed for being much bigger than the average Japanese at the time, but Miyagawa and the two directors took three distinct steps to ensure Saigō's larger than life status would remain intact: they gave Shimura/Saigō glamour (high-key) lighting despite Shimura's own relative lack of fame, especially in the 1930s, as a character actor; they shot Shimura's medium close-ups and close-ups from a lower camera angle than others' (the hero effect, which makes the on-screen character appear larger and more powerful); and they even had Shimura sit on cushions so he would appear taller than Kurata (Arakan) and others sitting nearby.

[43] "Sonna koto aru mai. Kondō wa, kodomo wo te ni kakeru yō na otoko de wa nai hazu da." And Kurata is right—Kondō is revealed not to have been involved the kidnapping plot, though Hijikata is implicated.

[44] I do not mean these women are fallen in the sexual sense, but rather have been corrupted on an ideological level, convinced to work as a "Shinsengumi dog" (as Okane refers to herself) for example; this sort of corruption is not permanent, however, and whereas he simply cuts down male enemies, Kurata often succeeds in redeeming his female opponents, converting them to the side of right.

kids' whereabouts, he finds it is the same woman who'd been trying to kill him throughout the film, seeking revenge for a Shinsengumi member, Tanaka, Kurata had killed before the film began; as before, he declines to kill her despite her practically begging him to do so, and when she incredulously asks why he is letting her go again, he gruffly replies, "Because even for a woman like you, it would be a senseless waste for you to sacrifice your life over such an inconsequential grudge."[45] Harsh as it may sound to audiences today, in the film these words immediately win her over, and she reveals where the villains have hidden the children. It is important to note that this is a political conversion, Kurata using his words to show her the error of her ways and prove she needn't feel any duty (*giri*) to the pro-Tokugawa forces or their cause.

Yet the true identity of the villains behind the kidnapping complicates any simple pro-imperial as good, pro-Tokugawa as evil reading, as does Kondō's elevation to national hero.[46] As it happens, a radical faction from Chōshū, in alliance with a corrupt official, is responsible for the kidnapping, meaning that Kurama Tengu, a loyalist himself, is forced to fight against hordes of fellow loyalists! Both Kurata and Kondō are shown to be men of high integrity and sincerity, with more in common with each other, in fact, than with the lesser members of their own factions; this similarity of character or values, despite their political differences, makes them virtually allies against those less scrupulous elements on both sides of the political struggle, who fight and scheme not for the good of the country but for their own profit. The timing of the film's release in 1938, after the situation in China escalated into full-scale war, is intriguing. In a period

[45] "Naze kirō to nasaranai no desu?" she rather histrionically demands, to which Kurata replies, "Anta no yō na onna demo...tsumaranu iji de, inochi hitotsu, bō ni furu gisei dewa nai desu."

[46] On the subject of Kondō's on-screen depiction, it is noteworthy that he receives much the same treatment in terms of glamour lighting, low-angle close-ups, and an elevated sitting position relative to others like Hijikata. Moreover, Kondō is played by Nikkatsu veteran Kawabe Gorō, a silent-era film star who specialized in depicting protagonists, which adds to Kondō's image as a quasi-hero despite being Kurata's enemy. He went on to appear as Kondō in *Ryūjō kohaku*. In fact, in addition to various silent-era heroic loyalist roles such as Tsukigata Hanpeita and Katsura Kogorō, Kawabe had also appeared as Kondō in none other than the 1926 *Gi wo naru kotetsu,* the very first film to begin rehabilitating him as a patriot rather than mustache-twirling villain.

where one might expect more and more films about national unity and more importantly continuity of the present with the glorious past of the loyalists' struggle to modernize Japan, we have, instead, a film exposing how murky the Bakumatsu was, and focusing on celebrating the exceptional and heroic few on both sides, not glorifying one side over the other.

The framing of the other 1938 Kurama Tengu movie, *Fight of His Life*, is more explicitly political in nature. For one thing, it is set in late 1867, at the very end of the struggle between pro-imperial and pro-Tokugawa, unlike *Kakubei Jishi*, set in the early 1860s.[47] The opening scene is of leaflets (*ofuda*) fluttering down from the sky like rain, leading directly into a montage of increasingly boisterous crowd activity and, soon enough, shots of mass crowds engaged in "what the hell!" (*ee ja nai ka*) dancing, itself a trope for the irrepressible energy (and anger) of the Japanese people in the face of oppression, and it is quickly followed by a brief scene showing Sakamoto Ryōma and Nakaoka Shintarō complaining about the noise (which, ironically, is loud enough diegetically to drown out most of their dialogue). This entire opening sequence is quite lengthy, and the cross-cutting, pacing, and in particular the manner in which a daring assassination of a loyalist by the villainous secret group Sangokutō (he is cut down right in the middle of the crowd of *ee ja nai ka* revelers) is emphasized by the camerawork are all very skillfully done. Sakamoto and Nakaoka are found dead at the conclusion of the sequence, and the mission for Kurama Tengu and his allies, motivated at least partly by revenge for these fallen patriots, becomes unearthing the mysterious and sinister identity of the Sangokutō group's

[47] We can be sure of the intended temporal setting for each of these films because of their iconic content: Mibudera as Shinsengumi headquarters in *Kakubei Jishi* dates the events in the film to no later than mid-1865, when the troop relocated to Nishi Honganji, while *ee ja nai ka* dancing combined with Ryōma's assassination dates the opening events of *Ryūjō kohaku* to late November 1867.

leader.[48] The film is also very carefully paced, with an attention-getting action sequence almost always occurring every seven to twelve minutes throughout the film.[49]

Fight of His Life features many of the same decorative flourishes as appeared in *Kakubei Jishi*. For example, it employs plenty of sword-flashes, as well as the obfuscating technique of having felled enemies stagger in front of the camera, blocking the view of Kurama Tengu.[50] It also rehashes several of the tropes present in *Kakubei Jishi*, including the need to rescue the boys Sugisaku and Shinkichi from the clutches of an evil group,[51] and a woman initially fighting against Kurata and his pro-imperial allies whom he wins over through his personal integrity.[52] But right from the opening sequence, it is clear that politics is far more important than it was in *Kakubei Jishi*, and the arch-villain, Tatebe Shingo, refuses to show remorse over the near-fatal injury his sharpshooters dealt Shinkichi while shooting at Kurama Tengu (in quite a melodramatic twist, the boy is later revealed to be, unbeknownst to Tatebe, his own son), insisting that to save the Tokugawa family and system of government there is nothing he will not do.[53] The scene where his younger sister Yukiji shows compassion for "the poor boy" and

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[48] The opening sequence is over five minutes long, consisting primarily of shots of the happy-go-lucky crowd, and the diegetic sound of their merrymaking as they dance to and fro combined with the extradiegetic orchestral music (initially rather reminiscent of Auld Land Syne), serve to render what little dialogue there is almost entirely unintelligible. In fact, the print from which the VHS transfer was made must have had a partially degraded soundtrack, because the sound is generally of poor quality throughout the film.

[49] If the initial *ee ja nai ka* dancing and assassinations are considered an action sequence; the rest of the film's action scenes are more straightforward, usually featuring Kurata wielding gun and katana against a horde of enemies. The one other exception is a 'dry spell' from about minute forty (Kurata cutting and punching his way out of a horde of Shinsengumi) to minute fifty-eight (when Kurata catches up with the traitor and kills him even as Osen is being stabbed elsewhere).

[50] This technique is used especially heavily in the climactic battle at the end, when Kurata invades Tatebe Shingo's home to rescue the boys and another of his allies who is being held captive.

[51] The film also features the astonishing juxtaposition of Kurata cold-bloodedly murdering the traitor right in front of the boys' eyes, then without missing a beat launching into a lecture about how they shouldn't be out at night!

[52] This woman is arch-villain Tatebe Shingo's sister Yukiji.

[53] He berates his sister Yukiji for showing compassion towards the boys, to him mere pawns in the struggle to defeat enemies of the Tokugawa (especially Kurama Tengu), and demands that as a woman of the Tatebe clan she "become a demon". His exact words are "mata jihi ka! Sonna ki no yowai koto de dō suru...Yukiji, sonata mo Tatebe shi no imōto dewa nai ka. Oni ni nare, oni no kokoro ni!" He goes on to detail how enemies like Kurama Tengu are seeking to destroy the Tokugawa family's rule, which has continued for almost 300 years, and to prevent that, to save the Shogunate, there is nothing he won't do. It is an interesting characterization, revealing several features of the

indirectly expresses doubt about their tactics in support of the cause of defending the Tokugawa Shogunate—only to be berated by Shingo for showing weakness—is filmed with a skilful decorative flourish. The actors are blocked and the mise en scene is arranged in such a way that although the camera is trained in medium close up on Yukiji, capturing her passionate plea, a strategically placed mirror also shows us Tatebe's stern and unyielding face.[54]



Figure 14: Matsuda's decorative touch showing Tatebe's unyielding pro-Tokugawa stance in *Fight of His Life*, 30:47.

perspective being advanced on the pro-Tokugawa side: firstly, they are in the wrong, and secondly (as evidence of their morally indefensible position) they have to resort to unnatural tactics like shooting children; but thirdly, they are human, and not beyond redemption, as Yukiji shows.

[54] Takebe, played by period film veteran Tsukigata Ryūnosuke, is going about disguised as an old white-bearded man quite evocative of Mito Kōmon. This was a rather prescient choice by Matsuda considering that in his later career Tsukigata went on to win great popularity by playing none other than Mito Kōmon.

Not all Kurata's opponents are shown to be quite so very villainous as Tatebe Shingo, however. The depiction of Kondō Isami as national hero continues in *Fight of His Life.* Midway through the film Kurata is betrayed by a supposed ally, who runs off to tell the Shinsengumi where he and the two boys are hiding, but although the Shinsengumi do heed his advice and rush off to find Kurata, and even protect him from Kurata's wrath, Kondō spares a moment to turn a withering glare on the pro-imperial turncoat and say "You know, I really HATE traitors!"[55] This scene, while unnecessary from the perspective of the main plot following Kurata, is critical in maintaining the heroic aura around Kondō, and advancing the notion that he and Kurata are closer to each other in nobility of character than they are to lesser members of their own political factions. Sympathetic treatment of Kondō is itself a good example of 'sympathy for the defeated', since historically we know he was on the losing side, and could help prevent the film from alienating audience members who identified with the pro-Tokugawa side due to regional ties and so forth.

The character of Tatebe Yukiji is a critical one for the purposes of ferreting out the film's perspective on the pro-Tokugawa forces and their tactics. She attacks Kurata near the end in order to protect her now badly wounded brother Shingo but, after being subdued and under pressure from Kurata's sincerity and integrity, breaks down upon news that the Sangokutō have kidnapped the boys, and agrees to betray her cause and help Kurata. The scene showing Kurata questioning Yukiji, which starts about seventy minutes into the film, is very skillfully crafted, using dynamic track-in zooms on Kurata among other techniques, and showing seamless cross-cutting of the two interrogations and the very different methods used: Kurata quietly if urgently appeals to Yukiji's sense of justice, arguing the kids are blameless and must not be allowed to die and begging her to tell him where the Sangokutō hideout is, referring to it with the untranslatable

[55] "Kono Kondō wa na, uragirimono wa DAI kirai ja!"

term "*isshō no negai desu,*"[56] whereas Tatebe, from his sickbed, orders the Sangokutō guys to shout into submission—and threaten to murder—the tied up boys, demanding information on Kurama's whereabouts, and later, when told they refuse to break, he gloweringly orders his men to kill one of them to cow the other, sternly overriding the objections of his own men.

By contrast, when Yukiji finally breaks down, she is shown in a low angle close up, with soft high key lighting, to emphasize the almost physical pain of her ideological position, and indeed she soon collapses to the ground, wailing about pain in her chest and an inability to breathe. In fact, it is a ruse, and she rushes over to her dagger, lying on the floor, and mortally wounds herself with it. But then, as she is dying, she chooses to reveal the identity of the Sangokutō leader, her brother Shingo. In other words, she places the safety of two innocent children ahead of the Sangokutō's more abstract pro-Tokugawa goals.

In the climax, Kurata saves the day again, and Tatebe, staggering to his feet despite his serious wound, collapses. At the very end, Kurata finds him dead on the floor, the positioning of his sword suggestive of seppuku, and in a rather depressing ending, says grimly, "Tatebe-san, you were fortunate to have gone to your death before you learned the truth [about being Shinkichi's father]."[57] The final shot is a montage of sorts, complete with mournful music, of a track-in zoom on Kurata's troubled expression overlaid on freshly orphaned Shinkichi's face.

Matsuda continued on to make two more Kurama Tengu films the following year, namely *Kurama Tengu: Diary of Edo* (*Kurama Tengu Edo nikki*), a two-part remake of a 1935 film of the same name, and *Kurama Tengu Terror Episode (kyōfu hen)*. The latter is entirely lost, but a complete print of the first installment of the former has survived, and stylistically it shows Matsuda continuing many of the same techniques he had developed in his 1938 Kurama Tengu

[56] Which means something like "This is the only boon I will ask my entire life [that's how important it is]."
[57] "Tatebe-san, nanimo shirazu, nanimo shirazu ni shinde itta! Anta wa shiawase deshita."

projects.[58] In terms of the film's storyline, it has the distinction of removing Kurama Tengu from Kyoto, itself a powerful geographic metaphor for the Bakumatsu period as a violent clash between old and new.[59] Having Kurata journey to Edo means many typical tropes, such as regular conflict with the Shinsengumi, are not in play, but the same pro-imperial versus pro-Tokugawa tension exists, and the Edo setting presents new storytelling opportunities; for example, Kurata engages in a "school challenge" (*dōjō yaburi*), a common enough trope in films about nineteenth century Edo, against a pro-Shogunate *dōjō*. Matsuda also adds a comic touch, having Kurata paint the iconography of a demon (*oni*) onto unconscious villain Satake's face, which hurts his prestige when he tries to issue orders later to his subordinates.

Where with Matsuda's *Diary of Edo* only the first installment survives, with Tazaki Kōichi's 1939-40 two-part *Tengu Circular Letter* series, also made at Nikkatsu, only the sequel is extant today.[60] In *Tengu Circular Letter Part II*, which was scripted by Marune Santarō, Kurata has returned to Kyoto, but there is no longer any attempt to humanize the Shinsengumi, and indeed the entire story is darker in tone than typical Kurama Tengu fare.[61] It concerns a mysterious circular letter with information on pro-imperial loyalists, their identities and movements, which is periodically sent to the Shinsengumi, who use it to merciless effect, wreaking havoc on pro-imperial forces in the city. Read symptomatically, this narrowing of interpretative possibilities—Kurama and his allies are once again unambiguously good, and their enemies like the Shinsengumi, who casually murder a woman when her allegiance to their cause

[58] He engages in a variation of obfuscatory tactics, for example: he has Kurata charge directly at the camera into an extreme close up, showing us this spectacle from presumably, an enemy's point of view.
[59] It is also significant because the non-Kyoto setting laid the precedent for Itō Daisuke's later decision to have Kurama Tengu appear in Yokohama, allowing him to make the case to censors that his proposed geographic and temporal setting was consistent with the rest of the film series. See below for more on Itō's 1942 film.
[60] This was not the only Bakumatsu mono Tazaki was involved in; he worked as supporting director for 1941's *Kessen kiheitai*, in which Arakan again appeared (as Takasugi).
[61] This early 1940 film is variously referred to as hakei (blade-shadow/silhouette) no maki or simply as 'zokuhen', sequel to the lost film, released for *oshōgatsu* in very late 1939, entitled 'Tengu kaijō maha (demon-blade) no maki.'

starts to waver, clearly evil—reveals much about the climate of 1940 Japan, which had entered its third year of total war with China.

Moreover, due to the greatly increased adult audience for films after 1937, this particular Kurama Tengu film may have been crafted with a largely adult audience in mind, therefore dispensing with the de-vilifying "we are all patriots despite our differences" process in favor of another, more forceful argument for national unity: standing united in the face of a genuine threat (powerful reactionary forces in 1860s Japan/contemporary China). In that context, attempting a revisionist interpretation of Bakumatsu history by characterizing the enemies of the eventually victorious overthrow-of-the-Shogunate (*tōbaku*) side—who went on, after all, to found the Meiji state, which led directly to the Showa polity as well—as unrepentantly against the Satsuma-Chōshū government yet nonetheless heroic and patriotic would have been a politically risky move for the filmmakers to make.

Despite—or in some ways very much in line with—these sobering realities of 1940 Japan, *Tengu Circular Letter Part II* insists redemption of pro-Tokugawa stalwarts is not only possible, it is essential to national unity. The film employs the oft-used trope in the Kurama Tengu series of a woman doing terrible things under filial pressure to support the Shogunate who is vulnerable on emotional grounds to ideological conversion by Kurata.[62] Here it is Sonoe (played by Nikkatsu star and pop singer Ichikawa Haruyo, who appeared frequently in Bakumatsu films), daughter of the ruthless pro-Tokugawa mastermind Sakon but niece to his older brother, a pro-imperial stalwart, who must ultimately choose whether to continue her filial support for her

[62] More generally speaking as well, Japanese filmmaking circa 1940 frequently employed this trope of the convertible woman, initially in a very antagonistic relationship to the hero; eventually, the sincerity of this man, and his love—not any abstract reasoning—wins her over. Around 1940 one can find plenty of examples of this trope in Kurama Tengu films, in *gendaigeki* romances like *Shina no yoru*, and in many other film types, but perhaps the most dramatic counter-example is in *Meijin Chōji hori* (1943), discussed in chapter five, which features Yamada Isuzu's character and her patently apolitical support for Chōji (Hasegawa Kazuo) in his need to take up arms in support of the pro-imperial cause.

father's immoral position and tactics or convert to her uncle's (much more honorable) side of the feud.[63] Similarly, young idealist Murao, initially allied with Sakon, is won over to the pro-imperial side by Kurata's sincerity and he and Sonoe fall in love despite the revelation that it is Sonoe herself who is authoring the circular letter. Far from exacting vengeance for the terrible price her actions have cost the pro-imperial side, Kurata completely forgives her, even after she tries to shoot him. He is able to do this because she does not require political conversion; she was acting solely out of love and duty to her father, doing things she already found distasteful, meaning that it is only Sakon himself, the true enemy, who must be converted on a political or ideological level—and that is exactly what occurs.

In the denouement of the two-part film series, pro-Tokugawa arch-villain Munakata Sakon, younger brother of pro-imperial supporter Munakata Konoe no kami (both roles are played by series regular Tsukigata Ryūnosuke), is saved from Kurata's blade by an extraordinary act of brotherly love, and this expression of sincerity on his brother's part, combined with Kurata's own unearned compassion towards him, convinces Sakon of the error of his ways.[64] Ideologically, this sort of conversion scenario was quite common in prewar and especially wartime Kurama Tengu films, where it is important for the 'good guys' not simply to defeat the pro-Tokugawa enemy, but to show through their own heroism that the very political platform of

[63] The Japan Movie Database does not list this film among Ichikawa Haruyo's known projects, but there is no doubt it is her in the role of Sonoe; when the film was released on VHS in 1997 by Nikkatsu, this information was prominently displayed on the jacket. Ichikawa was no stranger to Bakumatsu films, also starring in 1939's *Kaientai*, as Oryō in the all-star *Ishin no kyoku* (1942) and as an initially vengeance-bent woman slowly won over to the 'correct' pro-imperial ideology in the Kataoka Chiezō star vehicle *Ryū no misaki* (1945), among many others. Indeed, she frequently appeared in Kurama Tengu films, including as Oteru in 1941's *Kurama Tengu and the Secret Messenger*.

[64] Sakon and Kurata agree to meet for a final duel, but Sakon's brother, an ally of Kurata, decides to go and die in his place, so important does he hold the project of Sakon's ideological rehabilitation. Kurata, for his part, has decided not to kill Sakon, moved by his daughter Sonoe's filial devotion, and only wounds him. All are surprised when the real Sakon arrives soon after, and we are presented with a close-up on Sakon's emotion-ravaged face as he realizes how much has been risked to convince him of the error of his ways.

supporting the Shogunate was mistaken, ensuring that only one ideology remained: support for the eventually victorious Satsuma-Chōshū—and therefore the current—government.

This sort of conversion is in stark contrast to the vengeful 1952 remake of this same story centered around the Munakata family, for which Sakon's death, not political conversion, is the ultimate goal. In that film, directed by Ōsone Tatsuo, Kurata himself more or less announces, in one of the angriest speeches Kurama Tengu has delivered in the entire series, that Sakon must pay for forcing his own daughter to risk her life spying against the pro-imperial side, and sure enough Sakon falls victim to his own underhanded plot, shot dead by the snipers he'd placed to try to kill Kurata. In both the 1940 and the 1952 films, only one ideology remains, but the manner in which the other is eliminated, or the price those in the wrong must pay, is much more savage in the postwar film, no doubt colored by the general desire for vengeance and restitution against those responsible for leading Japan into its disastrous war. In 1940, ideological conversion erases all the earlier wrongs—which were considerable, up to and including murder—for which Sakon was the architect, and Kurata magnanimously announces he will be permitted to live quietly with his daughter, in peace. This was an ending, with its themes of national reconciliation and unity, certain to please Home Ministry censors worried about the extent of the Japanese people's commitment to the war effort in 1940.

The Most Popular Kurama Tengu Film of the War: Itō Daisuke's Adaptation

Itō Daisuke apparently felt little love lost for the censors and considerable ambivalence during the making of *Kurama Tengu: Yokohama ni arawareru*, his own national policy-esque contribution to the Kurama Tengu series, in late 1942.[65] In a surprisingly frank interview

[65] Katō Mikirō has argued that worldwide conditions in wartime gave rise to similar film projects elsewhere as well, notably *Sherlock Holmes in Washington* (1943, dir. Roy William Neill), which also features a cabalistic conspiracy that must be uncovered and then stopped by a quasi-mythical hero. He suggests the relatively lightheartedness of the

transcribed by Nomura Hiroya and published in the October 21st, 1942 issue of *Eiga junpō*, Itō described the difficulties he had in getting censors' approval for this original screenplay and movie project. Itō claimed that the initial version of the script, set in the 1890s with Kurama Tengu now an old man, had a climactic ending patterned off of the famous end of Cyrano de Bergerac, before brusquely noting that it was rejected by censors as being too different from Kurama Tengu's usual time period of the Bakumatsu.[66]

Rejection of his first draft, Itō explained, led him to rework the story and set it in the very early Meiji period. He found himself intrigued by the counterfeit money problem[67] which plagued Japan's currency system of the early 1870s, which as Itō notes faced a difficult struggle to replace all the disparate domainal coinage with a national currency and was heavily dependent on Satsuma coinage (*ryō*)—until it was discovered that the supposedly reliable Satsuma currency contained far less gold than claimed. The discovery of the degree to which Satsuma coins were debased led foreign merchants to demand that the Meiji government use coins (*koban*) of the full one *ryō* gold content when paying for foreign goods (but they made no promise to use such high-value coins in their own purchases), which led in turn to clandestine currency trading by Japanese merchants, an early form of economic collaboration and capitalistic collusion with the present-day enemy and his dishonorable profit-seeking methods. Given the context of the now-raging Pacific War, this version of the script had plenty of propagandistic potential, which Itō no

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American film, when compared to the desperate tone of the Japanese film (for instance the rhetoric of self-sacrifice in Kurama's argument ('oshimondō') with Sugisaku about what to say to Saigō, which was in Itō's screenplay but did not make the final filmed cut—nor, incidentally, did Saigō's response privileging Kurata's life over more abstract issues like justice or saving the steamship), can illustrate the far more serious situation Japan was facing at that time. See Katō, *Nihon eigaron, 1933-2007*, pp. 89-91. One other similarity Katō does not mention between these two films is that both are based on original, not canonical, stories, while one difference he glosses over is the historical setting, including actual historical figures like the abovementioned Saigō, for *Kurama Tengu*.

[66] Itō was evidently interested in making a case to audiences that a quasi-superhero like Kurama Tengu was just what was needed in the present (1942) crisis, and enhanced the melodrama of Kurama's emergence with comments in the script like "Kurama Tengu? Today he's no more than a legend" and tried and true plot devices like the appearance of the Kurama imposter (see Katō, p. 93), turning the true Kurama into a sort of King Arthur-like crusader for justice, who appears in his country's hour of greatest need.

[67] He terms this the 'nisegane jiken'.

doubt hoped would win the censors over and bring his project approval. But it too ran into problems, and for a rather surprising reason given the continuing call via state mouthpieces like *Nippon Eiga* to replace mindless entertainment films (*goraku eiga*) with more historically accurate films.

The censors' objection concerned one other detail of life in early 1870s treaty port Japan that fascinated Itō—the continued use of the pre-modern institution of barriers barring ordinary Japanese from entering places like Yokohama unless they had a hand-pass.[68] In this second draft of the script, he proposed to have Kurama Tengu, incensed at the corruption among his fellow Japanese, burst through one such gate. But he was unable to secure permission to include such a scene (or, judging from the final version of the script and the most complete version of the film itself, any storyline dealing with Japanese corruption); he attributes this rejection to the fact that "it had become too historical for a film that wasn't a history film."[69] In other words, if Itō is to be taken at his word, the censors rejected this climactic scene merely because it was too historical for a fiction film.

It seems more likely, however, that the potentially transgressive nature of Kurama's crusade to root out corruption among Japanese government officials and private subjects worried the censors, since after all in Itō's proposed storyline the truly hateful enemy is the Japanese merchant collaborators and bribable officials. This implies, of course, that such collaborationists existed, an inconvenient fact to recollect when trying to promote a message of loyalty and unity. Indeed, had such a barrier-busting scene been approved and filmed, perhaps some audience members would have interpreted Kurama Tengu as a champion who opposed the *present* government even more than the Western enemy. After all, the Meiji state is teleologically linked

[68] The Japanese terms being *sekisho* for barrier and *tegata* for hand-pass.
[69] The phrase meaning "too historical for a *shigeki*" (history film) is "amari ni shijitsu."

to the government of the 1940s, providing its very historical, institutional and legal foundation, so a hero who exposes corruption in and fights against the Meiji government might easily become a symbol of resistance against the wartime government as well.

Near the end of the published interview, Itō delivers what feels like an obligatory thank you to Japan's military. He praises them for recognizing that Kurama Tengu was a "virile warrior (*sōshi*) worthy of respect—and consequently letting him shoot scenes at a genuine dock. But his concluding remarks are in a tone that borders on sarcasm, casting doubt on his sincerity in praising the armed forces:

> Initially I too was of the opinion that Kurama Tengu films were incredibly insipid. However, when I engaged in self-reflection on what the military had said [i.e., that they respected Kurama Tengu enough to give permission for filming in restricted areas like the docks], and on the great responsibility I had been given, I resolved to try very hard, and vowed to make something that was both fascinating and fun through and through.[70]

Prima facie this may seem like a straightforward enough comment, but it has an undercurrent of contempt—against both the subject matter of Itō's own film and against the military itself. Itō admits to thinking Kurama Tengu movies were ridiculous, claiming it was the military's positive perspective on Kurama which filled him with a sense of purpose and the desire to make a thoroughly entertaining movie. What might not be clear is that he had to *convince* the military that Kurama Tengu was a true, militaristic hero in order to get them to agree to let him shoot at the dock (which would increase the production value, and thus the spectacle, of his

[70] Eiga Junpō, Oct. 21 1942, p. 16. The rōmaji transliteration of Itō's concluding remark is as follows: "watashi mo hajime ha, Kurama Tengu mono ha sōtō baka ni shita taido wo motteita. Shikashi, gun kara sono yau ni iwareru to sono sekinin no dai naru wo aratamete jisei shi ooi ni ganbatte, tettōtetsubi omoshiroi tanoshii mono wo tsukuru beku kakugo wo sadameta."

film).[71] One clue for this is in his use of 'also' in the first sentence, meaning that in the beginning the representatives of the military with whom Itō was dealing viewed Kurama Tengu with contempt as well. But presumably, when Itō was begging for permission to shoot at the docks and singing Kurama's praises, he was doing so out of necessity, not sincere belief, since he claims that it was the military's acquiescence which first opened his eyes to the value and awesome responsibility of making a Kurama Tengu movie. Itō, then, is claiming to have convinced representatives of the military of a proposition he himself did not believe—namely, that Kurama was a worthy and virile subject for a film—and goes on to claim that only the successful duping of the military led to his own now highly dubious conviction that Kurama was not insipid after all!

One is left with the distinct impression that Itō, chafing at the steadily growing constraints on what sorts of films were permitted to be made in late 1942, felt he had no choice but to make a film of a type he clearly considered beneath him, and felt no little ambivalence about the project itself and fury at the intrusions and objections of censors and military bureaucrats alike. Itō's veiled contempt for the subject matter of his own film, and his less than sincere conversion to a militaristic hate the enemy viewpoint, have important implications for the analysis of the finished film.

As both director and screenwriter for this project, and one who enjoyed celebrity status no less, Itō had an unusual degree of autonomy—within the confines of the censor-approved script, of course. Daiei, the studio for which he worked, was still a relatively unknown quantity, having formed just months earlier, and thus was in no position to challenge such an established director for artistic control. Consequently, Itō's personal beliefs about this project are of much

[71] As Katō Mikirō notes, the finished film did indeed profit from permission to shoot on location at a shipyard, leading to a complicated shooting schedule of shooting the location scenes during daylight hours and then all heading back to the Daiei Kyoto film studio's sound stage for more shooting at night. See Katō, p. 93.

greater importance than would be those of a more low-profile workmanlike studio director, whose degree of artistic control, if given a project like Kurama Tengu, would have been limited by the studio, the script, earlier film precedents, and so forth. Itō, by contrast, operated even during the war closer to an auteurist model of film creation, especially inasmuch as he also wrote the screenplay, and so it is more likely that seemingly out of place elements in his film may have been included with subversive intent, as hidden transcripts.[72]

Itō, known as a stickler for verisimilitude through detail, went to great lengths with the historical investigation into clothing and so forth contemporary to the period.[73] He was obviously pained to admit in the interview that he couldn't find a Western-style clothing store which was able to make historically accurate costumes from the early 1870s and was forced to commission costumes in the style of the early 1880s instead.[74] He was far more positive in tone, however, about the fact the film was able to shoot scenes of a genuine Western circus, the Nurie traveling circus, featuring an elephant, from (Vichy) France, which had serendipitously just arrived in Japan around the time shooting began. Itō leapt at the chance to film them despite the fact that there appears to be no evidence Yokohama played host to any circus in 1871, the year in which the film is set, and any such circus would certainly have been reported in the news, elephants being an extremely rare sight in nineteenth century Japan. Why would he compromise the film's accuracy with gratuitous shots of a circus?

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[72] Itō's Kurama is quite different both from Osaragi's novels and from other film adaptations, first and foremost in that his story takes place in 1871, after the Bakumatsu has ended and several years after Osaragi's setting, which is invariably the tumultuous 1860s, and Kurama's enemies, in Itō's version, are not pro-Tokugawa swordsmen like the Shinsengumi but instead gun-toting foreign merchants. Moreover, as explained below, the film contains a very robust romantic subplot involving Kurama and comparatively little emphasis on his attempts to help and protect children like Sugisaku, which had long been Kurama's selling point for the largely adolescent audience.

[73] jidai kōshō.

[74] One anachronism that Itō did not mention was the choice to show gas lighting in Yokohama, which Katō Mikirō argues was not present in 1871. See Katō, p. 93.

It seems Itō was not opposed to abandoning all pretense at historical accuracy if the inclusion of ahistorical or even anachronistic elements would enhance his film's production value—and thus, its entertainment value. Including scenes of a Caucasian woman riding an elephant in late 1942 Japan was a sure-fire way to wow the audience, given that both were in exceedingly short supply at that time, and despite his celebrity director status, Itō's films had been hit-or-miss at the box office since the advent of the talkies, so concern over the film's financial fate and desire for another big hit to add to his already storied career may have motivated both director and film studio to include the circus scenes. If so, he got his wish—despite a setting and storyline radically different from the typical Kurama Tengu movie heretofore, this film was a huge success, in fact Daiei's biggest earner for all of 1942.[75] Indeed, the film was the fourth-biggest hit overall for that year, and the top two box office earners for 1942, *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay* and *Malay War Record* (*Marē senki)*, had both benefited from massive governmental fanfare and concerted marketing and promotional efforts.[76] The film was advertised heavily in *Eiga junpō*, and as Fig. 15 shows, the marketing strategy also prominently featured the circus and elephant as a key motivator for people to go see it.[77] And see it they did: there is evidence the film was re-released in early 1945, in slightly shortened form.[78]

[75] Itakura, p. 22.
[76] See Furukawa, p. 172, for evidence of how the government manipulated statistics on viewership of these films.
[77] Among several other pictorial ads to feature the "Daphne" circus, one advertisement appearing in the Oct. 11, 1942 issue of *Eiga junpō* is particularly interesting: it displays a large poster in the background, advertising the circus in 1871 Yokohama, a clever use of the temporal spillage between "then" and "now"—it would be equally tantalizing to both 1871 and 1942 audiences, after all—and adroit evasion of censorship regulations about displaying and using English (excusable because of its framing as an 1871 poster). *Eiga junpō dai 44 kan*, p. 255.
[78] A small ad for the Kinryū gekijō (a movie theater) appeared on page two of the Jan. 2nd, 1945 morning edition of the *Asahi shinbun* announcing a ten-reel Kurama Tengu film, with the subtitle *Fūun Yokohama hen*; both the title and the overall length (Itō's *Kurama Tengu: Yokohama ni arawareru* was eleven reels) have been altered.



Figure 15: The "Daphne" circus as selling point for Itō's *Kurama Tengu*. *Eiga junpō,* Oct. 11, 1942.

Yet Itō had long been an innovative experimenter within the film medium, so perhaps including scenes of spectacle was a way of continuing his own efforts to foster a cinema of attractions in Japan.[79] Before we dismiss elements like the circus scene, or indeed the budding

[79] Itō's status as a director in the cinema of attractions, especially in the 1920s, was established when he famously broke with long theatrical tradition and filmed Ōkōchi Denjirō talking while walking, which many at the time thought impractical since in Kabuki speeches are always given from a stationary, usually sitting position and virtually all screen actors of the day had been trained as Kabuki actors. Itō was also one of the key forerunners in the mid-1920s of a more frenetic movie pace reliant on flashier shots, including close-ups, and rapid editing to yield a low average shot length, all of which was very unusual in 1920s cinema, in which the dominant mode of filmic

romance between Kurata and Oriki (discussed below), as mere spectacle for entertainment value, however, recall that Itō was deeply ambivalent about, if not openly disgusted with, the subject matter of this film, especially after all the obstacles thrown up by the censors. Any digressions from the national policy-esque, hate the enemy message may well have been included expressly to dilute that message.

By the same token, any overtly propagandistic or hate the enemy elements may have been included only at the express request of, or in an effort by Itō simply to placate, the censors. There are no comments and no deletions listed for Itō's *Kurama Tengu* in *Eiga ken'etsu jihō*, meaning that by the time it got to its finished stage it was perceived by censors as a successful national policy film, wherein lies the problem: how much censor-pleasing material is enough to win over the censors without alienating the audience with a dry, overly propagandistic film? Any filmmaker who wanted his final film to contain elements that subverted the pro-state themes mandated by the censorship apparatus at the time was forced to play a dangerous game.[80] Naturally he would wish to include as many such potentially transgressive elements as possible while yet infusing the film with sufficient propagandistic force to convince the censors not to ban it, all the while keeping any transgressive portions as innocuous-looking as possible in order to avoid demands that these scenes be cut.

Turning now to an analysis of the longest and finest-quality extant version of the original 1942 film, we will trace the elements of subversion within the film and explore the implications for potential readings of the film's ultimate message, in particular with regard to the romantic subplots. When first shown in late October 1942, *Kurama Tengu Appears in Yokohama!* (*Kurama Tengu: Yokohama ni arawareru!*) had a running time of 106 minutes according to

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storytelling relied heavily on long shots and medium long shots to present a tableau, and featured little camera movement and a long average shot length.

[80] I say 'he' because, with only one exception that I know of, all the directors in prewar or wartime Japan were men.

JMDB (Nihon eiga dētabēsu), whereas the longest extant version, the 1953 re-release under the altered title of *Kurama Tengu: Hell of Gold (Kurama Tengu: ōgon jigoku*), is over 1100 feet shorter, running just 90 minutes long.[81] If a complete comparison with the original were possible, it would be fascinating to investigate how many scenes were cut because they were deemed inappropriate for the postwar 1953 audience and the new geopolitical reality, as at least three short scenes are known to have been,[82] but sadly no complete version of the film exists.[83]

Before beginning close analysis of the film, a short summary is in order. Referentially, the film concerns an underground counterfeiting ring run by the Jacob trading company.[84] The counterfeiting facilities are located directly below a Japanese dock on which a steam-ship is being constructed, so once Kurata Tenzen uncovers the counterfeiting ring and locates it, the villainous Jacob (played by Kamiyama Sōjin, an actor who specialized in playing Westerners, and therefore villains) tries to blow up his underground lair, and with it the brand new steam-ship above. Kurata struggles mightily, eventually cutting Jacob down with his sword, yet it is not he but nearly blind Oriki (played by famed period film star Koto Itoji) who, after undergoing expensive eye surgery earlier in the film and having been warned not to remove the bandages,

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[81] Itakura claims the extant 1953 film version is actually 93 minutes long, but the film-to-DVD transfer yields a running time of just over 90 minutes. He also claims the film is physically 358 meters (or 1164 feet) shorter than the original film length; see Itakura, p. 20. Note also that this is one of the only films analyzed in this dissertation, and one of the very few from the early 1940s overall, to have seen a DVD (region 2) release, almost certainly because of its high-profile director.

[82] Two cases of the pejorative "ketō" ("hairy Chinaman") term for Caucasians and one use of the word 'ahen' (opium) were ordered cut by Eiren for the re-release, but they also demanded the film be re-edited more generally such as "to increase respect for foreign countries," a vague instruction whose particulars were left unspecified. Itakura, p. 32.

[83] Itakura notes that this film was actually on GHQ's 'banned from rerelease' list during the Occupation, and Eiren's gradual rescinding of the ban finally earned it rerelease in 1953, when it was again popular with postwar audiences. It was a windfall for Daiei, which had struggled during the late 1940s—when film production was at an all-time low, and studios were resorting to rereleasing popular prewar and wartime films—because, having been founded only in 1942, it had a far shorter crop of films to rerelease than older studios like Shōchiku or Tōhō, and what few films it had made, including Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, were almost all banned from rerelease by GHQ. See Itakura, p. 23.

[84] I say "referentially" in homage to David Bordwell's four strategies for reading a film for its structural meaning, of which referential is closest akin to a straightforward plot summary. The other three are explicit (the 'point' of the film), implicit (deeper, more abstract), and symptomatic (the values and ideological framework of the film, and what the film reveals about the time in which it was made). See Bordwell, *Film Art: an Introduction*, pp. 73-77 in 5th ed.

decides to rip them off, ruining her eyes forever, in order to have one chance to see and put out the dynamite fuse, which she manages to do just before Jacob shoots her dead.

To this referential reading we can add layers of explicit meaning as well. The steam-ship being constructed is a warship, intended to bolster Japan's national defense against predatory Western powers, and Jacob's threat to destroy that ship is a threat against Japan's sovereignty itself. Home-grown hero Kurata fights against the duplicitous and hateful Westerners and, with Oriki's help, saves Japan from their machinations. He's almost killed in the fighting, and gasps out "We saved the ship!" before collapsing in exhaustion and pain.

It is on its implicit and symptomatic levels that Itō's *Kurama Tengu* becomes truly fascinating. *Why* does each character behave as he or she does? For example, we know from the referential analysis above that Oriki chooses to sacrifice her own eyesight, and indeed her life, in order to put out the fuse. But is she doing this to save the steamship above, or to save Kurata, with whom she is obviously in love, from being killed in the impending explosion? In other words, is she motivated by patriotism, or romance? Viewed implicitly, the answer is clearly the latter. She writes a punch-hole letter (similar to Braille) just before going to her doom, in which she reveals she not only expects to perish, she thinks it "of no account at all that someone like me should die." Her only regret, she wrote, was "I longed for just one glimpse of you, Kurata-sama, before my death—for I wanted to see what kind of man you are." There can be no question that she acted for love, or that the tear Kurata sheds after his ally Miura reads him Oriki's letter is about his personal loss, and not simply a more abstract homage to her courage.

The character of Oriki is heavily layered with implicit meaning. First of all, there is her blindness, and her choice of garb and profession. Invariably dressed in demure and traditional kimono and performing in an old-style musical street act, she functions as a stand-in for Japanese

tradition itself, with her vulnerability reflecting Japan's own vulnerability in the face of Western territorial and techno-social encroachment and deep-seated ambivalence towards the West and indeed modernity. She, her little sister Chako, and little brother Sugisaku, who form a traditional street music troupe together, have come all the way to Yokohama in order to ask Dr. Hepburn to perform eye surgery on her: she (and Japan) are thus reliant on skills and technologies imported from the West. But they cannot arrange a meeting with Dr. Hepburn, and in any case the surgery would be too expensive for them to pay for—since as we see at the beginning, their musical street act is generating little interest or patronage in Yokohama, a carnival-esque space which features all manner of Western attractions. In other words, Japanese tradition is losing out to Western spectacle through the poisonous medium of market capitalism.

The film's implicit criticism of capitalism begins from the very first image. The initial credits appear overlaid on a small mountain of gold coins, and soon after the credits there is a scene depicting the implicit battle for the Japanese public being waged between Japanese tradition and seductive Western attractions. Oriki's traditional street act competes unsuccessfully for attention from the fickle Japanese crowd who instead rush around to see each new Western attraction, oohing and aahing at the sight of real Westerners playing in a marching band, which of course drowns out the quieter, putatively more refined sound of Oriki's zither (*koto*), and then eagerly clustering around each new spectacle in the circus. About four minutes into the film, one of the more inflammatory elements vis-a-vis the overall hate the Western enemy message of the film appears in the form of a cage in which is imprisoned, not an animal, but a Japanese man grimacing in confusion and bewilderment, at which the crowd laughs derisively.

Throughout the circus sequence, Western musicians, clowns and girls waving from a float are all shot from a low angle, making these figures seem larger and more grandiose,

whereas the caged Japanese man is shot from above, in high angle, meaning he appears pitiful and weak. Moreover, the entire circus sequence, roughly ninety seconds all told, features rapid cutting—a very low average shot length—and a style of editing and shot selection and camera movement more consistent with climactic action sequences. This is also true to a lesser extent of the handful of later scenes featuring circus performers and animals. The seductive West finds corporeal form in the figure of Dorothy (played by an unknown named Galla Kozlova), the blond-haired woman riding the elephant, at whose sight the crowd—and, given the intertextual appeal of this spectacle, probably the film audience as well—gasps in delight, and grows more frenzied still when she releases balloons to which are tied free admission tickets to the circus. Aerial shots of the crowd as it surges forward in naked greed, and medium close-ups of their grasping hands darting to and fro, pushing others roughly as they try to seize these balloons and the attached spoils, leave little doubt as to what Itō thought of the moral quality of a Japanese public ravaged by capitalistic desires and seduced away from tradition towards the West.

Read symptomatically, the film has much to reveal about late 1942 Japan. For example, the villainous moneybags Jacob, we discover about twelve minutes in, is supposed to be the scion of the real-life von Oppenheim family, a fabulously wealthy German mercantile family—and Jewish by ancestry. Kamiyama's makeup also shows certain stereotypical touches thought to

capture Jewish ethnicity, notably an enlarged and elongated nose (fig. 16).

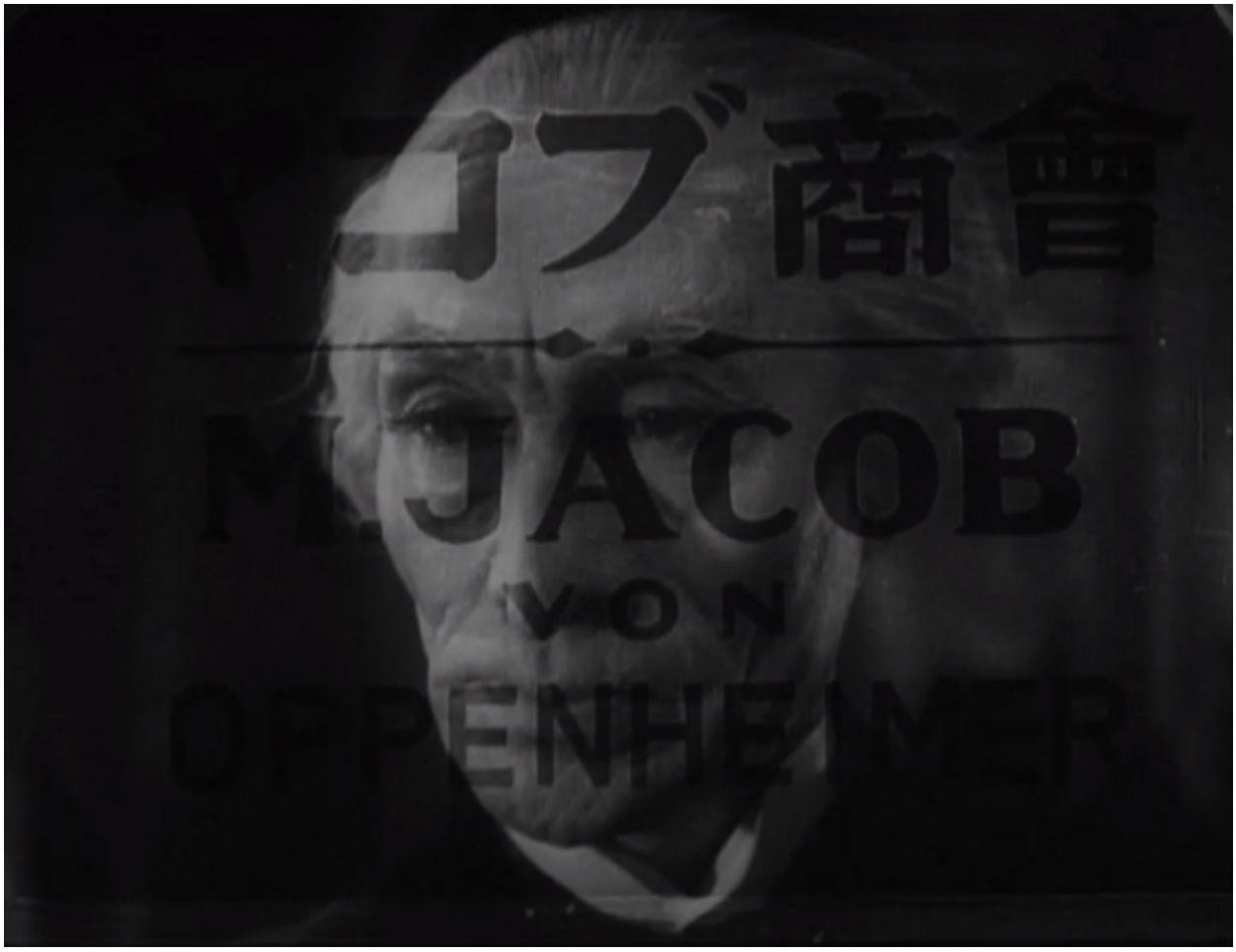


Figure 16: Kamiyama as prototypically Jewish banker Jacob in Itō's 1942 *Kurama Tengu*. Screen capture from 11:45.

Anti-Jewish rhetoric, while not unheard-of in Japan, never reached anything like the levels of prejudice and hatred in Axis ally Nazi Germany, probably because there were so few Jews in or near Japan's empire, but the stereotypical association of Jews with ruthless profit-seeking was widespread enough for Itō to use this rhetorical tack in his story about corrupt capitalism. As such, the film reflects the wartime reality of alliance with bitterly anti-Jewish Nazi Germany, but its anti-capitalist censure is not limited to the Jews; instead, the film targets capitalism itself, decrying it as the foundation upon which Western imperialism and moral depravity are based. In this way, the film rode the wave of anti-capitalist sentiment sweeping

throughout Japan in 1942, a time when many contrasted Japanese commitment to justice with Anglo-American profit-seeking.[85] But the film is not fully in support of this anti-American and British rhetoric, and in fact subtly inverts it: Jewish they may be, but the main villains are German, whereas the only sympathetic Western character is an American![86]

In fact, perhaps the worst hotbed of counterfeiting activity in early 1870s Japan was situated far from Yokohama and had everything to do with the imperial faction's recent victory over Shogunate loyalist domains and lingering tensions between the two sides. Hiraku Shimoda has detailed the extensive counterfeiting operations in a defeated ex-domain run largely by disgruntled Aizu samurai—not a few of whom went on to plot rebellion against the Meiji government—pointing out the damage this counterfeiting had already done to the Meiji regime's credibility domestically and to perceptions of Japan's trustworthiness abroad.[87] The film's displacement of this deeply subversive activity away from those defeated in the Meiji Restoration and onto hate-worthy foreigners helps bolster not only the hate-the-enemy message but also fosters the reconciliatory drive behind many of the Bakumatsu or Meiji-era films,

[85] A good example would be the poem quoted in Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, p. 219, which explicitly contrasts Japanese justice with the enemy who is 'fighting for profits'. John Dower has shown, in *War without Mercy,* that anti-Semitic rhetoric was more common (especially in the writings of ideologues like Tokutomi Sohō) than the tiny number of Jews in or near the Japanese Empire would putatively warrant; see Dower, pp. 225, 241-44.
[86] In its current extant version, at any rate. In Itō's handwritten version of the script, he included a "rivals in love" scene between Dorothy and Ohara Yuka, pursuing a subplot of competition between the foreigner and the widow over Miura, who perhaps was seen as a kind of romantic substitute for Kurata, who audiences would not readily associate with romance given the long history of Kurama Tengu as an essentially asexual hero uninterested in women. Contemporary plot synopses such as the one found on page 19 of the Oct. 21st, 1942 issue of *Eiga junpō* include mention of this subplot, so it is almost certain that the 1942 film included it. This scene was deliberately cut, perhaps, for the re-release. Deliberate deletion would arguably be consistent with Eiren's 1953 recommendation to re-edit the film to show foreigners in a less negative light—if the thought of a Japanese woman struggling with a foreign rival over an eligible Japanese bachelor was thought inappropriate, or if Dorothy growing spitting mad and hurling the sword-hilt that had belonged to Ohara at Yuka was considered an unfavorable portrayal of a foreigner.
[87] Shimoda, p. 52.

erasing the transgressions of the defeated side (despite the righteous fury Meiji victors evidently felt in the early 1870s) and thereby laying the groundwork for national unity.[88]

On the other hand, the foreign villains—who are robbing Japan by devaluing money itself—seek to buy the silence and collaboration of Japanese officials and other figures. As noted above, Itō initially intended to have Kurata function as a sort of avenging angel who rooted out corrupt collaborators within the Japanese, rampaging through an official government outpost (the barrier) to expose their collusion with the Jacob trading company. Evidently, Itō was not particularly committed to the theme of national unity, since the story he tried to tell would have revealed a deeply fragmented Japan. Had he secured approval for this storyline, the film's depiction of German villains and their Japanese allies might well have spurred audiences to question the Tripartite Pact itself, and the wisdom of Japan's current course.

Yet Itō was forced by the state, through its censorship apparatus, to deemphasize the theme of Japanese corruptibility, instead focusing on the most virtuous Japanese, who experience no difficulty in choosing honor over profit, in stark contrast to Jacob and his Western and Chinese underlings—and, recalling the circus scene, the Japanese masses, who are shown to be far from immune to the seduction of capitalism. Near the beginning, indeed even as the circus is parading around outside and the Japanese masses start practically crushing each other in order to get the prizes on the balloons, Jacob and his Chinese right-hand man corner the virtuous Ohara (played by Hara Kensaku) in a nearby building and, with pistol trained on him, demand he join them in their (literal!) money-making scheme or die, with the dramatic English phrase "Mister Ohara—yes or no?". He is given a minute to decide whether to choose ignominious collaboration

[88] Aizu certainly remained a problematic region for proponents of national unity, with a vigorously constructed regional identity somewhat at odds with the national identity the government was advocating. Aizu's lingering hold on the popular imaginaries not only of people from the former domain itself but of all Japan is revealed by the telling timing of the publication of the memoir of Aizu's most famous son, general Shiba Gorō, in 1942, under a title which emphasized his dual—and distinct—identity as a person of Meiji and a person of Aizu. See ibid., p. 77.

or doomed heroism, but instead of agonizing over the choice, he uses that minute to scrawl a secret message on his wooden dock pass and tie it to one of those very same circus balloons, which has floated up near the open upper storey window where he is trapped. Having used this weapon of capitalism against itself, in a sense, ensuring with his note that his knowledge of Jacob's counterfeiting operation will not die with him, he turns back to Jacob and Wang, his Chinese enforcer, as the minute ends and, with steely glare, says "No!" and is promptly shot, collapsing in silhouette, the sound covered by the bells tolling the hour.[89] Sure enough, the pass is picked up by Chako and Sugisaku and finds its way into the hands of Kurata, who joins with Ohara's cousin Miura (also played by Hara Kensaku) to destroy Jacob and his nest of vipers.[90]

On the subject of ethnicity, the portrayal of the Chinese in this film is profoundly negative. They are depicted as the willing dupes of their Western masters, as slaves of capital in scenes showing the interior of Jacob Trading Company's counting house, and as enablers of Western imperialism in the form of Wang, Jacob's lead enforcer and the one who actually shoots Ohara (and later nearly shoots Kurata). Not a single character is presented sympathetically, unlike the case of the Westerners themselves, who are portrayed in a more nuanced manner

[89] According to the surviving shooting schedule, held at the Museum of Kyoto (Kyoto Bunpaku Hakubutsukan) in the Itō Daisuke bunko, this sequence involving Ohara was handled by the B-han (or 'second-unit') group. Itō asked his longtime friend and associate Inagaki Hiroshi to be the second-unit director, so not all the scenes in the film were actually directed by Itō personally; for example, the impressive Western-inspired carriage chase/combat scene (featuring POV and tracking shots galore) near the end when Miura leads Saigō's men back to the docks to aid Kurama Tengu in his fight against Jacob was also handled by Inagaki. See Itakura, p. 36 n 28, and Katō p. 93.

[90] The manner in which Kurata acquires the dock pass is also noteworthy. It falls off of Chako's *geta* where Sugisaku had used it as a temporary strut, and when he sees this stranger picking up a piece of Chako's *geta*, Sugisaku angrily demands it back. When Kurata asks him to sell it to him and assures him he'll pay "any price"(ikura demo) for it, Sugisaku, instead of being corrupted by greed or asking for a specific sum, strikes a selfless bargain: he'll let Kurata have the dock pass in exchange for his help in getting Oriki the introduction to Dr. Hepburn and paying for her eye surgery. Kurata is impressed with his answer, and agrees to do so, but for our purposes it is also important to note that melodramatic music begins playing at the precise moment Kurata realizes Oriki is blind. So right from the very first minute of their acquaintance, an emotional connection is being formed between the two of them—and between the film (and its makers) and the audience in terms of generating romantic expectations.

thanks to the inclusion of the good-hearted American Dr. Hepburn, "the best in the world at eye surgery," with whom Kurata interacts quite amiably.[91]

Dr. Hepburn, of course, can be taken to represent value-neutral Western technology and science, whereas Jacob and all his goons embody an evil and corrupting ideology. To include ambivalence about the West is only natural, considering the West was seen as the source of modernity and the wellspring of modern science, and harks back to Meiji-era slogans like "Eastern spirit, Western science."[92] Japan itself modeled its own journey to modernity, its war machine, and its imperialist ambitions firmly in the Western tradition, so a categorical denunciation was out of the question. Moreover, Itō personally was hardly anti-West, given that he initially intended this film to evoke the fictionalized life and death of Cyrano de Bergerac before being forbidden to do so by the censors. China, on the other hand, apparently was thought neither to need nor to have earned such a nuanced depiction, reflecting the wartime reality of the endlessly ongoing and increasingly bitter war with China which lacked the glorious dividends of the war in the Pacific thus far.

In Itō's film, the hero Kurata finds himself the object of the affections of two very different women—and ideologies. Kurata too has apparently been negatively affected by the plague of capitalism ravaging Japan in the film's depiction of 1871. We are soon shown that he has been hired as security for the very same Jacob company, and subjected to the ignominious chore of chaperoning the blonde beauty around Yokohama as a personal bodyguard—we see his extreme reluctance in a scene fifteen minutes in when Dorothy comes in and repeatedly asks with an admonishing smile, 'Wakarimashita?' Dorothy is obviously drawn to Kurata, which sets

[91] This "sekai ichi" comment comes from Sugisaku at around minute twenty-three. Note that Hepburn is played by a Russian amateur actor, whose name as listed in the script and the movie credits is Alexander Petrovich.
[92] Sakuma Shōzan originally developed the concept of "Ethics (from) the East, technical learning (from) the West" in the Bakumatsu period; it was later shortened to a catchier four-character phrase, "wakon yōsai" (one translation of which is "Japanese spirit, Western learning"), and remained a popular slogan throughout Japan's modernization.

her up as demure Oriki's rival for his affections and has interesting echoes of the love triangle in the 1937 Japan-Germany co-production film *The New Earth* (*Tochter des Samurai/Atarashii tsuchi*, co-directed by Arnold Fanck and Itami Mansaku). Consistent with Kurama Tengu's incorruptibility throughout the entire film series, however, the audience could never doubt Kurata was above being seduced by Dorothy's glamorous smile, obvious economic power, or the Western ideology they represent; his love is for Japan, tradition, and Oriki, and is not for sale.[93]

Dorothy's request, apparently not the first such she has made, for Kurata to accompany her leads one of the other bodyguards lounging around to remark, "Ms. Dorothy, you sure do have a powerful hankering for Kurata!", to which she smiles her incomprehension and says "yes, thank you."[94] After she finally gets Kurata to quit fiddling with his umbrella and follow her, the remaining bodyguards mock her ignorance, repeating "yes, thank you!" to uproarious laughter.[95] Out on the street, a group of Japanese men near the circus tents notices Kurata scurrying along behind her and reveals their contempt that he would be willing to become her lapdog on her frequent shopping trips.[96] It is telling that she is going not sightseeing but shopping, flaunting her immense economic power through her behavior as well as her glittering, opulent dress. After Kurata obediently follows her out of frame, the men mutter "So now they've gone so far as to make him a shopping companion to a woman?", and according to the script, they go on to

[93] In the original version of the film shown in 1942, Dorothy was also in love with Miura, and in one scene grew furiously jealous with Ohara Yuka, Miura's cousin's widow and an obvious rival for Miura's affections. Since the rivals in love scenes involving Dorothy and Yuka were cut for the 1953 re-release, the only evidence that they were indeed part of the original film comes in the form of contemporary plot summaries, like the one found on page 19 of the October 21st, 1942 edition of *Eiga junpō*.

[94] The man's smirking comment in Japanese was "Dorothy-san, Kurata taihen go-hiiki desu nee!" to which she replies "hai, domo arigatō", a nonsensical response given the context.

[95] In the scene with Dr. Hepburn, as well, his inexpert Japanese is on prominent display, nor was this simply a function of an actor garbling his lines; the bizarre and error-filled speech he makes is taken word for word from the script, as was Dorothy's inane response to the man's comment, meaning that Itō had planned from the beginning to participate in one of the strangest and most baseless beliefs by then-contemporary Japanese regarding their language, that foreigners—and especially Caucasians—were incapable of mastering it. It is doubly ironic that no less a master of the Japanese language than Hepburn, the eponymous founder of the Hepburn romanization system and the author of the most famous Japanese-English dictionary, should be portrayed using such pidgin Japanese.

[96] One, a man named Gozarimatsu, says incredulously, "Oi, Kurata! Nanda, mata kaimono no otomo ka?"

derisively dub him Bonkura, meaning "Kurata the dim."[97] This final portion of dialogue did not survive in the 90-minute extant version, which is unfortunate as it weakens the sense of connection formed between Kurata and Oriki when, about twenty-seven minutes into the film, he asks her what her impaired vision is like and she responds 'bonyari...kuraku' ('dim...dark'), echoing his 'dim' epithet and even his name, which sounds similar to 'kuraku.' He looks a bit startled at this sign of their symbolic closeness, and chuckles appreciatively as he repeats her comment; with this, the audience senses even more strongly that romance is brewing.

Oriki is able to make out a sewing needle gleaming in his kimono, and picks it up; the camera sweeps around for a lingering, melodramatic close-up on her face as complicated emotions ripple over it, until finally she collapses in tears. The implication is that she feels she is a failure as a woman because her blindness means she cannot perform domestic tasks like sewing traditionally done by women, an interpretation confirmed by her mournful comment, "Oh, when will I finally be able to take up the needle and sew!" Kurata shows compassionate concern, insisting she will be fine once she has her surgery. All of this interplay, of course, increases the pathos of her decision to permanently ruin her eyes by ripping off the bandages in the film's climax to put out the dynamite fuse and thereby save the steamship—and Kurata's life.

The film also makes use of Kurama Tengu's well-known involvement with the *sonnō jōi* activists during the Bakumatsu. When Miura Katsuhiko, the lookalike cousin of Ohara, arrives in Yokohama to investigate his cousin's disappearance, he frightens Jacob and his cronies into trying to claim that it must have been Kurama Tengu, recently spotted in town, who did the deed, given his well-known affiliation with the xenophobic *jōi* radicals of the 1860s. Wang uses the ambiguity of a note Ohara supposedly scrawled into his carriage before he was abducted,

[97] A contraction of bonyari (dim/absentminded) and his name, Kurata. Bonyari, however, can also mean dim as in dark or difficult to see, which is why Oriki's comment later can be taken as a clever pun by Itō in his script.

"Kurama Tengu ni..." (which could mean, variously, "[I was abducted/killed] by Kurama Tengu" or "[give this dock pass] to Kurama Tengu") to convince Miura that Kurama attacked Ohara, and that he indiscriminately targets foreigners and foreign sympathizers among the Japanese, having never given up his quest for a Japan unsullied by a foreign presence. Naturally, the audience knows Kurama does nothing of the sort—he is even shown in a friendly conversation with Hepburn, the doctor who is also a Christian missionary!

What is fascinating about this invocation of Bakumatsu history is that in many ways, having Kurama appear precisely as anti-foreign as Wang had described him would have made more sense in the context of 1942. Instead, Kurata is shown as surprisingly pro-West. There is his friendly association with Hepburn, the scenes when he not only tolerates but in fact draws his livelihood from guarding the foreigner Dorothy, as well as one scene depicting Kurata studying English in a classroom, and most surprising of all, he shows a thorough understanding of Gresham's law—and mentions Gresham by name!—when explaining to Sugisaku around minute thirty-nine why the debased counterfeit currency Jacob is making is hurting Japan's economy. Through this accumulation of pro-Western ideas and relationships, Itō tries to show that Kurata, if not his alter ego Kurama Tengu, has fully embraced Meiji Japan's new globally integrated reality.[98] Moreover, Japan's integration into the world capitalist system has brought many demonstrable benefits, such as the eye surgery Oriki receives. In light of this nuanced portrayal of the West and Kurata's own balanced and not at all exclusionary approach to foreigners in

[98] Katō Mikirō discusses the ambiguity of having this sort of split personality as well, and suggests it is one reason for the film's box-office success; see Katō, p. 94. I would add that this ambiguity was doubtless important for viewers as they made sense of the film: some might have identified Kurata (the mild-mannered 'Clerk Kent' type) as the real main character, while others might have dismissed this aspect of the hero as a mere cover story and insisted the xenophobic crusader Kurama is the main character. Furthermore, Kurata's 'henshin' (transformation) into Kurama Tengu is tellingly incomplete during the climax: he leaves his cowl off, creating a third personality suspended in between the two polar opposites described above. One wonders whether there is any significance in the fact that Euro-American superhero transformations are subtractive (Superman takes *off* his glasses) while Japanese heroes' emergence is additive (Kurama puts *on* his cowl).

Japan, it is difficult to think the film was intended by Itō to be particularly effective either in its anti-Westerner, hate the enemy aspect or as a denunciation of market capitalism.

Despite its anti-capitalist rhetoric, moreover, the film itself participates in the capitalist system of exchange, entertainment in exchange for money, and as such, is aimed at pleasing the audience. One way of doing so is by managing to get Westerners on screen at all. By this point in the war, late 1942, there are virtually no Caucasians in Japan proper, so by virtue of the fact that scarcity breeds curiosity, simply having Westerners, especially a beautiful blond woman, appear in the movie is a powerful draw. In that sense, having the Vichy French circus in Japan represented an invaluable opportunity for Itō, one of which he took full advantage. But though the other circus performers may have been French, judging from the blonde actress's name as listed in the credits, 'Galla Kozlova', she, like all the other named Western characters but Jacob himself and one of his henchmen (who were played by Japanese actors, as was the Chinese villain Wang), was played by a Russian, perhaps recruited for this opportunity from among the Russians living in occupied Shanghai.[99]

Daiei, the studio which made *Kurama Tengu*, produced the lion's share of Japan's hate the enemy films, especially that rarer subset of films which actually managed to get Caucasians to appear on screen. In addition to *Kurama Tengu*, Itō Daisuke made another film at Daiei featuring genuine foreigners, namely the 1944 *International Smuggling Ring* (*Kokusai mitsuyudan*). Like

[99] I mention Shanghai as the most likely possibility for finding Caucasian amateur actors, especially Russians, because the 1944 film *Noroshi wa Shanghai ni agaru*, filmed mostly on location in Shanghai, is known to have recruited Caucasian 'actors' from among the local population who were both a) clearly Russian, given their accent, and b) definitely amateurs, given their performance. The supply of Caucasians within Japan was extremely limited, nor would the few Caucasians who did remain necessarily be interested or even willing to appear in such a film. So Itō might well have been forced to look abroad for actors to fill these key roles, in places—like Shanghai—where a supply of white faces was plentiful and the economic situation sufficiently dire that many such would be willing to misrepresent history by appearing as caricatured, racist villains. In any case, nothing is known about any of the Russians appearing in this film, and even their names as given in katakana are suspect; for example, the blonde woman's name is listed as 'ガラーコズロフ' but 'Garaa' is probably an error for "Galla" (perhaps short for Galina), and the 'fu' is surely an error for 'wa' (i.e., 'va') since as a woman it should be Kozlova, not Kozlov. This suggests that even the film crew and studio staff itself knew little and cared less about these amateur actors.

in *Kurama Tengu*, speaking roles went to well-known 'foreigner impersonator' actors, and indeed the main villain in both films was played by the same actor, Kamiyama Sōjin.[100]

Yet even with the central antagonist being played by a Japanese actor, *Kurama Tengu* must have been a refreshing change for Japanese audiences of the day, who had been reduced to a film diet of almost exclusively all-Japanese casts, reflecting the autarkic reality of Japan's empire. By contrast, *Kurama Tengu* depended on the expanded reach of Japan's empire in order to secure actors who merely by their appearance could dazzle Japanese audiences still enamored of Western movies and stars but now entirely cut off from the Western film world.[101]

It is worth noting that, despite the comparative ease with which, say, Chinese roles could have been cast ethnically accurately, owing to the much larger supply of Chinese in Japan and its empire, few Japanese film projects made any attempt at linguistic or ethnic verisimilitude by employing Chinese or other Asian characters. In Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, too, all the speaking Chinese roles are played by Japanese, and the "Chinese" (identifiable solely by their queues and dress) are limited to speaking Japanese and sometimes English.

Getting genuinely white faces into an early 1940s film was a different matter entirely, a step sure to enhance a film's visual appeal, and having such faces speak a bit of English, even heavily accented English, was even better for the rarity and novelty value. This is especially true considering the lengths the government had been going after the outbreak of the Pacific War to restore and preserve the purity of the Japanese language, attempting to eliminate English loan-words like 'strike' in common use in baseball and so forth (and eventually attempting to ban the

[100] For photographic evidence that this lost film both featured Caucasians and had Kamiyama Sōjin as its main villain, see *Daiei jidaigeki senzen hen*, pp. 130-131.

[101] Judging from the thick German accent of the English spoken by the actor playing the unruly sailor at the beginning of Kurosawa's 1945 *Zoku Sugata Sanshirō*, it was also occasionally possible to recruit actors or at least extras from among the few representatives of Japan's military allies. Indeed, this is true even of Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, in a way: the traveling circus was from Vichy France. The presence or absence of accented English was certainly far less important to domestic Japanese audiences than the visual spectacle of seeing Caucasians on screen, and more often than not being soundly defeated by virile Japanese, who were depicted as superior in spirit if not in body.

sport altogether in 1943) and even demanding that families stop permitting children to use 'mama' and 'papa'.[102] Filmmakers like Itō could claim, reasonably enough, that they were pursuing verisimilitude and that's why it was necessary to cast Caucasian actors and give them occasional lines of English dialogue, since that's what white people speak.[103] But apparently censors never thought to object to such a one-sided and incomplete attempt at 'accuracy' which left Chinese characters to be played by Japanese actors who then delivered their lines in Japanese.

While it certainly has many unique elements, Itō's *Kurama Tengu* does fit comfortably within the overall film series, with certain tropes common to filmic representations of Kurama appearing in this film as well. For example, it employs the device of a false Kurama Tengu who besmirches Kurama's good name with his evil deeds and who the real Kurama must defeat to prove his true character, which appears several times in prewar Kurama Tengu films. In Itō's version, Kurata dons his cowl and thus his alter-ego of Kurama Tengu in order to save the initially hostile Miura from a trap set by Jacob and Wang involving the false Kurama, thereby proving to Miura that he can be trusted, and also that Jacob and his cronies must be destroyed.

The contagious moral corruption Wang and Jacob embody finds cinematic expression as Wang tries to hire Dainoji (so named for the 'dai' or "big" character prominently emblazoned on his forehead), a formidable looking warrior, to impersonate Kurama Tengu in order to wound Miura and draw suspicion away from them and onto the putatively mythical Kurama Tengu. Initially the camera is focused in medium close-up on Dainoji's slightly smiling face, but it soon pans down—to follow his line of sight—into a close-up of Wang's hand on the table where, as he explains the job, he slowly places four neatly wrapped bundles of gold (*koban*) coins in front of Dainoji, whose eyes light up. Dainoji and his accomplices later explain to their fellow circus

[102] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, p. 220.
[103] This rather racist assumption that white skin=English speaker continues to some extent in Japan of the twenty-first century, to the consternation of many Europeans, who are assumed to be Anglo-American because of their skin.

bodyguards, among whom is Kurata, that word has been spreading that Kurama Tengu has appeared in Yokohama, and when Kurata asks "So do you know where Kurama Tengu is right now?" they all laugh derisively, insisting that Kurama Tengu is nothing but a myth, and one they're going to make use of by dressing Dainoji up as Kurama Tengu for his attack. Dainoji, then, is a mere foil for Kurata—the real Kurama Tengu—who soon proves with his actions he is no myth but a true champion of virtue, easily resisting Jacob's attempt to buy his allegiance later in the film. As a figure of clearly lesser moral stature, Dainoji is no match for Kurama Tengu and is soon dispatched when the attack on Miura begins and Kurama leaps out of hiding to save him.

As in the many other Kurama Tengu films featuring the trope of an imposter Kurama Tengu, what is important is not simply to show that a real Kurama Tengu exists, but to prove through action his unblemished virtue and sincerity. These films often portray Kurama caught in a trap and captured, where the only way for him to escape is for his enemies to show him mercy. And as a matter of fact, in several such films, Kurama's allies, functioning as character witnesses, passionately plead for his life, claiming his moral character is irreproachable, and his opponents, particularly Kondō Isami of the Shinsengumi, often deliberately let him escape or otherwise triumph, because, presumably, cutting down such a hero would be a crime against Japan itself.[104]

Yet in Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, the villains are utterly without this capacity to recognize or honor greatness in their opponents. As such, after he is captured near the end Kurama begins to resemble other tragic heroes of Itō's oeuvre, including folk hero Kunisada Chūji; the narrative seems to be building towards another nihilistic ending in which the lone hero struggles mightily but even though he wins some small concession he cannot truly defeat society, and the price of

[104] This trope has been a prominent part of film adaptations of Kurama Tengu since at least the 1928 *Kurama Tengu*, in which the boy Sugisaku pleads with Kondō not to kill Kurama Tengu, who is not only a great man but in fact a national hero; and incredibly, Kondō is won over by the boy's sincerity and passion, deliberately choosing the wrong road to give Kurama time to escape.

his intransigence is his death. But Itō obviously did not have permission to kill off Kurama, nor to end the film too darkly, and by contrast probably was under pressure to deliver a suitably uplifting 'Japanese triumph over the dastardly Western villains' storyline. As a consequence, the film ends with a straight victory for the 'good guys', almost an "all's well that ends well" (*ikken rakuchaku*) ending, and thus rather different from many of Itō's silent films. Itō does, however, keep the tone at the end somber, partly through manipulating the romantic subplot to maximize the sense of pathos when Oriki sacrifices herself. Kurama Tengu, as the main character in a well-loved film series with no end in sight, could never fail, and certainly could never die, so in terms of the narrative, there was a problem: how to make the audience feel any thrill or melodrama at all near the end, when everyone watching knows the main character will both survive, and win?[105] As we shall see in the analysis of the film's ending below, Itō manages to maintain a tragic tone despite the near-total triumph of Kurama and his allies by focusing relentlessly on Oriki and emphasizing that her death has deprived Kurama of a promising romance.

Lest audience attention flag, Itō inserts a brief circus performance scene immediately after Wang's hiring of Dainoji. A beautiful kimono-clad woman with wax-paper umbrella twirls about as two trapeze artists from the circus troupe begin their show just above her—and then she herself, shedding her kimono improbably fast, gets up on a trapeze. Since it has nothing to do

[105] Itakura has pointed out an interesting change from Itō's draft of the script to the version used while filming: after Wang captures Kurama Tengu and is about to shoot him, the latter was supposed to have delivered a speech about his Chako and Oriki (who were captured earlier in order to lure him in), begging Wang—as a dying request—to spare their lives, but that speech was cut from the finished version of the film (leaving, in fact, a rather awkward long sequence of Wang and Kurama Tengu just sitting in a room together for two minutes or so, with very little dialogue). Itakura speculates this deletion was probably made because the audience couldn't possibly have thought even for a moment that Kurama Tengu would actually be killed, so having him talk about his dying request might have seemed a trifle silly. More problematically still, having him talk about the girls at that moment as opposed to the steamship might have made it too obvious even to the censors what his real motives were for storming the underground lair—to save them, not the vaunted ship. See Itakura, pp. 28-30.

But I must disagree somewhat, since in the scene as filmed, Kurata still asks about Oriki and Chako, indicating his focus is on them; if Itō had really been willing to strip Kurata of all romantic association and present him as a patriot only, surely those lines of dialogue would have been struck as well, and some lines about the ship or Jacob's nefarious plot added in. Wang even asks him, "Don't you have other things you want to ask me?" But Kurata just smiles wanly and says "Thank you—that's all I wanted to know."

with the main plot, this short scene was surely included for its audience-pleasing entertainment value. Even in long shot, seeing a woman hanging upside down in mid-air tearing off first her wig and then her kimono to reveal a regular circus performer outfit provides quite a spectacle. But it has allegorical significance as well—in the initial sequence while she is still on the ground, this figure is clearly being played by a Japanese actress, who is wearing a genuine *furisode* kimono and high *geta* sandals. But after a cutaway to Sugisaku in the audience looking bored, upon cutting back to this figure, now on a trapeze and wearing an easy to shed trick kimono, it seems, as she sheds her wig and kimono, that this figure was a foreigner, just another regular circus performer, all along.

She has transformed from demure Japanese into brash foreigner. Allegorically, inside every Japanese person still cloaked in the trappings of tradition is a capitalist in a skimpy outfit ready to shed all links to the past and perform for money. As the scene immediately after this one shows the newly wealthy Dainoji recruiting henchmen by lot for the attack on Miura from among the other circus bodyguards, it seems no one is immune to the power of money. In fact, this recruiting scene is actually cross-cut with another trapeze performance sequence, suggesting Itō intended for the two to be seen as thematically linked. The juxtaposition between this capitalistic circus and the very next scene, of Ohara's widow Yuka wearing a proper kimono and kneeling in a Japanese-style domestic space with paper door panels (*shōji*), is quite strong.

Oriki, too, remains insulated from and uncontaminated by capitalist exchange, and moreover several key tasks fall to her despite or even because of her blindness. For example, only she can decode Ohara's message scrawled onto his dock pass, which reveals Jacob had him killed and is running a counterfeit money operation under the dock.[106] It has been suggested that

[106] This is done off-screen, however, and only related later by Sugisaku, after it becomes apparent that Oriki and Chako have been captured by Wang.

depicting the giving of even weaker or less capable members of society valuable and productive roles in the midst of total war was a goal of the state at this time, and so perhaps the character of Oriki is a crystallization of the desire by the Home Ministry to show people from all walks of life willing to sacrifice and give their all for the state.[107] But if so, it is unconvincing, since her motives are clearly personal and romantic rather than abstract and patriotic.

In the final climactic action sequence, Kurata sends Miura off to seek help from Saigō, Kurata's old friend and comrade in arms and Japan's de facto head of government in 1871, before invading the counterfeit money factory under the docks by himself. Before he arrives, however, there is a seventy-second long scene featuring Oriki in a dark room, hands tremblingly fixed on the sewing needle he'd given her as a symbol of her impending restoration to full productive womanhood (and also a foreshadowing of her final hole-punch note, though audiences could not have known that at this point). She sits in silence as the camera slowly zooms in on her into a close-up, until finally, after forty-five seconds of silence, she murmurs "Kurata-sama" and repeats it twice more, voice thick with emotion, as the clock begins to strike the hour.[108]

Kurata begins sneaking around the factory but is captured by Wang in circumstances identical to Ohara's death. He, however, escapes thanks to Sugisaku's intervention which leads to Wang falling down the stairs to his death. In another departure from the overall tenor of the

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[107] Moriwaki Kiyotada, personal interview, Sept. 12, 2013.

[108] The clock, of course, is an excellent symbol of capitalism in its own right—the commodification and consumption of time. The clock—and in some ways, the concept of minutely compartmentalized time itself—was a very new import to 1871 Japan. In audiences in the early 1940s, however, it would not have aroused any distress or been exclusively identified with the foreign Other, since in Japan as well, the clock was so firmly established as an indispensible object that, like the apparatus of film itself, it is doubtful whether anyone would have stopped to worry about using a 'foreign import' like timekeeping technology. On the other hand, around minute sixty-eight, one such close-up of a clock prominently shows the maker's name, P. Dupin, written on it in the Roman alphabet, which seems intentional given that a different angle could easily have deemphasized these mark of the Other.

Among the complicated cross-cutting in the scene immediately after this, the camera returns again and again to the motif of the clock, often zoomed in so that the face of the clock entirely fills the frame, showing its arms spinning steadily and rapidly to illustrate the passage of time. Makino Masahiro's deployment of the clock in his own climactic scene at the end of *Ahen sensō* is very similar to, and perhaps drew inspiration from, the prominent use of the clock here.

Kurama Tengu series, he sharply scolds Sugisaku for ignoring his order to stay put, and offers Sugisaku no gratitude at all for having saved his life, a depiction startlingly unlike the typical image of Kurama as a kindly uncle figure who is always compassionate towards children—who after all were the core audience for Kurama Tengu films into the late 1930s. Itō's decision to deemphasize Kurama as a heroic protector of children and instead present him as a romantic male lead, who functions a lot more like a stern father than a nice uncle to the kids in the film, is doubtless partly inspired by the declining proportion of Japanese filmgoers who were children.

As late as 1936 children still comprised 25% of the total film-going audience in Japan, but after war with China broke out in 1937, the adult film audience swelled greatly. In other words, even though the number of kids going to see films kept steadily increasing, adult viewership increased much more rapidly, so kids' overall audience share declined from 25% to just 16% by 1939. The contemporary theory advanced in *Eiga nenkan* for this increase in adult viewership was that many adults started going to cinemas in 1937 to get news about the war, then fell into the habit and continued going in later years even after the news in newsreels was no longer much of a draw.[109] Many such adults might well go to see just such a film as Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, especially if it had been reoriented towards an adult audience with an infusion of romance.

Kurama searches the bowels of the factory for Oriki and Chako, who are occasionally shown being forcibly moved around in an extended bout of well-executed cross-cutting. He fights hard, first with guns (because his cowardly opponents refuse to face him with swords, despite his "have you no shame!?" taunt, until they've run out of bullets) and then with his lethal sword.[110] Incidentally, while Itō and Arakan, the actor playing Kurata, surely did everything possible to keep the pace of blow and counterblow satisfyingly high, in 1942 Arakan was already

[109] This information on children's overall audience share is taken from Furukawa, p. 60.
[110] This fight, and the taunt, occurs around minute seventy-five.

thirty-nine years old, and since talkies were not compatible with variable frame rate projection, he was limited to his actual movement speed, meaning his various attacks and parries look rather slow and not particularly impressive.[111] On the other hand, Itō avoided the most common visual coding indicating death in most period films of the prewar and wartime period: having those struck by a sword instantly stiffen, thrust one or both arms over one's head, and topple like a felled tree.[112] He employs a refreshingly varied range of death-poses, most of which are fully as unrealistic as the "stiff topple" visual trope but not nearly as overused as that technique, meaning combat in Itō's *Kurama Tengu* is more interesting to watch than fighting scenes in most other period films or history films of the prewar and wartime periods. Moreover, Itō chose to film the first stage of the climactic battle between Kurata and Jacob's seemingly endless cronies on a staircase, which presented interesting visual possibilities; most of the fight is filmed from below looking up at Kurata in profile as he fights his way from upper right to middle-left of the screen down the stairs, with his felled opponents spinning off in various directions, until finally he reaches the trap-door to the underground money counterfeiting factory, cutting down two major foes, Jacob's lieutenants, a Caucasian and a Chinese (both, however, played by Japanese actors), in the process. This entire sequence is cross-cut with tracking shots of Miura leading the troops Saigō has sent down deserted roads at night, racing for the factory, and falling into but

[111] In the silent era, period film stars of Arakan's generation, in addition to simply being much younger than they were in the early forties, benefited greatly by the technique whereby projectionists would speed up the frame rate, and therefore the pace of on-screen movement, by means of a hand-crank on the projectors, but synch-sound talkies require a constant frame rate or the soundtrack will sound very strange indeed (due to the artificially high or low pitch of the dialogue and other sounds), meaning that many period film stars, including Arakan, suddenly seemed to slow down from the mid-1930s onwards.

[112] Japanese movies of this period are not alone in suffering from this type of visual coding strategy for depicting death; many American war movies of the same period, for example, share a similar "stiffen, drop rifle, and topple" trope for when enemies, in particular, are shot. All such strategies make sense in the context of the filmmakers' desire to make characters' deaths so incontrovertible—and so legible—that none in the audience could miss it. Having characters scheduled to die resort to such well-known behavioral patterns is tantamount to having them shout at the audience, "I'm dead now—turn your attention to the next bad guy." In the case of period films or history films, these deaths are almost always as a result of a sword-slash, and as such serve as testament to the advanced skills of the hero swordsman (who can kill, rather than merely wound, with a single blow).

successfully breaking out of a series of almost American Western-style gun ambushes sprung by more of Jacob's henchmen in a canyon and later in a tunnel.

Once he reaches the factory, Kurata is soon recaptured and held at gunpoint by Jacob himself, and suffers the ignominy of having his hands bound tightly with rope. Jacob leads him to where Oriki and Chako are being held prisoner and offers him a cruel choice: will he insist on revealing Jacob's secret, or make a deal to keep silent in order to save the lives of these two "blameless and innocent girls" as well as his own life? Kurata rejects this deal gruffly, at which point Jacob reminds him of the damage he can do to Japan's national defense if he blows up the factory, destroying the evidence of his wrongdoing as well as a steamship vital to Japan all in one fell stroke. Jacob begins preparing to blow up the entire factory—and the dock and precious steamship above, but also, tellingly, Oriki—causing Kurata to call out "Jacob!" desperately, and making him writhe in almost physical anguish at his inability to resolve the dilemma.



Figure 17: Kurata tormented by the cost of maintaining his honor. Screen capture from 82:20.

Jacob simply wishes him to look the other way so he can escape, and in return he claims he's willing to release the girls and Kurata himself, as well as cancel his plan to blow up the factory and the steamship. But Kurata, ultimately, clings to his pride, his inflexible moral code which has no regard for utilitarian or relativistic considerations like the greater good—there is only what is right *for him*. He looks Jacob in the eye and says "do your worst!"[113] One might have expected a putative patriot such as Kurata to value the steamship more highly than his own personal honor, which would be besmirched if he made a deal with a man like Jacob, but once again, Itō has a different agenda; it seems Kurata, staring down the barrel of the gun that is

[113] In Japanese, "Katte ni shi!"

poised to shoot him dead, simply cannot let go of his own notion of right and wrong. It is difficult indeed to construe any of this as a straightforward national police message of putting the state before oneself, since Kurata is doing the opposite—putting his own honor ahead of everything. As such, Itō's Kurata has revealed his true colors: he is cut from the same mold as many of Itō's other unyieldingly honorable heroes.

Itō's reluctance to embrace the national policy agenda also surfaces in a few subtle but telling differences between the final version of the script and the version actually filmed. For instance, in the final script any lines of dialogue meant to be delivered in English are so noted, and there are very few such lines, but in the finished film, as Miura and the government troops advance on Jacob's cronies down the underground tunnel, a few other lines of dialogue lacking the explicit "In English" proviso are delivered in English anyway.[114] It may not seem particularly subversive to have characters who are supposed to be native English speakers deliver extra lines in English, but since the outbreak of the Pacific War the state has been trying to cull English, the language of the enemy, from the everyday speech and thoughts of Japanese subjects. Creating a film with more English than the censors had authorized when they pre-approved the script, then, was a risky move,[115] and for audiences too hearing English (which in one earlier scene, of Caucasian troops patrolling in Yokohama giving the all clear, was even subtitled in Japanese) may have carried a transgressive undertone.

[114] For example, Jacob's blond-haired henchman (played by a Russian amateur actor) shouts from the tunnel, "Boss, the enemy is coming!" whereas in the script this line was supposed to be given in Japanese. Also, both this blond-haired man and the bizarre "エル サブ" character—in Arabesque turban and blackface!—deliver a few other lines amidst this long climactic action sequence in English, including both of them shouting simply "Dynamite!" rather than the scripted "Dynamite da!" when they see Jacob light the fuse.

[115] And in fact the CIB did issue an infamous ban of Daiei's 1943 *Blossoms of the Battlefield*, citing changes from its pre-approved script to the final filmed version that allegedly fostered a spirit of pacifism—but were forced to admit, in short order, that there were no differences from script to finished film, it was simply that the war situation had worsened from the time the script had been approved and the finished film's (scheduled) release. High, pp. 458-459.

Jacob's men manage to hold off Miura and the government troops for long enough to give Jacob one more chance to twirl metaphorical mustaches at Kurata, gloating at his inability to protect the steamship—or Oriki. Jacob slowly and melodramatically withdraws a match from his waistcoat and then strikes it, preparing to light the fuse and make good his escape. Kurata screams in impotent rage and anguish at Jacob's theatrical villainy, but his hands are literally tied—there is nothing he can do.



Figure 18: Jacob theatrically prepares to light the dynamite fuse. Screen capture from 84:07.

Kurata manages to break the ropes binding his arms to his sides and leap at Jacob but his hands remain securely bound and as soon as he springs free, Jacob shoots him at point-black range in the chest. As he collapses to the ground, several counterfeit gold coins he'd pocketed

earlier fall out of his kimono, four of which have been neatly holed by the bullet.[116] In a rather sardonic twist worthy of Itō, Kurata, in an anti-capitalist film decrying greed, is saved by money itself. He leaps up again and begins struggling with Jacob despite his still-bound hands. Among the complicated cross-cutting in this sequence (which includes periodic cutaways to Miura and all the government troops, who are still pinned down in the underground passageway and thus very much in danger if the fuse ignites the dynamite) are a number of fine close-ups on the gun, now lying gleaming on the dirt floor in the foreground of the shot while from above Jacob's grasping hands creep into the frame, straining to break through Kurata's bound hands, the only obstacle between him and the gun. But even if he manages to keep Jacob from picking up the gun, it is obvious that he can't both fight Jacob and put out the fast-burning fuse.

At this point the narrative focus shifts to Oriki. She stumbles around, ignoring her young sister Chako, and anxiously calls out "Kurata-sama!" several times.[117] Perhaps realizing that Kurata too will be killed in the explosion if the dynamite goes off, Oriki, slumped over a counterfeiting machine, suddenly raises her face up in a posture reminiscent of sudden enlightenment, determinedly tearing off the bandages covering her eyes—thereby permanently ruining her eyesight. This is the moment she decides to give her own life, if need be, for Kurata's. There can be no doubt it is Kurata she is trying to save, not the steamship; her desperate calling for Kurata attests to that. This critical moment of determination is shot from a low angle, a cinematographic choice associated with the portrayal of heroes, and extradiegetic orchestral

[116] It is worth noting that this sequence feels a lot more like an American Western than a Japanese film. Kurata's kimono, however, is not an ideal choice for this sort of tried-and-true "shot but saved by something solid in my breast pocket" plot device, for the simple reason that kimonos do not, of course, have breast pockets, and men tended to store items in their voluminous sleeves or in the folds over their abdomens, meaning it is almost impossible to imagine an angle from which Jacob could have shot him in the mid- to upper chest and hit the gold coins. Nevertheless, Itō chose to use this device here, I would argue because he wished to hammer home the symbolism of the villain's money saving the hero or, perhaps more accurately, thwarting the greedy villain.

[117] Oriki cries out "Kurata sama!" over ten times here. Chako, for her part, keeps screeching "oneesan, kowai yo!" ("I'm scared sis!") but Oriki is so focused on helping Kurata somehow that she actually shoves Chako out of her way.

music begins at the moment she looks up, quickly building to a melodramatic crescendo as she removes the bandages—all of this in close-up, considered (with good reason) the most melodramatic framing. Amidst this swelling of triumphant music, and more importantly right in the middle of the fight of his life with Jacob, Kurata spares a moment to raise his head from the tussle on the ground and shout worriedly "Oriki-san!". The camera cuts back to her, zooming in to an extreme close-up on her all-important eyes as she begins peering desperately through the fog of her near-total blindness for the fortunately quite lengthy fuse. The soaring melodramatic music transitions into a far tenser, thrilling melody, matching the difficult task she faces, and it continues throughout the ninety-second scene—swelling dramatically at one point when she stops and cries out in pain, rubbing her eyes with her hands. She finally manages to snuff the fuse out mere feet from the barrels of dynamite, but just then, Jacob tears himself away from Kurata and fires off two shots at her, mortally wounding her, before himself being cut down by Kurata, who has discovered a sword, gleaming in the lamplight, conveniently leaning against a nearby barrel and wields it well despite his bound hands. Miura and his men finally force open the trap-door, just in time for Miura to shoot Jacob, who was still clinging to life in an attempt to get off one last shot at Kurata. Almost exactly as the script indicated, Kurata then shouts "Miura-kun! We stopped the explosion...saved the ship! But that woman over there, Oriki-san, she..." and slumps to the floor, exhausted and badly wounded.[118]

At first glance, this speech would seem very supportive of the national policy interpretation of the film—namely, it was all about saving Japan's precious war materiel, not about love—but then, as the lights and sound fade, Kurata asks, twice, "Oriki-san, how is she?", lines not in the script. When speaking to Miura the first priority was naturally to explain they had

[118] He says "Miura-kun! Bakuhatsu wa...jōkisen wa sukuwareta! Ano onna ga, Oriki-san ga..." in the script, but in the film, he adds an extra two "Oriki san wa?" immediately afterwards.

managed to foil Jacob's plot, not talk about a woman Miura had actually never met, yet it seems Itō's Kurata cannot help but beg for news of whether Oriki has survived. The addition of two questions showing his deep concern for her adds to the pathos of her death, not as a noble sacrifice for the state, but as a personal tragedy for him.

In the film's final two minutes, Itō continues to pursue the melodramatic potential of the star-crossed romance between Kurata and Oriki by explaining her motivations via the device of the pinhole letter. As his men carry the barely conscious Kurata away in a litter, Miura explains, in the film's final moments, that Oriki had anticipated her own death at Jacob's hands and had written a testament via the pin Kurata had given her. He reads the letter, which the camera also shows in a close-up of Miura's hands holding it against a lantern to illuminate the holes, spelling out a simple message in katakana. "Mr. Kurata, I think it of no account at all that I should be killed by Jacob. But I wish I could have seen you just once—to see what kind of person you are."[119] Moreover, this message was originally a lot longer in the approved version of the script but was shortened during filming, no doubt to enhance the melodramatic impact.[120] Indeed, for the final sentence, the camera remains in a close-up reaction shot of Kurata's grief-stricken face, a tear shimmering in the lamplight under each eye. This is very much the treatment one might expect in a romantic melodrama where, say, one lover is being told terrible news about the other: the audience knows to expect the surviving character will be in deep emotional turmoil, and the camera voyeuristically zeroes in on the face in an exploitative close-up.

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[119] The text reads, in katakana, "Kurata sama, watakushi wa Jacob ni korosareru no wa nan to mo arimasen. Tada hitome osugata ga mitakatta, dono yō na okata ka."

[120] Itakura has pointed out this change, by which longer statements explaining how painful (*tsurai*) living as a blind woman had been were deleted from her pin-hole *kakioki*, cannot have been due to Eiren's recommended changes for the 1953 re-release, since the only changes requested were re-editing to make the foreigners look less bad, cutting of two instances of the term 'ketō' (hairy foreigner), and one instance of the word ahen (opium). See Itakura, p. 32. The opium reference, according to Katō Mikirō, was part of a speech Kurata made saying Jacob must have poisoned his laborers with opium, and that's why they weren't able to flee the impending explosion; see Katō, pp. 92-93.

In the final sequence of his film, Itō continues to keep the focus on Oriki's personal sacrifice. Kurata, Chako and Sugisaku, carrying Oriki's ashes, go to see the steamship she saved. But instead of praising her for being so patriotically minded per se, they reassure one another that she can 'see' the distant ship now despite her blindness while she was alive. Kurata does rather peremptorily claim, to assuage the fears of the two children, that she is now a "god" (*kami*) who lives on in—or, perhaps, as—that ship, an interpretation very much consistent with the national policy message desired by the state: even the weakest and least of the Japanese subjects can undergo apotheosis through the ultimate sacrifice, and they will come to inhabit Japan's war materiel, making the defense of the nation sacred work. The children call out to the ship and "as if in answer," as the script notes, the ship's horn blows. One can view this final scene, in which Oriki is associated with the steamship, as a stirring, patriotic ending, or as a mere smokescreen designed to hide her more personal motive for acting—to save Kurata, the man she loved.

Itō's triumph in this film, and what perhaps explains its box office success even more than the exciting action sequences or the star power of Arakan and Koto Itoji, is this essential ambiguity, this layering of the filmic text to ensure that multiple interpretations remained possible. It was surely a delicate balancing act, preventing any of the various and often contradictory themes and potential motivations from seeming so strong as to preclude the others. He found in the character of Kurama Tengu, who was never seen as a fanatical anti-foreign activist, and this early Meiji setting precisely the ideological ambivalence—rather than simple hatred—toward the West and modernity he wanted. He makes expert use of the tension between the various themes of Bakumatsu and early Meiji history, keeping the film ambivalent to the very end: those viewers so inclined could have read it as a straightforward and patriotic hate-the-enemy film, while audience members searching for hidden transcripts could find in the strong

romantic theme and scenes of circus merriment a resistance of sorts against a simple national policy message. And throughout, Itō keeps it entertaining, ensuring many would come to see it.

What sort of historical interpretation of the Bakumatsu/early Meiji period would such viewers be likely to take away after leaving the theater? Many would have noticed the specter of the predatory West, connecting the profit-seeking excesses of Jacob with more modern-day criticisms of Great Britain and the United States as greedy imperialist nations. Others might have sensed the extremely complicated nature of that period's history, perhaps even noting the fact that Itō chose to glorify the government official who ultimately provides Miura with the forces necessary to save the day: none other than Saigō, Japan's most famous rebel. As a man who very soon after 1871 grew disillusioned enough with the Meiji government to quit his post and then, eventually, take up arms in an attempt to overthrow that very government, Saigō was a troubling figure for those who claimed the Meiji era led naturally and teleologically to the wartime present.

The choice by Itō in his script and in the finished film to have Kurata be an old friend of Saigō, rather than a more politically safe Meiji leader, is a significant one. Saigō had been a rallying point for dissenters and critics of the Meiji Restoration from the very beginning, and even more so after his pardon in 1889; those who wished to suggest that the Restoration was incomplete or problematic had only to point to Saigō as evidence of the less than idyllic reality of the Restoration and its ultimate meaning. This focus on Saigō as linchpin for those questioning the historical legacy of the Restoration found concrete form in a publishing boom in the 1890s and in more specific historiographical efforts such as Japan's first 'modern' biography, which was of Saigō, published in 1895.[121] Itō knew full well that Saigō was a politically ambivalent figure to present in his film, yet he decided to continue that tradition of attention to Saigō, and even highlighted some of Saigō's more problematic characteristics in his script.

[121] Wert, p. 51.

Itō's handwritten script called for a meeting between Miura and Saigō.[122] Upon securing an audience with Saigō, Miura was to launch into a speech about the danger to national defense and prestige that Jacob's factory presents via the threat to the steamship, only to have Saigō cut him off with a long speech of his own, concluding by saying there was no need to go on and on about some steamship when he could have just said that his old friend Kurata is in danger: "I (Saigō) will never let Kurata die!" But this entire scene was cut, suggesting that presenting Saigō on screen was deemed too risky, too potentially subversive, especially given the fact that he apparently values the safety of his comrades above issues of national defense.[123] Itō's utilization of Saigō and his transgressive legacy, and the choice to identify Kurama Tengu as his old friend and ally, is consistent with Itō's original plan to have Kurama Tengu smash crooked Japanese government officials and institutions, rooting out corruption from within. It is not so compatible with a reading of the film as an earnest celebration of national unity against foreign oppression.

Some viewers doubtless noticed that even the foreign menace is not presented monolithically. Foreigners—and their ideologies, like capitalism—bring boons as well as dangers, a point Itō carefully emphasizes in his depiction of Dr. Hepburn. And even money has an ironic role to play, when the stack of coins save Kurata from a lethal bullet. In short, the film is a complex tangle of suggestive possibilities, and audience attempts to untangle it probably varied quite a bit from individual to individual. But few, I think, would have missed the romance—in 1942 already frowned upon by censors as well as some private critics as frivolous and a distraction from a spiritual commitment to Japan and the war effort—budding between

[122] This scene was still in the original numbering (as scene 88), so it may have been cut after being mentioned unfavorably in a *kondankai*, one of the informal advice sessions censors would offer during the filmmaking process; had it survived into later versions of the script, it would have been incorporated into the new numbering scheme.
[123] The script can be examined at the Itō Daisuke bunko collection in the Museum of Kyoto (Kyoto bunka hakubutsukan, or Bunpaku for short). Saigō's actual words to "Miura-don" in the script were: "Saigō wa Kurata wo shinaseru koto narimōsan!"

Kurata and Oriki, or her true motivations in sacrificing herself. Viewers may have noticed that throughout the film hidden or hard to decipher messages are frequently being scrawled, usually under duress and with unconventional writing tools like, for instance, Ohara's fingernail. In that sense, it is especially intriguing that the most concrete evidence of Oriki's love, whose inclusion as a theme can be seen as a hidden transcript of resistance to the state, also takes the form of a literal transcript: Oriki's will, written in secret with another symbol of their love, Kurata's pin.

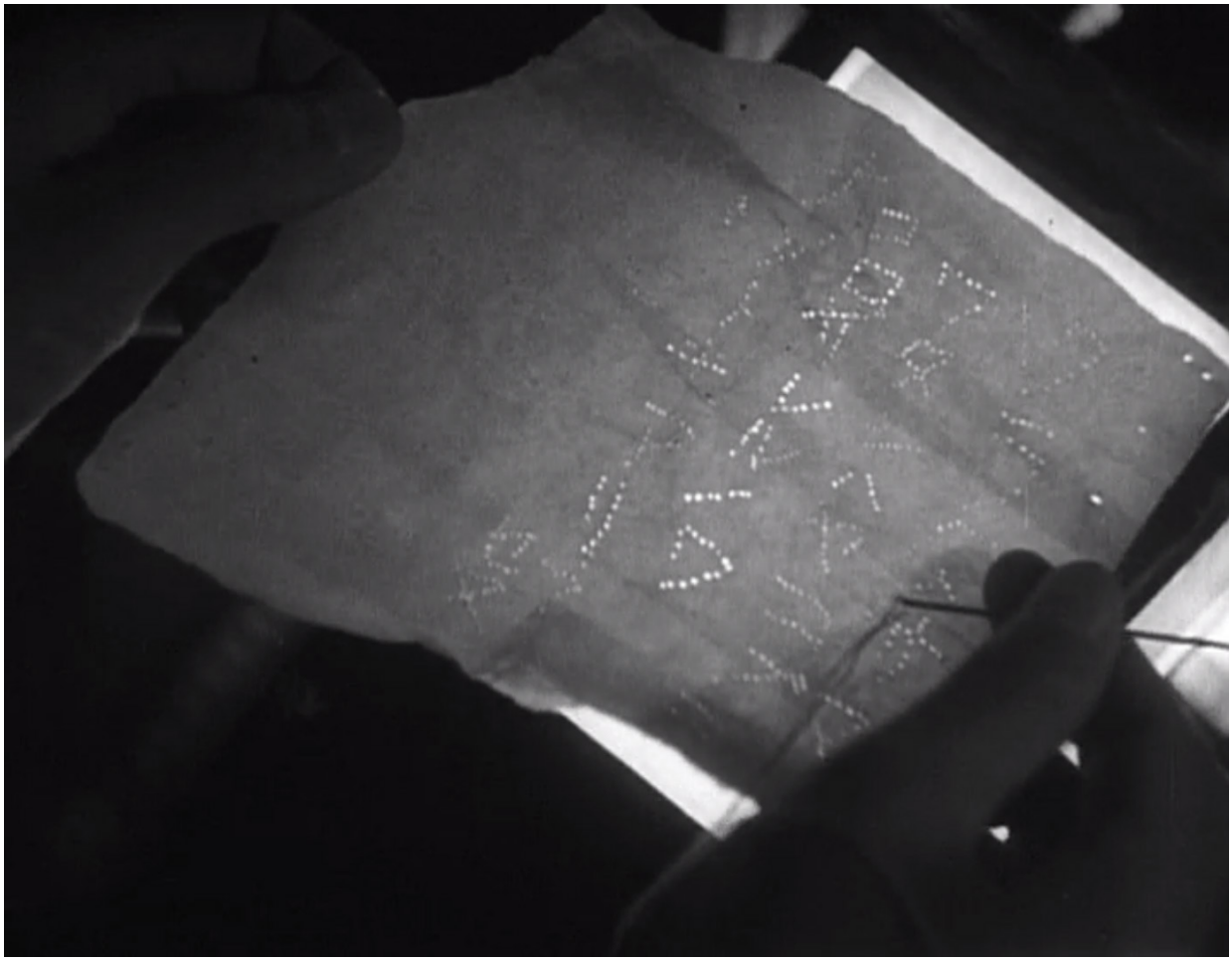


Figure 19: Miura holds a literal hidden transcript of Oriki's love, written with Kurata's pin. Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, 88:05.

Comparing Itō's Version to Other 1940s Kurama Tengu Films

Intriguingly, there is a 1941 Kurama Tengu film, Suganuma Kanji's *Kurama Tengu and the Secret Messenger to Satsuma* (*Kurama Tengu Satsuma misshi*, hereinafter "*Secret*

Messenger"), which is very similar in plot to Itō's 1942 effort. Both films emphasize the xenophobic, rather than country-opening, aspect of the pro-imperial political platform, and suggest Japan is being threatened by foreign nations, deploying Kurama Tengu as a symbol of Japanese resistance to foreign encroachment. Both also display a certain exoticism with Restoration-era (*Secret Messenger* is set in 1868, Itō's film in 1871) Yokohama sets and other elements sure to please audiences. As Yamane Sadao has pointed out, it is difficult indeed to imagine that Itō deliberately copied the work of a no-name director like Suganuma; it is more likely the case that social and industrial conditions in 1941-2 were such that this sort of movie would be green-lit while other possibilities were not permitted.[124] And to be sure, Itō's inability to get his initial ideas for a Kurama Tengu film approved by the censors provides evidence that the range of storytelling possibilities for a Kurama Tengu project was severely limited by late 1942. Perhaps Marune Santarō (who wrote the script under a pseudonym) engaged in a bit of self-censorship in producing this anti-foreign screenplay.[125] But after a close viewing, it is difficult to agree that the film was intended to be, like Itō's film, a kind of hate-the-(Western) enemy film, or differed nearly as much as Itō's had from typical Kurama Tengu stories, because by contrast with Itō's effort, the villains are the French, already defeated by Germany and now, as Vichy France, allies of Japan, not the opponents of the Pacific War, the Anglo-Americans.

For the purposes of uncovering the uses and applications of depictions of Bakumatsu history in Kurama Tengu films, the choice of the French as enemy makes very straightforward sense. *Secret Messenger* takes place in early 1868, after the official Restoration of Governmental Power to the Emperor (*taisei hōkan*) and the subsequent battle of Toba-Fushimi but before the Shogunate side had decisively surrendered. Indeed, the French continued to support the former

[124] Yamane, *Kurama Tengu Satsuma misshi* tanoshimi zeminaaru.
[125] Yamane claimed in the "explanation" (*kaisetsu*) portion of the same insert for *Secret Messenger* that the screenwriter listed, Raisu Jūbei, was a pen-name of Marune's.

Shogunate forces deep into the Boshin War, and having Kurama Tengu and his pro-imperial allies fight against the staunchly pro-Tokugawa French in that early 1868 context was not at all inconsistent with portrayals of Kurata as a staunch opponent of pro-Tokugawa forces everywhere.

Nor does *Secret Messenger* portray the French as villainously as were Jacob and his minions in Itō's *Kurama Tengu*. One sympathetic French soldier gives an enemy about to be executed a final drag on a cigarette, and although it is true the French are plotting to supply the Shogunate with a potentially game-changing shipment of weapons, the conspiracy is military, not capitalistic/anti-Japanese, in nature, unlike with Jacob's counterfeiting scheme. Moreover, although both films feature a climax centered around a ship, in Itō's film the ship is Japanese, a key component in Japan's national defense and must be saved at all costs, whereas in *Secret Messenger* the ship holds weapons for the Shogunate and hence must be destroyed at all costs.

In some ways, China, then Japan's only enemy, is being indirectly vilified in *Secret Messenger*. It is frequently emphasized in the film that the shipment of arms, though presumably French in origin, is coming from Shanghai. Worse yet, in the film's tense final confrontation on board ship between Kurama Tengu and the French and pro-Shogunate conspirators, in addition to one French shooter Kurata dispatches, there is one enemy coded as Chinese who treacherously tries to shoot Kurama in the scene, only to be himself shot when Kurama spots him first.

Who, then, is the true enemy? The French are simply helping their sworn allies, the Shogunate. The Chinese seem to be accomplices, not instigators, of the conspiracy. Based on the dialogue in the denouement, the true villains of the film are the Shogunate supporters, who would risk a crippling alliance with a foreign power to hang onto power, not realizing or perhaps simply not caring that the chaos stemming from a civil war in which both sides are evenly matched would allow other foreign countries to swoop in and colonize Japan (as Kurata says at

one point in the film).[126] When he bursts in on them all toasting the new arms deal with France, he reserves his anger, not for the French, but for those Japanese willing to sell out their country for weapons, saying with withering innuendo, "So, how do they taste? These French cigarettes?" He then makes sure to kill the main Japanese conspirator, an act far more retributive and personal than his subsequent sinking of the ship, which is presented as simply something that must be done. Thus, *Secret Messenger* is in a very real sense closer to Itō's initial film proposal, about exposing corruption and disunity among the Japanese themselves during the chaos of the Restoration, than the film Itō was ultimately able to make, and so the difference in dates, 1941 versus 1942, pre- and post-Pearl Harbor, seems all too significant.

In the next chapter, the effects of the Pacific War on depictions of the Bakumatsu will be discussed more fully, specifically with regards to hate the enemy history films (*rekishi eiga*). It seems fitting, therefore, to conclude the current chapter with a note about the final Kurama Tengu film made before the surrender, namely Shōchiku Shimogamo's 1944 hit[127] *The Tengu Did It (Tengu daoshi*), directed by Inoue Kintarō and produced by Makino Masahiro.[128] In a manner far more blatant than either *Secret Messenger* or Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, *The Tengu Did It* proclaims the hatefulness of the Western enemy and the glorious unity between Japan and China. British predations in 1860s Japan are thwarted by the appearance of Kurama Tengu, whose identity is a mystery even for the audience (unlike when watching Nikkatsu or Daiei films with the iconic Arakan in the title role). In a stunning turn, Kurama Tengu is revealed to be, not one

[126] Once again, Kurata must convince an emotionally convertible woman to abandon her familial ties to the pro-Tokugawa cause and support his own jōi mission, and he points out the dangers of a strong Shogunate-France alliance to her in an effort to convince her; what actually wins her over, however, is his magnanimity in treating her so well despite her status as an enemy. The seeds of doubt that kindness plants in her heart lead eventually to her decision to abandon the pro-Tokugawa cause and aid Kurata.
[127] The film placed 13th for the first half of 1944—far ahead of heavily studied films like Kurosawa's *Ichiban utsukushiku* (27th)—and had more than a million viewers. *Nippon eiga* #15 (Nov. 15, 1944), p. 26 (vol. 31, p. 538).
[128] The expression "tengu daoshi" refers to a mysterious phenomenon in mountainous areas in Japan: there is a sound of large trees crashing down to the earth yet, upon investigation, no trees have been felled, leading to the notion that "the tengu (long-nosed goblins) must have done it."

man, but Everyman, or in other words, all Japan and China, all Asia, are standing united against the West and are not afraid to rise up, don the cowl and fight.[129] The central conflict of the film is over the fate of the many Chinese held captive on the British ship, for whose sake the mostly Japanese Kurama Tengus continue to fight; when a Chinese character wonders aloud why one such was risking his life for the Chinese, he pompously proclaims, "there is no such thing as 'Nihon' or 'Shina'!" But as we shall see in the following chapter, and indeed have already seen with the presence of sympathetic foreigners like Hepburn in Itō's *Kurama Tengu*, this sort of un-nuanced portrayal of pan-Asian solidarity in the face of Western oppression was actually the exception rather than the rule in Bakumatsu history films.

[129] Several of the film's main characters adopt the Kurama Tengu persona temporarily to strike terror into the hearts of the British, including Hou, a Chinese character (who undergoes a *Usual Suspects*-esque transformation from servile, bent-backed Chinese to straight-backed warrior, using martial arts to defeat several British stooges. The role of Hou is listed as being performed by an actor named Sakai Takeshi, continuing the standard and perhaps inevitable practice of giving the parts of all foreigners with spoken lines to Japanese. For example, the named "British" characters like 'Jim', are also played by Japanese, though at the level of extras, one or two genuinely white faces seemed to be present (but their background presence in deep focus long shots prevents me from being certain).

Chapter Four

Consuming History, Hating the Enemy

Introduction: the Problem of Sources, the Problem of History

There is at least one pivotal question about Japan's wartime popular culture that has yet to be convincingly answered. What sort of relationship existed between outlets of popular culture like movies and the ordinary Japanese subject's actions, at home or at the front, during the war?[1] Or, put differently, to what extent did popular culture output, especially movies, mobilize Japanese for—or against—the war effort? As we shall see, cinematic representations of Japanese history, and in particular representations of the ever-popular Bakumatsu period, appeared to resonate strongly with wartime Japanese audiences, despite the dramatically different social conditions Japanese subjects faced in the early 1940s compared to earlier moments of Bakumatsu film popularity like the mid 1920s.

The Japanese film industry's wartime output is sometimes contrasted with American film propaganda efforts.[2] The contrast is purportedly self-evident: Americans made Hate the Enemy films, while Japanese made what one might call Love the Self films. Peter High describes such films as "spiritist" rather than rational, a celebration of the putatively unique racial traits only Japanese were thought to possess, and where the Western enemy was mentioned or depicted at all, the argument goes, he was shown with considerable ambivalence.[3]

This line of argument initially seems compelling, but only in the context of a very selective viewing of the films made in early 1940s Japan. Only a bare handful of wartime films

[1] Eric Rentschler's nuanced study of Nazi-era film production in *The Ministry of Illusion* inspired me to ask this.
[2] For the theory that the conventions of Japanese film production meant too great a preoccupation with the Self to worry about depicting a hateful Other, see Dower, *War without Mercy*, p. 254, among many places.
[3] High, *Imperial Screen,* p. 369.

are readily available in contemporary formats like DVD and Blu-ray, which can lead to a path of least resistance selection bias where films that have already been exhaustively studied continue to claim the lion's share of attention simply because they are easier and easier to find. This is especially pernicious in the case of auteur studies, where the most exceptional filmmakers and, among their oeuvre, the films which depart the most from mainstream popular culture are analyzed without regard to viewer reception when they were made; as a consequence, one runs the risk of developing a theory of wartime Japanese film culture based entirely on a handful of exceptional cases—not always or even usually box office successes—and ignoring the wildly popular lowbrow films audiences were actually flocking to see.

For example, by limiting the body of films analyzed solely to the handful of famous films set in the present that were directly about the war, one might easily conclude that, sure enough, Japanese filmmakers and, presumably, moviegoers were more interested with the Japanese Self than with hating the Other. But before rushing to the conclusion that because direct depictions of a despicable enemy in war films are few, Japanese must have had no film outlet for hating the Western enemy, other film genres, and more importantly, films of little perceived artistic merit (which are thus harder to find today) but were box office successes should be examined as well.

Viewing some of those box office hits today is difficult but certainly not impossible to arrange. As much as 15% of Japan's total fiction film output from 1937-1945, or about 300 films total out of 2000 produced, can still be viewed today, and although only a tiny number of these surviving films—almost invariably those made by a director identified in the postwar period as an auteur, notably Yamanaka, Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi, and Naruse—have been transferred to DVD for commercial sale, over half of them are still available in limited numbers on older

formats like VHS, including many then-popular hits which have since been forgotten.[4] Those surviving wartime films which did receive a film to VHS conversion were released in the 1980s and 1990s, targeting the older generation, many of whom doubtless still remembered going to see those very films during the war. Film studios and other companies who paid for the expensive conversion process were gambling that members of the older generation would still want to see the heartthrobs of the 1930s and 1940s. The fact that such companies continued to release wartime titles until the VHS medium was rendered obsolete by DVD technology in the late 1990s—and, not coincidentally, as the older generation began to pass away, shrinking the pool of prospective buyers—suggests they were right to assume stars could still attract interest from those old enough to remember the stars in their heyday.[5]

It is true that many of the biggest box office successes of late 1930s and early 1940s Japan, including many of the films analyzed in this dissertation, have nothing overtly to do with Japan's war effort. But total war cast a long shadow throughout society. Virtually every film made during the timeframe of the Pacific War, especially from late 1943 on, after conditions on the homeland began to deteriorate, can be construed as in dialogue with the war and its effects on Japanese society. Subtle reminders of Japan's military and societal struggle abound, as chapter two, with its discussion of the pointed critique of the wartime present in Enoken's 1935 hit

[4] Furukawa, p. 8.

[5] One of the most high-profile companies who produced film to video conversions of prewar and wartime films for commercial VHS sale, Kinema Kurabu, eventually went out of business in the early 2000s, for two main reasons: the obsolescence of the VHS medium, and their reported inability to generate interest for their products in younger generations who had not grown up watching the prewar and wartime stars in theaters. One can see just how star-driven their efforts were by examining their final catalog, in which films of all the stars, but especially Hasegawa Kazuo, are heavily represented, and almost invariably feature close-up stills of the stars in a dramatic pose or, in Hasegawa's case, a melancholy downward gaze. The catalog is organized thematically into sub-genres, for example Melodrama, or Onna no namida, otoko no iji (Women's Tears, Men's Pride), yet Hasegawa receives his own classification, "Hasegawa Kazuo wo omou" (Longing for Hasegawa Kazuo), a mix (of period films and films set in the present) which occupies five out of forty-four total movie-listing pages in the catalog. Clearly business, at least in the late twentieth century, depended on prospective VHS tape buyers' nostalgic attachment to stars, not movie storylines or even genres per se, and when the number of prospective buyers began to fall through the attrition of time, the company was unable to continue, having failed to interest other generations in the prewar/wartime stars.

Enoken Plays Kondō Isami; chapter three, with Itō Daisuke's 1942 blockbuster *Kurama Tengu*; and chapter five, with the star-crossed lovers of *Kantarō of Ina* or *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* facing their wartime-esque dilemmas, make clear. As such, expanding the discussion beyond films overtly about the war to other genres can lead to valuable insights into the nature of Japanese notions of nationhood, selfhood and the Other. And one of the key components in the formation of the concept of the self—and the nation—is the creation and interpretation of history, the account of how and why one has come to the present situation.[6]

For Japanese, the crucible of modern selfhood and nationhood came in the Bakumatsu and early Meiji period. It is reasonable to infer, therefore, that wartime films about the Bakumatsu, and their interpretations of that convoluted transition to modern state and citizenry, were of pivotal importance to Japanese moviegoers of the 1940s, who were no doubt seeking to understand how Japan had come to the point of total war. Moreover, following the 1939 Film Law and the increasing pressure on the film industry, both from government officials like Fuwa Suketoshi and vociferous quasi-official ideologues[7] like Tsumura Hideo, to stop making carefree but ahistorical period films (*jidaigeki)* and start producing true history films (*rekishi eiga*), film projects set in the Bakumatsu period grew somewhat scarcer, though due to the prohibition of showing the Emperor on screen, history films set in earlier eras when the Emperor played a more

[6] Judging from the sheer quantity of period films, and especially the number of history films narrowly defined, that Japan has produced, history certainly seems to have been (and perhaps still is) considered more important in Japan than in almost any other country. Dower asserts that for modern Japan (mytho)history "played a role somewhat comparable to the sciences and social sciences in the West as a vehicle for affirming racial superiority; and the essence of the superiority was, in the final analysis, moralistic." Dower, *War without Mercy*, p. 205. In other words, the evidence for Japanese exceptionalism and notions of purity was to be found in its purportedly unique history, and this fixation on history in general helps explain the Japanese preoccupation with the Bakumatsu.

[7] The term "*minkan* (among the people) ideologue" originates with Carol Gluck, who used it in *Japan's Modern Myths* (pp. 9-10 and passim) to describe private or quasi-private Japanese subjects of an earlier era who voluntarily and enthusiastically supported the state through ideological projects (Tokutomi Sohō comes to mind); the term also applies quite well to figures like Tsumura in the 1930s and pre-surrender 1940s. See also High, p. 423.

active role in politics were rarer still.[8] But this reduction in supply boosted interest in those Bakumatsu films which studios did manage to finish, especially if they featured period film superstars like Bantsuma, Hasegawa Kazuo or Kataoka Chiezō. This more or less built-in popularity was a double-edged sword for the state, however; people came in droves to see them, but did they come to contemplate the political argument such films made about the meaning of the Bakumatsu period, or to see the stars and their flashy sword combat or romantic interludes?

In this chapter, I will cite surviving wartime Bakumatsu and Meiji-era history films to argue that Japan's wartime film production was far more complex and varied than a simple Love the Self model can adequately convey, nor was interpretation of the significance of the Bakumatsu itself stable within this body of films. Historical films made in Japan during the war present a far from united front in their interpretations of the Bakumatsu and its significance for Japan. The Bakumatsu, as a film setting, functioned during the war as a site of revolution, full of exciting action and sometimes subversive possibility.

The choice to set one's film within the context of Bakumatsu struggles toward modernity also provided filmmakers with considerable artistic freedom thanks to the very ambiguities of Bakumatsu history, and its colorful cast of (potentially) heroic characters and unusual situations. They were able to include a wider variety of entertainment content than a film set in the present could hope to include, since they could justify much in the name of historical accuracy. This state of affairs led to otherwise serious national policy-style (*kokusaku*) films whose propaganda impact is blunted, quite possibly intentionally, by the inclusion of romantic sub-plots, comic or even slapstick routines, musical numbers, parades and pageantry, sympathetic as well as hateful

[8] It was Tsumura's "Kinugasa Teinosuke he no tegami," in which he called for the director to create a third category, history films (*rekishi eiga*), which would be neither period films nor films set in the present (*gendaigeki*), that inspired Kinugasa to do precisely that, with *Ōsaka natsu no jin*, a film which was released in April of 1937. The film, despite being released before the war with China began, was also intended to address the war many (correctly) expected was about to break out. See Yamada, *Edison teki no kaiki,* pp. 192-193.

Westerners, and multiple languages, including snippets of the language of the enemy. This wide range of variation in depictive strategies for the same short historical period allowed filmmakers to embed a hidden transcript of resistance to the Japanese government's official interpretation of history and expansionist war aims.[9] And regardless of filmmaker intent, audiences themselves may have chosen to read some of the films subversively, especially near the end of the war, or simply ignored the heavy-handed political message of many such films in favor of the more engaging melodrama of the romantic sub-plot.

Audience reluctance to embrace straightforward national policy films shows tellingly in box office receipts; generally, the more histrionic in pro-state tone, the weaker the film performed.[10] In other words, it is true that in wartime Japan purely Hate the Enemy films represent a smaller proportion of overall film output than, say, in the United States, but is that really because of unique racio-ethnic characteristics, a mystical fixation on the Self, or simply because moviegoers wanted entertainment, not propaganda, in the movies? The logic of capitalism, to paraphrase Eric Cazdyn, dictated that the film industry in Japan—which was never nationalized and enjoyed a considerable degree of latitude despite government efforts to exert control—make what people actually wanted to see.[11] One way to interpret the sometimes jarringly "off-message" entertainment elements in various national policy films is that these films were a compromise, a hybrid of sorts between the propagandistic demands of the state and its censorship apparatus—whose informal advice sessions motivated filmmakers' decisions to include patriotic slogans in the opening credits and plenty of 'flag shots' in their film—and the

[9] The concept of hidden transcripts was developed by James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press, 1990.
[10] Furukawa Takahisa argues this point persuasively throughout his book, *Senjika no Nippon eiga*. On p. 125 he discusses the film contest for finest (kokusaku) narrative film held in 1940 by the Home Ministry, in which all the prize-winning films of the competition flopped at the box office despite heavy official promotion and advertising.
[11] The more provocative term Eric Cazdyn uses is "flash of capital" but throughout the eponymous book, he discusses the capitalist logic at work in film production and marketing. See Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital*.

desire of the audience for entertainment.[12] This implicit compromise between filmmaker and censor was occasionally made explicit, as with film producer's Mori Iwao's quid pro quo friendship with a military police (*kenpeitai*) officer, who agreed to support Mori's drive to produce pure entertainment film products (and provided Mori with access to black-market food commodities to which only the military police had access) in exchange for Mori's support for government policy.[13]

The Bakumatsu period's sustained popularity throughout both peacetime and wartime requires explanation as well. What made the Bakumatsu so fruitful a setting for filmmakers in the 1940s who wished to register their lack of support for the Japanese state is precisely the period's chaotic complexity, with its confusing jumble of actors who sometimes changed their perspective a full 180 degrees. For example, Takasugi and other xenophobic activists from Chōshū were largely, and often fanatically, in support of physical expulsion of the foreigners, and enacted that policy with the attack on foreign shipping in Shimonoseki Strait. But the incontestable superiority of the Western military, as shown in its reprisals against Chōshū in 1863 and 1864, converted almost all of these xenophobic fanatics to precisely the opposite position, namely opening the country (*kaikoku*), and redirected their patriotic fury against not the foreigners but the Shogunate. What is so fascinating about this about-face is that as a result of it, within four years of their exultation at the news of the assassination of Ii Naosuke, the key architect of Japan's opening, they had come into full agreement with him, meaning that he, and through him the Shogunate, had been right and they had been wrong all along. Yet instead of

[12] For more information about the *kondankai* in the film world (regrettably no written record was kept of these meetings, as they were intended to be informal and non-binding, at least in theory), see Kasza, p. 233.
[13] High, p. 336. This telling anecdote about forming connections with individual representatives of the state, while it helps complicate a view of the state as monolithic, also illuminates the Faustian deals would-be filmmakers had no choice but to make if they wished to secure approval for their products, especially if heavily entertainment-oriented.

showing contrition for their fanaticism, or support for the Shogunate (now proven right), they redoubled their opposition to the Shogunate despite now sharing much the same political outlook.

It is far from clear who among all this chaos would truly deserve to be celebrated as a national hero. In some places and times, there is nothing so damning in the eyes of public opinion as the perception that a politician or other public figure is a flip-flopper on key issues, changing what are purportedly deeply held beliefs whenever it is expedient to do so. After all, it is difficult to present such a figure as wise and resolute if he or she frequently advocates radical about-faces in policy. Given two choices, and given such a person's admission that one is better than the other, he or she must have been wrong either before the 180-degree shift or after it. The situation becomes more difficult still if the public figure had earlier attacked political rivals for espousing the very belief (for example, opening the country to foreign trade) s/he now accepts. But Japanese heroes of the Bakumatsu are celebrated above all for their sincerity, despite the waffling of the loyalists (*shishi*) on key issues like opening the country to foreigners and, worse yet, their adoption of what amounts to terrorism against those like Ii Naosuke and his successors for supporting the opening of the country, a policy which they later came to support themselves.

It would be easy to see the political fanaticism of the loyalists as morally reprehensible, yet that perspective is not often visible in Japanese popular culture. Instead the discourse is dominated by the comforting if bizarre argument, dubbed the "Meiji bias" by Conrad Totman, that everyone on both sides of the struggle was blameless and sincere, a true patriot, and all the deaths were tragedies but none of the murders were crimes.[14] If 'patriots' like Takasugi had really put their country ahead of personal considerations (as presumably patriots ought to do), one

[14] As described in chapter one, Totman's idea is that when supporters of those on the losing side of the Restoration struggle wished to appeal to the public that a particular figure was worthy of veneration, they chose not to vilify the Satsuma-Chōshū victors but to insist their chosen hero, too, was just as patriotic as those of the victorious side. See Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate*, p. 558.

might expect a show of contrition after realizing that individuals like Ii were more foresighted than they had been, and perhaps even a hint of willingness to negotiate with the Shogunate peacefully since that would surely have been better for the country than a messy and ideologically confused civil war. Instead they displayed a rather vindictive desire for personal vengeance against the Shogunate (in Takasugi and Kido's case, for the execution of their teacher Yoshida Shōin in 1859) which, it would seem, motivated their continued topple-the-Shogunate (*tōbaku*) activities more than concern for the country. Victor's justice meted out against former Tokugawa officials like Oguri Kōzukenosuke or Kondō Isami was often transparently personal, amounting to little more than a grudge and sometimes not even an accurate one (Kondō was blamed, almost certainly wrongly, for Sakamoto Ryōma's assassination).[15] Worst of all, the victors arguably were motivated less by patriotism than by a self-serving desire for power, pragmatically staging a coup and replacing the Tokugawa Shogunate with a new oligarchy of their own making simply because they realized that they could.

Yet despite their many faults, in the eyes of public opinion at the time and even many decades later, in the 1940s and indeed today, the loyalists have almost never been seen or shown in a consistently negative light. Moreover, the rehabilitation of villains like Kondō Isami or Ii Naosuke led not to a corresponding vilification of the loyalists but instead a willingness to include pro-Tokugawa figures in Japan's pantheon of tragic heroes; in other words, starting in the late 1920s, the Bakumatsu, and by implication Japan itself, no longer had any real villains, only heroes who disagreed with each other over the best course for Japan to take. In such a situation, there can be no condemnation for any act, no matter how brutal, which had important implications for public perceptions of later acts of political terrorism like the assassinations of

[15] See Michael Wert, *Meiji Restoration Losers*, p. 37, for information on the vengeful execution of Oguri, Sagara Sōzō and Kondō Isami, all of whom were executed by the same Tosandō army.

prime ministers (Hara's murder was compared by some to Ii's assassination); if the sincerity of one's motivation is everything and the actual deed nothing, than anything can be excused.

In some ways, this de-vilifying of Japanese history is due to the limitations of film as a storytelling medium. It is not possible to present, in just a few hours (let alone within the 74-minute limit for feature films enacted by the Home Ministry during the later stages of the war), even a tiny portion of the ideological complexity of a period such as the Bakumatsu, nor to construct a compelling case for why, say, Ii Naosuke had to be assassinated, because the exposition required in the making of such a case, the minute explanations of this decision or that policy, would be both endless and terribly tedious.[16] Films cannot really 'tell,' or in other words explain ideological considerations, without devolving into an on-screen lecture; they can only 'show,' and seek to arouse an emotional response in viewers through the showing.[17] The thrill and pathos of a man carrying out an assassination—or being assassinated—is more compelling than exposition-heavy discussion of his political views. In any case, it would be a strange film which tried to show a figure like Takasugi both before and after his about-face on the exclusion versus opening of the country issue, since the moral foundation of actions taken in support of exclusion and against the opening of the country would crumble if the protagonist later came to accept fully the necessity of opening the country.

Yet that is one of the key reasons why the Bakumatsu is so enduringly popular in Japanese culture, especially in the film world. Its extraordinary complexity allows would-be filmmakers to select almost any ideological position from which to make a film, and without worrying about opening themselves to charges of distorting the truth with an incomplete

[16] As we saw in chapter one, when a filmmaker (like Ikeda Tomiyasu) attempted to 'tell', to do justice to the historical forces at work in the late 1850s, he ended up resorting to a tremendous number of very exposition-heavy intertitles and a very long and not particularly eventful film.

[17] Which is not to say that some did not try to use film as a vehicle for conveying ideology; the most famous such attempt in Japan was when Araki Sadao lectured the camera/populace in *Hijōji Nippon* in 1933.

depiction. All depictions of the period are necessarily incomplete, it simply not being possible, nor in any way desirable from a storytelling standpoint, to chronicle on film all the permutations of the main historical actors and chart the course of their giant ideological leaps.

The Anglo-Satsuma War on Film: *The Pirates' Flag Is Blasted Away*

While the Bakumatsu's complexity allowed filmmakers considerable leeway, even during the war, to make the sort of film they wished to make, the Japanese state had demands of its own for film topics and content, and those demands escalated in the early 1940s, causing plenty of friction between the still-private film industry and a state control apparatus frustrated by the lack of compliance with its aims. Negotiations between filmmakers, especially those less ideologically committed to the war effort, and state officials were often protracted and far from harmonious. The conflicting aims of each side frequently pulled both into an uncomfortable compromise, where the final film would contain plenty of rhetoric in support of state war aims yet also, where permissible, entertaining 'cinema of attraction' touches to please the audience.[18]

Yet while plenty of films, even those made at the height of the war, feature entertaining flourishes, not all Bakumatsu hate the enemy history films made during the war contain actual hidden transcripts. Some were far more straightforward in their hate the enemy message. One of the few such films to survive the war intact was *The Pirates' Flag Is Blown Away* (*Kaizokuki futtobu,* hereinafter "Pirate Flag", dir. Tsuji Kichirō and Makino Shinzō*)*, a 1943 film about the Anglo-Satsuma war of 1863. Unlike Itō's *Kurama Tengu* with Arakan, discussed in chapter three, or Inagaki Hiroshi's *Signal Fires over Shanghai/Remorse in Shanghai* (*Noroshi wa Shanghai ni*

[18] The idea of the cinema of attraction(s) as proposed by Tom Gunning (1986) applies quite well to the film situation in wartime Japan, where audiences appear to have gone to see diegesis-straining spectacle, not a self-contained narrative of state propaganda, and a film which contained none of the former was unlikely to attract anyone to influence. In this way, censors too faced the uncomfortable need to accommodate off-message entertainment elements in otherwise propagandistic films, in order to ensure there would be an audience to influence at all.

agaru/Chunjiang yihen, hereinafter *Signal Fires*) with Bantsuma (analyzed below), this film had neither a first-rate director nor a superstar actor. This is due partly to the realities of the film studio system in Japan; the other two were produced by Daiei, which had both major directors and major actors in abundance, whereas *Pirate Flag* was produced by Shōchiku's Kyoto (Shimogamo) studio, a minor tributary of the massive Shōchiku film production based in Ōfuna near Tokyo, and apart from this little Shimogamo studio firmly rooted in production of films set in the present, or any time after 1868 (*gendaigeki*). Shōchiku only half-heartedly attempted to make period films in the 1940s and none of their offerings could seriously compete with Daiei or even Tōhō, each of which had a far more impressive lineup of acting and filmmaking talent devoted to period films. Daiei, in particular, benefited a great deal from the industry's forced consolidation; the influx of star talent in both the action and production side allowed them the easiest path to what Anita Elberse has dubbed a 'blockbuster strategy', focusing its resources disproportionately on a select few films with very high production value due to the presence of multiple superstar actors, an A-list director, and in some cases technically advanced (and therefore expensive) special effects, betting heavily that the added spectacle would draw audiences.[19] But Shōchiku's period film arm in Kyoto lacked any such infrastructure; the effort made to market the film was rather lackluster, with only a handful of ads being placed in *Eiga junpō*, the wartime incarnation of *Kinema junpō*.[20] There was also little evidence of much effort

[19] See Elberse, p. 4, for an outline of the blockbuster (also known as the 'event-film') strategy, which involves heavy investment in a handful of high-profile projects rather than spreading one's investment evenly over many products.
[20] One quarter-page ad can be found in *Eiga junpō* vol. 51 p. 156, and a full-page ad—consisting almost entirely of stills showcasing the forbearance of Sōhachi and the men of Satsuma when presented with the mustache-twirling malice of the foreigners, as well as a heavy emphasis on the pure love between Yuri and Sōhachi, as represented by her adoring upturned eyes in one still—but very little text, in the final issue of November 21, 1943, appearing in *Eiga junpō* vol. 51, n.p. There is also a cast and crew list and plot summary on pp. 297-298 of the same volume, and a two-page photo spread (Fig. 20 below) again most prominently featuring Miyagi Chikako gazing up adoringly, juxtaposed by a picture of Kamiyama Sōjin as the British commander Joslin, who is brandishing a gun and looking positively maniacal, and Takada Kōkichi looking down at Joslin with an appropriately resolute expression.

beyond those ads in the way of fliers and so forth.[21] This unfavorable context is important when evaluating *Pirate Flag*, which did not perform very well at the box office or earn critical praise.[22]

Pirate Flag, unlike either Itō's *Kurama Tengu* or Inagaki's *Signal Fires*, presents the foreign enemy without any trace of nuance. The British as portrayed in this film are one-dimensional in their maliciousness, seeming to take delight in insulting the Japanese for no purpose whatsoever, and there is no figure comparable to Dr. Hepburn in *Kurama Tengu* or Medhurst in *Signal Fires* to suggest any positive variations in the British national character. However, like the other hate the enemy films discussed in this chapter, *Pirate Flag* did manage to secure Caucasian (amateur) actors for the bit parts, while following Itō's strategy in *Kurama Tengu* of leaving the key villain roles to be played by Japanese actors who specialized in portraying Westerners. Indeed, the primary antagonist of the film, the British fleet commander, is played by Kamiyama Sōjin, the very actor who appeared as Jacob in *Kurama Tengu*,[23] and another key 'Westerner' role by Saitō Tatsuo, a frequent collaborator with Ozu Yasujirō.

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[21] It is true that Shōchiku did manage to get relatively well-known actors like Saitō Tatsuo to appear in the film, but the lead role of Sōhachi was played by an actor who was far indeed from the level of fame of the industry's top period film stars. As Elberse has pointed out, the vast majority of people only focus on, and remember the names of, the handful of people at the very top of the industry, and because human psychology tends to make us interested in whoever others are interested in, this creates a self-sustaining advantage helping those top-level performers to remain famous and preventing those one or more tiers down from breaking through. See Elberse, p. 89.

[22] In fact, perhaps precisely because the film's preferred reading was so straightforwardly and histrionically in support of the war effort, thereby offering comparatively less material for negotiated or oppositional readings (especially compared to the unabashed romance of *Ina no Kantarō*) it was far from a hit with audiences, placing near the bottom of the film industry's releases in 1943: it was 58th out of the total of 68 films by total number of admissions. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944-1945), p. 107.

[23] There is some disagreement over whether the role of British antagonist Joslin was actually played by Kamiyama Sōjin. The National Film Center's listing for the film claims the role was in fact played by Nishimura Seiji, but the short advertisement for *Pirate Flag* I discovered in the Museum of Kyoto's Fushimi handbill (*chirashi*) collection as well as the one-page ad in *Eiga junpō* claim it was Kamiyama Sōjin (as does JMDB, but that website is based largely on print sources like *Eiga junpō*). Having viewed both the stills and the film itself I am almost certain it was indeed Kamiyama, though I cannot be sure, having had the opportunity to view this film only once; the only known extant print of the film is at the National Film Center in Tokyo, where arranging screenings is both difficult and expensive. Further obscuring the issue of casting and the accuracy of printed materials about the film is the fact that the National Film Center data on *Pirate Flag* (after incorrectly claiming the film dates from 1942) lists the father character's name as Ikeda Ryūhei, while the Fushimi handbill ad has it as "Ikeda Gōhei."

The plot of *Pirate Flag* concerns the Anglo-Satsuma War, from the causes of the conflict to the climactic bombardment of Kagoshima by the British. The issue of what caused the war is a complicated historical question and would require a lot more than a mere 75 minutes' running time to analyze, so predictably enough, the film adopts a rather simplistic view of the conflict: the British were all wrong, all the time, and the Japanese endured their rudeness and barbarity as long as possible until finally they had no choice but to strike a blow for justice. The film opens with the notorious Namamugi Incident (also known as the Richardson Affair) of 1862, and the film's interpretation of history immediately embellishes the known—or at least commonly accepted—features of the incident to paint a more incendiary picture.

In the film, the treatment of the Namamugi Incident is meant to demonstrate the shocking ignorance and lack of propriety of the Westerners and the tremendous forbearance of the Japanese—as well as their extraordinary strength if aroused to fury. Three Westerners, played by Caucasians, are riding (near Kanagawa, presumably) when the Satsuma alternate attendance (*sankin kōtai*) procession goes by on the way back to Satsuma from Edo, and far from dismounting, the woman among them, encouraged by one of the men, actually goes so far as to knock a leaf off the hat of one of the samurai as he passes. A close-up of his face reveals his fury but also his strength of will—he grits his teeth and bears the humiliation. But then, inexplicably, the three Westerners decide to ride their horses right through the middle of the procession, near the daimyō regent Hisamitsu's palanquin, which triggers a rapid montage of reaction shots of the samurai, who soon leap into action and expertly cut the two men down; the scene ends with the sound of the woman's cries for help, in English, still audible, though her fate remains unknown.

Historically, Charles Richardson, leading a four-person party on horseback, was mortally wounded but his two male companions managed to escape despite their own injuries, and his

female companion escaped unharmed. Needless to say, the leaf-brushing episode is not mentioned in any of the accounts of the incident that survive, but more significant than that is the fact that the film's account exaggerates the martial capabilities of the Japanese when aroused to anger. The lethality of the Japanese swordsmen is also consistent with period film convention: virtuous warriors almost never merely wound their opponents, since a non-lethal cut is in some sense a failure. Allowing some British to survive the onslaught would weaken the scene's impact, and all for the dubious benefit of factual accuracy.

In hate the enemy films, such accuracy is never the primary consideration, and so the legality of the British actions or the Japanese response are not at issue here. Instead, consistent with film's medium-specific emotional impact, the scene highlights the intractable and essential arrogance of the British.[24] In other words, instead of using this incident to discuss the unequal treaties and the violation of sovereignty represented by extraterritoriality, or even to emphasize the clever way Satsuma used the Richardson indemnity issue to humiliate and weaken the Shogunate, the filmmakers focused on putatively national and unchangeable characteristics, namely Japanese forbearance and British insolence, in an effort to arouse an emotional response—hatred—from the domestic audience. In that logic, the Anglo-Satsuma War was inevitable because only the chastisement of military defeat could humble the British and open their eyes to the reality of Japanese spiritual superiority.

Pirate Flag is thoroughly spiritist in nature. Historically, the Satsuma forces did manage to inflict costly casualties on the British during their bombardment of Kagoshima, in the form of a lucky cannon shot that killed two high-ranking officers and nine others. But in *Pirate Flag's* climax, when the British bombard the city, the film dramatically departs from the historical

[24] Of course, given the unequal treaties in force in 1862, the British were not subject to Japanese law and the Japanese action against them was therefore illegal.

record, foregoing the chance to celebrate Japanese military technology (accurate fort batteries or gunners) in favor of a more traditional period film trope, namely the lone swordsman against swarms of enemies. It is not enough for the Japanese to match the British technologically, perhaps because of the perceived impersonality of a cannon shot; instead, the instrument of moral instruction must be the sword, the wielder proving the superiority of the Japanese spirit even in the face of his enemies' 'better' weapons.

However, most of the film takes place between these two key moments of Anglo-Satsuma conflict, and actually has surprisingly little to do with the war directly. This lack of engagement with the causes and realities of the war was noted with severe disapproval by critics of the day, one of whom also singled out actor Saitō Tatsuo for blame for the film's failure to embrace its own propagandistic message; the reviewer complains, "I am uncertain as to whether the director is truly committed to the war effort" and, later, "I was left with the impression that Saitō Tatsuo, on his own initiative, may have tried to sabotage the film's message by delivering an over-the-top performance."[25] It is true that, in the aftermath of the Namamugi Incident, first the Satsuma government and then the British legation officers are shown discussing what to do in response, and much of the rest of the film depicts Satsuma's preparation for war, but until the very end, the nature of that preparation offers much in the way of entertainment, and little in the way of hate-the-enemy rhetoric.[26] For example, early in the film men are gathered around a fire after discussing whether Satsuma is strong enough to take on Great Britain in a war, and one man leaps up and begins an acrobatic sword-dance, soon joined by others, and all draw swords and

[25] Kiyomizu Akira, "Shin eiga hyō *Kaizokuki futtobu*," in *Shin eiga* 1944 (1), p. 37.
[26] Interestingly, this film chooses to have its British villains speak at times in English, even though the speaking roles were being played by Japanese actors. Using the language of the enemy in a film is a political choice, and cannot be explained away simply by a desire for verisimilitude, since the actors doing the speaking were not themselves Caucasians (and thus the film obviously made no concerted attempt at verisimilitude).

sing a rousing war song (*gunka*)-style chorus together. Such a performance can be seen as a martial display in support of war, but it is also simply an eye- and ear-pleasing spectacle.

The directors, Tsuji Kichirō and Makino Shinzō, also employ a sophisticated time-saving device, a variation on the dissolve-in-place identified by David Bordwell as a common decorative flourish in Japanese cinema, by using innocuous dialogue to bring together two very disparate scenes without any need for fades or other transitional techniques.[27] A playful question, "Should we do it?" [here meaning 'Should we look through the telescope?'] uttered to some boys at a watch-tower is instantly followed by a cut to a different place and different people, who shout "Yes we should!" [in response to the domain's debate over whether to take up arms against Great Britain]. It is intriguing to note that the Home Ministry's demand that feature films be under seventy-four minutes long may have inspired Tsuji and Makino to develop this time-saving technique. The filmmakers' personal touches did not stop with such flourishes. Midway through the film, in what must have been quite an expensive and long sequence, involving many horses and some tracking shots, protagonist Ikeda Sōhachi manages to win a capture-the-flag style war game, a scene full of complicated and rapid-paced editing. The mood here is almost playful, lighthearted, with little foreshadowing of the coming crisis.

The filmmakers were wise to avoid scene after scene of men sitting around talking about war, instead giving audiences something entertaining to savor. Ironically, the Home Ministry's decision to limit feature films to a maximum of seventy-four minutes may have encouraged the filmmakers, when cutting the film together, to remove the less exciting portions and leave a higher proportion of fast-paced spectacle. *Pirate Flag* has such attractions both in content like the sword-dance and war-song but also in technique, as with the dolly shots earlier and in the capture the flag sequence, or with its use of track-in shots (zooming in on a motionless character),

[27] Bordwell, "A Cinema of Flourishes", in *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, p. 334.

for example onto Hisamitsu in his palanquin during the Namamugi sequence, just the sort of decorative stylistic flourish David Bordwell remarks on as characteristic of Japan's 'decorative' film style.[28] There are also decorative techniques employed in the love scenes of the film that enhance the sense of romance, as with the artistic play of shadows resulting from the silhouette photography used in some of the lovers' meetings between protagonist Sōhachi and his betrothed Yuri.[29] Indeed, the film's lingering focus on the romance between Sōhachi and Yuri is itself interesting; given film's length restrictions in 1943, the filmmakers devoted a perilously large proportion of their film to a romantic subplot, and consciously marketed it in such a way as to emphasize the romantic angle.[30]

Of course, one reason to focus on romance in a tragedy, which *Pirate Flag* certainly is, would be to enhance the pathos when the hero falls. Now the hero's death has the added melodrama of denying the fulfillment of the romance, and leaving a blameless woman in grief. Certainly the filmmakers desired to create a melodramatic film, but what is interesting is the form that melodrama takes. Following Peter High, *Pirate Flag* exemplifies what I term the 'vengeance melodrama,' in which fighting for impersonal and abstract concepts like 'nation' plays second fiddle to the all too personal need for revenge for some monstrous private injury to one's honor.[31] The filmmakers or the studio may have worried that the conflict between Great Britain and Satsuma, if presented in all its complexity, would not arouse an emotional response in the audience, so decided to make Sōhachi's motives personal, and indeed to show an ideological

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[28] Bordwell, "A Cinema of Flourishes", in *Reframing Japanese Cinema*, p. 338.
[29] The choice to show the two in silhouette evokes what Daisuke Miyao has called the "aesthetics of shadow," and in keeping with Miyao's thesis, here too the filmmakers may well have been excusing their use of techniques heavily influenced by Hollywood by claiming to participate in a putatively unique Japanese appreciation for low-key lighting and shadowy mise-en-scene; see Miyao, *The Aesthetics of Shadow,* pp. 1-2, 12, 219 and passim.
[30] For example, in the advertisement appearing on page two of the Dec. 10, 1943 evening edition of the *Asahi shinbun*, almost the entire area of the ad is devoted to a large drawing of Yuri's upturned, hopeful face.
[31] High, pp. 427-428.

conversion of sorts for Sōhachi over the course of the film.[32] Initially he counsels caution—and is vilified as a coward, creating a rift between him and his father and delaying his marriage plans with Yuri—rather than reckless bravado against the British, saying he does not wish anyone to throw his life away needlessly, yet in the end he does precisely that, serving up a double dose of pathos in the climax: he manages to avenge his brother's death, but perishes in the process.

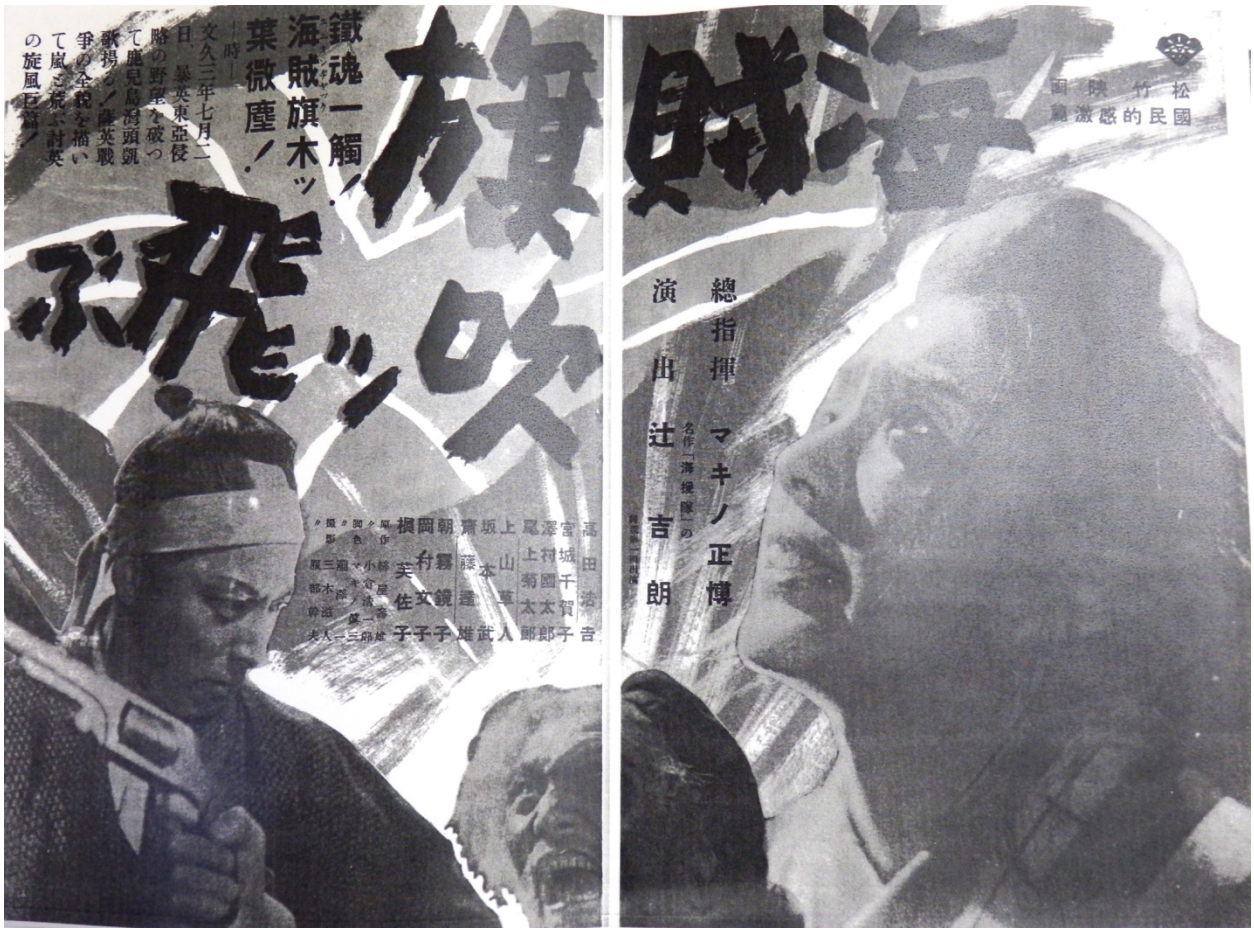


Figure 20: Romance on prominent display in a November 21st, 1943 *Eiga junpō* ad for *Pirate Flag*.[33]

[32] High also points out that Shōchiku's Shimogamo studio was a 'miserable backwater' where directors whose careers had stagnated were sent, virtually guaranteeing that any film produced there would conform to period film program picture standards. See ibid., p. 428.

[33] N.p.; in *Eiga junpō,* only text-heavy pages, and not image-based pages, were given page numbers, but in the 2004 reprinting, it is possible to infer that the ad appears on pp. 330-331 of vol. 51. Note also, in addition to the pride of place given romance via the deployment of Miyagi Chikako's character Yuri (she appears larger than anyone else in the ad despite having rather limited screen time in the film), that this advertisement prominently displays the name of Makino Masahiro, with the title *sōshiki* (overall [project] leader), followed by Tsuji Kōkichi, "who brought us the masterpiece *Kaientai*," (a Monbushō-recommended film which placed tenth on *Kinema junpō*'s Best 10 list for 1939; see Furukawa, p. 103) as director; the only credit given co-director Makino Shinzō, who was largely unknown at

The boy Tōjirō, his younger brother, was himself killed (along with many of his similarly young friends) in an attempt to avenge an insulting injury done their father, the commander of Satsuma's gun batteries, by the British shore party. Sōhachi explicitly declares his desire to avenge Tōjirō is the reason he is now in favor of an attack on the British, and moreover the reason he, and not all the other young man clamoring to be allowed to go, should be given the honor of joining the impending suicide mission against the enemy fleet.

The goal of the planned attack on the British fleet is mystifying. Samurai head out in a one-way trip in rowboats towards the fleet, whereupon the Satsuma shore batteries open fire, giving the samurai the cover they need to close with the anchored ships and board them. But the intended purpose of the attack—to win a symbolic victory by running up the sun-disk flag (*Hinomaru*)? to slaughter every last Englishman? to demonstrate Japanese spiritual superiority whatever the odds?—is never explained. In any case, most of his compatriots are quickly overwhelmed and soon Sōhachi is the last Japanese still standing on the enemy deck; undeterred by the enemy's bullets, he cuts down five Brits with his sword, then slices through the line holding aloft the Union Jack (which had been explicitly glossed in the above advertisement for the film as the "pirate flag" in question)[34] and sends the sun-disk flag up in its stead before finally collapsing from his mortal wounds, gazing up at his flag.

Did audiences in December 1943, when the film was released, assume that the Japanese had won a victory in the Anglo-Satsuma war exactly eight decades earlier and driven off the British, that the sword had triumphed over the gun? Some may well have mistakenly thought so, while others may have been confused—rightly—by Satsuma's subsequent history of detente with

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that time, is co-screenwriter. Moriwaki Kiyotada of the Museum of Kyoto suggested in a personal interview with me that Makino Shinzō was the de facto director, with the much better-known Tsuji's name probably added mostly for marketing purposes, it being doubtful how much he actually contributed to the film. Interview, Feb. 7, 2013.

[34] The Japanese characters for "pirate flag" (which normally would be read "*kaizokuki*") appear, but next to them is the suggested pronunciation: "Union Jack." See the above figure.

the British and no further hostilities between Japan and Great Britain for almost eighty years. The film ends right after Sōhachi's pyrrhic 'victory' but certainly does nothing to suggest Satsuma, and eventually Japan, would capitulate and pay the indemnity for the Richardson Affair and then ally itself with Great Britain relatively soon thereafter.

On the other hand, some might have been equally confused by the film's portrayal of the British bombardment of Kagoshima, distinguished on screen by its brutality and high casualty count: many innocent civilians, including women, are shown perishing in the explosions and resulting flames, though damage to the city itself seems limited. Ironically, what is known of the historical attack is precisely the opposite; the city was evacuated before the bombardment and thus casualties were very light, just five killed, but given the flammable construction materials and building practices then prevalent in Japan, damage to city structures was considerable.

Despite Shōchiku Kyoto's inability to pursue a blockbuster strategy, production values for *Pirate Flag* are actually rather high. Featuring skilled miniature work for the scenes of naval combat near the end, lots of explosions and other big-budget flourishes like heavy use of horses, and the best cast and crew the studio could assemble, expectations were apparently fairly high for the film.[35] The crew included Makino Masahiro as producer, talented co-directors Tsuji Kichirō and Makino Shinzō (the latter is also credited as one of the screenwriters, and secured his wife and sometime assistant director Miyagi Chikako the leading lady's role of Yuri) as well as, in the cast, Shōchiku period film leading man Takada Kōkichi starring as Sōhachi, Onoe Kikujirō as Shimazu Hisamitsu, and veteran Saitō Tatsuo (who received top billing according to

[35] According to the one-page ad, almost entirely occupied by five production stills, taken out in the final issue of *Eiga junpō*, the combination of Makino Masahiro as producer and sometime collaborator Tsuji Kichirō, "director of the masterwork 'Kaientai'" as [co-] director was exciting indeed, and promised to 'reinvigorate the stagnating *jidai eiga*'. See *Eiga junpō* no. 100 (*shūkan tokubetsu gō*), n.pag. (vol 51, p. 233).

the *Eiga junpō* synopsis)[36] as Sōhachi's father. In other words, given the limited resources at their disposal, Shōchiku Kyoto poured significant effort into this film; the only area they faltered was in marketing, with little real attempt to promote the film if the surviving film materials and magazines from late 1943 are any indication.[37]

Pirate Flag is unusually prescient in its portrayal of suicide tactics. Screened eight months before the official formation of the Special Attack Force (*Tokubetsu kōgekitai*, often shortened to *tokkōtai* and popularly known as the Kamikaze), it nevertheless argues forcefully that suicide attacks are both necessary and desirable thanks to its depiction of Sōhachi's conversion to ire-filled patriot, which is the key to finally healing the rift between him and his father. The father displays nothing but pride at his only remaining son's decision to sacrifice his life to avenge his family's honor; he presents his son with a sword, a precious family heirloom and a potent symbol of personal honor as well, and sends him off with the chilling words, "go and die gloriously."[38] Then the father bursts into passionate song while he and Sōhachi's betrothed Yuri—who never shows any sign of grief at this turn of events—help him don his battle armor. Sōhachi heads out for the beach with the others in the suicide attack squad, and all around the relatives of these men walk behind them, with big smiles on their faces, singing in unison, in a lengthy sequence of long and extreme long shots showing the extent of the crowd

[36] *Eiga junpō* no. 100 (*shūkan tokubetsu gō*), pp. 69-70 (vol. 51, pp. 297-298).
[37] For example, in the Museum of Kyoto's extensive wartime collection of handbills from movie theaters in Fushimi—very close indeed to where the movie was produced, the period film heartland of Kyoto—I could find just a single mention of the film, from a pamphlet passed out at a local Fushimi theater the week of December 22-28, 1943. That mention, which lacked stills or any other visual, was a standard cast and crew listing followed by a very short summary emphasizing rather histrionically the connection between Sōhachi's triumphant raising of the sun-disk flag in 1863 and "our flag today, eighty years later, which has utterly driven out the [British] pirates' Union Jack in every corner of East Asia, from Hong Kong to Singapore to Burma, and [soon] in India!" ('sono nisshōki ha hachijū nen go no kyō, daitōa no sumizumi kara kaizokuki yunion jakku wo kuchiku shite Hon Kon ni, Shingapōru ni, Biruma ni, Indo ni toberu no da').
[38] In Japanese, he says "rippa ni shini[shinde?] koi." The low-quality audio track on the somewhat degraded 35mm print (the only one still in existence, to my knowledge, is held at the National Film Center in Tokyo), made it difficult to catch his words here after just one hearing, but his fiercely proud expression and his use of the words "die gloriously" leave no doubt as to the intended message, whatever the exact wording.

and their progress toward the beach. The people's faith in their suicidally brave sons and husbands proves justified: the pirates' flag is swept away and the Sun-disk flag run up in its stead, whereupon there is a quick reaction shot of the people gathered on the beach, cheering in joy.

Yet just as important as victory itself is the ideological conversion of Sōhachi to true believer and patriot, of which his success—despite having been shot and mortally wounded—in replacing the flags is incontrovertible evidence. *Pirate Flag* is more committed to the war effort than *Signal Fires,* the other hate the enemy film analyzed in this chapter, as evidenced by the former's spiritist emphasis on the purity of the self, the unity of the Japanese people, and their potency when angered, all of which is combined with a truly hateful enemy. Yet even *Pirate Flag* contains entertaining and somewhat light-hearted sequences (such as the capture the flag game), and in a social climate in which it was almost impossible to produce straightforward period films, much of *Pirate Flag*'s audience may have been drawn in by the promise of period drama spectacle rather than by any particular desire to see, much less internalize, anti-Western propaganda. As Itami Mansaku pointed out in reference to just such a "spiritist" movie, the medium of film is a very poor conductor of ideology.[39]

Pirate Flag was also considerably less successful at the box office than the other films mentioned in this chapter. Partly this is due to audiences' documented general aversion to overtly national policy films, where the more straightforwardly propagandistic a film was the poorer it generally performed in selling tickets.[40] The film also lacked star power, which then as now was one of the most accurate predictors of box office performance.[41] We turn next to a more

[39] See High, p. 247 for the Itami quote.
[40] See Furukawa, p. 125 for evidence of this correlation between national policy films and poor box office showings.
[41] Examining the top-grossing period films of each year in prewar and wartime Japan reveals a strong correlation between the presence of A-list stars like Hasegawa Kazuo (for example, *Ina no Kantarō*, 1943's top-grossing film) and box office success, even when the government tried to discourage people from seeing such entertainment films (labeling them '*hi ippan yō*' or "unsuitable for general audiences") or making them logistically difficult to see (restricting theatrical run to just five days). See Furukawa, p. 185 for data on *Ina no Kantarō* (and chapter five for

successful hate the enemy film that had many more hit-making factors in its favor: megastar, well-known director, and more.

Film and Empire: the Case of *Signal Fires*

In early 1944, veteran director Inagaki Hiroshi traveled to Shanghai with the cast and crew of his newest film, a Japan-(occupied) China coproduction which was to be set and filmed mostly in Shanghai. The full title was to be *Noroshi wa Shanghai ni agaru* (*Signal Fires over Shanghai*) in Japanese, and *Chunjiang yihen* (*Remorse in Shanghai*) in Mandarin Chinese.[42] The use of two such divergent titles, the former evoking Anglo-American imperialism and how Western duplicity and aggression against China will soon threaten Japan too, the latter seemingly far less straightforwardly political-sounding, suggests very different audience expectations and tolerance for politico-historical propaganda in Japan as compared to China. Put another way, giving the Chinese release of the film such a title suggests Japanese filmmakers—and censors—were aware overtly propagandistic films were unlikely to find success in China and were taking that into account when marketing the film. On the other hand, another interpretation of the Chinese title, which is actually quite ambiguous in meaning, would be "Resentment in Shanghai" (if *yihen* is understood as "resentment" or "grudge" rather than "remorse"), thus perhaps signaling resentment by the Chinese crew, as representatives of the people of Shanghai and of China, against Japan itself.[43]

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my analysis), and p. 173 for the chart of biggest box-office earners from 1941-44, in which films featuring top stars dominated (for example, Bantsuma's *Muhō no Matsu* was #2 for 1943, and Fujita Susumu and Ōkōchi Denjirō's *Sugata Sanshirō* #3—this latter is a particularly clear example of star power, as the director, Akira Kurosawa, was at the time almost entirely unknown by the public at large, it being his directorial debut, and therefore no case could be made that people were drawn to see the film by the director, unlike with *Muhō Matsu*'s veteran director Inagaki.

[42] *Chunjiang* (springtime) is a reference to the Zhejiang river, which flows near Shanghai, and was a common poetic way of referring to Shanghai.

[43] Poshek Fu suggests the title should simply be "Remorse in Shanghai." Fu, "Ambiguity of Entertainment," pp. 78-9.

In any case, *Signal Fires* represented the first true coproduction between Japan and China, and one of only a bare handful of films that was genuinely multinational.[44] The exotic setting and the presence of period film superstar Bantsuma in the lead role were certain to draw in audiences in Japan, while the inclusion of genuine Chinese film and opera stars would, if past successes were any indication, attract Chinese audiences as well.[45] Spreading a pan-Asian message of unity between Japan and China against the West, their purportedly common foe, was an important wartime goal for the Japanese state, and earlier efforts had been poorly received in China, due partly to the tendency in the Japanese film industry to ignore issues of linguistic verisimilitude and simply have Japanese actors deliver lines phonetically in Chinese. But *Signal Fires* was to have genuine, and very high-profile, Chinese stars, especially the hugely popular Li Lihua, and as such, would avoid the ignominious fate of being laughed at by Chinese audiences for less than perfect pronunciation, as well as draw a much larger audience in the first place.[46] In Japan as well, buzz for this big-budget film, slated to be released in Japan in late December 1944, was considerable, with frequent mention in *Nippon eiga*.[47]

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[44] At least, that was how it was hailed in both the Japanese and Chinese mainstream press. There had actually already been a high-profile coproduction, namely *Wanzi qianhong* (A Myriad of Colors), a quite successful if rather frivolous film musical in 1943, also starring Li Lihua, in which she appeared with the Takarazuka dancing troupe. See Fu, "Ambiguity of Entertainment," p. 78.

[45] This strategy was tried and true: Tōhō had negotiated with Zhonghua dianying for Chinese opera star Wang Yang to appear—and sing—in its 1940 Enoken song and dance extravaganza *Songokū*, which was a megahit at home (it even earned an "approved for general audiences" ippanyō rating, unlike almost all of Enoken's other films, which were labeled hi ippanyō by censors in an effort to reduce viewership) and abroad. See Furukawa, pp. 146-149.

[46] Not that *Signal Fires* is entirely free of Japanese actors trying to read lines in Chinese phonetically; around minute sixty the character Nakamuda is supposed to speak kindly and sympathetically to the newly fatherless Xiaohong, Yizhou's sister, and reassure her, essentially, that with Japan on her side everything will be alright, but star Ishiguro did not know Chinese and certainly muddled the delivery badly; in response, Xiaohong, looking extremely unhappy, mutters "arigatō".

[47] The film had a pre-production period, shooting schedule, and post-production editing period worthy of a true blockbuster, to say nothing of the expense of such extensive on-location shooting in a foreign country. The Japanese crew arrived in Shanghai in January of 1944, shooting began in March and continued for six months, and the finished film wasn't released until November in China and late December in Japan; compare this to the typical pattern of prewar film production where producing an entire film from start to finish frequently took less than a month, and in extreme examples less than two weeks. For information on the shooting schedule and so forth, see the Okazaki interview in *Bantsuma*, pp. 57-59.

Written evidence of Japanese audience anticipation for *Signal Fires* can primarily be found in *Nippon eiga* for a very simple reason: *Nippon eiga* was the only major film periodical still being published in late 1944.[48] Its survival, even after essentially all other more well-known magazines like *Eiga junpō* (the wartime incarnation of *Kinema junpō,* with far fewer pictures of and articles about foreign stars and films and, not coincidentally, a title whose foreign loanword had been replaced with the politically safe Japanese term *'eiga'* for "movie") were forced to cease publication is no accident; its articles were often written by government officials, including film censors.[49] *Nippon eiga* was a de facto mouthpiece for state policy on Japanese cinema; the views expressed in its pages about *Signal Fires* can be read as the quasi-official view of the film.[50]

In volume thirty-one of *Nippon eiga*, published before the film was released, an unnamed author highlights how *Signal Fires* draws attention to the all-important theme of pan-Asian brotherhood. In his micro-summary of the film, he writes "This film depicts the history of the Anglo-American invasion of East Asia, making clear that East Asia is for, and must be controlled by East Asians themselves, who must live together and die together in the struggle to resist Anglo-American encroachment."[51] A long, detailed synopsis of the film's plot, and the geopolitical situation in 1862 in Japan and in China, follows. Based on the level of attention being paid to the film in *Nippon eiga*, it is clear the government had high hopes for *Signal Fires* as a national policy film, and one expected to have international appeal at that.

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[48] The only exception was *Shin eiga*, which continued publication, albeit in abbreviated form, until Feb. 1945, and actually did cover the production and release of *Signal Fires* in some detail. The reviews and comments on *Signal Fires* in the pages of *Shin eiga* dealt with the same themes of linguistic multiplicity and so forth, but also focused more on the aesthetic side; Ōzuka Soichi mournfully pronounced, "this is truly an unfortunate film for Inagaki" ('kare ni totte wa ki no doku na sakuhin da'). See Ōzuka, "Geki eiga no kaiko," in *Shin eiga* 1945 (2), p. 17.
[49] There had been a flourishing written culture on film thru the late 1930s, with 47 film magazines and 37 film newspapers in December of 1937, but censorship of the written word was far more restrictive than that of the moving image, and by late 1944, virtually no trace of this print culture on film remained. Furukawa, p. 46.
[50] For example, the editor-in-chief for *Nippon eiga* (referred to after the war by the less militaristic-sounding *Nihon eiga*) was the pro-state writer and ideologue Kikuchi Kan, who went so far as to join the military and was fully and enthusiastically in harmony with wartime governmental goals. See Richie, *100 Years of Japanese Film*, p. 104.
[51] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 423. The term 'live together and die together' is my translation of 'dōshō kyōshi'.

According to this anonymous writer for *Nippon eiga*, the central issue facing Chinese in 1862—and in 1944, of course—was who to put their faith in, Japan or the West. As such, the writer's synopsis of the film focuses heavily on the relationship between Takasugi Shinsaku, Japanese patriot, and Shen Yizhou, Taiping revolutionary. Shen, the writer notes, is initially skeptical of Japan and chooses to put his trust in Britain, and even convinces the British consul, Medhurst, of the justice and religious sincerity of the Taiping's cause.[52] In the writer's synopsis, Medhurst tries to sway the other British officials in Shanghai to ban opium and form an alliance with the Taipings, but is sternly told that he must choose where his ultimate loyalty lies: to the British crown, or to his God, and mockingly reminded that "God knows nothing of what happens east of the Cape of Good Hope."[53] This particular line is supplemented, in the final film, with comments supplying a racist motivation for saying the Taipings cannot be considered allies of Britain or even Christians, only fanatics. Indeed, the Minister chuckles derisively when Medhurst suggests the Taipings are Christians "like us" saying he can't believe that, and of the Taiping King, the Minister says "I'm sorry for him that his skin is not white like ours."[54]

Immediately below the synopsis in *Nippon eiga*, the unnamed writer continues with an introduction to *Signal Fires* intended to explain its significance. He begins by highlighting its status as the first genuine Japan-China coproduction, meaning it has an international dimension

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[52] The Taiping rebellion was loosely inspired by the Christian faith, with the rebellion's supreme leader claiming he was Christ's younger brother; this dogmatically problematic claim may have contributed to the reluctance of Western countries to pledge support to the Taiping's anti-Qing cause, despite their dislike of the Qing bureaucracy. In the film, however, issues of dogma are not raised; Medhurst is presented as a Christian, compassionate and true, whereas the other British refuse to accept the Taipings, not due to historical reasons like concerns over the Taiping's religious claims, but because they are too racist and anti-Asian to tolerate the thought of yellow-skinned allies.

[53] The original Japanese for this slogan, as written in *Nippon eiga,* was " kibō mine itō ni kami no shōran nashi." Literally translated, "East of the Cape of Good Hope god cannot see clearly," the implication being that God doesn't know or care what happens in the Far East, giving Westerners free rein to do immoral things (like selling opium) in Asia they would never dare do in Europe or the United States.

[54] However, in the Japanese subtitles displayed vertically on the screen during this lengthy English-dialogue exchange between Medhurst and the Legation Minister at the British Legation in Shanghai, the comment about the skin is translated, far more innocuously, as "kare ha fukō ni shite Eikokujin de ha nai." This scene at the legation is three minutes long, beginning around 39:30 in the extant VHS version of the film.

only a bare handful of films heretofore had possessed.[55] Although he admits many of the film's crew were Japanese, from Daiei studio, the cast was closer to half and half. He also emphasizes the exotic setting, noting that much of the film was being shot on location in Shanghai, before explicitly stating he had "great expectations" for the film.

The writer for *Nippon eiga* points out that the script for *Signal Fires* skillfully weaves together the historical coincidence of Takasugi's visit to Shanghai and the concurrent Taiping advance to outside the city walls with an anti-West, united pan-Asian message.[56] Obviously these comments about the script of *Signal Fires* indicate that he had access to the script, and since there is no evidence of the script having been published before the film was released, such access could only have come from the pre-production censorship screening of scripts, which means he must have been one of the censors involved in or in charge of evaluating the script. When this writer praises the film's composition and goes on to use phrases like "[I/we] have great expectations for this film and it is certain not to disappoint", therefore, he can be construed to be speaking not as a mere critic but in a semi-official capacity, and indeed speaking for the Home Ministry, the Cabinet Information Bureau and the government itself, partly in an effort to help market the film, increasing the domestic audience size through quasi-official endorsement.[57]

The reviewer does, however, issue an interesting caveat. On the subject of the actors, he wrote quite ambiguously, saying "We should only expect strong performances from those actors

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[55] For instance the 1943 *Dawn of Freedom/Fire on that Flag* (*Ano hata wo ute*), a Japan-(occupied) Philippines coproduction which made use of Filipino film stars and, more controversially, American and British prisoners of war, acting under duress. Note that box office receipts suggest that casting one's film with actors from the country in question, whether the Philippines or China, did actually have a discernible effect on a film's success; statistics from *Nippon eiga* reveal that when *Ano hata wo ute* was released in the occupied Philippines in March 1944, it became the most popular film in recent memory, far outperforming all-Japanese films like *Hawaii Malay oki kaisen* both in terms of total admissions and average admissions per day. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 323. On the other hand, while the box-office performance of *Sayon no kane* (1943) was considerably better in Taiwan than in Japan, ranking eighth out of all the films released there, it had fewer than half as many average daily admissions than the number one film in Taiwan in 1943, *Kaigun*. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 403.

[56] About this pan-Asian, anti-imperialist message he uses the phrase "tekisetsu ni orikonde". See p. 424.

[57] On the subject of the film's interweaving of the pan-Asian message, he writes "nakanaka takumi ni kōsei sareteiru to omofu", meaning "I think the film's composition was quite masterfully done". Ibid., p. 424.

worthy of such expectations, but I feel there are plenty such actors in the film."[58] The intentionally vague wording implies that not much should be expected from the Chinese actors, since they are largely unknown quantities to the Japanese. He concludes by saying of the film, which he claims has more to offer than simply the interesting fact that it is a Japan-China coproduction, that "I hope it will skillfully portray the above [pan-Asian, anti-West] themes. By doing so, I think it will fully realize its political significance."[59]

If these comments in *Nippon eiga* on *Signal Fires* before it was released are intriguing, *Nippon eiga*'s evaluation of the finished film is fascinating. Its semi-official review of the film is distinctly disappointed and rather admonishing in tone, an interpretation that makes more sense in light of the high hopes expressed for the film in the above synopsis and pre-release analysis. The post-release review continues to praise the intention of the film to be a robust coproduction, but finds fault with the manner in which the film combined the Chinese and Japanese elements.

Specifically, the *Nippon eiga* writer of the review blasts *Signal Fires* for its portrayal of the Japanese loyalists like Takasugi. The writer was deeply unhappy with the relatively passive role given Takasugi and the others in the film, bemoaning the fact that they are essentially mere observers of the main action, which centers around the Taiping Shen Yizhou. He apparently feels it is damaging to Japan's national prestige to have such a well-known hero as Takasugi portrayed so "feebly" as a mere "bystander" or, worse yet, a "tourist."[60] Obviously, for this particular writer, historical accuracy was far less important than issues of perception and a certain minimum standard of heroic depiction for Japan's heroes. According to diaries of the trip to Shanghai

[58] "Enshutsusha mo shinrai suru ni tariru hito dake ni kitai subeki mono ha jūbun ni aru to kangaheru." Ibid., p. 424.
[59] "Zenjutsu no izu ga yoku hyōgen sareru koto ga nozomashii no de aru. Sau aru koto ni yotte kono eiga seisaku no igi ga kanzen ni hatasareru no da to omofu." Ibid., p. 424.
[60] In Japanese, "Takasugi tachi shishi no tōjō ha kono kenbunroku wo tsuduru hodo no tachiba ni suginai mono ni natteiru...yahari nan to itte mo Takasugi tachi no tachiba ha bōkansha teki, ryokōsha teki na mono ni sugizu, sore ha karera shishi no kono geki ni okeru ichi wo kiwamete bijaku na mono ni shiteiru." *Nippon eiga*, vol. 31, p. 576.

written by some of the Japanese, which Inagaki and his crew consulted when making the film, Takasugi did engage in some arguably tourist-esque activities, so Inagaki was well within his rights, say, to show Takasugi buying an ink stone, and even more so when one considers that one way of framing such a scene is that Takasugi is winning admiration from the Chinese ink-stone merchant for his great refinement and discerning eye, thereby forming a symbolic bond between the two countries through the medium of the brush, with scenes of Chinese admiration for Japanese swords similarly conveying closeness between the countries as well as the suggestion that China needs Japanese military—and spiritual—prowess.[61]

Inagaki, armed with historical evidence in the form of Takasugi's diary, was able to include scenes, and indeed create a mood, of which the censors clearly disapproved.[62] He could 'get away with' having an opera song in his movie, for example, because it was more than plausible that Takasugi and the others might have heard such a performance while in Shanghai. Given the choice between emphasizing or even exaggerating a Japanese hero's larger than life capabilities for monumental or patriotic reasons, or keeping the hero's story true(r) to life, and thereby potentially more light-hearted and entertaining, he opted for the latter, to the distinct displeasure of the censors and critics. By choosing the latter route, Inagaki was moving his film away from a straightforward hate-the-enemy message and much closer to the tradition, since 1937, of "continent films" (relabeled "Greater East Asia" films after the outbreak of the Pacific War, though filmmakers actually on the continent continued to use the old, rather Orientalist term "continent film"), which tended to have a travelogue-like feel, showing either the physical or social landscape as a method of exploiting the exoticism of China for the domestic Japanese

[61] Joshua Fogel points out that diaries by some of the 51 Japanese who went to Shanghai on this trip mentioned Chinese curiosity in the Japanese swords. See Fogel, p. 135.
[62] Even Inagaki, however, didn't dare go so far as to depict perhaps the most important contact Takasugi made while in Shanghai, missionary William Muirhead, who may have been his actual interlocutor and guide while in Shanghai and is known to have lent him many books, including some on the Taiping rebels. See Fogel, pp. 128-9.

audience.[63] Ironically, not all the scenes putatively showing the exotic Chinese countryside were actually filmed on location; all the close-ups were completed on location in Shanghai, but because it was not possible to shoot the countryside freely due to safety considerations, all the long shots of the rolling hills of Shanghai were actually filmed near Kyoto, and the two disparate shots combined into a composite, representing a technical triumph for Inagaki,[64] as well as a rare treat for period film stars like Bantsuma, who reported feeling overjoyed to be doing such extensive location work after being 'cooped up' in the studios at Uzumasa for so long.[65]

Despite the reviewer's disappointment with *Signal Fires*, general government policy towards entertainment films had just been changed two months before its release by none other than the Bureau of Information, with which the reviewer was affiliated.[66] In October 1944, Ogata Taketora, president of the Home Ministry's Bureau of Information, made a public speech at a press conference signaling a shift of policy on entertainment (*goraku*) films and implying restrictions would be eased.[67] Inagaki's film probably profited from the newly forgiving attitude towards films meant to entertain.[68]

The Home Ministry had been concerned about the lackluster performance of national policy films for some time. Their surveys of audience reactions to mobile projection units and their screenings of national policy versus entertainment films showed, unsurprisingly, that

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[63] Tairiku eiga, later Daitōa eiga. See An Ni, "'Daitōa eiga' he no kaidan: 'tairiku eiga' shiron," in Iwamoto hen, *Eiga to daitōa kyōeiken* (chapter five), pp. 132-4; specific mention (and even a photo still) of *Signal Fires* in the context of this discussion of tairiku eiga can be found on pp. 151-2.
[64] For background on which scenes were shot on location in Shanghai and which in Kyoto, see the interview of Okazaki Kōzō in *Bantsuma*, p. 58.
[65] Bantsuma made these comments in July 1944, according to Okura Kōichirō, "Satsuei wa Shanghai ni susumu," in *Shin eiga* 1944 (7), p. 11.
[66] Few author names are given for the individual synopses and reviews in *Nippon eiga* at this late date; instead, as here, it is simply indicated that the writer is a member of the Home Ministry's Jōhōkyoku kokumin eiga (Bureau of Information, National Films [Division]).
[67] Furukawa, p. 207.
[68] It is interesting to note that, also in October 1944, due to the rapidly worsening war situation, the cabinet approved a policy paper advocating that efforts be made to arouse more intense hatred for the enemy among the Japanese populace. See Dower, *War without Mercy,* pp. 246-7.

audiences consistently preferred entertainment films to national policy films.[69] The Home Ministry was not above manipulating statistics to make it seem like national policy films were more popular than they were, notably with *Katō's Falcon Fighters* (*Katō hayabusa sentōtai,* dir. Yamamoto Kajirō, 1944). In their figures for the box office rankings for the first half of 1944, *Katō* was listed as #1, a result achieved by including ticket sales for double feature programming in which the screening of *Katō* (but not necessarily actual audience attendance) was mandatory; looking instead at actual theater admissions numbers, *Katō* was a lowly twelfth out of the twenty-nine films released in that six-month period.[70] It goes without saying that the Home Ministry and the Cabinet Information Bureau also used double feature programming in an effort to increase actual viewership, gambling—without much success—that audiences already coming out to see one type of film would be willing to sit through a national policy film as well.

It was rare indeed for a national policy film to become truly popular. During the entire war, only two films had really managed widespread mainstream success, Yamamoto Kajirō's 1942 *Hawaii Malay oki kaisen* (The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaysia) and Kurosawa's *Sugata Sanshirō* from 1943, and even these two films include a fair number of light-hearted moments and scenes geared more for entertainment than political suasion.[71] The Home Ministry and the Cabinet Information Bureau, therefore, had apparently concluded by late 1944 that

[69] The actual ratios of films actually shown by the mobile projection teams was 43% national policy, 29% entertainment (and 16% news, the remainder presumably culture films) but in the survey, 47% preferred to see entertainment, 38% national policy films, and 13% news. In some ways, it is actually surprising that so many answered they wished to see more national policy films. The methodology of the survey is not known, unfortunately, but it is worth noting that not everyone would have answered a question like, say, "next time do you want us to show national policy films or entertainment films?" honestly. Even if the people conducting the survey had no direct connection to the government, some may have feared political consequences for the "wrong" answer, and others might simply have felt social or peer pressure to choose the putatively sophisticated option, falling into a social desirability bias, especially if asked publicly; such a "spiral of silence" scenario, to use Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann's term, might play out rather like the Bradley effect has in American politics and race relations. Since Japanese respondents would know what the government and by extension society itself wished them to say, many might have given the desired answer, national policy films, even though privately they preferred entertainment films. For data on the survey, see Furukawa, p. 206.
[70] Furukawa, p. 201.
[71] Ibid., p. 207.

unvarnished national policy films, which were intended to influence the thoughts and perspectives of the Japanese people, were not popular enough to reach a wide audience partly because they contained too few crowd-pleasing entertainment elements.

Yet the Home Ministry had also been heartened by the success of two quasi-national policy subgenres, the history film and the pan-Asian film (especially if a coproduction). These two subgenres are best represented by, respectively, *Kantarō of Ina (*discussed in chapter five), a Bakumatsu tale starring Hasegawa Kazuo which placed second for 1943 at the box office,[72] and particularly by the exotic *Shoot that Flag/Dawn of Freedom* (*Ano hata wo ute*, dir. Abe Yutaka), a 1943 Japan-Philippines coproduction which won popularity in Japan—especially among fans of American and European films, who had been starved for non-Japanese faces and languages for almost two years due to the wartime ban—for its multilingualism and international cast.[73] Bureau of Information officials were doubtless expecting great things of *Signal Fires*, as a combination of both subgenres and as a film of epic scale that had been in production for seven months (at a time many films were completed much more quickly), but were deeply disappointed with the finished film, as the *Nippon eiga* review makes abundantly clear.[74]

Most of the reviewer's major complaints about *Signal Fires* concern the depiction of the Japanese loyalists. In an elaboration of the "Takasugi as tourist" issue noted above, he was displeased with everything the loyalists were shown to be doing between the boarding of the *Senzaimaru* in Nagasaki at the end of the first reel (which is lost), and the development of trust between Takasugi and Shen Yizhou near the end. He apparently felt the film's ending, which attempted to show the ideological sameness between the Taiping rebels, betrayed by the West,

[72] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944-1945), p. 106.
[73] Furukawa, p. 202.
[74] Contemporary reports on the film stress the unusual length of time devoted to its production, which began on March 17, 1944 according to Okura Kōichirō, "Satsuei wa Shanghai ni susumu," in *Shin eiga* 1944 (7), pp. 10-11.

and 1862/1944 Japan, champions of the East against the British and Americans, worked well, and could have been expanded in scope to replace all the touristic scenes earlier. He decried such scenes as "tedious" and argued that they contributed little to the overall story or the main theme, contemptuously pointing out that they are saved from being utterly boring only thanks to the on-location filming of the scenery in Shanghai, which brought "a whiff of the 'exotic'" (he used the transliteration of the English word) to the middle of the film.[75]

Signal Fires contains many eye-pleasing scenes which contribute little or nothing to the advancement of the main storyline concerning the bond forming between Takasugi and Shen Yizhou. And even in those scenes which can be construed to serve some propagandistic purpose, the message is always ambiguous. For example, one sequence occurring around minute forty-three in the extant version shows Caucasian men uniformed as sailors and soldiers cavorting in a club, dancing to Western music and chatting in English (though they all have thick Russian accents) about how the decision to fight the Taipings will mean more amorous opportunities with Chinese women. The visual spectacle shown on screen is arguably connected to the hate the Anglo-American enemy plotline and could be interpreted as emphasizing the moral bankruptcy and even the threat to Eastern chastity represented by Western men. Nevertheless, one cannot help but wonder, as the camera lingers on the couples twirling about on the dance floor or pans over to the tables to catch both English conversation and exotic white faces in medium close-ups, whether Inagaki hasn't in truth found a clever way to justify presenting what audiences secretly wanted to see—namely, the very types of spectacle deemed degenerate by the government.[76]

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[75] The reviewer writes, "Taiping tengoku no ran ni itaru made no, Nagasaki wo shuppan shite irai no shishi tachi no kōdō wo utsusu bōtō no bamen ha shudai kara hanarete jōchō no kan sura ari, genchi fūbutsu no kamosu ekizochikku na nioi de sukuwareteiru hodo ni natteiru." *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 576.

[76] By late 1944, fashion choices were severely constrained, and jazz and other Western types of dance-worthy music, as well as dancing itself, had been banned. Japanese women were expected to dress in monpe, sexless and unflattering trousers, and had very few opportunities to see the spectacle of someone, especially white women, spinning around in dresses on the dance floor. Until a few years before, many in the audience for this film might

Near the end, when Bantsuma and Li Lihua walk through the rubble in the aftermath of the treacherous British attack on the Taiping army, the camera soon pans up from the devastation of flattened buildings to focus instead on the wide expanse of the almost virginal landscape itself. A later scene, in long shot, has Takasugi wetting a hand-cloth for Wang Ying in a beautiful river, and again the mood is almost romantic, especially given his solicitousness of her needs, and concern she might be tired after their long hike in search of Yizhou. It was so important to Inagaki to capture the beautiful landscape of China that despite not being able actually to shoot very much in China, he decided to recreate that landscape by splicing together close-ups of Bantsuma and Li Lihua with long shots of the countryside outside Kyoto, a combination which is telling from a pan-Asian perspective: nothing prevented the use of one as a stand-in for the other, as though the two were the same.[77]

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well have frequented jazz clubs and danced themselves, and so the portrayal of Western decadence, though legible as an attempt to arouse moral indignation and hatred for the enemy and their way of life, also offered a tantalizing glimpse into now forbidden pleasures.

[77] See the Okazaki interview in *Bantsuma*, p. 58, for evidence of the composite nature of those sequences purportedly featuring the Chinese countryside.



Figure 21: "Continent film" landscape in *Signal Fires, 59:45,* ironically shot mostly in the countryside near Kyoto.

This sort of shot, visually pleasing but inexplicable from the perspective of the narrative, is surely what the reviewer had in mind when he criticized the film for being touristy and for milking the exoticism of the on-location shooting, especially when one takes into account the dreamy, almost upbeat music in this forty-five second sequence, not at all the sort of music one might expect in a scene ostensibly about showing the damage the dastardly British have done.

Perhaps surprisingly, the *Nippon eiga* reviewer praised the performance of the Chinese actor portraying Shen Yizhou (veteran Chinese film star Mei Xi, then just 33 years old) while criticizing the Japanese actors. Regarding the latter, he singles out the actor depicting Takasugi, namely period film megastar Bandō (though he never explicitly names him in the review) for the

most direct criticism. Takasugi delivers an ostensibly rousing speech after being told of the Teradaya incident in Kyoto—a violent crackdown by Satsuma domainal authorities on Satsuma's *sonnō jōi* activists, who had been basing their operations out of the Teradaya. But the reviewer concludes that Bantsuma just wasn't able "to make the speech come alive."[78] The reviewer does not explicitly raise the issue of actors' ages, but it is worth noting that while the Chinese stars recruited for the film were close to the ages of their characters (easy enough to arrange, because many of those characters, including Shen Yizhou himself, were fictional), the Japanese stars tended to be much older than their historical characters. Perhaps the fact that Bantsuma, forty-three, is playing a character who was just twenty-three in 1862 contributed to his failure to capture Takasugi's famous exuberance, and overall lackluster performance.[79] Or possibly Bantsuma himself felt little inclination to deliver the speech, quite a mouthful of "unity in the face of the encroaching West" propaganda, in a convincing manner. Bantsuma was certainly capable of delivering rousing speeches if he wished, and never more so than in the early 1940s, after his efforts to improve the quality of his speaking voice in the 1930s started to bear fruit.[80]

In fact, the *Nippon eiga* reviewer absolves Bantsuma and the rest of the Japanese cast from responsibility for this failure, arguing that this portion of the film fails to come alive because the film provided too little exposition about conditions in Japan at that time, and even

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[78] "[kono] kasho ha amari ikiteinai." *Nippon eiga*, vol. 31, p. 576. In the extant film, Takasugi receives the letter with the fateful news, and delivers the subsequent speech, at minute thirty-eight.

[79] That exuberance was the selling point in Bantsuma's silent-era portrayal of Takasugi in the 1931 hit *Fūun Nagato-jō,* which featured "Takasugi Shinsaku, soldier of fortune of the Restoration" in "a three-layered tale of swords, blood and romance." See *Kinema shūho dai nana kan*, pp. 357-360 for the deluxe four-page ad.

[80] Bantsuma faced two related problems with the advent of the talkies: he had a weak, high-pitched voice (not at all in keeping with his magnetic on-screen presence and virile energy in the silents) which shocked and disappointed audiences for his first talkie in 1935 (see Kyoto shinbunsha hen, *Kyoto no eiga 80nen no ayumi*, p. 75). Deeply affected by this problem, he took voice lessons to strengthen his voice by training to speak in the cadence of a katsuben narrator. This led to his subsequent tendency to deliver speeches in his early talkies in an exaggerated, theatrical manner, very much like (*katsuben*) narration. In any case, he had had to retrain his voice extensively to find true success in the talkies, but had evidently done so by 1943-4. Several wartime Bantsuma films, notably *Muhō Matsu no isshō* (*Matsu the Untamed*) and *Kakute kamikaze wa fuku* (*Thus Did the Divine Wind Blow*), in both of which he gives several rousing speeches, were huge hits; *Kakute* was the #1 film at the box office for the first half of 1944 (and no reliable data is available for the second half). See Furukawa, p. 173.

worse, it leaves the motives of the Japanese to visit Shanghai in the first place anything but clear.[81] The implication is that the director and screenwriter are ultimately to blame for choosing to film this particular story, and in this way. Indeed, he concludes that while the original plan, to make a coproduction, is praiseworthy, the final product "has serious problems, and I wonder whether finding a different story would have been a better way of realizing the goal [of coproduction success]...the film obsesses over the trivial detail that Takasugi went to China, ignoring the historical circumstances and the times, meaning that this film may lead the masses astray."[82] In other words, the Bureau of Information officials who'd had such high hopes for this film as a paragon promoting Greater East Asian solidarity were far from happy with the finished film, even going so far as to raise the fear that, far from convincing everyone of the rightness of Japan's history and cause, it could actually end up misleading the population.

The reviewer's main complaint about *Signal Fires* was that it showed Japanese heroes in a rather lighthearted fashion, as tourists rather than deadly serious patriots. And the very last sentence of his review emphasizes that he also cares deeply about historical accuracy in history films, and implies that the filmmakers of *Signal Fires* failed to portray heroes like Takasugi correctly due to faulty research: "I would like those making [history] films to dig up all the historical facts and circumstances and do their best to conduct research for the film very carefully."[83] But we have already seen how, based on the diaries of some of the Japanese members of the voyage, there was a healthy dose of tourism and curiosity in this trip to Shanghai, so the screenwriter and directors were arguably being true to the historical record, at least with

[81] 'tōji no nihon no kokunai jōsei mo setsumei sarete worazu, nani yori mo shishi tachi no toshi ni itaru jijō ga hanzen to shiteinai kara.' Ibid., p. 576.
[82] '[kono eiga ni] muri ga ari, kono tagui no kikaku wo ikasu naraba nanika betsu no hanashi demo saguri ageta hō ga yoku ha nakatta ka to mo omowareru...Takasugi ga, toshi shita to ifu jijitsu ni kōdei shite, rekishiteki jijitsu, toki wo bokkyaku shita kōsō wo tateru koto ha, ayamari wo taishū ni kamosu osore ga aru.' Ibid., p. 576.
[83] 'Subete rekishiteki jijitsu wo saguri agete eigaka su baai ni ha tsutomete kenkyū wo shinchō ni shite moraitai.' Ibid., p. 576.

this touristic aspect of their experiences. This contradiction is at the very heart of the push by patriotically minded government officials and citizen ideologues alike. Historical accuracy is vital, since such patriots wanted Japanese exceptionalism to shine forth from Japan's national history, but only if the historically accurate tale being told would function smoothly in support of state goals; if not, a more useful history or historical interpretation must be found.

On the subject of alternate stories that might have served the state's propagandistic needs better, the film had not always been intended to focus on Takasugi and the Taiping Rebellion. The original idea for this movie was to center it around the life of Godai Tomoatsu (a real-life samurai from Satsuma, played by period film star Tsukigata Ryūnosuke in the film) and his journey to Shanghai, but because he left no written record of his experiences there, screenwriter Yahiro Fuji began reading the diaries of other members of the Senzaimaru voyage, and hit upon the idea of focusing on the Taipings after seeing Takasugi's interest in them in his diary.[84] Yahiro and Inagaki can perhaps be forgiven for wishing to embellish the material they found in Takasugi's diary, which nowhere indicates he actually managed even to see, much less meet and "talk" with, a Taiping, so the script and the film follow what one might call an alternate history track, in which Takasugi succeeds in befriending a Taiping officer. And although this friendship facilitates the inclusion of a few bald-faced propaganda speeches about uniting against a common enemy, it has many more implications than simply that.

To start with, the film portrays China and the Chinese in a surprisingly favorable light. To date, almost all wartime depictions of China by Japanese moviemakers fell into a pattern of virile Japan as strong male soldier saving China as rebellious woman. The most famous examples of this stereotype can be found in films like *China Nights* (*Shina no yoru*, dir. Fushimizu Osamu, 1940) which feature Hasegawa Kazuo as the virile Japanese and Yamaguchi

[84] Fogel, p. 132.

Yoshiko, then known as Li Xianglan, as the initially suspicious but soon head over heels in love Chinese woman. In the case of *China Nights*, the woman—and thus, China—must literally be slapped into submission by a stern yet loving Japan(ese man). Given this context within the film industry, it was more or less unheard of to have a virile, trustworthy and honorable Chinese *man* as a main character, but *Signal Fires* dared to do precisely that in the person of Shen Yizhou.

Prejudice was not the only reason so few sympathetic Chinese male characters appeared in wartime Japanese films. Linguistic difficulties plagued any attempt to depict Chinese characters in Japanese films, since with very few exceptions, Chinese characters were played by Japanese actors who could not speak Chinese. As a consequence, most filmmakers opted for the far easier route of simply having everyone speak Japanese. But native Chinese audiences had little respect for such performances, and it is doubtful whether a Japanese audience, seeing a Japanese actor speaking Japanese but nominally portraying a Chinese character, would necessarily come to associate that character's heroic qualities with the Chinese people. For example, one potentially heroic depiction of a Chinese man in a Japanese film is Commissioner Lin in Makino Masahiro's *Opium War* (*Ahen sensō,* 1943), but the entire movie is in Japanese, and the cast is all Japanese too. Lin is portrayed by famed Kabuki actor Ichikawa Ennosuke II, and though he does appear heroic during his brave stand against the rapacious British, this instance of a proud and defiant China is more a case of a Japanese film company's appropriation of Chinese history for propaganda reasons than a true valorization of a Chinese hero.[85]

On the other hand, filmmakers in Japan had almost no alternative to all-Japanese cast and dialogue films. In the 1940s, to manage to recruit for one's film a professional actor to play a

[85] While *Opium War* had a mediocre performance at the domestic box office, coming in 37th (out of 68) for 1943 by number of admissions (*Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 107), it fared significantly better in occupied areas; box-office data from the Philippines confirm it as the third-most popular film (by admissions) to be released during the occupation. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 323. In Taiwan, it ranked 14th; see ibid., p. 403. In Thailand, it was the 2nd-most popular film of the war, behind *Songokū* and ahead of *Kurama Tengu Yokohama ni arawareru*. Ibid., pp. 404-405.

strong Chinese male lead, one who both speaks and is himself Chinese, was a serious challenge given the ongoing war by Japan against China. The only movie producer who made a concerted effort to bring Chinese actors into his movies was Kawakita Nagamasa, a man with strong ties to China and Shanghai in particular. Kawakita, the founder and vice-president (and de facto controller) of China Movie Company,[86] which was involved in the production of *Signal Fires*, had personal experience with multilingual European films, which may have been part of the inspiration for the literally heteroglossic nature of *Signal Fires*.[87] Kawakita also attempted ethno-linguistic filmmaking experiments like *The Road to Peace in the Orient* (*Tōyō heiwa no michi,* dir. Suzuki Shigeyoshi, 1938), which featured casts with plenty of amateur Chinese actors and large sections of Chinese dialogue subtitled in Japanese, but Japanese audiences had not liked such films,[88] which provoked hand-wringing from film critics, most of whom were of the opinion that the Japanese were simply uninterested in China.[89] His greatest success was in learning from overacted Nazi hate the enemy films and green-lighting an entirely different model of film with *Signal Fires,* and more specifically, getting *Signal Fires* made as a co-production that could straddle both film worlds.[90] Its propagandistic elements would and did ensure Japanese state sponsorship in the form of having the censorship fees mandated by the Home Ministry waived, while the involvement of Kawakita's Chinese allies in the Shanghai film industry guaranteed it genuine Chinese stars—and this in turn would help bring in a sizable

[86] 中华电影公司, or in pinyin, Zhonghua dianying gongsi; name later changed to China United Movie Company.
[87] For Kawakita's experience with European films, see Baskett, "All Beautiful Fascists?" p. 219.
[88] Fu, p. 75. For evidence that mostly Chinese casts were box-office poison for Japanese audiences, see Baskett, *Attractive Empire*, p. 74, and on *The Road to Peace in the Orient*'s failure at the box office, see High, p. 277.
[89] There was a round-table discussion in the pages of the June 1938 issue of *Eiga no Tomo*, in which Iijima Tadashi and nearly all other critics were in agreement that the source of the problem was Japanese beliefs about superiority vis-a-vis the Chinese and a general lack of interest in China; the sole dissenting voice was that of Iwasaki Akira, who retorted that Japanese people simply did not like to see pro-state national policy films. Silverberg, p. 135.
[90] Kawakita had been struck by the overacting in such German hate the enemy films as the 1941 *Ohm Kruger*, and resolved to follow a co-production model thereafter. See Baskett, "All Beautiful Fascists?", p. 223.

Chinese audience. And its Japanese superstar Bantsuma, who had always been strongly associated with Bakumatsu films, was sure to bring in Japanese audiences.[91]

The decision to focus *Signal Fires* around the friendship of Takasugi and Shen Yizhou, in addition to creating a more positive—and virile—depiction of China than any all-Japanese cast and language film could have done, also made for a much more exciting film. Had the film limited itself solely to things actually described in the historical sources of the Senzaimaru voyage and mission, the *Nippon eiga* reviewer's "touristy" complaint would've been well deserved indeed, since touristic records and observations are the focus of the diaries. But by creating the character of Shen Yizhou, who as a Taiping is necessarily a fugitive in Qing-controlled Shanghai, the story becomes much more dynamic and action-filled.

For example, about twenty-two minutes into the extant version, there is a dramatic night-time chase sequence during a rain-storm, in which Shen, trying to sneak out of the city after meeting with Medhurst and convincing him to support the Taiping and ban opium, has to flee Qing police through the streets of Shanghai, trading gunshots with them from time to time, and in the end is sheltered by none other than Takasugi.[92] Thrilling extradiegetic orchestral music and rapid cutting dominate the minute-long sequence.

Of course, following the alternate history track of having the Taipings and British actually come to blows while the Japanese observers were in Shanghai has propagandistic valence as well. Takasugi, who tries to warn Shen against trusting the British by detailing the

[91] In fact, in the "Shōchiku news" film program leaflet dating from Feb. 15, 1927, the writer gets rather defensive, insisting that Bantsuma was capable of playing other, non-Bakumatsu roles, so strong was his early association with Bakumatsu sword-fighting films. See *Purogurammu eigashi Taishō kara senchū made*, p. 115.

[92] It is worth noting that in the script, this act of heroism was given to Yizhou's little sister Xiaomei, not Takasugi, so the proposed film would have presented a Takasugi even less heroic, with even less to do; this may be an instance where Inagaki and the filmmakers capitulated to censors' demands (as indicated by the semi-official *Nippon eiga* review) that the loyalists be given a more proactive role in the film. See *Nihon shinario*, p. 779, for scenes fifty thru fifty-four, which covers the chase sequence with Yizhou and Xiaomei calling to him from the doorway, in Chinese; in the finished film, all this has been replaced by an essentially non-verbal communication from Takasugi acting benevolently, and alone, to save the imperiled Chinese patriot.

sordid history of Anglo-American misdeeds and treachery in Asia, is proven right in spectacular fashion after the British break their promise and open fire on the Taiping camp. Actual armed conflict involving the Taipings never occurred while any Japanese were there to witness it, but including combat scenes certainly makes the film more thrilling, and depicting the British as oath-breaking instigators adds power to the hate the enemy rhetoric.

Since depicting groups of men in long shot firing cannon at each other, while exciting, would have lacked the melodramatic power that personalizing the conflict can bring, the British also resort to a malevolent reprisal against Shen's family, which only a heroic Japanese passerby can prevent, or at least mitigate. Tsukigata Ryūnosuke's character Godai is given one sword-flashing action scene, the decision to include which was also certain to please audiences now starved for period drama action and fulfill audience expectations that the swashbuckling stalwart Tsukigata would have something exciting to do.[93] Godai heroically cuts down a British soldier before the man can shoot Shen Yizhou's defenseless sister Xiaohong (the British having already burned down their house and then, with gratuitous cruelty, shot Yizhou's father Shen Changling). Xiaohong, weeping with her fiancé as they kneel by her murdered father, is depicted from a high angle in a close-up on her face as she delivers a speech in extremely slow and simple Chinese, explaining she understands now that the British are the true enemy. Then we cut to Godai, shot in low-angle close-up, so stricken by her grief that he must turn away from the camera altogether. But Godai's protective role fulfilled, his presence soon becomes almost inappropriate given the romantic grief expressed by the two Chinese actors. As one wider medium long shot makes clear,

[93] Tsukigata Ryūnosuke, as names go, had very strong type-casting associations with period films, so much so that Tsukigata himself commented on it in an April 1925 article appearing in *Tōjiin* (soon after renamed *Makino*), a cinema fan magazine. In the article, Tsukigata admitted his name, sounding like a combination of the antihero Tsukue Ryūnosuke from *Daibosatsu tōge* and the eponymous hero from *Tsukigata Hanpeita*, was likely to continue to limit his career options to period films, and hoped audiences would go see his then-upcoming Shingeki stage appearance despite these strong associations. See Tomita Mika hen, *Makino dai 1 go*, p. 51.

Godai remains standing near Xiaohong and her fiancé, who patriotically pledges (he too inexplicably speaking in very slow and simple Chinese) to join her brother Yizhou's Taiping army and seek vengeance on her father's killers, but they continue to talk only in Chinese and the camera never returns to Godai again.

However, it is with its attempt to link British treachery in China with American aggression in Japan itself that *Signal Fires* departs furthest from history and delves into speculation and fantasy. The major departure concerns the chronology of the *Senzaimaru's* voyage. According to *Signal Fires*, the voyage occurred in the fifth month of the third year of the Bunkyū era, or 1863. Tellingly, the ten-week trade mission actually set sail in the spring of 1862, meaning that, in fact, none of the major events depicted in the film actually occurred while the Japanese delegation was present in Shanghai; this seemingly subtle change in the chronology is of critical importance to the interpretation of history *Signal Fires* advances.[94]

Signal Fires also presents a heavily doctored version of the *Senzaimaru* and her crew itself, suggesting, among other things, that it was crewed entirely by patriots from a unified Japan. The film proper opens, in its current form (the first reel is missing), with a medium close-up of several queue-wearing Chinese youths looking and pointing out at the harbor. It then cuts to a wider shot of several Chinese fishermen (and women) standing up on their boats to peer out into the harbor too, before quickly cutting to the harbor itself, which contains only traditional Chinese-style sailboats.[95] Then the camera slowly pans right to reveal the source of the commotion—the *Senzaimaru*, a Western-style three-masted steamship that towers over the little junks in the harbor, and has several samurai standing regally on deck. The implication is clear:

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[94] References to the *Senzaimaru's* arrival in and departure from port in the *North-China Herald* (among many other sources) from May to July 31st (when the Japanese departed for Nagasaki) prove decisively that the *Senzaimaru* voyage occurred in spring 1862, not 1863; see Fogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere*, pp. 51-55.

[95] Often called junks, the boats shown in the film are so patently traditional in appearance that they would not look at all out of place in a Southern Song-era *shanshui* (landscape) painting.

China is hopelessly backwards, and the technologically advanced Japan—shown as able not only to construct, but also to crew, such a mighty vessel—has arrived to save the Chinese from, essentially, themselves. Even though the West is branded the enemy, the true struggle is going on inside China itself, a struggle between the West's lackeys (the Qing/Nationalists) and the real patriots of China (the Taiping/Communists). In the ideological climate of the Japanese empire in late 1944, it was certainly no longer permissible to make pro-Communist films, which is probably why the strong analogy—or even allegory—to China's internal situation in the 1930s and 1940s is never made explicit.

In the abovementioned shot of the ship entering port, Japan's national flag, the Sun-disk flag or Rising Sun, is proudly and prominently flying.[96] Here the historical context of the making of the film—late 1944—looms large, as ever since Japan began tightening censorship of films in the late 1930s, filmmakers more and more often opted voluntarily to insert scenes featuring the flag or some national patriot in an effort to boost the chance it would be approved without significant cuts by the censors.[97] *Signal Fires*' filmic gaze lingers on both flag and national hero (Takasugi), showing clear evidence of this sort of preemptive self-censorship.[98]

On the other hand, though it is possible to view the opening thirty seconds of footage as conveying the awe and admiration of the backwards Chinese for their Asian neighbors, close examination of their facial expressions reveals not awe or even curiosity at the newcomers, but

[96] Although in 1854 the Satsuma daimyo, Shimazu Nariakira, had managed to convince the Tokugawa Shogunate to use the Sun-disk flag, based on a Satsuma design, for all Japanese ships sailing in international locations, it is almost impossible to believe that this ship actually entered the harbor under that flag, for the reasons outlined below. Information on how the Sun-disk flag became Japan's national flag can be found at the Kagoshima ishin furusato kan museum in Kagoshima, or alternatively see Hosoi, p. 117.
[97] High, p. 173.
[98] Loving shots of the flag bookend the film; it features especially prominently in the final scenes, as Takasugi and the rest set sail. In fact, the flag forms part of a three-way overlay, along with b) the departing Taipings and c) Takasugi standing tall and proud on his way back to Japan. The script also reveals the very first shot in the film was also of the Sun-disk flag fluttering in the breeze from the mast of the Senzaimaru before its departure in Nagasaki harbor. See *Nihon shinario*, p. 767.

rather stoicism—and even, perhaps, a hint of trepidation at the sight of the Sun-disk flag waving in the sea breeze. This is true, perhaps, of the Chinese extras and stars of the film themselves, all of whom must have been aware of the true war situation, as well as at least some of the atrocities committed by the Japanese army in China, by mid-1944 when the film was being made. As such, they cannot be faulted for their lack of enthusiasm upon seeing the Sun-disk flag appear on the horizon; indeed, the scene brings to mind Kamei Fumio's famous response to Mori Iwao's comment in 1937 that seeing the Rising Sun flag flying proudly over the warships entering Shanghai brought tears (of patriotic pride) to his eyes: Kamei retorted that the people of Shanghai must have been crying even more at the sight.[99] Thus even the proud ship and the flag it was flying might convey an ambivalent message for the international audience of this film.

The *Senzaimaru's* depiction, in everything from its country of origin to the nationality of the crew to the flag it flew, reveals a number of *Signal Fires*' most interesting historical elisions. Historically speaking, how did the Japanese, who had no official relations with Qing China, even receive permission to enter Shanghai harbor in 1862? Actually, the historical *Senzaimaru* was probably flying the Dutch flag, because the key intermediary on board, who secured permission for the Japanese to dock, was a Dutchman, Theodorus Kroes, and it was necessary to convince the Chinese customs officials that the ship was Dutch in order to receive permission to dock.[100] And as for the ship itself, though certainly impressive, it was not, as the film suggests by omission, built by the Japanese; a British ship originally named *Armistice*, it was bought secondhand by the Shogunate from its captain, Henry Richardson.[101] Finally, the favorable impression the obviously skilful crew of this state-of-the-art steamship might have made on the watching Chinese (both of the time and in film audiences of 1944) would have lost much of its

[99] High, p. 103.
[100] Fogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere*, p. 56.
[101] Ibid., p. 55.

rhetorical force if the crewmen had been portrayed accurately, because the original—presumably British but certainly not Japanese—crew was hired back for the journey to Shanghai after the ship's purchase.[102] In other words, except for the Japanese passengers, everyone else on board, from the entire crew to the diplomatic liaison, was European! Needless to say, it was out of the question to acknowledge these historical debts to the British or Dutch in late 1944, so neither Richardson (and crew) nor the Dutchman Kroes is ever mentioned in the film.

However, a figure who might be intended to be Kroes appears in a later scene, one which presents perhaps the most telling chronological and historical revision in the entire film. In this scene, which occurs two-thirds of the way through the film, an American ship captain bedecked in plausible uniform appears in a drawing room and meets with another American, the merchant named Cunningham who is just then negotiating, apparently through a Caucasian interpreter who may be intended to be Kroes or another Dutchman, with the Japanese envoys present in Shanghai over the purchase of a steamship. The captain rushes in to convey news that frightens but also presents a welcome opportunity: the Japanese of Chōshū domain have opened fire without warning on his ship, the *Pembroke*, an American merchant vessel, as it was crossing the Shimonoseki Straits. The captain draws the merchant away from the group of Japanese and together, the two unleash quite a barrage of righteous (and racist) fury against "those rascal Japs." But they quickly flash knowing smiles and intimate that they had been scheming for just such an opportunity to teach the Japanese a lesson, and that "it will be quite an expense for Japan" once the USS Wyoming arrives to deliver the planned chastisement.

Turning next to a close analysis of the scene described above, one is immediately struck by a number of aspects, particularly the laughable pronunciation of the "American" actors, who are both—indeed, as Joshua Fogel has pointed out, all the Caucasian actors with spoken lines in

[102] Ibid., pp. 54-6.

the film appear to be Russophones, though it is worth noting that Okazaki Kōzō, interviewed nearly sixty years later, claimed the film recruited both Russian and Turkish extras.[103] Their accents are so thick that even for native English speakers, they are at times almost unintelligible. But more significant is the appearance of the Kroes-like character, who is apparently an interpreter for the Japanese during their meeting with Cunningham, ostensibly assisting in their efforts to purchase a steamship from the Americans. Surprisingly, this Caucasian interpreter apparently chooses to side with the Japanese: because they can't understand English and thus have no idea what Cunningham and the captain are saying, the interpreter whispers (inaudibly to the camera) to the Japanese negotiators what has happened and perhaps even mentions the racist rhetoric with which Cunningham and the captain detail the American plot against Japan. The inclusion of not one but, with Medhurst, two friendly Caucasian interlocutors and allies of Japan, while subtle, weakens the force of the hate the enemy propaganda message. Neither of these men appears to be swayed by the virtue of the Japanese into voicing their support for Japan; instead, they are acting in a manner consistent with their own ethical position, particularly in Medhurst's case, as he refers explicitly to Christianity as the reason both to support the Taipings, "Christians like us," and to oppose predatory designs on Japan as unworthy of Christian morals.

For these ethno-linguistic reasons, *Signal Fires* displays rather startling cosmopolitanism, despite not featuring the most well known actress mediator between Japan and China, Li Xianglan. This was not for lack of trying; obviously, the best choice for a character who is supposedly fluent in two languages is to find a genuinely bilingual person to portray him or her, which explains why Inagaki tried to recruit Li Xianglan for the film, but she was unable to do so due to her association with Manchuria as opposed to mainland China, so the glamorous singer Li Lihua was chosen for the bridging role of Wang Ying, who was made to function, despite Li's

[103] Fogel, "A Cinematic Recreation," p. 134. For the Okazaki interview, see *Bantsuma,* p. 58.

lack of fluency in Japanese, as a Japanese-Chinese interpreter.[104] On the level of characters, Wang Ying was neither historically nor logistically necessary; as we have seen, the Japanese trade mission sent to Shanghai aboard the *Senzaimaru* also included a key interlocutor between Chinese and Japanese in the form of the Dutchman Kroes.[105] His absence, however, is not surprising in light of the fact that the Netherlands was, after all, part of the ABCD encirclement so lamented by the Japanese press from 1941 onwards.[106] For Inagaki, however, who was committed to making above all an entertaining and successful movie rather than a historically accurate or straightforwardly propagandistic one, Li was value added: she brought performance skills that any Caucasian "actor" in Shanghai certainly would have lacked, as well as a very large following of fans devoted to both her voice and her onscreen beauty.

Signal Fires' focus on entertainment value and playfulness regarding language also surfaces in the casting of two well-known Chinese comedians in the role of bellboys at the guest house where the Japanese envoys are staying, and their comical interactions with the Japanese, which concern the language barrier and mutual unintelligibility. In one early scene six minutes into the film they repeat without comprehension the words the Japanese keep reiterating, words like "ocha" (tea) and "wakaranai" (I don't understand) and "kore da" (this is [what I'm talking about]), until arriving at the hilarious conclusion the Japanese must be requesting sorghum wine (gāoliáng jiǔ, which sounds faintly similar to "kore da"). But although it might appear the Chinese bellboys are the butt of the joke, if anything it is the reverse: after all, it is the Japanese who suffer through a sip of what they believed to be tea only to find it is a very strong alcoholic beverage instead. Far from being depicted as wise and all-knowing, as the *Nippon eiga* reviewer no doubt wished to see them, the Japanese loyalists appear somewhat pitiable, the victims of a

[104] Fogel, "A Cinematic Recreation," p. 142.
[105] Fogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere*, p. 57.
[106] Dower, *War without Mercy*, p. 59.

common mishap when traveling to a foreign country.[107] The bridging presence of Wang Ying, who soon appears on screen and, after a comic interlude of her own in which she lets the Japanese men comment on her beauty before revealing that she understands Japanese, resolves the linguistic impasse and helps ensure the scene will leave a lighthearted impression.[108]

It is significant to note that the comic misunderstanding between the bellboys and the Japanese over the drink, as well as the opera singing scene which occurred a bit before that, are not mentioned at all in the censor-approved script. Wang Ying and the speculation on her identity is in the script, but the singing and the comedy before that are all extraneous elements the filmmakers apparently chose to insert, thereby subverting the film's propaganda message through entertaining spectacle. The script arguably left openings for such spectacle in its brevity, so for example scene sixteen is simply described as the characters being 'in the inn', and scene seventeen 'on the second floor', and since it is not specified what they are doing and there is no dialogue written, having a woman singing opera is within the realm of possibility; but there is no dialogue included in the script for any of the subsequent scene, involving the bellboys and the tea/liquor misunderstanding, and adding dialogue that had not been pre-approved was a risky move for filmmakers to take.[109] It is not clear whether credit for inclusion of these elements should go to Inagaki or one of the two Chinese co-directors, Yue Feng and Hu Xinling, the extent of whose responsibilities is unknown; it is hard to imagine, however, that any such

[107] The presence in this late 1944 film of lighter, comic flourishes like the two bellboys, played by famous Chinese comedians in a vaudevillian, *mansai*-esque manner that strongly reminds one of Enoken, provides more evidence that Japan's march to ultra-serious hyper-nationalism was far from smooth and linear—and always incomplete.
[108] This is after all a moment of superiority for this Chinese interlocutor, a scene of dramatic irony in which the camera dwells on her amused smile as the men just behind her, never suspecting for a moment that she understands Japanese, comment on her beauty and wonder who she could be. She quickly dispels this and other mysteries by virtue of her linguistic abilities, neutralizing the implicit threat her linguistic skills carry by revealing a pro-Japanese bent and becoming their loyal interpreter. Needless to say, Li Lihua was not actually able to speak Japanese, so she learned her lines phonetically (and though she did rather well pronunciation-wise, no native speaker could mistake her as a fellow native, as the film's characters do).
[109] See *Nihon shinario*, pp. 770-772, for the sparse descriptions of scenes fifteen thru seventeen, and for what dialogue and description is included in scene eighteen (when Wang Ying comes in and blushes to hear them praise her beauty) and what excluded (any mention of the bellboys or the gaoliang jiu debacle).

insertion of entertainment scenes could have occurred without the active approval of Inagaki, who knew full well Japanese censors' expectations and chose to risk their displeasure anyway.[110]

The above interlude functions as a partial foreshadowing of the climactic final scene featuring Takasugi and Shen, who had argued earlier (with Wang Ying as interpreter) over whether Britain could really be trusted. In their final meeting, Wang Ying is again present but is no longer needed, for although Takasugi and Shen cannot speak more than a few words of each other's language, they have somehow transcended linguistic differences through mutual understanding and harmony of thought;[111] Britain's treachery is clear, and (as Takasugi joyfully announces in a sort of passing-of-the-torch scene) Japan will succeed, where the Taiping have failed, in reforming China and driving the West out of Asia.[112] This anti-Western, pan-Asian harmony becomes a sort of universal language, then, rather like cinema itself, which many at the time believed to be a universal language capable of transcending national borders and spreading the good news of Japan's anti-Western expansion throughout the occupied territories.

Yet Inagaki and the other crew members, and perhaps the cast as well, do not seem to have been particularly committed to making a robust propaganda film as ideologues like the anti-entertainment Tsumura Hideo would define it. Their concerted attempts to keep the film entertaining call into question the very rationale for the various chronological and historical alterations made in the film (and discussed in Appendix B). It is true that all such changes at

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[110] See Fogel, "Cinematic", p. 130.

[111] Ironically, this miraculous ability to understand each other is just what the Japanese (about 25) and Chinese (almost 50) in the crew lacked; the linguistic barrier the cast and crew faced (five languages being spoken and almost no one able to speak each other's language, particularly in the case of the Russophones, meant everyone was forced to communicate in far from fluent English) made production slow and "yayakoshii" (irksome), even prompting director Inagaki Hiroshi to cradle his head and scream in frustration, according to Okura Kōichirō. See Okura, "Satsuei wa Shanghai ni susumu," in *Shin eiga* 1944 (7) pp. 10-11.

[112] This trans-verbal communication, sometimes identified as a kind of *ishin denshin* (heart-to-heart transmission), is actually a rather common occurrence in wartime Japanese films set in China; for example, it occurs in the 1940 *Vow in the Desert*, whose story takes place in China and must therefore face the same problem of how to overcome the language barrier. See Baskett, p. 37.

least potentially serve the interests of the state in its desire to evoke stronger hatred for the enemy among the Japanese populace and feelings of unity among Asians. These changes enabled the creation of scenes with British soldiers committing atrocities and Americans spewing racist epithets, after all. But the changes simultaneously accomplish other goals as well.

News of Chōshū's attack on the *Pembroke* is also the catalyst that inspires Takasugi to take his long walk outside the city looking for Shen Yizhou; in other words, it provides a chance to dazzle audiences in Japan with images of the exotic Chinese countryside, complete with rather upbeat, dreamlike music. And the battle scenes certainly make the film more entertaining, as does Godai's sword-slashing of the British soldier. In fact, hate the enemy films offered veteran period drama filmmakers like Inagaki villains and storylines that fit comfortably into the filmic tropes of the period film, meaning projects like *Signal Fires* were a way of making period films in a wartime climate in which the state frowned upon apolitical swashbuckling (*chanbara*) entertainment. Since the 1920s, period films had quite often featured the specter of an enemy so unreasonable as to push the hero beyond even his superhuman endurance into a paroxysm of violence in the film's climax. So the scenes in *Signal Fires* showing the casual brutality and gratuitous cruelty of the British soldiers, which compel Godai to leap into action, mirror other such scenes in Japanese period films featuring villains who leave the hero, in the end, no option but to kill. The example par excellence of the unreasonable, goading enemy is Kira from the Chūshingura cycle of stories and films, whose malicious goading of Asano had been emphasized in the good-versus-evil (*kōdan*) versions of the tale from the mid Tokugawa period onwards, and had continued to be a major theme in film depictions thru the 1940s (and to the present day).[113]

Moreover, as both Itami Mansaku and Stanley Cavell have pointed out, a single viewing of a film is unlikely to leave a sufficiently reinforced, detailed impression on the viewer's mind

[113] In a discussion of the Loyal Retainer film archetype, Gregory Barrett (p. 27) discusses Kira's villainous brutality.

to impart, or rather to implant complex ideological ideas.[114] Since most cinema-goers in wartime Japan probably saw most films only once,[115] any sort of ideological ambivalence like that present in *Signal Fires* would ensure its propaganda impact would be weak indeed.

Close analysis of the script, particularly of the first nine scenes, which represent the missing first reel, yields key insights into the interpretation of Japan's history *Signal Fires* was meant to advance. The sequence of nine scenes on the no longer extant first reel began with a flag shot, and more importantly, the second scene was of an argument over the significance of that very flag. A high-ranking Shogunate official in Nagasaki presiding over the launch of the Senzaimaru, which was flying the Sun-disk flag, gave a speech about the Sun-disk flag as a symbol of the Shogunate, but is suddenly interrupted by an "insolent" Japanese deck-hand who rebukes him for seeing the flag as a mere symbol of the reigning government, insisting instead that it is a symbol for the entire nation.[116] This sailor, who dares to criticize a major government official despite his own low rank, turns out to be none other than Godai Tomoatsu.

The argument in *Signal Fires* over the significance of the flag is telling for two reasons. First of all, having a low-ranking samurai rebuke a high official is consistent with the hegemonic narrative of the Meiji Restoration as a "low overthrowing the high" (*gekokujō*) revolution, but it is also an example of outspoken civil disobedience and protest against a corrupt and misguided regime, quite an ambivalent message for the 1944 audience now suffering from their government's war on a scale not even official censorship of news could hide from view.

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[114] No less an authority than director Itami Mansaku (father of Jūzō) famously criticized one of the irrational, spiritist films produced in Japan in the late 1930s by pointing out that the medium of film is severely limited in the weight of message it can carry, rendering it unable to articulate abstract concepts (like, in the case to which he referred, the notion that spirit can triumph over rationality). See High, p. 247. For Cavell's thoughts on single viewings, see Cavell p. x, xiv.

[115] While some would return to theaters to see the same film again and again, even for such enthusiasts, the length of films' theatrical runs in Japan at the time (just one week, two to four for a major hit) would limit their exposure.

[116] The sailor is described in the script as 'muenryō', or "outspoken" (in a pejorative, cheeky sense). See *Nihon shinario taikei daiikkan*, p. 767, scene two.

Moreover, Chinese audiences might have viewed this argument over the Japanese flag's meaning with even greater ambivalence, given what had been done in China in the 1930s and 1940s under that flag; for such audiences, the flag was unlikely to be seen as an innocuous national symbol of Japan, to say the least, so disagreement among the Japanese over its significance would have been read very differently by Chinese audiences than by native domestic moviegoers.

While Godai's rebuke of the official is potentially subversive of the 1944 state, who Godai is and what Godai actually says also have an intriguing story to tell. Godai was from Satsuma, the original birthplace of the Sun-disk flag flag, and here he is arguing that it is a truly national symbol without any local, regional, or politically exclusionary markers whatsoever. But given the flag's provenance as a Satsuma-proposed idea, it would certainly have had strong associations with Satsuma and thus risked becoming a symbol, not of the nation, but of the Satsuma-Chōshū clique which had ruled Japan, and its military in particular, since the Restoration. Having a famous Satsuma samurai argue that the flag represented all Japan was a politically significant act that could help defuse—by denying the possibility of—any lingering resentment among certain domestic audiences against the winners of the Restoration struggle.

Takasugi Shinsaku was also prominently featured in the first reel, but the notoriously anti-foreign Takasugi was not presented in the manner one might expect of an anti-West propaganda film, to say the least. The first mention of him occurs in scene three, in which Godai and Nakamuda Kuranosuke (from Saga, an anti-foreign domain close to Nagasaki on Kyushu) laud his character and mention they hope he will be able to join them on board, but since he is just then meeting with the French consul they are not certain he will make it in time. In the film, therefore, Takasugi is immediately identified by reputation as no extremist but rather a moderate,

who is more than willing to meet with foreigners and share ideas amicably, and scene five from the first reel featuring Takasugi continue to bear out this portrayal.

Scene five is a dialogue-heavy discussion between Takasugi and two Christian missionaries.[117] Takasugi instructs the missionaries at length on the sorry state of domestic conditions, lamenting how the Opium War and Perry's threatening arrival in Japan, and the subsequent port openings, led to Ii Naosuke being parted from his head. [118] Thereupon one missionary, Williams, suggests Qing China is in even more dire straits, thanks to the Opium Wars and so forth, until a revolution inevitably emerged among peasant farmers, those who had been suffering worst of all: the rebellion of the Taipings. Initially Takasugi does not understand what Williams is talking about, 'taipin' having no meaning when pronounced that way in Japanese, but when Williams scrawls out the kanji for "Taiping" (the Chinese characters for "great" and "peace", pronounced Taiping in Mandarin Chinese but "taihei" in Japanese) recognition dawns and he demonstrates he knows about them, but by the name "longhairs," which is what the Japanese are calling them; Williams stresses that the Taipings are Christians.[119] Then the steam whistle of the Senzaimaru sounds and Takasugi indicates he must leave, standing up after promising to come see them again once he gets back from Shanghai. Before he can leave, however, the other missionary tries to get him to accept a Bible "to study during your voyage," but Takasugi firmly if politely refuses.

The nature of Takasugi's rejection of the Bible and, more generally, Christianity itself, is telling. When Williams starts trying to convince him to accept that "in contrast to all the pagan

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[117] Despite Godai and Nakamuda's certainty he's visiting the French consul, the main participant in the conversation with Takasugi in scene five is named "Williams", hardly a French-sounding name, and the eponymous Williams and his companion are clearly identified as Christian missionaries, not consular officials. Takasugi's journal indicates that while he was in Nagasaki he indeed met with a missionary, an American; the inspiration for the scene surely came from that journal entry, though the dialogue about eye color and so forth was doubtless an invention of the scriptwriter. See Huber dissertation, p. 157.

[118] The memorable phrase for the Tairō's fate is "kubi ga tobu". *Nihon shinario,* p. 768.

[119] The script claims Williams showed him *kanakugi moji* (etched characters) for 'Taiping.' *Nihon shinario*, p. 768.

gods, Christ is the one true God" Takasugi counters by saying, "Hold on a second and look at me (pointing to his eyes), they're black, see?" And when the missionaries look confused, he continues, saying "I'm a Japanese. This is Japan. It's different from lands of the blue-eyed."[120] And when Williams counters that eye color doesn't matter in questions of faith, and that all are equally servants of God, Takasugi simply repeats that he has no need for a Bible and departs.

Aside from the propagandistic purpose of emphasizing the supposed incompatibility of Christianity with the Japanese temperament—on a physiological level, in fact—the scene is remarkable for the restraint Takasugi shows in the face of this proselytizing.[121] Takasugi, who as a historical figure had earned lasting fame not for his cool head but for his excesses, especially his impetuosity, is here portrayed engaged in a calm debate with what to many anti-foreign activists was the worst kind of foreigner imaginable: the missionary.[122] The historical hero Takasugi had appeared in several other films thru 1944, including one from 1931 which also starred Bantsuma in the eponymous role, but there is no indication that *Signal Fires'* depiction of Takasugi-as-coolheaded conversationalist had any precedent; when he appeared in prewar

[120] "Washi wa nipponjin da. Koko wa nippon da. Medama no aoi ningen no kuni to wa chigau." Ibid., p. 768.
[121] Statements, like Takasugi's, of the fundamental characteristics of the Japanese, intended to prove that Christianity and other Western philosophies were tailor-made for Westerners and thus ill-suited to the Japanese temperament, are suspect, however, given the widespread conversion in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries of much of Kyushu and parts of Honshu. Indeed, one of the most important goals of the so-called sakoku edicts, most of which were in reaction to the Shimabara Rebellion or other outbreaks of anti-governmental resentment perceived as religiously motivated, was to limit exposure to Christianity, which the ruling elites obviously believed was anything but a hard sell to the common people of Japan. In that sense, physiologically based logic like "blue-eyed people have their creeds, and we black-eyed people have ours, and never the twain shall meet," can actually be taken to reflect a deep-seated insecurity and uncertainty about the putatively normative characteristics they are meant to champion.
[122] The notion of Christianity as the true threat, and Western imperialism as merely the opening gambit in attempts to convert countries to that faith, gained popularity in Japan with Aizawa Seishisai's 1825 *New Theses (Shinron)*, which devotes no little attention to Christianity as the deadliest of all Western ideas. He was a Mito school stalwart and advisor to none other than Tokugawa Nariaki, and consequently Aizawa's New Theses arguing for Japan's uniqueness as the land of the gods, the true center of the world (he uses the term "Middle Kingdom" to describe, not China, but Japan! See Wakabayashi dissertation, p. 83), and how its theocratic polity would be vulnerable to the spiritual onslaught of Christianity, was very influential in *sonnō jōi* circles (and even some high Shogunate officials read it, including Abe Masahiro, the de facto Shogunate leader at the time of Perry's incursion; see Wakabayashi dissertation, p. 8). For an analysis of the New Theses vis-a-vis its perspective on Christianity, see Wakabayashi dissertation, pp. 91 (on the need for 'cultural *jōi*' to ban Christianity without necessarily physically expelling foreigners), 156 (Christianity as key 'soft power' for the West), and p. 170 (Christianity as the lethal key 'to vanquish[ing] one's enemies without fighting a battle', a la Sun Tzu).

Japanese films, Takasugi was a brave and larger than life swashbuckling hero, not a debater.[123] So this incarnation of Takasugi is already quite unusual, but having him debate such a thorny issue as Christianity only exacerbates the uniqueness of the depiction. Specifically, although Takasugi firmly rejects Christianity in the scene, the filmmakers went so far as to have him meet with missionaries in Nagasaki to discuss it. What makes this meeting politically significant is that at this point in the 1860s proselytizing was still officially illegal, and Christianity remained banned by the Shogunate until and indeed even after the Shogunate itself dissolved in 1867. Thus, Takasugi's conversation with the missionaries can be seen as a subversion of the government's authority, both then in the 1860s and in the 1940s as well, when many forms of Christianity—seen, not totally without reason, as the de facto state religion of Japan's enemies in the Pacific War—then existing in Japan suffered severe restrictions on their activities and, in some cases, persecution by the state.[124] In other words, 1944 Japan was a time in which, once again, civil conversations with Christian missionaries were inappropriate, yet there was Takasugi, blithely debating with them, in total contravention of his legacy as a virulently xenophobic activist.

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[123] The lost 1931 silent film starring Bantsuma as Takasugi Shinsaku is *Fūun Nagato jō*; at that point in his career, Bantsuma was a *chanbara* megastar who drew audiences with the promise of his energetic sword-fighting, and Takasugi a hero famous for his successes in battle and profligacy in his private life, so one might with some confidence say any such film was unlikely to contain evidence of Takasugi as a coolheaded debater. Takasugi was also portrayed by other *chanbara* superstars such as Ichikawa Utaemon in the 1920s and early 1930s, but the precipitous decline in movies featuring Takasugi after the transition to sound in the mid-1930s again provides strong circumstantial evidence that Takasugi's on-screen persona was too closely identified with *chanbara* to weather the transition to sound, which rocked the *chanbara*-style period film badly due to the non-variable frame rate (*chanbara* heretofore having depended for much of their excitement on the phenomenon of a faster frame rate for action scenes, which sped up the action beyond what actors were actually capable of doing).

[124] On the subject of Christian groups being targeted by the wartime government for persecution, see Garon, "State and Religion," p. 300. Garon argues that this sort of persecution of minor, not particularly influential religious groups was the inadvertent result of the police state's too successful culling of Communist groups, which led to the bureaucratic problem of how to justify the expanded police force tasked with rooting out political subversion in society; the answer was to devote the resources of the state to crushing fringe religious groups. See ibid., p. 302.

Of course, groups being (or in danger of being) oppressed also can choose to capitulate with their oppressor, a choice made more attractive if some goals of the two seemingly oppositional groups are shared, and that is exactly what happened with most religious groups in Japan, including many Christian groups. Sheldon Garon highlights the proactive collusion of those Christian 'moral suasion' groups advocating the abolition of prostitution and loose morals, as represented by cafe waitresses, etc., with the wartime state. Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds*, p. 108.

In scene eight, which took place inside a cabin on board the *Senzaimaru* which has now set sail for Shanghai, the script indicates that Takasugi, Godai and Nakamuda had a laugh about this attempt at proselytizing and also took some pride in Japanese forbearance and kindness. They marveled at how nice Takasugi was to have debated the matter civilly rather than resorting to more extreme methods of disagreement.[125]

Indeed, simply conversing with a Westerner in any guise, missionary or not, was highly unusual for Japanese in the early 1860s, even in treaty ports like Nagasaki. The Shogunate had taken whatever steps it could during the Bakumatsu to limit the extent that Japanese, especially those from domains not directly affiliated with the Shogunate, could legally interact with foreigners, even for Dutch learning (*rangaku*) students like Godai and Nakamuda who were actually enrolled in the Nagasaki Naval Training Center (a Shogunate-sponsored 1850s military academy featuring Dutch instructors which Ii Naosuke ordered closed in spring 1859) in Nagasaki.[126] Takasugi, who had been attending various Japanese-run schools in Edo and embarked on the *Senzaimaru* from there in the first month of 1862, having been recommended by Kido when the Shogunate requested that various domains submit able men for the voyage, had lacked even the limited opportunities for interaction with foreigners students at the Nagasaki Naval Training Center had had.[127] There is no question that the historical Takasugi was a staunch

[125] See *Nihon shinario*, p. 769.
[126] For example, Nagasaki Naval Training Center (Nagasaki kaigun denshūjo) students from local domains like Saga were ordered to leave as soon as they'd finished talking with the Dutch instructors, in an effort to discourage friendship from building between the locals and the foreigners. See Tadatoshi Hosoi, "The Nagasaki Naval Training School," p. 72, 110. It is interesting to note that it was the Shogunate, through this Center, which led Japan into the creation of a modern navy; in other words, the Shogunate was actually ahead of Satsuma or Chōshū in the development of naval science as demonstrated with the founding of this school and then its successor school in Kobe under Katsu. Indeed, this sense of the Shogunate having lain the foundations for Japan's modern navy has a physical component as well: the Center was located at the very same spot later used for the Mitsubishi shipyards where the *Musashi* battleship was built. See ibid., p. 114.
[127] For more information on Takasugi's journey to Edo, schooling there, and Kido's recommendation that he go abroad on the *Senzaimaru*, see Huber, pp. 146-152. On pages 195-196 of his dissertation, Huber notes that Takasugi did manage to speak with an American missionary while languishing in Nagasaki for the three months before the

supporter of expelling the barbarians; later in 1862 he even helped burn down the British legation.[128] But instead of showing the burning of the legation, an episode certainly more in keeping with the film's ostensible hate the enemy theme, the filmmakers chose to show him engaged in a civil discourse with missionaries. Surely *Signal Fires* must be the first hate the enemy film in history to feature a real-life, anti-foreign historical hero whose on-screen depiction is *less* anti-foreign, and more reasonable, than the historical figure is known to have been!

Signal Fires' refusal to embrace its hate the enemy raison d'être is significant, not simply because it represents an example of a liberal filmmaker like Inagaki pushing back against the state's agenda with hidden transcripts of resistance, but also because it reflects the essential ambiguity of the history of the Bakumatsu period itself. Was the historical Takasugi a xenophobic fanatic or a pragmatic advocate of opening the country? The answer, of course, is 'both,' because he went from one end of the spectrum to the other within a very short period of time. Takasugi of early 1862, the time of the voyage to Shanghai, claimed to be an expulsionist zealot in principle but had yet to act on those beliefs, whereas the post-voyage Takasugi went into anti-foreign action beginning with his late 1862 attack on the British legation and continuing up to the attacks on foreign shipping in the Shimonoseki Strait dramatized in the film's "those rascal Japs" scene, but the Takasugi of 1864 after the Western reprisals against those attacks was a sober advocate of opening the country. The film wisely leaves out these ideological shifts.

There are obvious propaganda considerations involved, since choosing to show Chōshū chastened and humbled by the Western reprisal into an open-the-country mindset, or Satsuma concluding agreements with England right after the 'victory' during the bombardment of

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Senzaimaru finally set sail for Shanghai, the probable source for this episode in the film script; however, Takasugi was known to be firmly expulsionist (*jōi*) in outlook. See Huber, pp. 157.

[128] Takasugi, Kusaka Genzui and several others successfully launched a plot to burn down the British legation in Gotenyama in late 1862, after he returned from Shanghai; see Huber dissertation, p. 200.

Kagoshima, would not make for very good hate the enemy material. Thus it is that both *Signal Fires* and *Pirate Flag* end, essentially, at the moment of crisis, while there is still a chance to see the situation in a light favorable to an autarkic, anti-foreign Japan.

But it would also simply be weak filmic material to show the about-face, building up to the climactic confrontation only to dissipate that tension and excitement with the admission that all the major historical figures subsequently changed their minds. On the other hand, filmmakers in the postwar era interested in telling a different sort of story could easily do so by, for example, shining the spotlight on a different character and/or moment in Bakumatsu history and ending their story before the next ideological shift occurred. This storytelling malleability of the Bakumatsu period goes far in explaining its steady and recurring popularity as a film setting, as does the wealth of potential tragic heroes all over the ideological spectrum.

Conclusion

Signal Fires, paradoxically, is both a more successful hate the enemy/national policy film, and a more useful, because ambiguous, film for wartime audiences, than *Pirate Flag*. With its gratuitous entertainment sequences and relatively balanced treatment of China and the Chinese, it is not hard to imagine how it could have resonated with audiences on both sides of the East China Sea. That is the visual message of the film, while the written message, as evidenced by the script, is more straightforwardly pro-Japan and national policy-esque, which perhaps explains why censors were willing to release it. The semiotic gap between the script and the visual text is the source of much of the film's ambiguity, but not all of it—the sympathetic British character, Medhurst, dissents against Great Britain's imperialistic course in both.

Signal Fires' ambiguity is the key to its popularity with audiences, but no film genre was as popular as romances, and so it is to Bakumatsu romances that the final chapter is devoted.

Chapter Five: Romancing History

Introduction

Imagine you are a subject of the Japanese empire in the home islands and it is early August, 1944. The actual wartime situation is not yet common knowledge; aside from the April 1942 Doolittle raid and the June 1944 bombing of Yawata the homeland proper has not at this point suffered any physical damage from the war. So as a member of the general population, you are probably not yet fully aware how badly the war has turned against Japan. You have begun to notice warning signs, however: the notifications of 'great victories' whose locations have started to creep ever closer to Japan, the growing scarcity of food and other daily necessities, disturbing reports about the Great Zoo Massacre of 1943,[1] more and more funerals of fallen soldiers, the dwindling proportion of film audiences made up of young and middle-aged able-bodied men, and most noticeably, the ever more monumental and darkening tone of Japan's popular culture, from newspapers to radio and above all films.

The above characterization probably reads fairly innocuously, and doubtless few would object to it. But is it truly accurate? In fact, Japan's popular culture, especially film culture, was neither as dark nor as serious as existing scholarship suggests. Wartime popular culture did not uniformly descend into gloomy demands for yet greater sacrifices and spiritual commitment to the war effort, nor was the aesthetic at work in the majority of films, especially popular films, monumental in tone; scholarship, notably the English-language scholarship of Peter High, Harald Salomon and Darryl Davis, excellent as it is in many respects, has suffered from an excessive focus on the most propagandistic and pro-state films and consequently will benefit from a re-

[1] Miller, p. 120.

focusing onto the films that Japanese audiences were actually flocking to see.[2] And as for the other, most visible signs of Japan's supposed decline in popular culture, the mere existence of sumptuary prohibitions, like the infamous "luxury is the enemy" slogan being utilized during the war, does not in itself provide any evidence of compliance, and if anything, suggests a degree of noncompliance—else why sponsor a social movement meant to reduce extravagance?

Back in August 1944, after going into a movie theater of the White Group, located in one of the urban centers, you settle in with your friends or family to watch Daiei's new historical epic. Midway through, you notice a scene familiar to any who has seen swordplay-heavy period films (*jidaigeki*): the protagonist must face down, and ultimately defeat, two opponents at the same time. The cinematography of this scene is breathtaking, as the protagonist and antagonists weave among shadow-dappled trees in medium-long shot. Soon enough, the tension crescendos into the moment of decision: the hero's sword flashes down and strikes one of the villains, who gives a strangled cry and staggers away, mortally wounded. The remaining foe looks at the protagonist with a new respect and even fear, having learned his lesson not to underestimate the hero.

[2] Interesting as the handful of films identified by Davis in *Picturing Japaneseness* as 'monumental' or the 30 Ministry of Education-recommended films analyzed by Salomon in *Views of the Dark Valley* are, aesthetically and institutionally speaking, they have been studied out of all proportion to their likely social impact, as these films were almost invariably unpopular with filmgoers. In *The Imperial Screen* Peter High attempts to be comprehensive, but say little of the popularity of films, focusing instead on the films' damning content (but relying, perhaps unavoidably given the broad scope of his project, on plot synopses or quick viewings of many films, thereby missing the signs of passive dissent contemporary audiences might have latched onto, signs close visual analysis can reveal). Scholars focused on the most propagandistic films from this period would naturally conclude that Japan's popular culture was darkening in tone, given such films' frequent exhortations to sacrifice everything for the state, but Furukawa's analysis of viewing trends in the early 1940s, discussed in more detail below, indicates that audiences shunned such films in favor of more straightforward entertainment films, be they comedy, historical action, or romance.



Figure 22: The protagonist (screen left) of *The Woman Who Wields a Sword (Kodachi wo tsukau onna)* kills one enemy (foreground) and in the process, rewrites the rules of gender relations; screen capture from 47:45.

Yes, everything about this scene is familiar—except for the fact that the "hero" is actually a heroine. The movie is *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* (*Kodachi wo tsukau onna*, 1944, dir. Marune Santarō), and so she does, wielding the putatively quintessential masculine tool, a sword, with greater skill than her male opponents—who are battle-hardened samurai from Satsuma. Whoever you are (and there is a better than even chance you are a woman), as you sit there in the audience in August 1944, you feel a jolt, of excitement and perhaps also of trepidation, because this is a far more proactive model of femininity than you are used to, a femininity sanctioned to use violence to destroy her enemies. There had been stirrings in Japan's cinema, especially its

history films, in the last few years, gestures toward an expanded understanding of proper gender roles and a realignment of the right to use violence, but this is the most dramatic example yet.

As in the 1920s and 1930s, societal anxiety over proper comportment in the wake of modernity and total war was particularly intense vis-a-vis the conduct of women. If Japan's populace, filmmaker and filmgoer alike, had been truly unified behind the state's wartime goals, one might expect films of the wartime period to be increasingly dogmatic and restrictive about how women ought to behave and so forth. Instead, as the war situation worsened, social expectations about proper wartime roles for women, as seen in the hugely popular history film genre, loosened, and gender norms became more fluid. Men began to be portrayed in a less hyper-masculine (and physically superior) manner and women in more proactive ways, up to and including physical combat as their male opponents' equal.[3]

In this chapter, I analyze several blockbuster Bakumatsu romances in an effort to uncover traces of the range of interpretative possibilities available to audiences living in wartime Japan. I use close formal analysis of select scenes to demonstrate that watching a historical romance would have been a far richer experience than previous scholarship, focused narrowly on these films' superficial and ill-fitting propaganda content, has suggested. I argue that in some ways the films analyzed herein constitute rather spirited resistance to the state's pro-war mantra, and reached such a pinnacle of popularity because they were successful, despite interference from censors, and vociferous anti-entertainment purists like Tsumura Hideo,[4] in offering audiences

[3] The spectacle of women attempting violence against men is quite a standard trope in Japanese period films, but earlier examples almost universally contain this implicit threat by an almost contemptuous on-screen reaction by the always more skilled men, who easily disarm the 'hysterical' woman. Where *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* parts ways with these earlier examples is in Otsu's much greater capabilities: just as the scene is settling into the familiar 'hysterical woman' trope, and a man begins literally man-handling her, she draws her sword and kills him, then crosses blades with his friend.

[4] Judging from the various reviews he published in the *Asahi shinbun* and opinions in film journals and so forth, Tsumura had little to no appreciation for the idea of entertainment for its own sake; for example, in his review of the comedy-romance blockbuster *Matteita otoko* (1942, directed by Makino Masahiro, perhaps the entertainment film

what they really wanted: not only escapist entertainment but also an alternative lens on Japanese history itself, and exciting new possibilities for how women and men should behave in the wartime present. I conceive of the Bakumatsu romance subgenre as a discursive space that became especially useful to female viewers, a space in which to explore war-impacted gender roles and a training ground for the proactive new femininity that emerged after the defeat, for which these Bakumatsu romances helped set the stage.[5]

When the Bakumatsu boom first began, in the 1920s, cultural interest appeared to be entirely devoted to the male heroes and villains of the Bakumatsu story. When women appeared in these early Bakumatsu films at all, they tended to occupy only the most peripheral roles, and indeed were sometimes deployed as mere plot devices to mock certain male characters' inability to participate fully in the homosocial world of male bonding. For example, in *Sonnō jōi,* discussed in chapter one, the figure Seki Tetsunosuke, historically the leader of the Mito *rōnin* but in the 1927 film a mere country bumpkin, is constructed as being unable to rise to the heroic ideal of stern asexual manhood (i.e., a *tateyaku* model of masculinity), at once too bashful and too eager around women, so the more sophisticated members of the samurai conspirators play a joke on him: they force Seki to be alone with a woman who seems interested in him. Mortified, he begins clawing at the paper sliding door (*shōji*), begging via intertitles to be freed from this humiliation. And later in the film, he is obviously still quite uncomfortable being around this woman who likes him, continuously resorting now to idiotic grins, now to histrionic antics to get away from her, much to the amusement of the other Mito samurai. In this 1927 film, the ability

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(*goraku eiga*) director Tsumura most loathed), he claimed it was 'shameful' for Toho and for all Japan that the film had been made, even criticizing the censors themselves for allowing such vapid entertainment fare. See Hase Masato, "Nihon eiga to zentaishugi," in *Nihon eiga to nashonarizumu, 1931-1945*, p. 279.

[5] Without the subgenre of Bakumatsu romance films preparing the way for a new more assertive type of femininity, the transition to postwar Japan, with its explosion in female participation in politics, would seem puzzlingly sudden; conceiving of Bakumatsu films in this way helps highlight cultural continuities through the seeming rupture of 1945.

to interact with women, then, is being construed as one of the skills necessary to enter what was evidently considered the highest level of social interaction: male homosocial bonding.

Over the next fifteen years, however, and especially after the expansion of Japan's war in 1941, the role of women—and men—as depicted in Bakumatsu films underwent a thorough and not entirely unexpected transformation. Interest in the historical part women might have played in the Bakumatsu and early Meiji periods greatly increased, as did curiosity about what the experience of living through the tumultuous events of those days might have been like not only for the principal male heroes and villains, but for the women of the period. This reevaluation of the importance of women to the Bakumatsu and early Meiji story is clearly visible in films such as *Flowers Have Fallen (Hana chirinu*, 1938, dir. Ishida Tamizō), told entirely from the perspective of geisha in a tea house who can hear evidence of violence and chaos outside but can only speculate as to what is happening, as well as *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, a romance-tinged historical adventure about a skilled swordswoman who takes up arms against the Satsuma invaders during the 1877 Seinan War, and Mizoguchi Kenji's *Bijomaru the Famous Sword* (*Meitō Bijomaru*, 1945), a spiritist romantic drama of a woman on a revenge quest during the final days of the Bakumatsu period. But it is also evident in the biggest blockbuster romances of the wartime period, films like *Kantarō of Ina (Ina no Kantarō,* 1943, dir. Takizawa Eisuke) and *Chōji the Famous Sculptor (Meijin Chōji hori*, 1943, dir. Hagiwara Ryō), especially the latter, in which the female lead character is the true protagonist of the film.

Below, I closely examine the above-mentioned five films, particularly their depiction of women in the Bakumatsu, to discover how romance affected the telling of history.[6] I argue that

[6] It is worth noting that few of these films, despite their great popularity when released, has received any scholarly attention in English or in Japanese. This neglect is due to a number of factors, including the tendency of film scholarship to focus on auteurist exceptionalism and ignore or criticize films precisely because they are popular, as this constitutes evidence of low quality. In this they echo wartime critics in Japan, who derided films which to their

the increased agency of women in these Japanese history films pushes beyond the boundaries of the 'Rosie the Riveter' effect observable in the popular culture of other combatant countries, in which women's activity and sacrifice on the home front is celebrated, especially in films, as part of a culture-wide hortatory effort presumably intended to coax greater sacrifice out of the domestic population. Were this effect the only force shaping Japanese cinema and popular culture during the war, one might reasonably expect films more along the lines of Kurosawa Akira's *The Most Beautiful* (*Ichiban utsukushiku*, 1944), a spiritist factory film about teenaged young women struggling for the right to make the same level of commitment and sacrifice in support of the war effort as the factory's male employees. It is essentially a military drama with the characters transposed from soldiers to factory workers, men to young women.[7] As such, it fits squarely into the paradigm late in the war for films set in the present, which, with few exceptions, had to be nakedly propagandistic, even histrionic in support of the war and wartime sacrifice.

Yet there was another paradigm in Japan's wartime cinema, namely the period film approach to sacrifice and war. Subject to much the same pressure from the censorship apparatus of the Home Ministry, the period films production studios, unlike the relatively straightforwardly pro-war output being produced by Toho, Shōchiku and Daiei's modern film (*gendaigeki*, i.e. a film set in the present or the recent, post-1868 past) production arms, managed to maintain greater creative leeway in how to approach the subject of the war and its costs. This leeway was possible largely because of the displacement of the concerns of the present (war privations) onto

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mind were "pandering to the masses," as Mizumachi Seiji said of *Kantarō of Ina* (see *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 292 (page 24 of issue #71, Feb. 1, 1943). Moreover, these five films are romances, which is not a genre that has won much scholarly respect in the past. But there is another possible reason: all these films, except *Kantarō of Ina*, are centrally concerned with women, and offer proactive models of women's behavior that would be unsettling to some.

[7] High, p. 419.

the past;[8] this sense of distance from the present made the reevaluation of standard events from history far safer than the questioning of painful realities in the present.[9] The historical setting, in effect, covered the plots of such films with a veneer of ambiguity, allowing them to play with the standard view of Japan's history and explore alternate interpretations challenging the view of Japan's history as teleologically leading from the pro-imperial (*kinnō*) patriots of the Bakumatsu and the Meiji Restoration to the Emperor-worshipping soldiers and society of the Pacific War.

Armed and Dangerous: *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*

A film such as *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* is doubly remarkable, not only for starring a sword-wielding female protagonist, but also for re-examining the Satsuma Rebellion (of 1877, also known as the Seinan War) from the perspective of the heroic residents of Kumamoto after it is invaded by the Satsuma rebels, and casting those rebels as, with one significant exception, uncivilized and in fact rapacious monsters. Indeed, while the preferred reading from the perspective of the state was doubtless to interpret the Satsuma rebels as allegorically equivalent to the foreign (British and American) enemy, it is equally possible to view the Satsuma rebels as stand-ins for the Japanese Imperial Army, a force, in such a reading, that is occupying and controlling domestic Japan very much against the will of the peace-loving, pure-hearted inhabitants. At the time this film was released, there were very few film magazines or film-related publications remaining, but one of the only such magazines, namely the quasi-official *Nippon eiga*, gave it a negative review. The anonymous reviewer draws attention to the

[8] Naturally, this sort of displacement into the past is a common trope in Japanese popular culture (and indeed in world popular culture, from the time of Aristophanes on) from at least the wave of kōdan tales and Kabuki plays on the topic of Chūshingura, safely shunted into the Ashikaga period and out of the Tokugawa-era present.
[9] Also, it was physically more difficult to make films set in the present (or set after 1868, at any rate) near the end of the war. Studio properties in or near Tokyo—the ones focused on modern film production—were, from late 1944, either suffering damage or being requisitioned by the military. See High, pp. 490-491, 497. This is in stark contrast to the studio facilities in the never-bombed Kyoto, which were focused on period films or history film production.

surface allegory of Satsuma rebel as foreign invader, but also expresses a fascinating fear: that viewers would be too reassured by the on-screen *images* (which, to his mind, did not show enough bloodshed and wartime suffering to instill in the audience a proper level of urgency and crisis mentality) to pay sufficient attention to the *words*—the reviewer stresses the speech by Ikeda Tsu that "in the event of a war with a foreign country, this [kind of behavior] simply will not do."[10] And whenever pro-state, pro-war reviewers register complaints with a film's ideological content, as here, we can infer, first, that the film was probably a popular success (it was),[11] and secondly, that the film in question is rich in ambiguity.

Sure enough, while on the surface *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, given its bias in favor of the Meiji side of the conflict, seems to support the teleological view of the Meiji period as having led directly to Japan's later strength and prosperity, in reality just the act of pushing the boundaries of the Bakumatsu period film out to 1877 in order to treat the subject of the Satsuma Rebellion, which in fact was both militarily and ideologically a civil war, ensured there would be plenty of ambiguity over the historical stakes and over Japan's present as well. After all, films set in the present of 1944, like Kurosawa Akira's factory production drama *The Most Beautiful,* were relentlessly stressing the spiritist need for total commitment by each individual to the war effort, which is to say they demanded and themselves promoted national unity. Only a history film

[10] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 349 (note that after the war, the magazine became known as *Nihon eiga*). The reviewer calls Ikeda's comment "very suggestive indeed of the connection between the film's theme and today's situation," while simultaneously faulting the film for not producing enough of a 'kinpakukan' (sense of urgency) and possibly lulling those watching it into feeling 'anshinkan' (a (false) sense of security).

[11] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 479 has the chart of box office performance for August 1944, and shows *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* significantly outperforming its competition, Toho's *Nichijō no tatakai*, in both the initial week and the repeat week (*The Woman Who Wields a Sword* was initially assigned to the White Group, then switched with its rival film and went to the Red Group). In its first week, *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* earned almost 680,000 yen, and over 450,000 yen in its second week, compared to *Nichijō no tatakai*'s haul of roughly 475,000 and 350,000, respectively. This box office victory over *Nichijō no tatakai* (a feature film released by Shōchiku devoted to the importance of thriftiness in savings) happened despite, or perhaps because of, the Ministry of Finance's unusual step in officially recommending the latter film. Salomon, p. 191.

could dare treat a subject as divisive as the Satsuma Rebellion, and only audiences at such a film had the opportunity to consider the disunities of Japan's past.

Given that it was released in August 1944, quite late in the war, it will surprise no one that *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* also contains propagandistic elements calculated to please the censors. For example, the film's plot resonates with the crisis situation of 1944 by creating an unspoken but powerful analogy to the national crisis back in 1877, an analogy noted by contemporary reviewers.[12] It essentially centers around a familiar conversion narrative, wherein a weaker-willed character is sternly instructed in, and eventually has an emotional conversion to, the wartime ethos of self-denial and sacrifice by a mentor figure whose views are "correct" both ethically and politically. But this standard conversion narrative is complicated by two factors in the case of this film. Firstly, both the convert-to-be and the instructor are women, but contra the usual interpretation of how women's roles were constructed in the popular culture and especially cinema of wartime Japan—namely, that women supposedly had to suffer self-abnegation, usually culminating in a sacrificial death in indirect support of the war effort—both women, far from dying for their homeland, actually kill some of the men invading it. And the film preserves an undercurrent of ambiguity over what these female exemplars are meant to signify; are they being empowered by society at large to kill as part of mobilization for total war, in which every citizen is a latent soldier, or are they showing women (and men) in the audience some of the heretofore transgressive, potentially exciting possibilities of femininity during the wartime crisis—or both?

The Woman Who Wields a Sword was heavily promoted in the *Asahi shinbun*, which ran no fewer than thirteen picture-ads for it in the weeks around its mid-1944 release date. The ads'

[12] The reviewer notes its potentially strong relevance for people living in the Japan "of today, after the outbreak of the Saipan Incident." *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 349.

tag-lines focused on the contrast between the two women, one 'a merchant daughter' and the other 'raised as a warrior' while promising that the latter could inspire the former to overcome the timorous limitations of her birth station.[13] The *Asahi shinbun*'s film commentator, the ornery "Q" (in reality Japan's most influential film critic of the war years, Tsumura Hideo[14]), gave the film a mixed review in his regular 'New Film" column, claiming it was a minor work but one with a well-chosen setting and story, at least compared to the "deluge" of mediocre films released recently, though he thoroughly disapproved of the (lack of) characterization of the only significant male character, warrior woman Otsu's younger brother Ken'ichirō, who he felt was "not fleshed out enough," and more importantly, dismissed the character of the merchant daughter, Otaka as "simply too feminine."[15] Even ideologues like Tsumura wanted women to be portrayed as capable and strong, rather than stereotypically as repositories of traditional virtues.

The unusual degree of physical agency shown by the two leading women in *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, up to and including sword-fighting with men as equals (or indeed as superiors), dramatically exceeds the boundaries of the 'Rosie the Riveter' prescribed roles for women in wartime worldwide, in which women were encouraged to contribute to the war effort indirectly by taking up manufacturing jobs, not directly by taking up weapons. It also has important implications for women's political behavior, since if women are authorized by society not only to speak out against, but actually to kill men, at least those with incorrect political views

[13] For example, the advertisement appearing on page four of the July 16, 1944 morning edition of the *Asahi shinbun* features an illustration of the two women, one standing strong and proud, dressed in rather manly fashion, with sword in hand, the other collapsed tearfully at the warrior woman's feet. The text reads "A Daiei women's film, Kodachi wo tsukau onna: Poor Otaka, merchant daughter! [But] Otsu, raised as a warrior, sheds no tears!"

[14] Peter High describes Tsumura's rise to a predominant position over the film criticism world, noting in particular his status as an insider of insiders; in addition to his writing as "Q" for the countless readers of the *Asahi shinbun* and his independent publications, he was consistently given lavish space in the pages of the quasi-official *Nippon eiga* to expound his views, dwarfing that given other critics. See High, pp. 474-476. Moreover, his insider status vis-a-vis the government can be in no doubt: he had actually held official government office. See High, p. 66.

[15] His words were "Otaka to iu onna wa, amari ni yowayowashiku ikenai." Interestingly, the term "yowayowashii," which Q/Tsumura used here, can be translated as either "weak(-willed)" or as "feminine," implying that he felt the character of Otaka was too weak/feminine to be believable. Yet his description of actress Mizutani Yaeko reveals a markedly paternalistic attitude; he calls her by her given name, Yaeko. *Asahi shinbun*, July 26, morning ed., page 4.

(like the Satsuma rebels), societal standards for the supposedly feminine virtues of docility and obedience might well run into some problems.[16]

Secondly, despite the film's focus on woman as killer, and on the seriousness of the national crisis (in both the filmic present of 1877 and the production present of 1944), *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* cannot resist activating the specter of romance, of woman as lover—but it does so entirely from the woman's point of view. In short, a "love interest" for the main protagonist, Ikeda Tsu (played by veteran stage actor Mizutani Yaeko[17]) is introduced at the very end of the film, but the face of this old flame of hers is never shown, nor does he speak; instead, the camera lingers on a slow track-in shot of the protagonist's face, as her cool, capable expression shatters into a complex battlefield of emotions, bashfulness warring with joy.

Otsu, in essence, can have her cake and eat it too: she becomes both a rational actor of the highest agency (with the autonomy and the authority to kill by force those with whom she disagrees) and at the same time a picture of feminine vulnerability in the face of requited love, earning a fairytale happily-ever-after ending. Mizutani Yaeko, a veteran of the stage, had not appeared in a film in almost three and a half years, so she brought little cinematic star-baggage with her to the screen; her co-star, Tsukioka Yumeji, had been a member of the Takarazuka Revue until 1943, and brought the glamour of a burgeoning career in films set in the present as well as a lingering hint of a new face, especially in that this was her first period film. The combination of these two stars could generate a broad appeal, including, in Tsukioka's case,

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[16] The *Nippon eiga* reviewer noted these implications with apparent unease, and faulted the female protagonist, Ikeda Tsu, for "having insufficient womanly grace and softness" (onna rashii yasashisa to yawarakasa ga busoku shiteiru), while also criticizing the actress playing Taka, the convert-to-be, for a weak performance and for failing to make the character "come alive" (and thereby failing to develop the theme of proper comportment as a 'warrior's wife' (bushi no tsuma)). Mizutani Yaeko, on the other hand, was given a left-handed compliment: her performance was dubbed rather cold, but also "virile" (ōshii, which could also be translated "manly"). *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 349.

[17] That Mizutani had a flourishing stage career is evidenced by the frequent mention of her name in the pages of the English-language *Japan Times* in the 1930s and into the 1940s (for just one example, on Jun. 4, 1940, p. 5).

drawing in fans from her modern-day films films who would perhaps not normally be interested in history films (*rekishi eiga*), while Mizutani's still-flourishing career in theater might have attracted fans from the theater not ordinarily interested in film at all.

As a film about women, starring no significant male actors (with the borderline exception of Hara Kensaku, who nevertheless has little screen time), and released at a time when women made up the lion's share of film audiences, it is safe to say this is also a film primarily for women.[18] And for female spectators, Otsu offered a subject position that was compelling indeed, and a perhaps welcome change from more standard narratives of self-denial and even self-sacrifice as can be seen in such films as the 1943 Li Xianglan/Yamaguchi Yoshiko propaganda film *Sayon's Bell (Sayon no kane,* dir. Shimizu Hiroshi). Otsu, by contrast to the sacrificial mother archetype, takes up a sword and cuts down (male) villains aplenty, not in parochial defense of home or children, but for broader, more abstract political reasons.

Then, in the final ninety seconds of the film, she is 'unmanned.' Or perhaps a better term would be "refeminized." She is softened by emotion, flustered by her old flame's sudden appearance into shedding the instruments of war, removing her headband (*hachimaki*) and hanging up her sword because her actions have won her the ultimate reward: a renewed love affair with her still-single lover, who is also a government minister. Otsu rather coquettishly has to be half-dragged by her brother and his wife to the rendezvous with her old flame, pleading with them to give her time to fix her hair, and when she lays eyes on him, the passive object[19] of her desiring gaze, she is bashful and somewhat half-heartedly struggles to escape, using none of the iron strength that we, as spectators who witnessed her impressive combat earlier in the film,

[18] This is not to deny that some men might have derived pleasure in the viewing of this film, but given the subject matter (women killing men), it would have been more difficult to find a compelling subject position.
[19] The fact that we are never shown this man's face magnifies the sense of his presence on-screen as an object to be looked at, rather than a ready vehicle for the (putatively male) gaze of the spectator.

know she possesses. But her supportive companions hold firm, and she slumps in resigned joy as the camera, outpacing the man over whose shoulder the scene began, tracks in closer and closer. A rather mournful-sounding nationalistic choral song is overlaid onto the scene extradiegetically just as she resigns herself to love, until finally the camera has tracked all the way in to a close-up of her face, which she raises boldly, having recovered her courage. She stares directly into the camera and produces a hopeful smile as the mournful melody soars, and with that the final "the end" (*'shū'*) title screen appears.

The Woman Who Wields a Sword's emphasis on the female protagonist's agency, on being not the object of the gaze but the one confident enough to do the gazing, is foregrounded to a degree that would appear to challenge Laura Mulvey's historic critique of the cinema as an apparatus designed to objectify women, and please male spectator-consumers, through the controlling power of the male protagonist's gaze.[20] Instead of forcing female spectators into identifying with the male protagonist and thereby evaluating women on screen from a male perspective (their beauty, sex appeal and so forth), *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* offers women the chance to identify with two proactive women who, for almost the entire running length of the film, are subject to no male character's gaze, and do not appear to be sexualized via the putatively male gaze of the film apparatus of (male) director and cinematographer.[21] *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* is a film about and for women, and the influence of the male gaze is weak. Japanese wartime cinema can thus be viewed as a potential alternative to the mainstream Hollywood narrative films Mulvey set out to critique. Ironically, it was the hyper-masculine, all-male project par excellence, war itself, with its demands on several million men

[20] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Screen*, 1975.
[21] It bears mention that, according to theorists of (secondary) cinematic identification like Anne Friedberg, a spectator's identification with a film star on screen is not a conscious choice so much as the result of various unconscious processes, and is primarily introjective (the incorporation of the other into the self, not the projecting of the self onto the other) see Friedberg, "A Denial of Difference: Theories of Cinematic Identification," pp. 36, 39).

who might otherwise have been cinema-goers, that shifted the capitalist logic of film production towards the creation of films more likely to please female spectators. As a result, female spectators had access in this film to an unusual subject position, one which encouraged women to see themselves as the masters of their own futures, romantic and otherwise. The fact that only the uniform-like ministerial clothing, but never the face, of Otsu's lover is shown on camera allows him to function as a floating signifier, an everyman blank slate upon which each woman in the audience could write the transcript of her own hopes and dreams. He clearly loves Otsu (and by extension those spectators sharing her subject position), and has a prestigious and lucrative job; in short, he is the perfect mate, offering both romance and financial security without the specificity of a potentially displeasing face or personality.

The gender politics of this reversal of the familiar 'boy wins girl' narrative are fascinating, and quite possibly liberating to the largely female audience for the film. Only one year later, the war was over, and almost immediately the women's suffrage movement exploded into prominence, and women into all manner of political activity.[22] I argue that films like *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* helped pave the way for this otherwise surprising transition. In this sense, 1945 should not be seen as a decisive historical rupture. Instead, the 1940s represent a transwar period, with considerable continuity in Japan's society, popular culture and cinema in particular despite the draconian restrictions placed on the film industry, and especially on period film production, by the Occupation. The distance from *The Woman Who Wields a Sword wo tsukau*

[22] Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan*, p. 234. Gordon notes, as one of the most concrete (and potentially surprising) symbols of women's rights, that 39 women (almost 10% of the total Diet) were elected in the first postwar election, meaning the percentage of women in the Diet was actually higher in the late 1940s than it is now, in the 2010s.

onna to Kurosawa's *No Regrets for Our Youth* (*Wa ga seishun ni kuinashi*, 1946), and from Ikeda Tsu to the latter film's protagonist Yagihara Yukie is smaller than might be assumed.[23]

The Late 1930s Model of Historical Femininity: *Flowers Have Fallen*

The Woman Who Wields a Sword shares interesting similarities with *Flowers Have Fallen*, a 1938 film depicting just forty-eight hours in the war-torn seventh month of 1864. It was shot entirely on the set of a Kyoto tea house and features only female characters. While *Flowers Have Fallen* is focused somewhat more on the interiority of the main protagonist, Akira, and the emotional toll the (torturously indirect) news of the chaos outside the tea house's doors is taking on her, as she is literally forced to sit and wait inside, both films feature long sequences of building interiors, filled with anxious women who are explicitly excluded from the male world of outdoor combat. In *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, much of the film in fact depicts a siege scenario, in which Otsu and Otaka must inspire their fellow townspeople (almost all of them women, since the men are out fighting and losing to the Satsuma invaders), essentially trapped in a local temple to wait out the artillery barrages, and their reactions to the more and more desperate and stressful situation. What differentiates *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* from *Flowers Have Fallen* is that in the former, Otaka and Otsu not only venture outside despite the extreme danger, they actually engage the invaders in hand-to-hand combat. Inasmuch as *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*'s preferred reading is a hortatory call to arms addressed to the women on the home front, this far more militant interpretation of women's ideal role in wartime makes sense, suggesting an equivalence between past and present. By contrast, *Flowers Have Fallen* lacks any truly active female subject position, instead offering up a potent dose of

[23] Moreover, Yagihara is by no means a shining or unproblematic paragon of liberated femininity (recall her choice to embrace the painful duty of enduring the hostile shunning of the villagers (*mura-hachibu*), of playing the part of the despised wife of a wartime traitor); Otsu, stiff as she is, might well be the more appealing of the two.

nostalgia for the simpler world—and gender politics—of Gion in 1864 Kyoto, its longing for the vanished past a veiled critique of the tumultuous present of 1938, and in particular, longing for a world where women were (believed to be) *more* dependent on men, not less.[24]

Both of these films were literary adaptations, and while each features a historical setting with plenty of attention to detail and obvious concern about historical accuracy, both also contain many invented elements, up to and including the main characters themselves. In other words, the historicity of the stories, while important, plays second fiddle to the central theme of both films, which is one and the same: how war affects, and should affect, women. For both, advertisements promoting the films seized upon the focus on women as the major selling point. But in 1938 the ads for *Flowers Have Fallen* appear to be designed to appeal to men, as does the film itself. The ads highlight the uniqueness of the experiment that "for the first time in Japanese film history, all those who appear on screen are women!!" and the pleasure this could potentially offer male (and some female) spectators who had come to see this "woman-only film about the red-light district of Kyoto!", a district, after all, that very few non-resident women ever historically visited.[25] Male voices from the street are diegetically audible in the film, and the main character Akira is shown pining away for a Chōshū loyalist (*shishi*), offering to male spectators limitless potential in writing themselves into the story as the heroic but unseen beloveds of the on-screen women, all while offering such men a reassuring pleasure in the spectacle of women's dependence on men. On the other hand, some men in the audience might perhaps have sympathized with the plight of the women of Gion, seeing themselves as similarly imprisoned by tradition or circumstances,

[24] Tsumura Hideo argues in his review of the film in the *Asahi shinbun* that the setting and plot of *Hana chirinu* was likely inspired by the 1936 French film *Club de femmes* (released in early 1937 as *Kindan no ie*, or "The House from which Men Are Forbidden," in Japan). June 23, 1938, morning ed., p. 6.

[25] *Asahi shinbun*, June 26, 1938, evening ed., page 6. The exact tag-lines are "onna bakari de egaku Kyō no iromachi!" and "Nihon eiga saisho no kokoromi! Tōjōsha wa subete onna ni kagirareta ishoku hen!!" It is worth noting that the film actually portrays not Shimabara, the actual licensed quarter of Kyoto, but Gion, which was not a red-light district so much as an entertainment hub.

much like the daily drudgery of Tasogare Seibei's life is known to have struck a powerful chord with office workers in 2002 Japan, and found subject positions that crossed gender lines.[26]

No woman in *Flowers Have Fallen* is able to venture out beyond the borders of her silken prison, Gion, into the world to see for herself what is transpiring in the streets of 1864 Kyoto.[27] Instead, all remain entirely reliant on men for their news of the outside world, much as they are forced to rely on male patronage for their livelihoods. This point is heavily emphasized in the *Asahi shinbun's* short review of June 25th, 1938, the day before the film's Tokyo premiere: over half the review is devoted to characterizations of several of the women, and each such description is careful to emphasize that the woman in question was both very young and childishly innocent, knowing "only Gion...where they had been born and raised and would probably die...and nothing of the world beyond Gion."[28] The central message is one of pity for these childlike, helpless women, who cannot even fathom the wide world outside their tiny bubble, and indeed, the film itself also dwells at length on the rather archaic lifestyle the women enjoy, largely unaware of the growing chaos near—but beyond—Gion.

This community of infantilized women cannot tolerate a more assertive, independent approach, as the main protagonist Akira learns when she tries to open the door to their teahouse in response to desperate knocking on the other side. By opening the door, she is attempting to save her Chōshū loyalist lover, or possibly her mother Toki, who had been hauled away earlier by the Shinsengumi for questioning, from the chaos of the outside world, but also risks inviting that very chaos into their own relatively serene bubble. The other women cannot accept the risk,

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[26] Yamamoto Ichirō, pp. 324-325.

[27] It is revealed during the course of the film that one, Matsuba, actually did leave Gion once, but returned voluntarily, not unlike the recidivistic 'revolving door' effect in which former convicts commit crimes with the conscious intention of being sent back to prison, feeling themselves unable to cope with the wider world and longing for the comfort and security of the miniature world of jail.

[28] *Asahi shinbun*, June 25, 1938, evening ed., page 6 ("shin eiga annai"). A typical description reads as follows: "the pure-hearted Yoshiya, Harue, Michiyo and the others, who knew nothing of anything beyond their lives in Gion, so young..." (Gion no seikatsu igai nanimo shiranai junshinna Yoshiya, Harue, Michiyo tōtō, wakawakashii...).

and physically restrain her until she gives up her fleeting attempt at independence and sits down, docile once more. At times, the women discuss outside events, especially the most recent news near the end of the film that Chōshū has been branded an enemy of the court, but the focus is on the emotional impact this news has on them personally, particularly on Akira, whose lover is from Chōshū, and certainly not on how these events might affect their country. That said, a muted pro-Restoration interpretation of history is still being advanced, since it is the pro-Tokugawa (*sabaku*) side, represented by the Shinsengumi, who are causing Akira, her mother Toki, and the other women the most acute distress. Nonetheless, there is no hint of a Japaneseness or national consciousness here; indeed, the women, far from offering a standard "Japanese" subject position, mark themselves as slightly other (at least from the perspective of audiences outside of Kansai) by their thick Kansai and Kyoto accents.[29] This was a conscious addition, as all of the actresses cast in the film, with the sole exception of the star Hanai Ranko (who played Akira) were no-names from Tokyo and had to be given lessons in Kansai dialect.[30]

The most visually engaging cinematography in *Flowers Have Fallen*, a series of track-ins, was saved for a telling contest of wills: the okami-san of the house is trying to convince one of the young women to go with her to an appointment elsewhere in Gion, but the woman, brave in her cowardice, initially refuses, too scared by the outside world even to venture beyond the doors of the tea house. In terms of shot selection, director Ishida Tamizō and cinematographer Machii Haruyoshi made heavy use of the slow pan, which is by nature synchronic, a 'slice of life' that can quickly show a large number of people simultaneously engaged in their various day-to-day

[29] The June 25th review characterizes the film as a "confrontation" between the apolitical all-women world of Gion with the "roiling upheaval of the changing times" that the Meiji Restoration era represented ("go-ishin no ookina jidai no uneri ni tōmen shita, onna bakari no sekai"). See ibid., page 6.
[30] *Kyoto eiga zue*, p. 45.

tasks.[31] It is not hard to see the heavy nostalgia, the longing for a bygone and much simpler age, that this film offers its audiences, especially with so much screen time devoted to a depiction of the pleasant boredom of their daily lives, so well insulated are they from the outside world. Even on the level of the marketing for the film, the women and their world are being shown as the objects of both nostalgic and sexual longing, described as they are as both "pitiful" and "enticing."[32] Moreover, even for those women in the film who are interested in the political developments in the wider world beyond Gion, they are categorically barred from participation, as symbolized by the apparatus of the film itself, which restricts what the audience can see to the interior of the tea house, focusing on the women waiting helplessly as the events that will determine the future of their country, and indeed whether they themselves will live or die, play out, far beyond their control.[33] *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, by contrast, foregrounds women's ability and indeed duty to take charge of their own lives, up to the point of striking down their enemies, and thus argues women too can and must be active participants in the fate of the nation. Despite some similarities in these two films' portrayal of women's lived historical experience of war and chaos, then, the gendered conclusion they offer their audiences is very different, which is unsurprising given the very different context in Japan from 1938 to 1944.

By 1944 even the preferred readings, to say nothing of negotiated or oppositional readings, of films like *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* were offering women a decidedly more active model to follow, suggesting that in the six years between 1938's heavily nostalgic

[31] The assistant director for this film was none other than Ichikawa Kon, who was also fond of the 'slice-of-life' effect of slow pans and featured them several times in his later films, perhaps especially *Tokyo Olympiad*.
[32] The tag-line to the *Asahi shinbun* review of June 25th, 1938 reads, "namamekashiki aion jidai no nami ni oshinagasaruru onna no machi!" The nostalgia for the now-vanished world of Gion is further emphasized by the decision to use as promotional image for the film, not one or more geisha's faces or bodies, but a yamaboko float with its powerful associations to the present (in both 1938 and into the twenty-first century) Gion matsuri.
[33] The only exception to this restrictive camera view is at the very end, when one woman clambers onto the tea house roof to look out over the city, and finally the audience can see beyond its walls. But what can we see? A city in flames, an era ending, and—as bells ring diegetically throughout the city—Gion's death-knell is sounding as well.

women's film *Flowers Have Fallen* and *The Woman Who Wields a Sword*, something fundamental had changed culturally. This trend was occurring at the very same time that the state began attempting to police more rigidly the experience of theater-going itself, issuing directives on what sorts of postures and behaviors were appropriate in movie theaters.[34] The evidence from 1943 romantic history films also supports this growing trend toward more and more progressive roles for women, and indeed, even within 1943, some progression is visible. For example, the Bakumatsu blockbuster romance *Kantarō of Ina*, the number one hit film of 1943, gave star Yamada Isuzu the minimally active role of Oshin, but by July 1943, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, a very similar blockbuster Bakumatsu film which also starred the same romantic pairing, gave Yamada the far more proactive role of Outa. By comparing what sorts of interpretations of history—and gender—these two films offered their audiences, we can shed further light on the wartime trend for women's roles in period dramas to move from passivity to proactivity.

The Early 1943 Model of Historical Femininity: *Kantarō of Ina*

Kantarō of Ina is a wandering yakuza tale (*matatabi mono*) set in the same year as *Flowers Have Fallen*, namely 1864. It is focused firmly on the male protagonist, Kantarō, played by Hasegawa Kazuo, a former lieutenant (*aniki*) of the "good" yakuza group in Ina, who went to Mito to serve the Tengutō (a group of loyalists who operated out of Mito and launched an abortive rebellion in 1864) after his life was saved by Mito *sonnō jōi* activists in 1861. *Kantarō* opens with a case of subverted expectations: the initial triumphant march (complete with upbeat, martial march music) of the Tengutō members after the credit sequence, which might seem to

[34] For men and women going to the theater together, essentially only sitting rigidly upright was officially permissible, at least according to a July 1941 hortatory photo-essay in *Eiga no tomo*. But as Miriam Silverberg points out, as with all attempted strictures on sumptuary or behavioral patterns, the publication of such a guide is itself evidence that the poses deemed inappropriate, such as slouching, were very much in use. Silverberg, p. 141.

promise a political story with plenty of combat, is replaced almost immediately with the eponymous Kantarō's half-comedic antics with a 'fake' Tengutō he is ordered to kill but decides to spare since it turns out to be a childhood friend from his hometown, Ina, and thereafter with a cut to Ina, where none other than famous comedian and character actor Takase Minoru, his dramatic eyebrows arched for maximum comic effect, regales the disbelieving townsfolk with his tale of having seen Kantarō (presumed dead) in the flesh. This shift from martial/political (Mito, the Tengutō, the national stage) to local/comedic foreshadows what the audience can expect: an apolitical tale of heroism and local attachments, with a side helping of comedy.

The character of Oshin, meanwhile, is presented as the beloved Kantarō left behind when he went off to war, who then had no choice but to marry Kantarō's worthless friend Shōkichi. One of Kantarō's first acts in the film is to suggest he lead the surviving remnant of the Tengutō loyalists to Ina, his hometown, and then do so. Kantarō himself has an ulterior motive to return: he is trying to seek out Oshin, obviously hoping to renew their love affair, but his hopes are dashed and he is forced into the melodramatic position of loving Oshin from afar, having to save her husband Shōkichi from his crippling debt with the bad yakuza family in town—to which Shōkichi responds with the most insidious betrayal of both Kantarō and the surviving Tengutō loyalists—and then to spare Shōkichi's life, thereby ending any chance of Kantarō himself being able to resume his romance with Oshin. Similarly, Oshin's love for Kantarō, while clear as day, is sublimated to her sense of duty to her good-for-nothing husband Shōkichi. Her most important role in the film is in indirectly and unknowingly convincing (by audibly exhorting Shōkichi to be a better person) the eavesdropping Kantarō not to kill, and presumably then replace, Shōkichi in revenge for his spineless betrayal.

Despite her love for Kantarō, Oshin chooses to stand by her utterly unsympathetic husband, an act of selflessness that inspires Kantarō to sacrifice his own happiness as well. Both of them, in short, choose *duty* (*giri*) over *feeling* (*ninjō*), an ethical stance that is essentially unchanged from the wandering yakuza films subgenre's inception, since from the beginning wandering yakuza films were all about the terrible (and melodramatic) cost of *duty* on the individual's desires. Interestingly enough, the film also suggests that *duty*, and possibly *feeling*, between individuals trumps *duty* to abstract political causes. From a political perspective vengeance against the Tengutō's betrayer, Shōkichi, is entirely justified yet Kantarō chooses to spare his life when he sees Oshin's commitment to stand by Shōkichi come what may—in other words, he values her choices more highly than the political cause to which he is nominally aligned. Similarly, Shōkichi, the one whose weak will endangered the entire Tengutō, the political "good guys," is let entirely off the hook, unlike the fate awaiting those not sufficiently committed to Japan's war effort in then-contemporary vigilance-against-betrayal spy films like *Anata wa nerawareteiru* ("You Are the Target") or *Kanchō imada shi* sezu ("The Spy Isn't Dead Yet", both late 1942).

Moreover, *Kantarō of Ina* presents a strongly traditional interpretation of proper gender roles in the face of crisis. Women, far from being fellow combatants in the political fight (as they are sometimes exhorted to be in present-day war or spy films of the early 1940s), are instead shown as merely the spoils of war, dependent on men for safety and livelihood. All the action and heroism is performed by the men, especially mighty Kantarō, whose sword more or less singlehandedly saves the day against the evil yakuza gang and the inspectors hunting the Tengutō; but the sword cannot win him happiness, so he leaves town to wander once again. Nor is there much to suggest he is wandering off to rejoin the pro-imperial cause and fight to

overthrow the Shogunate; if anything, he seems to have lost the object of his *feeling* (Oshin) and repaid his debt to the Tengutō, thereby shedding his political *duty*, leaving him with no one and nothing except an even more abstract goal of protecting the oppressed and weak wherever he may roam. This ending, so typical of the wanderer genre, presents an interesting contrast to the visually similar final moments of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, discussed in detail below.

Four features distinguish *Kantarō of Ina* from run-of-the-mill films of wartime Japan and even from the other wandering yakuza films that were made throughout pre-1945 Japanese film history, almost all of them in the 1920s and 1930s; taken together, these four factors can help explain the film's colossal popularity. Firstly, the film benefitted from a fine crew, and moreover one with strong ties to the cutting-edge filmmaking group of the 1930s, the Narutaki Group; both the director Takizawa Eitarō and the main screenwriter Mimura Shintarō had been members, as had cinematographer Yasumoto Jun, a representative figure in what Daisuke Miyao has called the strategic deployment by many cinematographers of the supposedly Japanese aesthetic fixation on and concept of shadow in order to justify, as here, his otherwise untenable desire to shoot much of the film in beautiful Hollywood-style low-key lighting.[35] Secondly, and partly as a result of the aesthetically-minded crew, the film features unusually skillful treatment of the emotional cost of Kantarō and Oshin's decisions, as evidenced by the sophisticated sequences involving one or the other's facial expressions during or after the moment of these *duty*-tinged decisions. Thirdly, it possessed several 'box-office gold' elements any one of which would have virtually guaranteed financial success but the combination of which created a mega-hit: the red-hot romantic pairing of Hasegawa and Yamada, two of the finest and most bankable stars of their

[35] Miyao makes this point throughout his book *The Aesthetics of Shadow*, particularly on pp. 200-201.

generation,[36] plus the effort to tie the film in with the music industry via the guest appearance of superstar singer Ichimaru (who according to some reports sang the film's theme song, "Kantarō Tsuki yoru," which later became a mega-hit in its own right[37]), and the favorable economic situation of entertainment period films being in very short supply but in very high demand.

Finally, there was a concerted effort to tie this love story into Japan's national history by setting the tale in the midst of the 1864 hunt of the Tengutō. But as Yamane Sadao has argued, the film's Bakumatsu setting can be seen as a fig-leaf of historical respectability over the naked *duty-feeling* spectacle of an otherwise forbidden subgenre: the wandering yakuza (*matatabi*) films, which had become very difficult to get approved in the wartime climate of the 1940s.[38] And it is certainly true that the central drama of the film concerns the love triangle of Oshin, Kantarō and Shōkichi, not the political travails of the anti-Shogunate Tengutō remnants, a fact lamented by politically minded critics like Tsumura Hideo.[39] In that sense, the Bakumatsu's social utility was simple in 1943 Japan: relating a project to the Bakumatsu period eased the film's passage through the crucible of censorship, allowing producers to bring audiences the films they really wanted to see, films that, aside from the tacked-on historical contextualization, were largely the same as the subgenres of the period films now strongly discouraged by the state,

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[36] Shimura Miyoko argues that, from an experiential perspective, simply bringing megastars Hasegawa and Yamada together on screen ensured audiences would pay little attention to the 'history' being told and focus largely on their romance; their popularity with filmgoers continued irrespective of director. Shimura, "Hasegawa Kazuo to Yamada Isuzu: Senjika ni okeru romanticism no kōryū," in *Nihon eiga to nashonarizumu, 1931-1945*, p. 166.

[37] Sources disagree on who initially sang the film's theme song, "Kantarō tsuki yoru." The Nihon eiga database entry for *Kantarō of Ina* lists Ichimaru as the singer, but other sources claim it was Obata Minoru (a popular Zainichi singer also known as Gang Youngcheol). It is well known that Obata released a rendition of the song through Victor records which became a huge hit, but since there is no mention of him in the Jan. 1943 ads for *Kantarō of Ina* and by contrast Ichimaru is mentioned (for example in both the two-page ad in the Dec. 11, 1942 issue of *Eiga junpō* and in the ad near the end of the Jan. 1, 1943 issue (no. 69), both of which make a special point of noting she was on loan from music company Victor), it seems likely that it was Ichimaru, not Obata, who originally sang the song.

[38] Yamane argues flat-out that the Bakumatsu setting was tacked on to help the film pass censorship. See Yamane, "Kaisetsu" in "Yamane Sadao no otanoshimi zeminaaru," *Kantarō of Ina* (VHS, Kinema Kurabu).

[39] In his review of the film in the *Asahi shinbun*, Tsumura blasts the plot, saying "how typical of Toho films: in its depiction of the Pro-imperial party, [politics] never escapes the limits of mere backdrop...and even the loyalists themselves vanish into the background, in the shadow of beautiful youth Kantarō, the only one given the chance to fight." Tsumura Hideo, "Shin eiga hyō," in *Asahi shinbun*, Jan. 6, 1943, morning ed. page 4.

like wandering yakuza films or unmotivated romance (that is, romance for entertainment rather than hortatory political purposes).[40]

There is one aspect in which *Kantarō of Ina*'s 'wanderer film' core is itself somewhat subversive, from the perspective of the state in 1943 Japan. This is the fact—noted, with fascinating ambivalence, by Mizumachi Seiji in a February 1st, 1943 review in *Eiga junpō*—that the film has a "fundamentally and obviously fake setting" but if we "ignore this line of inquiry" we will find it "contains no national policy-style lecturing, and on the other hand does not possess a provocative message designed to pander to the foolish masses; this above all makes the film worthwhile."[41] Mizumachi goes on to praise director Takizawa for "bringing the settings of the film to life" and "showing improvement" over his recent work, and for surpassing the theatrical play (which he mentions also starred Hasegawa and Yamada) on which the film was based, particularly with regard to the two stars' acting; seeing the play, Mizumachi had judged the leads' acting unconvincing and "excessive," and the audience reaction to the play had confirmed his fears and left him "feeling uncomfortable," but in the film Hasegawa and Yamada were better, and Yamada especially was "a bit more subdued" thanks to Takizawa's direction.[42] However, he also identifies a medium-specific weakness of the film: because, as a film, it is possible to play "more freely with the passage of time and the depiction of events than the

[40] The most successful film of 1938, and a box office record-holder for a few years thereafter, was Shōchiku's melodramatic romance *Aizen katsura*; this film's popularity solidified official disapproval for romance as entertainment. See Salomon, p. 140. This perspective would reappear in the wake of 1943's historical romance craze.
[41] Eiga junpō vol. 46, p. 292 (page 24 of issue #71, Feb. 1, 1943). Mizumachi explains the back-story, Kantarō aiding the Tengutō, before saying, of this story, that it is "somosomo mayutsuba mono de aru ga, sonna sensaku [note: kane-ben ateji used in place of the typical gon-ben 'sen'] wa nuki ni shite, kono sakuhin ha jūrai no kokusaku fū no sekkyō mo naku, to itte hantai ni, gushū ni kobita chōhatsusei mo nai tokoro ga nani yori torigara de aru."
[42] Ibid., p. 292. Near the end of his review, however, Mizumachi asserts that while Hasegawa and Yamada were in general better in the film than they had been in the play, he felt Yamada's on-screen dialogue with Kurokawa (in the role of Shōkichi) was forced, and made him "long for the charm of the theatrical play" (butai'i no jōmi ga hoshikatta).

theatrical play could, it is even more critical that Kantarō's life before being saved by the Tengutō be shown...without seeing this [motivation], Kantarō's conduct is mere fabrication."[43]

But does *Kantarō of Ina* actually encourage its viewers to engage with Japanese history, or offer any noteworthy interpretations of the events and significance of the Bakumatsu? Yes and no. I argue that by focusing so completely on the love triangle between Kantarō, Oshin and Shōkichi, the film personalizes history, denying to even the historical actors any hint of abstract political or ethical motivations for their actions and insisting instead that history is all about emotional bonds between exceptional individuals. This finding echoes Robert Rosenstone's assessment that the film medium personalizes and emotionalizes history for the viewer.[44] *Kantarō of Ina* strongly implies that its eponymous hero fights, not out of devotion to the national cause per se, but out of a personal obligation to those who saved his life—which implies, in turn, that had the ones who'd saved him been of a different political alignment, Kantarō would have joined their cause just as willingly.

Kantarō is loyal to the individuals, and especially the captain, of the Tengutō, but, as evidenced by his off-into-the-sunset solo departure at the end of the film, clearly has no particular commitment to their ideals. [45] And with the exception of that captain, the Tengutō themselves, despite traditionally being lauded as the true heroes of the Bakumatsu for their courageous if ultimately doomed opposition to the supposedly corrupt shogunate, are depicted in a surprisingly negative light.[46] No effort is made to develop their individual characters, much less show them in a heroic light. Indeed, the rank and file members distrust and look down on the

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[43] Ibid., p. 292.
[44] Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (2006), pp. 53-54.
[45] This implication caused the abovementioned reviewer, Mizumachi, no little consternation; Mizumachi blasted the film for failing ever to address on screen why Kantarō joined the Tengutō or why he fights so earnestly for them, identifying this as the film's primary "inadequacy" (monotarinasa). *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 292.
[46] Mito rōnin (like the Tengutō) were swiftly enshrined at Yasukuni shrine, after its creation in 1869, for heroic service to the nation. See Michael Wert, p. 79.

hero, a tried and true trope in melodrama which creates a burst of sympathy in the audience for Kantarō, who we know to be truly heroic and utterly above reproach, and a resulting surge of antipathy towards the Tengutō for daring to doubt him. No sooner does Kantarō reappear at the hiding place he'd chosen for them than a posse of angry and suspicious Tengutō surround him, accusing him to his face of being a spy and traitor. Even the revelation that Shōkichi was the fake Tengutō for hire Kantarō had been tasked with killing, but had secretly spared out of loyalty to their childhood friendship, is meant to increase our melodramatic identification with the blameless Kantarō when he is attacked by the Tengutō for having failed to kill him, as ordered. If heroic Kantarō judges him worthy to be spared, the audience will have difficulty emotionally identifying with the now seemingly bloodthirsty Tengutō. This negative characterization of the Tengutō loyalists is coupled with a similarly unsympathetic portrayal of the pro-Tokugawa alternative; the film, in essence, is a villainization of both historical sides, which only serves to demonstrate the protagonist's extraordinary qualities by showing them in ever sharper contrast.[47]

Only the captain continues to have faith in Kantarō, and it is this personal demonstration of faith that inspires Kantarō to rush down the mountainside, singlehandedly cutting a path through the Tengutō's enemies in an attempt to justify the captain's belief in him. The captain, upon witnessing this near-suicidal act of bravery, shouts out "Don't throw your life away!" And by a combination of miracle and skilled swordplay, Kantarō indeed emerges unscathed. Furthermore, in a slightly earlier scene a wounded Tengutō tried to end his own life, unwilling either to be captured by the pro-Tokugawa enemy or to slow down his comrades, but Kantarō forces him to stop and slings the man over his back. This is quite an unexpected message given the wartime climate in 1943 Japan: political causes, even one that supposedly helped create the

[47] Mizumachi dubs the scene where Kantarō prevents the wounded Tengutō member's suicide (and his subsequent heroic rescue of said injured member) a good example of the "most prominent failure" of the film, which to him is the way the director used the Tengutō only to show how magnificent a hero Kantarō was. *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 292.

modern state of Japan, neither require nor deserve the supreme sacrifice. In fact, they don't even require one's loyalty, as both Shōkichi, who betrayed the Tengutō, and Kantarō, who, life-debt paid, wanders off, to all intents and purposes abandoning the cause at film's end, remain alive and well. To each audience member, then, *Kantarō of Ina* offered a highly personal encounter with Bakumatsu history, where the fictional Kantarō, standing in for all the actors on the historical stage, fights out of love and loyalty to individuals, never to creed or country.

To return to the utility of setting this film in the Bakumatsu period, Yamane overlooked a commercial motivation for, or perhaps an unintended benefit of that decision. The added political intrigue brought with it a virtual promise of sword-fighting action, which expanded the potential audience for this film from only those interested in the melodrama of *duty* versus *feeling* (among them many women) to include those who wanted the spectacle of action itself (including many men). Moreover, some members of each of these seemingly straightforward gendered audience categories may actually have preferred films of the other category but found it difficult, for social reasons, to attend such films unless they contained enough of the attractions of the film category they, for reasons of gender, were socially expected to prefer. For instance, some men may have enjoyed *duty-feeling* tales but were perhaps too embarrassed to go unless the film also featured 'traditional' masculine attractions like bloodshed, and vice versa for women.[48] Similarly, Hasegawa Kazuo's graceful on-screen presence and beauty won him millions of female fans throughout Japan, but presumably at least some male filmgoers secretly also preferred

[48] This speculation is not based on (sadly unavailable) data like postmortem audience surveys, etc. but on Fiske's notion of producerly texts, in which each audience member brings his or her own unique constellation of desires and meaning-making to any text rich enough in ambiguity to support multiple readings. Audiences were free to focus on whichever aspects of a film resonated most strongly with their own tastes, including tastes that did not fit masculine or feminine social "norms." For more on 'producerly texts', see Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 83.

Hasegawa—an always already estheticized,[49] handsome and somewhat diminutive man with an air of softness to him—to the gruff, hyper-masculine stars of Daiei, like Bantsuma or Arashi Kanjurō. [50] This film, with its historical setting and attendant violence, might have appealed to such men especially, since it would prompt no awkward questions about film taste and its relationship to gender identity and heteronormativity,[51] and offer them a chance to access these themes from a different perspective, what Miriam Silverberg has called 'code-switching.'[52] And some audience members, especially the unwilling subjects of Japan's empire, may have chosen to read the romance films they saw oppositionally, or in a more negotiated manner, selectively interpreting the film to weed out any unwanted political content.[53]

All of these factors, with their powerful appeals to multiple and varied audiences, combined to elevate *Kantarō of Ina* to the top of the box office charts for 1943, a result that surprised even industry insiders.[54] It also provoked consternation and even data manipulation[55]

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[49] As Daisuke Miyao points out in his book *The Aesthetics of Shadow*, Hasegawa benefited from careful glamour lighting throughout his film career, extending into the publicity photos of him shot for Shōchiku, which also used glamour lighting to make absolutely sure his fans always saw him the same beautiful (beautified) way. Miyao, p. 87.

[50] In *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany*, Patrice Petro has argued that a somewhat feminized male on-screen figure, especially when appearing in the melodramatic romances so popular among both men and women in Weimar Germany (and in interwar and wartime Japan), had the potential to please men in the audience by offering a vicarious experience of femininity, whereas for women, identification with such a feminized male figure can come to symbolize a feminine desire for freedom from patriarchal authority. Petro, p. 25.

[51] It appears that even hyper-masculinized active-duty soldiers stationed abroad during the war tended, in fact, to prefer weepy Shōchiku melodramas, Enoken comedies, or romances/matatabi mono like *Kantarō of Ina* to national policy films. Soldiers, given the dangers of their daily lives, were perhaps even more likely to seek light-hearted entertainment than those on the home front. Furukawa, p. 194.

[52] Code-switching because, when watching films like *Kantarō of Ina* which starred a sensitive, emotional male lead, men in the audience were obliged to bring a different set of cultural norms and expectations to bear on that aspect of the filmic story, all while simultaneously enjoying the considerable violence in the film on a more straightforward, indeed hyper-masculine level. For Silverberg's definition of code-switching, see Silverberg, p. 33.

[53] This is particularly true in the case of *China Nights*, which was hugely popular in China, especially among native Chinese audiences, despite the nakedly propagandistic conversion narrative; it is hard to imagine many Chinese actually accepting the dominant reading and being themselves converted to a pro-Japan stance, so clearly some level of negotiation, or opposition, was at play when they watched a film like *China Nights*. For audience breakdowns by nationality of the huge crowds that flocked to see *China Nights* in occupied Shanghai, see *Eiga junpō* vol. 49, p. 29.

[54] Analysis of box office results for early January in the pages of *Eiga junpō* stresses the "overwhelming popularity" of the film and the "astonishing numbers of people" going to see it, noting that due to the star pairing it was naturally expected to be a hit, but the result was "beyond all expectations," blowing away the box office record set just two weeks before by *Hawaii Malay oki kaisen*. *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 340 (p. 56 of issue #71, Feb. 1, 1943).

in the Japanese government and its quasi-official mouthpiece for all things film-related, *Nippon eiga*.[56] For instance, despite passing censorship per se, the film was designated "not suitable for general audiences" (*hi ippan yō*) due allegedly to its gangster (*yakuza*) subject matter and was squeezed into a week offering just a five-day initial theatrical release, one moreover that did not include a Saturday. It was also shown in half as many theaters, 55 versus 119, as the Navy-sponsored *Kaigun,* the film *Nippon eiga* and the government (the Cabinet Information Bureau doubled the number of prints and demanded it be released on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Pacific War in both the red and white groups of theaters) tried to claim had topped the attendance charts for 1943.[57] By average attendance per theater, *Kaigun* placed a mere 28th, while *Kantarō of Ina* was far ahead of all the other films, almost double the average attendance of *Kaigun*.[58] These attempts to limit *Kantarō of Ina*'s availability to audiences were unable to stop the film from grossing over one million yen and selling over 1.5 million tickets just in its initial run, at a time when Japan's total population was only about seventy million, and with the number actually able to see a 'not for general audiences' film (since that meant no children were allowed) like *Kantarō of Ina* even smaller.[59] The film was shown before the shift, in April 1943, that gave each film a two-week run, one at the White and one at the Red group of theaters.[60]

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[55] Perhaps the most notorious case of the government manipulating admissions data to create the perception of a populace enthusiastic for kokusaku eiga was, as Furukawa shows, *Malay senki*, supposedly the number two film of 1942; the film was the beneficiary of a huge, government-sponsored marketing campaign (its sequel, *Burma senki*, enjoyed no such effort and was a major flop), and benefited from mandatory group viewings by school-age children despite the film's extreme unpopularity among schoolgirls, a great many of whom spent large portions of the film's running time in the restroom. But this sort of resistance was of course entirely ignored in the reporting of how many people 'saw' the film. See Furukawa, pp. 172, 174.

[56] In 1944, *Nippon eiga* released a chart of the top films of 1943, but rearranged the data to privilege total admissions over total box office, average admissions per theater, and average earnings per theater (in all three of which *Kantarō of Ina* was first place), thereby fostering the mistaken impression that the pro-war *Kaigun* was the number one film of 1943. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944-1945), p. 106.

[57] See Salomon, p. 357.

[58] 28,000 versus just over 14,000. *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944-1945), p. 106.

[59] Furukawa outlines these efforts by the Home Ministry to curtail Japanese audiences' ability to see the film, and their spectacular failure: of all the films made during the last years of the war, only *Hawaii Malay oki kaisen* (The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay) was able to surpass *Kantarō of Ina* in both box office and total attendance, and

Yet *Kantarō of Ina* was also popular enough to be exhibited in subsequent weeks and months at more minor cinemas throughout Japan. For example, one theater handbill (*chirashi*), dating apparently from late May 1943, advertises the "long-awaited" arrival of "this famous film" at a local theater "next week" on the 27th of May. More than four months after the film's premiere in the metropolis, *Kantarō of Ina* was coming to the countryside.[61] This indicates that the number of people who actually went to see it was considerably greater than its premiere suggests.[62] Moreover, starting in September 1943 mobile projection teams traveled throughout the country (and in fact the empire) bringing both national policy films and the most popular films to audiences, and there is no doubt *Kantarō of Ina* was one of wartime Japan's most popular films, meaning that it was likely shown by at least some of these teams, thereby reaching a still larger audience.[63]

Despite the government's best efforts to dissuade them, then, it is clear that filmgoers flocked to see *Kantarō of Ina*. In fact, the enthusiasm for the film was so extreme it led to long

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that only thanks to a longer theatrical run that included a full weekend, its 'ippan yō' designation (which allowed children, comprising 15~25% of the total film-going audience in Japan at that time, to see it), schools' decisions to send their elementary and middle school students en masse to theaters to see it, and its exhibition at a far greater number of theaters. Furukawa appears to be under the impression, however, that *Kantarō of Ina* had a Monday thru Friday release, but according to my calculations, Jan. 3rd, 1943 (the opening day) was a Sunday, meaning the film did have a partial weekend showing. See Furukawa, pp. 185-186.

[60] Furukawa, p. 193.

[61] A note on the left side explains the unnamed theater, due to electricity shortages, will have to close down on Tuesday, May 25th; the inclusion of the day of the week allows us to confirm it dates from 1943. It is interesting to note, moreover, that the advertising slogans used to promote *Kantarō of Ina* in this handbill are exactly the same as the *Asahi shinbun* ad of Jan. 6th 1943 discussed above, with the sole exception that the word "early spring" (*shoshun*) has been replaced with "early summer" (*shoka*). Author's private collection.

[62] But box office and attendance figures from re-screenings were clearly not taken into account when the box office results of a film were reported in *Eiga junpō* or *Nippon eiga*; we know this for certain since such figures were reported too soon after a film's initial release, typically within three months, to take re-screenings into account. Also, these initial figures claim an improbably high market share of the total film-going audience for Tokyo and Kansai, typically around 45% for the former and 30~35% for the latter. For example, see *Eiga junpō*, vol. 46, p. 254 for figures from the first two weeks of December 1942, showing these proportions of total market share for Tokyo and Kansai, a mere 8~9% each for Chubu and Kyushu and just 2~5% for Hokkaido. These figures, again, are only for the films' opening run in each of these locations and certainly do not factor in later re-screenings of popular films, which thanks to the mobile projection teams would have been especially significant in more rural areas, suggesting the actual audience share of Tokyo and Kansai, in particular, is lower than these official statistics might imply.

[63] These teams held almost 30,000 mobile screenings, and in 1944 their film programs were seen almost 42 million times. For more on the projection teams, see Furukawa, p. 200.

lines many hours before the show time and even violent tussles, with overeager fans falling victim to injuries in some cases.[64] Critics also blasted the story for a lack of artistry, which film historian Furukawa Takahisa sardonically notes is a sure indicator it was a popular, crowd-pleasing film.[65] Based on box office receipts, *Kantarō of Ina,* playing in the White Group of theaters, was an obvious winner over its direct competition being exhibited in the Red Group of theaters, namely Daiei's historical epic *Jingisu Kan* [Genghis Khan], and in fact outperformed all the other films in both Groups, for all three weeks shown, including the Red Group's hit from the third "week" of December (actually an eight-day span that included two weekends, compared to *Kantarō of Ina's* Sunday thru Thursday run of Jan. 3-7), *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay*.[66]

Yet why were audiences so dangerously enthusiastic for it? That is difficult to say with precision, because in its extant form, the film is just 67 minutes long, yet originally was a ten-reel film of 2500 meters with a 100-minute[67] running time, meaning one-third of the entire film has been lost. Initially, "Kantarō of Ina" was only the subtitle; the filmmakers gave it the title "*Ina bushi jingi*" ("Ina melody, honor and humanity") which makes their decision to have singer Ichimaru guest-star in it much clearer, as she had a hit rendition in the 1930s of the popular folk song "Ina bushi," and it is probably due to knowledge of this song that led the filmmakers to choose Ina as the setting. They had another motivation beyond just the planned tie-in with the

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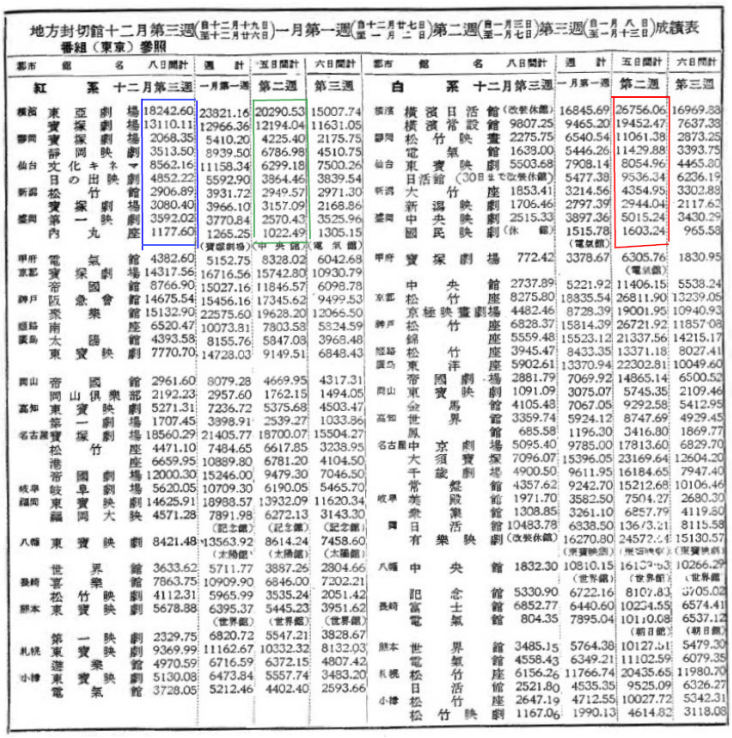
[64] Furukawa, p. 187. The stampeding crowds were especially fierce around the Denkikan in Asakusa, while the film drew crowds 'the likes of which had never been seen' at theaters in Kansai, with some lining up at 3 AM for the chance to see the film once the theater finally opened many hours later. These *Kantarō of Ina*-related incidents may have recalled for some participants the infamous riots on the occasion of Ri Kōran/Li Xianglan (Yamaguchi Yoshiko)'s concert at the Nichigeki on Feb. 11, 1941.

[65] Ibid., p. 188.

[66] Film-goers were offered two different kinds of films the week of Jan. 3rd: an exciting yet romantic historical drama, or the spectacle of an epic history film, with the former (*Kantarō of Ina*) the clear winner, ranking 1st versus *Jingisu Kan*'s 18th in box office receipts, and unlike the epic film on Mongolia, generating huge crowds waiting to see the film. *Nippon eiga*, May 1, 1944 issue, p. 26 (vol. 31, p. 106). It seems Kantarō, who was described in contemporary sources as fighting and acting "less like the Tengutō and more like [folk hero Shimizu] Jirochō in his younger days," ended up winning several hundred thousand more fans than Genghis. Furukawa, p. 188.

[67] It was 91 minutes according to the Nihon eiga database, at least, but according to Tsumura Hideo, writing on Jan. 6th, 1943, during the film's original theatrical run in the White Group of theaters, it had a running time of 100 minutes. See Tsumura, "Shin eiga hyō," in *Asahi shinbun*, Jan. 6 1943, morning ed., page 4.

music industry, however; in the Narutaki-gumi, of which director Inagaki Hiroshi was also a member, Inagaki was affectionately known as "Inakan" (a portmanteau of "Inagaki kantoku"), which made the "Ina" location perfect for their intended tribute to Inagaki: Ina (no) Kan(tarō).[68]



地方封切館十二月第三週(昌十二月十九日/至十二月廿六日)一月第一週(昌十二月廿七日/至一月二日)第二週(昌一月三日/至一月七日)第三週(昌一月八日/至一月十三日)成績表
番組(東京)參照

都市	館名	八日間計	週計	五日間計	六日間計
紅系十二月第三週			一月第一週	第二週	第三週
横浜	東亞劇場	18242.60	23821.16	20290.53	15007.74
	寶塚劇場	13110.11	12966.36	12194.04	11631.05
靜岡	寶塚劇場	2068.35	5410.20	4225.40	2175.75
	靜岡映劇	3513.50	8939.50	6786.98	4510.75
仙台	文化キネマ劇	8562.16	11158.34	6299.18	7500.26
	日の出映劇	4852.22	5592.90	3864.46	3839.54
新潟	松竹劇場	2906.89	3931.72	2949.57	2971.30
盛岡	寶塚劇場	3080.40	3966.10	3157.09	2168.86
	第一映劇	3592.02	3770.84	2570.43	3525.96
	内丸座	1177.60	1265.25	1022.49	1305.15
			(寶塚劇場)	(中央寶映)	(東宝館)
甲府	電氣館	4382.60	5152.75	8328.02	6042.68
京都	寶塚劇場	14317.56	16716.56	15742.80	10930.79
	帝國館	8766.90	15027.16	11846.57	6098.78
神戸	阪急會館	14675.54	15456.16	17345.62	9499.53
	寶樂	15132.90	22575.60	19628.20	12066.50
姫路	南大和座	6520.47	10073.81	7803.58	5824.59
豊島	東寶映劇	4393.58	8155.76	5847.03	3968.48
		7770.70	14728.03	9149.51	6848.43
岡山	帝國劇館	2961.60	8079.28	4669.95	4317.31
	山陽倶樂部	2192.23	2957.60	1762.15	1494.05
高知	東寶映劇	5271.31	7236.72	5375.68	4503.47
	第一寶映劇場	1707.45	3998.91	2539.27	1033.86
名古屋	寶塚劇場	18560.29	21405.77	18700.07	15504.27
	松竹座	4471.10	7484.65	6617.85	3238.95
	港帝國劇場	6659.95	10889.80	6781.20	4104.50
	阪東寶映劇	12000.30	15246.00	9479.30	7046.50
岐阜	阪東寶映劇	5620.05	10709.30	6190.05	5465.70
福岡	東寶映劇	14625.91	18988.57	13932.09	11620.34
	大映劇	4571.28	7891.98	6272.13	3143.30
			(記念館)	(記念館)	(記念館)
八幡	東寶映劇	8421.48	13563.92	8614.24	7458.60
			(大勝館)	(大勝館)	(大勝館)
長崎	世界館	3633.62	5711.77	3887.26	2804.66
	富樂館	7863.75	10909.90	6846.00	7302.21
熊本	松竹映劇	4112.31	5965.99	3535.24	2051.42
	東寶映劇	5678.88	6395.37	5445.23	3951.62
			(世界館)	(世界館)	(世界館)
札幌	第一映劇	2329.75	6820.72	5547.21	3828.67
	東寶映劇	9369.99	11162.67	10332.32	8132.03
	東進樂館	4970.59	6716.59	6372.15	4807.42
小樽	東寶映劇	5130.08	6473.84	5557.74	3483.20
	電氣館	3728.05	5212.46	4402.40	2593.66

都市	館名	八日間計	週計	五日間計	六日間計
白系十二月第三週			一月第一週	第二週	第三週
横浜	横濱日活館	(改築休館)	16845.69	26756.06	16969.38
	横濱常設館	9807.25	9465.20	19452.47	7637.38
靜岡	松竹映畫館	2275.75	6540.54	11061.38	2873.25
	電氣館	1639.00	5446.26	11429.88	3393.75
仙台	東寶映劇	5503.68	7908.14	8054.96	4465.80
	日活館 (30日まで改築休館)		5477.38	9536.34	6236.19
新潟	大竹座	1853.41	3214.56	4354.95	3302.85
	新潟映劇	1706.46	2797.39	2944.04	2117.63
盛岡	中央映劇	2515.33	3897.36	5015.24	3430.29
	國民映劇	(休館)	1515.78	1603.24	965.58
			(電試館)		
甲府	寶塚劇場	772.42	3378.67	6305.76	1830.95
				(電試館)	
京都	中央館	2737.89	5221.92	11406.15	5538.24
	松竹座	8275.80	18335.54	26811.90	13239.05
神戸	京極映畫劇場	4482.46	8728.39	19001.95	10940.93
	松竹座	6828.37	15814.39	26721.92	11857.08
姫路	錦座	5559.48	15523.12	21337.56	14215.17
	松竹座	3945.47	8433.35	13371.18	8027.41
豊島	東洋座	5902.61	13370.94	22302.81	10049.60
岡山	東帝國劇場	2881.79	7069.92	14865.14	6500.52
	寶映劇館	1091.09	3075.07	5745.35	2109.46
高知	金馬館	4105.43	7067.05	9292.58	5412.95
	世界館	3359.74	5924.12	8747.69	4929.45
	鳳館	685.58	1196.30	3416.80	1869.77
名古屋	中京劇場	5095.40	9785.00	17813.60	6829.70
	大須寶塚	7096.07	15396.05	23169.64	12604.20
	千歳劇場	4900.50	9611.95	16184.65	7947.40
岐阜	常盤館	4357.62	9242.70	15212.68	10106.46
	第一殿館	1971.70	3582.50	7504.27	2680.30
	衆樂館	1308.85	3261.10	6257.79	4119.80
岡	日活館	10483.78	6838.50	13673.21	8115.58
	有樂映劇	(改築休館)	16270.80	24572.46	15130.57
			(常盤映劇)	(常盤映劇)	(常盤映劇)
八幡	中央館	1832.30	10810.15	16123.63	10266.29
			(世界館)	(世界館)	(世界館)
長崎	記念館	5330.90	6722.16	8107.83	5705.02
	富士館	6852.77	6440.60	10224.55	6574.41
	電氣館	804.35	7895.04	10110.08	6537.12
				(朝日館)	(朝日館)
熊本	世界館	3485.15	5764.38	10127.51	5479.30
	電氣館	4558.43	6349.21	11102.59	6079.35
札幌	松竹座	6156.26	11766.74	20435.65	11980.70
	日活館	2521.80	4535.35	9525.09	6326.27
小樽	松竹座	2647.19	4712.55	10027.72	5342.31
	松竹映劇	1167.06	1990.13	4614.82	3118.08

Figure 23: Box office data by theater and location (excluding Tokyo and Osaka), for the final week of Dec. 1942 (with *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay* in blue) and second week of Jan. 1943 (with *Kantarō of Ina* in red and *Jingisu Kan* in green). *Kantarō of Ina* performed especially well, comparatively and in terms of absolute box office returns, in Yokohama, Shizuoka, Kyoto, Kobe, Nagoya, and Sapporo. For original chart, see *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 340 (no. 71, Feb. 1 1943, p. 56).

The film was also carefully cast so as to appeal to women (and some men) of all ages thanks to the casting of the perennially popular Hasegawa and Yamada, who at that time was nearing the apex of her fame. Advertisements for the film in newspapers and film magazines of the day support the notion that the film was being marketed largely based upon its star-studded cast,[69] with tag lines proclaiming "It's amazing! You'll find yourself shrieking out loud, it's so interesting!" only to reveal, in the next line, that the 'it' being praised so effusively is not the

[68] See "Yamane Sadao no otanoshimi zeminaaru" for *Kantarō of Ina*.
[69] Even Mizumachi Seiji, despite considerable ambivalence over certain aspects of the film, had unambiguous words of praise for the casting of the film, including the large supporting cast, and even predicting it will "win this company's 'best cast' award." (In the original, it is the katakana "besuto kyasuto"). By contrast, he criticized the film for having so little on-location shooting of the ostensible setting, Shinano/Nagano. *Eiga junpō* vol. 46, p. 292.

film's story or cinematography but simply "This bringing together of stars!"[70] The star-studded cast also earned a left-handed compliment from the *Asahi shinbun*'s resident film critic, the histrionically pro-war, pro-state "Q" (Tsumura Hideo), who said "Among the, as always, inferior crop of films released for the New Year, this one [*Kantarō of Ina*] is worthy of note...its bringing together of Hasegawa and Yamada lacks the repellent lasciviousness and excessiveness of their earlier pairings."[71] The casting of ever-amusing Takase Minoru in a supporting role ensured there would be plenty of laughs among audience members of all ages and both genders thanks to his widely popular slapstick facial contortions and expressions, while the film was also carefully designed for maximum appeal among young adult audiences through the casting of Takehisa Chieko, who was popular among that demographic. To maximize her impact, Takehisa's casting was heavily promoted in the advertisements for *Kantarō of Ina*.[72]

Yet neither Takehisa's Osei nor Yamada's Oshin offers a particularly proactive subject position for women in the audience, and the film's advertisements center on the issue of masculinity, describing Kantarō as a satisfying "man among men" who uses "caustic words" while actor Hasegawa, whose name is super-sized and included again and again, is praised for returning, after a long absence, to "gallant sword-fighting."[73] Visually, as well, the ads prominently feature pictures of Hasegawa's face in close-up, or in various action poses, relegating Yamada and others to mere 'supporting cast'-style mug-shots, which further

[70] *Asahi shinbun*, December 22, 1942, morning ed., page 4. The original Japanese is "Sugoi! Omowazu sakebitai omoshirosa! Kono kao awase!" The 'kao awase' could refer solely to the two main stars, Hasegawa and Yamada, who are the only ones pictured in the ad, but could also refer to the larger cast of the top five listed in the ad, namely Hasegawa, Yamada, Kurokawa Yatarō (who played Shōkichi), Takehisa Chieko, and Ichimaru.
[71] Tsumura Hideo, "Shin eiga hyō," in *Asahi shinbun*, Jan. 6, 1943, morning ed., page 4. Despite occasional left-handed compliments like the above, Tsumura is overall quite negative on the film, especially its treatment of historical heroes like the pro-imperial forces, and concludes that "it has a thin flavor" (sarari to shita aji ga aru).
[72] For example, the tag-line for the giant two-page spread at the beginning of the Dec. 11, 1942 edition of *Eiga junpō* devoted to *Kantarō of Ina* proclaimed, "Satisfaction awaits in this chivalric tale when you see the pairing of Takehisa added to Hasegawa and Yamada! It's the most exciting release of the New Year!" (Hasegawa, Yamada ni Takehisa wo kuwaeta kao fure ni miru mune no suku ninkyō hen! Shinshun saidai no otanoshimi!)
[73] *Eiga junpō*, Jan. 1, 1943 (issue 69), end matter ("mune no suku otoko no naka no otoko ippiki no tansō! Hasegawa Kazuo hisabisa no sassō taru tachimawari").

emphasizes the issue of masculinity while also no doubt pleasing the legions of Hasegawa fans throughout the country, many of them women.[74] But what is important to keep in mind, here, is that female spectators' fascination with Hasegawa itself centered on masculinity, inasmuch as he seemed to offer a far more sensitive, emotional type of masculinity than typically celebrated on the big screen; Hasegawa films did not typically offer a similarly enlightened interpretation of femininity, designed as they were to sell a specific commodity, the sensitive Hasegawa,[75] as object of consumption.[76] This is in stark contrast to the balance of (pro)activity in the next Hasegawa-Yamada collaboration to hit the silver screen, July 1943's *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* (Tōhō, 85 min.), in which the tables have turned and her role is the most important of all.[77]

Love over Duty: Outa as True Protagonist of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*

*Chōji the Famous Sculptor'*s Outa, played by Yamada Isuzu, proved popular abroad as well. Although *Kantarō of Ina* had dominated the Japanese box office and outperformed *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* at home, finishing 1st in box office revenue compared to 11th for the latter film, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* did better in some of Japan's occupied territories, for example in Taiwan.[78] The two films are remarkably similar in many respects. Released just six months apart, both feature the same two leads and a similar 'all-star' quality to the supporting cast, and both are

[74] For example, in the above-mentioned two-page ad in the Jan. 1st, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō*, the entire left section of the ad is devoted to a giant close-up of Hasegawa's face in profile, while two smaller pictures of him heroically striking down enemies, and coiled like a tiger ready to pounce, adorn the two bottom corners.
[75] But as already noted, it is likely that Hasegawa offered an attractive subject position to at least some sensitive men.
[76] For an excellent analysis of the ways in which Hayashi Chōjirō/Hasegawa Kazuo's star and on-screen images were carefully controlled, by both the studios and by Hasegawa himself, to offer maximum value (in terms of star appeal trumping action-movie credentials, the 'flash of the star' outshining the 'flash of the sword') to viewers eager to consume his masculine beauty and sensitivity, see Daisuke Miyao, *The Aesthetics of Shadow*, p. 9 and passim.
[77] Contemporary critics like Tsumura Hideo noted the male hero's reliance on "strange antics" by the heroine with considerable disquiet. See Tsumura, "Shin eiga hyō," in *Asahi shinbun*, July 18, 1943, morning ed., page 4.
[78] *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* ranked 35th versus *Kantarō of Ina*'s 36th out of films released there by average daily admissions, though neither could compare to Itō Daisuke's *Kurama Tengu* (released there in 1943), discussed in chapter three, which was 17th for the year. *Nippon eiga*, vol. 31, p. 403.

set in the Bakumatsu and involve Mito; the only major difference is Yamada's character, who is far more dynamic in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* than in *Kantarō of Ina*. The physical dimensions of these two suggested an interesting equality of the genders, as the combination of the short Hasegawa and the tall Yamada led to a visual balance of physical power and presence on screen which was perfectly suited to the increased proactivity of Yamada's character—and the unusual passivity of Hasegawa's—in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*.[79] In addition, Yamada's personal life had changed a great deal in 1942-1943; in her memoirs, she describes the conflict between her first husband's growing insistence that she quit her job acting, and her equally strong determination to flourish in her career, as the reason that her first marriage failed, and claims she married her next husband so soon afterwards because he was a film producer and an 'excellent confidante' who could support her career, a decision she regretted almost as much as the films she starred in while married to him.[80] After divorcing him in 1943, she became more independent than ever, a true modern girl who lived for today, not caring what society might think of her succession of lovers and heavy-drinking lifestyle.[81] To live so large was, in theory at least, nearly impossible in the 1940s, an era where "Luxury is the enemy!" and women were being encouraged to wear formless monpe trousers.[82] Yamada, then, may have inspired many simply through her scandalously extravagant lifestyle.

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[79] Shimura, "Hasegawa Kazuo to Yamada Isuzu," in *Nihon eiga to nashonarizumu, 1931-1945*, p. 163.
[80] Her first husband was fellow actor Tsukita Ichirō, whom she married when she was just 19, while her second husband was a producer for Tōhō named Takimura Kazuo, who, once married to Yamada, ignored his promise to make her a big star and began to demand she focus on being a 'good wife,' leading to the swift dissolution of the marriage. Yamada Isuzu, *Eiga to tomo ni*, pp. 84, 95-96.
[81] Yamada recalls this second failure at married life as, in company with the worsening war situation, being the impetus for her free-wheeling lifestyle of alcohol and lovers aplenty. Ibid., p. 100.
[82] This defiance of the mores of the times, and especially Yamada's brave refusal to sacrifice her own career once married, must have made her something of a model to the countless women who in the 1930s (before it became impossible, in the early 1940s, to find a venue in which to publish these sorts of views) had written in to magazines like *Shufu no tomo* to express their own dissatisfaction with societal expectations for women, especially married women, and their support of, and desire for, an independent career. See Silverberg, p. 155.

In *Kantarō of Ina*, released soon after the formal dissolution of her first marriage, Yamada had played Oshin, a loyal, stoic wife who stuck by her husband despite his abysmal conduct. But in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, her role of Outa was much more emotional and also more independent, not a wife but a lover, and one moreover with life-or-death power over her man. Given that she divorced her second husband in 1943, she was starring in this unusually independent but also emotionally distraught role of Outa at the precise moment her second experiment with married life was ending in (doubtless rather emotional) failure, and just when she was embarking in response on a new, hedonistic lifestyle; perhaps this strong resonance between the personal life of the actress and the role she played explains in part why the role struck such a chord with audiences.[83] Yamada said absolutely nothing of either *Kantarō of Ina* or *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* in her memoirs, instead referring to all the film projects she was involved with in the late wartime period, obliquely, as "unsuitable for me."[84] And it is no wonder—in *Kantarō of Ina* her role was rather uninteresting, while *Chōji the Famous Sculptor,* on its most basic level, is about the conversion of a dissolute and lazy sculptor, the eponymous Chōji, into a political radical willing to sacrifice everything for the nation, including his art and any chance at romantic happiness, meaning the film is a great deal more propagandistic in tone, at least on the surface, than *Kantarō of Ina.*

Parallels between *Kantarō of Ina* and *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* abound. On the production side, both films were produced by high-profile Tōhō producer Kiyokawa Minesuke,[85] and both featured Narutaki-gumi alumnus Mimura as screenwriter, not to mention the similarities in casting, both of individuals like Hasegawa and Yamada, and more generally of

[83] For a timetable of Yamada's marriages and divorces, see Yamada, p. 160.
[84] Ibid., p. 107 ("watashi wa omowashii shigoto mo nashi").
[85] Note that for *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, there was an executive producer, Mōri Masaki; there does not appear to have been an executive producer for *Kantarō of Ina*, which had two co-producers, Kiyokawa and Oshiyama Yasuaki.

sheer scale (both offering the pinnacle of 'all-star' casts).[86] And there are key points of resonance in the narratives. In both, Hasegawa's character is a non-samurai—at a time and in a genre where virtually all heroic individuals were explicitly identified as of samurai stock. Both are set outside the Bakumatsu's political center of Kyoto. And in both, there is ample *feeling* binding his and Yamada's characters together, or in other words, both films are at their core romances.

Moreover, contemporary critics also noticed—and objected to—some of the thematic similarities between the two films, especially the cursory treatment of the male protagonists' political motivations. The unnamed reviewer of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* in the Aug. 1 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō* blasts both *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* and its predecessor *Kantarō of Ina* for giving too few details of Hasegawa's characters' conversion to the pro-imperial side, investing no time developing their political back-stories and thus failing to make them convincing—spending all their screen time making the romance believable instead.[87] The reviewer also judges *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* harshly for failing to explain the political platform of the pro-imperial activists,[88] and the righteousness of their cause, thus generating no meaningful contrast with those on the pro-Tokugawa side. He cannot tolerate the two films' cursory treatment of these issues, since after all this calls into question the hegemonic interpretation of history, which stresses the importance and above all the moral purity of the patriotic loyalists, bravely overcoming major resistance by reactionary and not at all heroic pro-Tokugawa hold-outs, to

[86] Mimura's name is more prominently displayed in the film's opening title screen than that of director and fellow Narutaki-gumi alumnus (and in fact the youngest member) Hagiwara Ryō, as it occurs to the right (that is, before) the film title, identifying this film as a "work by Mimura Shintarō" and only then, after the larger-sized title, noting "directed by Hagiwara Ryō." This order of precedence nudges audiences to conceive of the process of film-making as one in which the director Hagiwara was merely the person who happened to depict Mimura's story (rather than the other way around, i.e. a Hagiwara-helmed film that just happened to be based on a Mimura script). But it also itself suggests that audiences were more familiar with Mimura's name than Hagiwara's, and found it a bigger draw.
[87] *Eiga junpō* vol. 50, p. 39 (page 23 in the original pagination).
[88] He refers to them as *kinnō rōshi.*

ensure Japan's emergence as a modern nation.[89] Sure enough, the reviewer expresses worry that their depiction in these films make the pro-imperial fighters seem like villains.[90]

Most of this reviewer's criticism is directed at *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, though much of it applies to *Kantarō of Ina* as well. He takes issue with most everything in the film, including the title, pointing out we are never shown whether Chōji is actually a 'famous sculptor' or, still more troubling, whether he even deserves to be famous, and for what, especially after his hard-to-believe instantaneous conversion from ardent sculptor to pro-imperial patriot when Kusakabe confronts him. As the reviewer notes with dismay, *what* Chōji learned when (as explained in the exposition) he went off to Kyoto is left unstated and ambiguous, since all Chōji himself says about it is "I went to Kyoto and was taught." But was he taught simply the art of sculpting Vairocana (*Dainichi nyorai*) goddess sculptures, or something of the political realities in Bakumatsu Japan? This issue of who taught Chōji, and the content of that instruction, becomes even more ambiguous after the sculpture-cutting scene, in which Kusakabe violently slices down the sculpture on which Chōji had been working unusually earnestly, an attempt to repudiate apolitical spiritualities and indeed art itself.

Finally, the reviewer takes issue with *Chōji the Famous Sculptor's* greatest selling point, its star-studded cast. He argues that a film's political message trumps all, and a film, like this one, with a muddled or inappropriate political message will still fail to satisfy audiences no matter how many stars the studio packs into the cast. He claims that "since filmgoers were not satisfied despite the film's star-studded cast, this is evidence the film is transmitting lies," both politically

[89] Where there is no definitive proof the reviewer was a man, the timing of the review, so late in the war, and the frequency of men versus women submitting such reviews in the pages of *Eiga junpō*, make it all but certain.
[90] "Kinnō undō to ifu mono ga, nanika hannin meita otsukakeraretewiru inei wo mottewiru. Tadashii kōdō ni kurai inshō wo ataeru koto wa, sude ni kyō no sakugekijutsu kara ittemo okuretewiru" (the imperial loyalist movement [as shown therein'] contains some kind of dark shadow that follows them around like a signpost proclaiming 'villain').

and in terms of character development, with which he also took issue.[91] Despite the film's investment of capital in getting all its top entertainers, including Manzai comedians like Entatsu and Achako, he pronounced it "unsatisfactory."[92] The film fails, he argues, because screenwriter Mimura was clearly 'bored' when he wrote the story, and audiences will be bored too if all that is on offer is the cast; he concludes by lauding viewers for 'recognizing the difference between real sugar and mere saccharine, even though both might seem equally sweet."[93]

Despite the film's supposed reliance on the box-office draw of its cast, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* was also innovative in its narrative, departing dramatically from the more conventional story offered in *Kantarō of Ina*. For one thing, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, unlike almost all Bakumatsu films, was set in Edo, not in the more historically relevant Kyoto, and could draw upon the 'row tenement' (*nagaya*) atmosphere familiar from standard period films tales set in Edo.

More importantly, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* is a 'battle of the sexes' contest of wills between Chōji and Outa. It is both a meditation on gender, values and conduct in times of crisis and a difficult film to categorize using the standard tools provided by film theory. While women are assumed to 'freeze' the narrative due to being always already sexualized for on-screen consumption, men are usually understood in feminist film theory to be the 'actors' in the sense of

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[91] "saidai no haiyaku de, kore de kankyaku ga manzoku shinakereba, yahari kihonteki ni kankyaku ni uso ga tsutawaru shōko de aru." Note, however, that *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, while not quite able to repeat *Kantarō of Ina*'s huge success, was a major hit, and not reaching an earlier box office record is rather shaky evidence that audiences "weren't satisfied" by it; for instance, *Kantarō of Ina* was one of the only films made in the subgenre of "wanderer film" during the entire war; moreover, it benefited from its release at the New Year, the period of greatest leisure in the Japanese year; and most importantly, it came out earlier in the war, in the honeymoon period, before the initial glow of success faded and the worsening war situation started to affect people's daily lives (including whether to go to the movies). In such circumstances, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* might have performed equally well.
[92] The term is "monotarinakatta," which could also be translated as "something is lacking" or "inadequate."
[93] He says, of audiences, that "amaku to mo satō to sakkarin to no sa wa, doko ka de wakaru mono rashii." I think the reviewer is actually correct, that screenwriter Mimura was in some sense on autopilot when he wrote certain portions of the script, and found the material 'taikutsu,' as some of the more histrionic and explicitly political speeches leave much to be desired. But I will argue below, based on close formal analysis, that the filmmakers encoded these overly political moments to fall flat, and likely included them in the first place simply to appease the censors. Hence, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*'s "make me a man" and "it is in death that men can find true meaning in life" speeches are functionally equivalent to 'flag shots' and other censor-pleasing elements filling late wartime films.

advancing the plot and being the bearers of the gaze.[94] The transcendental gaze of the camera, meanwhile, is understood as implicitly male in the manner in which it objectifies female characters on screen, forcing female spectators to choose between identifying with the objectified female characters or taking a male subject position, thereby becoming themselves complicit in the ongoing process of on-screen objectification of women.[95] But in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* Yamada's character Outa, the main protagonist, is by far the more dynamic of the two, and must choose, essentially, what to do with Chōji. Far from being sexualized, to the point of offering only the narcissistic pleasure of projecting oneself onto the screen, the exciting range of Outa's actions, and especially her proactive use of violence at the end, could offer women (and perhaps some men) in the audience a deeper pleasure: the "introjective"[96] incorporation of Outa's capabilities into one's own self. Outa is by no means an objectified spectacle to be consumed by the male protagonist/spectator and his gaze; in fact, she (and thus, the female spectator) even does a bit of gazing at the passive and somewhat objectified Chōji.[97]

Once Chōji is captured by the local officials, his fate is in Outa's hands, as is that of his mentor, Kusakabe Isōji (played by Maruyama Sadao), one of the leaders of the *sonnō jōi* cause Chōji has joined and an actual historical figure.[98] But, improbably for a mid-1943 film, not only

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[94] Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in Evans and Hall, eds., *Visual Culture: a Reader*, p. 384.
[95] According to Anne Friedberg, Christian Metz characterizes primary cinematic identification in this transcendental way but claims this transcendental gaze was gender-neutral; it was later feminists like Mulvey who suggested it was essentially male. Friedberg, pp. 40-41. Mulvey modified her own work somewhat in 1981 to suggest that women filmgoers are forced to oscillate between masculine and feminine identifications (Jackie Stacey, "Desperately Seeking Difference," in Evans and Hall eds., *Visual Culture: a Reader*, p. 393).
[96] Otto Fenischel developed the idea of *ocular introjection*, in which the viewing subject tries to make what s/he sees become part of his or her self. Fenischel, p. 330.
[97] Her gaze isn't precisely lustful or sexual in nature, but nonetheless, has a possessive potency at times that exceeds the boundaries apparently imposed on the American women's films of the 1940s analyzed by Mary Ann Doane, which de-eroticize the feminine gaze. See Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship," in *Cinema Journal* 25, No. 4, Summer 1986, p. 9.
[98] Kusakabe's deployment in this narrative, and his references to nemesis Ii Naosuke as still living, date the story, whose exact time frame is otherwise left unstated, to no later than 1859, since the historical Kusakabe is known to have died in jail in early 1859, during the Ansei purge. The film's utilization of Kusakabe, then, is an interesting example of re-appropriation, as the historical Kusakabe's rather tragic (because ineffectual) role is transformed here

does Outa consistently choose *feeling* over *duty*, the cinematography and structure of the film seem to affirm these choices.[99] In practical terms, this means that even when the severely beaten Chōji begs her "Make me a man!" or in other words "say nothing and let me die, because I would rather die than put Kusakabe/the cause in jeopardy," Outa chooses to rat out Kusakabe in exchange for a promise that Chōji himself will be spared, even though this decision risks alienating (and in fact does temporarily alienate) Chōji, whose freedom she purchased over his strenuous protests. And again, at the melodramatic ending, she chooses to sacrifice her own life to ensure, not the ultimate victory of Chōji's political faction per se,[100] but simply that her beloved Chōji will survive.

Since by her actions Chōji was able to travel to Mito and join the pro-imperial fight against the pro-Tokugawa reactionaries and foreign enemies alike, it might be tempting to view Outa's actions as consistent with the state's notorious demand that subjects "offer yourselves courageously to the state."[101] As what was holding Chōji back from political action, she had to die, from the perspective of the narrative, to free him to act. And if Outa had selflessly given her life for the political cause, as occasionally occurred in modern-day films (notably *Sayon's Bell*) about the logic of self-sacrifice, the ideal feminine way to serve the empire, perhaps that reading would be convincing. However, Outa did not passively sacrifice her life, nor did she commit

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into a triumphant role as proselytizer, as though speculating about how effectual a spiritual leader Kusakabe could have been had the pro-Tokugawa side not captured him. Knowledge of this historical context potentially changes our understanding of Outa's decision to betray his location to the pro-Tokugawa forces, though here, unlike in history, the filmic Kusakabe somehow avoids being arrested (off-screen).

[99] This is perhaps especially surprising given that the film was released after the June 1943 incident that rocked the film industry, the attempted banning by the Home Ministry of a Daiei film (they claimed the script had been altered since being approved during preproduction censorship, a charge refuted by the filmmakers). Peter High argues this incident removed the last vestiges of trust between the state's censorship apparatus and those in the film industry (High, pp. 458-459). If this were the case, one would expect to see less and less innovation, and more conservatism (that is, self-censorship) in films after this point, yet if anything *Chōji the Famous Sculptor,* compared to earlier films, is more innovative and even progressive in its treatment of history, and of women's place in it, not less.

[100] Ultimate victory was not in the cards: Kusakabe was trying to recruit Chōji to join the Mito rōnin/Tengutō, who by 1864 had been decisively defeated by the Shogunate and had virtually no impact on national politics thereafter.

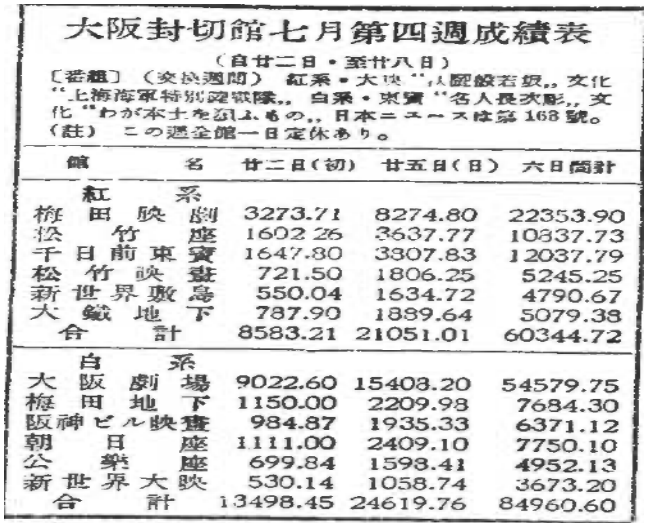
[101] This well-known exhortation is from the Imperial Rescript on Education, promulgated in 1890.

suicide; she chose to kill, in order to free Chōji from pursuit. In an act fraught with symbolism, she used Chōji's chisel to assassinate Gamatoku, the local official hunting Chōji, knowing full well that his men would immediately strike her down in retaliation. Played by veteran character actor Shimura Takashi, on loan from Shōchiku, Gamatoku is not entirely unsympathetic figure; he simply supported the pro-Tokugawa side and was cooperating with the countrywide hunt for *sonnō jōi* activists like the loyalist Kusakabe. Her decision to kill Gamatoku, then, can be seen as politically motivated, at least if she were really committed to the pro-imperial cause, but the rest of the film exposes her lack of political affiliation. And as the *Eiga junpō* reviewer lamented, the film makes no effort to identify which side, the pro-imperial or the pro-Tokugawa, was 'right'; Gamatoku, thus, was not portrayed as a villain who 'deserved' to die, but rather as someone threatening the life of her beloved, Chōji. As such, her motivation for the murder must be personal, stemming, to use the parlance of period films, from *feeling*. She loves Chōji, and wants him to survive. Close visual analysis of the final moments of the film supports this conclusion.

What was it like to go to a movie theater in mid- to late July, 1943 and see *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*? Initially it was in the Red Group, all theaters in major cities being split into two groups roughly equal in size. After April 1943, and due primarily to material and political restrictions on the three film studios, which limited each to a maximum production of two new films a month, each film program (consisting of one feature film, eventually limited in running time to a maximum of 74 minutes, one culture film (*bunka eiga*) and one newsreel) would run for one week at either the Red or White Group of theaters, then switch and run for an additional week at the other. Red and White Group theaters were not divided along geographic lines,[102] so

[102] We can be certain of this because there were both Red and White Group theaters located in popular areas like Ginza (the Ginza Shōchiku theater was Red Group, the Ginza Gekijō theater was White Group) or Asakusa (Daishōkan and Denkikan for Red, Kokusai Gekijō and Asakusa Shōchiku Eiga Gekijō for White). See *Eiga junpō* vol. 50, p. 111, for a list of twenty such theaters, divided into their respective Groups.

this film rotation system meant box office revenue typically fell steeply in any film program's second week, since anyone who was eager to see a given film program could easily do so in the first week at whichever of the theater Groups it was playing; there was no need for anyone to wait in order for the film to "come" to their location, at least if they lived in a relatively large city such as those listed below. Yet *Chōji the Famous Sculptor's* box office and attendance figures remained unusually high in its second week, especially in Osaka, as the below chart shows.



大阪封切館七月第四週成績表

（自廿二日・至廿八日）

〔若櫻〕（変換週間） 紅系・大映"山脈若鷲"，文化"上海海軍特別陸戦隊"。白系・東寶"名人長次郎"，文化"わが本土を狙ふもの"，日本ニュースは第168號。

（註） この週全館一日定休あり。

館名	廿二日（初）	廿五日（日）	六日間計
紅系			
梅田映劇	3273.71	8274.80	22353.90
松竹座	1602.26	3637.77	10837.73
千日前東寶	1647.80	3307.83	12037.79
松竹映畫	721.50	1806.25	5245.25
新世界敷島	550.04	1634.72	4790.67
大鐵地下	787.90	1889.64	5079.38
合計	8583.21	21051.01	60344.72
白系			
大阪劇場	9022.60	15408.20	54579.75
梅田地下	1150.00	2209.98	7684.30
阪神ビル映畫	984.87	1935.33	6371.12
朝日座	1111.00	2409.10	7750.10
公樂座	699.84	1598.41	4952.13
新世界大映	530.14	1058.74	3673.20
合計	13498.45	24619.76	84960.60

Figure 24: *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*'s box office returns in Osaka during its 2nd week, (in the White Group, bottom half). Chart from *Eiga junpō* vol. 50, p. 160.

Chōji the Famous Sculptor, which premiered in the Red Group in the third week of July, was popular in Tokyo as well, especially at the huge Nihon Gekijō (or "Nichigeki") theater in Yūrakuchō, where at that single theater alone it sold more than 70,000 tickets.[103] Laws at the time mandated that all feature films be shown in company with a culture film (*bunka eiga*) and a newsreel; *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* was paired with the culture film "Those Threatening Our Homeland" ("Wa ga hondo wo nerafu mono") and, in its first week, Nippon News #162, a seven-minute reel consisting of four minutes concerning Tōjō's early July trip to Thailand and

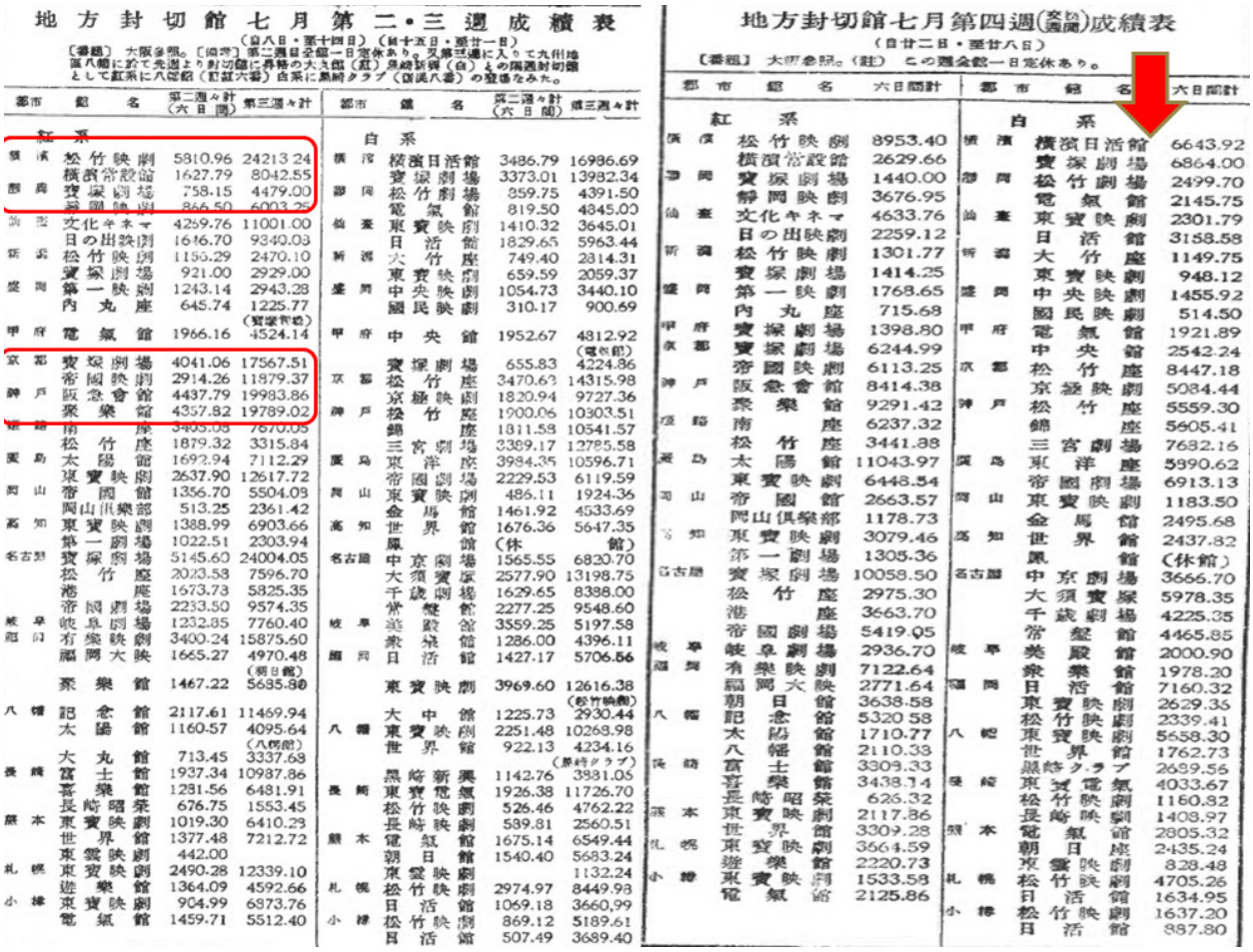
[103] The Nichigeki was to close soon afterwards, in early 1944 (along with many others, as listed in an announcement Toho made in the English-language *Nippon Times* on March 4, 1944), and was converted into a munitions assembly site for balloons released into the jet-stream to cause damage in North America. High, p. 461.

Singapore and, in part two, three minutes on the war front situation in the Pacific. Once *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* switched to the White Group in its second week of wide release, it was paired with newsreel #163, which is devoted to speeches on the war situation, videos of older boys and young men training, quasi-militaristically, in the pool and so forth. So audiences would have seen, not only a feature film itself bearing, at least on the surface, a pro-war political message, but also what was doubtless a 'hate the enemy, love the self' style culture film and a two-pronged news reportage designed to reassure the audience with evidence of the Japanese Empire's diplomatic and military clout (or in the case of newsreel 163, the might of Japan's youth).[104]

In its first week, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* faced stiff competition from the film playing at White Group theaters, *Duel on Hannya Hill* (*Kettō Hannyazaka*), a film about the ever-popular Miyamoto Musashi that was directed by celebrated auteur Itō Daisuke and featured superstar Kataoka Chiezō. It was itself a popular film with its own biumvirate of star director and period films leading man, and finished 18th for the year, yet *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* held its own and more, and surely would have done even better if, like *Kantarō of Ina*, it had faced no real competition.[105] Tōhō's *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* earned more than Daiei's *Duel on Hannya Hill* in Tokyo, while commentators noted that the two of them together had broken the Red plus White Group box office 'record' held until that point by the combination earlier in 1943 of *Daughter* (*Musume*, dir. Ōba Hideo) and Itō Daisuke's Miyamoto Musashi tale, *Awakening of the Two-Sword Style (Nitōryū kaigan)*.[106] The same commentator makes a point of denouncing both *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* and *Duel on Hannya Hill*, saying "it is truly regrettable that both

[104] These newsreels are currently available for viewing on the Nihon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK)'s website here.
[105] *Duel on Hannya Hill*'s ranking is taken from the table in *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 106.
[106] The procedure of rotating film programs between the Groups had just started in April 1943, only a few months earlier, so it is perhaps not as impressive as it sounds. But the industry writer in *Eiga junpō* was excited by this result, and used the katakana word 'recōdo' here despite the wartime prohibition on foreign words (even Japanized versions of them) and despite the existence of plenty of native Japanese words like *tōroku*. See *Eiga junpō* vol. 50, p. 111.

continue to offer up [mindless] entertainment while being so very far from deepening, in any way, the public's consciousness of the [seriousness of the] current situation; but these low-quality Obon film programs, so similar to those of recent years, are certain to please spectators."[107] He condemns anyone who likes either film as a person of low quality, or at the very least poor taste.



地方封切館七月第二・三週成績表

（自八日・至十四日）（自十五日・至廿一日）

〔番組〕大阪參照。〔備考〕第二週目全館一日定休あり。又第三週に入りて九州地區八館に於て先週より封切館に昇格の大九館（紅）吾妻映寶（白）との隔週封切館として紅系に八館（紅組六番）白系に黒崎クラブ（白組八番）の登場なみた。

都市	館名	第二週々計（六日間）	第三週々計
	紅系		
横濱	松竹映劇	5810.96	24213.24
	横濱常設館	1627.79	8042.55
靜岡	寶塚劇場	758.15	4479.00
	靜岡映劇	866.50	6003.25
仙臺	文化キネマ	4259.76	11001.00
	日の出映劇	1646.70	9340.03
新潟	松竹映劇	1155.29	2470.10
	寶塚劇場	921.00	2929.00
盛岡	第一映劇	1243.14	2943.28
	内丸座	645.74	1225.77
			（寶塚實地）
甲府	電氣館	1966.16	4524.14
京都	寶塚劇場	4041.06	17567.51
	帝國映劇	2914.26	11879.37
神戸	阪急會館	4437.79	19983.86
	聚樂館	4357.82	19789.02
堺	南座	3465.05	7670.05
	松竹座	1879.32	3315.84
鳥取	太陽館	1692.94	7112.29
	東寶映劇	2637.90	12617.72
岡山	帝國館	1356.70	5504.03
	岡山倶樂部	513.25	2361.42
高知	東寶映劇	1388.99	6903.66
	第一劇場	1022.51	2303.94
名古屋	寶塚劇場	5145.60	24004.05
	松竹座	2023.58	7596.70
	港座	1673.73	5825.35
	帝國劇場	2233.50	9574.35
岐阜	岐阜劇場	1232.85	7760.40
福岡	有樂映劇	3400.24	15875.60
	福岡大映	1665.27	4970.48
			（朝日館）
	聚樂館	1467.22	5685.80
八幡	記念館	2117.61	11469.94
	太陽館	1160.57	4095.64
			（八幡館）
	大丸館	713.45	3337.68
長崎	富士館	1937.34	10987.86
	富樂館	1281.56	6481.91
	長崎昭榮	676.75	1553.45
熊本	東寶映劇	1019.30	6410.23
	東世界館	1377.48	7212.72
	東雲映劇	442.00	
札幌	東寶映劇	2490.28	12339.10
	遊樂館	1364.09	4592.66
小樽	東寶映劇	904.99	6873.76
	電氣館	1459.71	5512.40

都市	館名	第二週々計（六日間）	第三週々計
	白系		
横濱	横濱日活館	3486.79	16986.69
	寶塚劇場	3373.01	13982.34
靜岡	松竹劇場	859.75	4391.50
	電氣館	819.50	4845.00
仙臺	東寶映劇	1410.32	3645.01
	日活館	1829.65	5963.44
新潟	大竹座	749.40	2814.31
	寶映劇場	659.59	2059.37
盛岡	第一映劇	1054.73	3440.10
	國民映劇	310.17	900.69
甲府	中央館	1952.67	4812.92
			（電氣館）
	寶塚劇場	655.83	4224.86
京都	松竹座	3470.63	14315.98
	京極映劇	1820.94	9727.36
神戸	松竹座	1900.06	10303.51
	錦座	1811.58	10541.57
	三宮劇場	3389.17	12785.58
鳥取	東洋座	3984.35	10596.71
	帝國劇場	2229.53	6119.59
岡山	東寶映劇	486.11	1924.36
	金馬館	1461.92	4533.69
高知	世界館	1676.36	5647.35
		（休館）	
名古屋	中京劇場	1565.55	6820.70
	大須寶塚	2577.90	13198.75
	千歲劇場	1629.65	8388.00
	常盤館	2277.25	9548.60
岐阜	美殿館	3559.25	5197.58
福岡	聚樂館	1286.00	4396.11
	日活館	1427.17	5706.56
	東寶映劇	3969.60	12616.38
			（松竹映劇）
	大中館	1225.73	2930.44
八幡	東寶映劇	2251.48	10268.98
	世界館	922.13	4234.16
			（黒崎クラブ）
	黒崎新興	1142.76	3981.05
長崎	東寶電氣	1926.38	11726.70
	松竹映劇	526.46	4762.22
	長崎映劇	589.81	2560.51
熊本	電氣館	1675.14	6549.44
	朝日館	1540.40	5683.24
	東雲映劇		1132.24
札幌	松竹映劇	2974.97	8449.93
	日活館	1069.18	3660.99
小樽	松竹映劇	869.12	5189.61
	日活館	507.49	3689.40

地方封切館七月第四週（廿五日開）成績表

（自廿二日・至廿八日）

〔番組〕大阪參照。（註）この週全館一日定休あり。

都市	館名	六日間計
	紅系	
廣島	松竹映劇	8953.40
	横濱常設館	2629.66
靜岡	寶塚劇場	1440.00
	靜岡映劇	3676.95
仙臺	文化キネマ	4633.76
	日の出映劇	2259.12
新潟	松竹映劇	1301.77
	寶塚劇場	1414.25
盛岡	第一映劇	1768.65
	内丸座	715.68
甲府	寶塚劇場	1398.80
京都	寶塚劇場	6244.99
	帝國映劇	6113.25
神戸	阪急會館	8414.38
	聚樂館	9291.42
堺	南座	6237.32
	松竹座	3441.88
鳥取	太陽館	11043.97
	東寶映劇	6448.54
岡山	帝國館	2663.57
	岡山倶樂部	1178.73
高知	東寶映劇	3079.46
	第一劇場	1305.36
名古屋	寶塚劇場	10058.50
	松竹座	2975.30
	港座	3663.70
	帝國劇場	5419.05
岐阜	岐阜劇場	2936.70
福岡	有樂映劇	7122.64
	福岡大映	2771.64
	朝日館	3638.58
八幡	記念館	5320.58
	太陽館	1710.77
	八幡館	2110.33
長崎	富士館	3309.33
	富樂館	3438.14
	長崎昭榮	626.32
熊本	東寶映劇	2117.86
	東世界館	3309.28
札幌	寶映劇	3664.59
	遊樂館	2220.73
小樽	東寶映劇	1533.58
	電氣	2125.86

都市	館名	六日間計
	白系	
横濱	横濱日活館	6643.92
	寶塚劇場	6864.00
靜岡	松竹劇場	2499.70
	電氣館	2145.75
仙臺	東寶映劇	2301.79
	日活館	3158.58
新潟	大竹座	1149.75
	東寶映劇	948.12
盛岡	中央映劇	1455.92
	國民映劇	514.50
甲府	電氣館	1921.89
	中央館	2542.24
京都	松竹座	8447.18
	京極映劇	5084.44
神戸	松竹座	5559.30
	錦座	5605.41
	三宮劇場	7682.16
鳥取	東洋座	5390.62
	帝國劇場	6913.13
岡山	東寶映劇	1183.50
	金馬館	2495.68
高知	世界館	2437.82
	黒潮館	（休館）
名古屋	中京劇場	3666.70
	大須寶塚	5978.35
	千歲劇場	4225.35
	常盤館	4465.85
岐阜	美殿館	2000.90
	聚樂館	1978.20
福岡	日活館	7160.32
	東寶映劇	2629.35
	松竹映劇	2339.41
八幡	東寶映劇	5658.30
	世界館	1762.73
	黒崎クラブ	2699.56
長崎	東洋電氣	4033.67
	松竹映劇	1160.82
	長崎映劇	1408.97
熊本	電氣館	2805.32
	朝日座	2435.24
	東雲映劇	828.48
札幌	松竹映劇	4705.26
	日活館	1634.95
小樽	松竹映劇	1637.20
	日活館	887.80

Figure 25: Local box-office data comparing *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* with *Sayon's Bell*. *Eiga junpō*, vol. 50, pp. 112, 160.

The above chart combines local theaters' returns for the second, third, and fourth weeks of July for both the Red and White group programs. The left half compares the box office results for the second and third weeks of July 1943. Note the dramatic upsurge in box office returns from *Sayon's Bell* (second week of July, left) to *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* (right), at the same

[107] "goraku wo ataenagara jikyoku he wo ninshiki wo fukumeru eiga to ha hodo tōi no ha makoto ni ikan ga, hodo no hikui bon no kankyaku ga suki na reinen dōyō na kondate de atta." Ibid., p. 111. The 'bon' refers to the Obon holiday.

theaters in Yokohama and Shizuoka (upper left area circled in red) and in Kyoto and Kobe (lower area circled in red).[108] The right half of the chart (from p. 160) covers the fourth week of July, in which the theaters switched their programs (that is, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* went from being in the Red Group to being in the White Group). *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, marked by the red arrow, held its own against *Duel on Hannya Hill*, which moved over to the Red Group for the fourth week of July. In the end, *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* overmatched *Duel on Hannya Hill* in both box office returns and number of admissions, finishing 12th for the year compared to 18th for *Duel*, and greatly outperformed 46th-ranked *Sayon's Bell*[109] despite a very thorough advertising campaign in *Eiga junpō* promoting the latter film for months before its release.[110]

The Uses of Comedy in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*

What expectations would audience members have had going into the film? *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* was marketed not as a prim and proper history film (*rekishi eiga*) but as a period film, indeed as an unabashed romance containing plenty of slapstick comedy, and audiences would have known to expect both, since the film's marketing campaign emphasized both the tears and the laughs in store for viewers. The tag line of the below ad highlighted the inclusion in the cast of Manzai superstars Yokoyama Entatsu and Hanabishi Achako especially strongly, saying "Kenzō (Entatsu) and Sukejū (Achako)'s spontaneous antics amidst all the bloodshed will draw the snickering, inappropriate laughter bursting out of you!"[111] The

[108] These places were chosen as representative of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*'s success, but are not unique.
[109] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, pp. 106-107.
[110] Starting in April, regular ads appeared in *Eiga junpō* for *Sayon's Bell*, including expensive photo spreads and color ads (see for instance the three-page color spread in the June 21, 1943 issue); all told, these ads are probably more numerous, and cover a wider period, than virtually any other film of 1943, and are an especially strong contrast to *Kantarō of Ina*, which had relatively light advertising therein.
[111] This two-page ad appears in the un-paginated front matter of the July 1, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō*, meaning it was one of the first images anyone opening the magazine would see. The tag line translated above is visible in the original Japanese, the sentence starting with "sakki" (殺気).

expression *shisshō* means 'not able to hold back one's laughter' in the sense of 'laughing at an inappropriate time,' as at a funeral or similar somber occasion. The marketers are promising audiences a chance to laugh, in a sense, at the seriousness of the times, and at history itself.



Figure 26: *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* ad promising the film will offer both tender romance and irreverent comedy. *Eiga junpō*, July 1 1943 (issue 86), front matter.

The opening sequence of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* sets the light-hearted tone. More exactly, the tone is set by the relatively up-beat extradiegetic music in the credits preceding the film's visual opening. After the fade to black at the end of the credits comes the first shot of the film, a low-angle long shot, presumably in the early morning given the backlit bell, shrouded in relative darkness, of a temple bell about to be rung. At the moment the bell is rung, there is a cut to a long shot of the temple roof and birds scattering, presumably at the sound, into the sky; the

sun is just beginning to peek over the edge of the roof. But instead of jumping right in to the film's main narrative, we return to the bell, now in medium shot and about to be struck again by the monk, now off screen. At the moment of impact there is another, this time to a canal showing the rippling wake of a fish, startled by the noise into diving. Back once more to the bell, this time in medium close-up, and a cut at the moment the bell is struck a third time to a low-angle shot of a wooden gate opening. Only then do characters involved in the story's narrative make an appearance, in the following high-angle long shot of the street by the canal, yet it is not either of the main characters who emerges from the now open gate, but rather the two bumbling night watchmen, Kenzō and Sukejū, who from the instant they appear are comedy incarnate, shuffling about in long shot with tiny steps and flubbing their morning obeisance, with one facing the wrong way as he ritually claps. This placid, gently humorous opening, which blossoms into an extended five-minute sequence heavily featuring the *manzai* pair, sets audience expectations for the remainder of the film, confirming they are in for a pleasantly languid and amusing tale of life in a sleepy town, not a rapid-fire action movie or a tear-jerker. An opening like this undermines the potential for genuine melodrama and affect later in the film, as thanks to the primacy effect audiences are very likely to remember the first images of a film, and to have the memory of those images as a sort of mental filter through which the rest of the film is viewed. Innocuous in content though it may be, then, this opening nonetheless structures what comes after, and indeed, this comedic duo appears several times throughout the film to deflate whatever tension the overt political message of the film had started to generate. They were given the ideal roles to accomplish this periodic deflation, since as the night watchmen they could be shown regularly performing their function of calling out the hour.[112]

[112] For instance, at the 60-minute mark one shuffles back with the news that Chōji is being tortured by Gamatoku, and in a more serious movie one might have expected an extended reaction shot of the other showing his horrified

Probably the funniest such comedic intervention occurs after Chōji has been arrested and is presumably being tortured for information. There are many ways a serious moment like this could have been handled, for example by melodramatically drawing attention to Chōji's suffering through mournful extradiegetic music or a few close-ups of his pain-ravaged face, but instead director Hagiwara, with precision comic timing, chooses this moment to deploy his comedians once more, right in the middle of the otherwise ominous interrogation scene, thereby splitting it into two. Screenwriter Mimura has the duo engage in friendly banter over who should go visit their friend Chōji in jail; both of them are apparently too squeamish, and afraid of Gamatoku, to go, yet both attempt to convince the other that it is his solemn duty to visit. Any tension over Chōji's fate, or over that of his political cause, quickly dissipates in the face of these antics, which generate precisely the "inappropriate" sort of laughter referenced in the *Eiga junpō* advertisement for the film (Fig. 26).

Needless to say, neither the notion of romantic love, which glorifies the individual and human emotion (*feeling*), nor slapstick comedy, with its origins in Vaudeville theater and the cinema of the West, was likely to please the Home Ministry and the Cabinet Information Bureau. Its censors desired politically useful national policy films that directly addressed Japan's war aims and celebrated what Peter High terms the 'spiritist' rejection of Western frivolity, and showed little interest in the potential use of mildly subversive films as safety valves to give the people an outlet to vent their frustrations harmlessly.[113] Unfortunately for them, however, the general public—including, incidentally, the people of conquered areas, where Japanese films stressing the unique spiritual component of the Japanese understandably struggled at the box office but slapstick comedies and romances performed well—was still capable of voting with

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sympathy; instead, he nods sadly, then whips around on his heel and says in a perky voice, "It's the fourth hour!"

[113] The notion of 'spiritism', an almost mystical sense of the superiority of the Yamato damashii and a rejection of more practical or scientific considerations, was developed by Peter High in *The Imperial Screen*.

their feet, and tended to shun national policy films in favor of just the sort of "Western" frivolity Japan was supposedly fighting to eradicate. As noted earlier, contemporary reviewers blasted *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* for devoting so much screen time to romance and so little to making the characters' political motivations believable, and I would add that even Chōji's political speech criticizing Outa, discussed below, reveals a selfish, appearance-obsessed side to the logic of sacrifice. Chōji cares more about how his failure to perish bravely looks to his peers, and reflects upon his notion of ideal masculinity, and his fascistic aesthetics in which men can supposedly only find their life's meaning in death, than the practical matter of whether his death would have contributed to the political cause.

Japan's film industry was never nationalized, and thus continued to be profit-driven, unlike other industries such as the radio.[114] So filmmakers faced a conundrum: how could they offer what audiences actually wanted to see without risking heavy censorial interference or even an outright ban? It is plausible that, like its even more popular predecessor *Kantarō of Ina, Chōji the Famous Sculptor* made its message palatable to censors simply by setting its story in the Bakumatsu, using that historical setting to increase the *perceived* utility of its otherwise frivolous subject matter.[115] The Bakumatsu period was understood to possess such utility because of the tendency of Bakumatsu films to frame history in terms of strong continuity from past to present. A great number of Bakumatsu films had been made since 1925, many of which explicitly argued

[114] The fact it was never nationalized was due, not to perceptions it was less important than industries like the radio, but to the timing of the film industry's emergence; by the mid-1920s, when both the growing desire of the state to regulate entertainment began to manifest and the technology of radio came onto the scene, the film industry already had a venerable history as a privately-run enterprise, and in later years, industry insiders put up whatever indirect resistance they could against the occasional pushes to nationalize (the most famous example being Nagata's adroit managing of the government's sudden announcement in 1941 that the industry must consolidate into two companies; he wheedled and cajoled and somehow managed to convince them to allow three instead).

[115] As usual, pro-state critics like Tsumura Hideo were furious to see what one might dub the 'just a spoonful of history makes the romance go down' strategy at work here. Tsumura, writing as "Q" in the *Asahi shinbun*, denounces the film as "typical Tōhō strategy of trying to hang a story around [Hasegawa and Yamada] and obviously just using the pro-imperial history as cellophane...to wrap this [romance] up in." Tsumura, "Shin eiga hyō," in *Asahi shinbun*, morning ed., July 18, 1943, page 4. He goes on to demand an end to the production of any such films who misuse pro-imperial history as mere window dressing, railing at *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* for daring to slight the loyalists.

that Japan's present strength and prosperity were a direct result of the heroic struggles—against rival nations also—and sacrifices of that period, so a censor in 1943 would probably give any story set in the Bakumatsu the benefit of the doubt, since it was likely to have a stronger link to the present-day crisis than the average history film, and the average period film even more so.

By setting their romance in the Bakumatsu, the filmmakers of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* were trying to give at least the appearance of a political angle to the otherwise emotional tale. Thereby, they were trying to frame Outa's individual sacrifice of human feelings of love, and her murder of Gamatoku (and subsequent death in turn), as a selfless act supporting Chōji, who would now be able to join the fight to overthrow the decrepit Tokugawa regime and usher in the Meiji Restoration, the changes and policies of which continued to inform the early Shōwa state. Due to the human predilection to identify with characters on screen, a simple analogy arises between *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*'s positive spin on sacrifice in the historical struggle for a modern state in the Bakumatsu and the need for similar sacrifices in present-day (1943) Japan. It is possible the filmmakers were acting, wittingly or unwittingly, on the state's behalf by slowly indoctrinating audiences with positive feelings about self-abnegation and heroic service to the nation. On the other hand, films about the basic conflict between *duty* to a larger group and the individual's private emotions or *feeling* were perennially popular in the cinema of Japan, and audiences may have chosen to revel in the pathos and melodrama of this fundamental conflict, an emotionalized history and politics, and reject the explicitly political analogy of Bakumatsu sacrifice equaling wartime sacrifice.

On a theoretical level, the abovementioned two possibilities correspond well to two opposing theories concerning film and reception: Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry model and the Birmingham School's more optimistic encoding/decoding model, later expanded

upon by John Fiske.[116] In the culture industry view, films, regardless of subject matter, are infused with dangerous ideology, usually bourgeois pro-capitalist ideology, against which audiences are essentially defenseless; they are also forced, by the ideological state apparatus (here referring to cultural industries like the cinema itself) into an ideologically fixed and predetermined subject position when, in Louis Althusser's version of the culture industry view, the filmic text interpellates or 'hails' them, and there is no ideological room to find another perspective than the one the film and cultural apparatus itself ordains.[117]

The Birmingham School view, by contrast, asserts that while producers may encode a film with an ideological message, viewers themselves have at least some room to negotiate over how to decode the finished product, and may even be able to decode an oppositional message at odds with the likely intentions of the film producers. In order to judge which theoretical model more accurately explains the experience of watching films like *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, we must first determine the extent to which *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*'s reenactment of Bakumatsu history is meant to convey a serious ideological message.

Was *Chōji the Famous Sculptor,* in other words, merely using the Bakumatsu setting as a convenient cloak of respectability around an otherwise impermissible story, or was it genuinely attempting to evoke in its audiences the desire to "offer themselves courageously to the state"? In the final moments of the film, is Outa smiling so triumphantly, despite being in mortal pain, because she had the chance to give her life for a political cause, or because Chōji finally declared his love for her? To answer that question the most compelling evidence remaining—in terms of

[116] The 'encoding/decoding' concept was developed by Stuart Hall in his seminal essay "Encoding, Decoding," and developed in a still more audience-empowered direction by John Fiske in the 1980s.
[117] Althusser sees the subject as in fact produced by the ideological forces hailing him or her; this always already interpellated subject, needless to say, has no true agency. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, pp. 121–176.

something that might help us recover traces of audience interpretations—is the film itself, so let us turn now to an analysis of two scenes, one overtly ideological, one strongly romantic.



Figure 27: Outa's ambiguous smile in the closing moments of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor:* screen capture from 83:10

The Politics: Analysis of Kusakabe "Killing" Vairocana, 53:52 to 56:25

The scene begins with the loyalist leader Kusakabe visiting Chōji—whom the exposition to the film makes clear he had befriended earlier in Kyoto—in his sculpture studio and asking Chōji for his "life," meaning he wants Chōji to abandon his artisan status, take up arms and join the anti-Tokugawa loyalist forces in Mito. To Kusakabe's astonishment and fury, however, Chōji refuses, and even throws Kusakabe's words from an earlier speech in the film, about how each person, at the proper station, devoting oneself to one's work serves the nation, back at him.



Figure 28: Chōji hiding behind his art. Screen capture from *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, 54:38.

Chōji cites community ties (thinking about a particular person in that community, namely Outa) and says he cannot abandon his art. A tense standoff begins, with Chōji hiding, in more than one sense, behind his statue of Vairocana (*Dainichi nyorai*), but Kusakabe severs his

devotion to both the art of sculpture and his own narrow regional view of how he can serve the nation in a single stroke: he slices the statue in half. Chōji, furious, says he cannot forgive even Kusakabe for such an egregious act, but Kusakabe retorts with a powerful political sermon. He barks, "In this time of national crisis, how dare you fritter away the time by sculpting! Offering up your life for the nation: that is where you will at last find your true Vairocana!"[118] By the end, Chōji is on his knees, his anger apparently gone, instantly converted to the national cause.

But is he really converted?[119] There is a good deal of irony in the film's hegemonic reading, that politics must trump art and all must take up arms to defend the nation, since after all it is a work of art that is conveying this anti-art message. And indeed, the filmmakers, from screenwriter Mimura Shintarō to director Hagiwara Ryō[120] to cinematographer Yasumoto Jun,[121] all had well-deserved reputations as cutting-edge artists, and ties to the famed Narutaki Group.[122] True to their reputations, they inserted plenty of beautiful imagery that contributes little or nothing to the political plot,[123] but instead seems to offer audiences the possibility of a negotiated or even oppositional reading of the film. Hagiwara, a disciple of the late auteur Yamanaka Sadao, had been deeply interested in telling period stories about the common people, not merely the elites, since directing the 1939 Yamanaka-inspired project *The Night Before* (*Sono zenya*), which explains the emphasis in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* on the artisan Chōji and the geisha Outa rather than the stern samurai Kusakabe, as well as the deployment of the bumbling comedic duo

[118] This speech implies that to Kusakabe, there are no longer any caste divisions—all are and must be warriors in the fight to save the country. He asks Chōji, famous for his sculptures, to throw away his old life and become a warrior.
[119] It could be argued that Hasegawa Kazuo himself made little effort to 'sell' this moment, as his face appears to retain a glimmer of anger (a visual echo to the phenomenon, earlier in his career, when, as the quintessential 'pretty man' (*binan*), his facial expressions were of such intensity he was said to be able to "kill with his face" (kao de kiru); see Miyao, p. 118) and resignation as he pledges his service, and the conversion scene lasts just a few seconds.
[120] In an interesting referential move, Hagiwara apparently chose Asakusa, the film-going center of the capital, as the site for location shooting for *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*. See *Nippon eiga*, June 1943, p. 88 for the report.
[121] Yasumoto was a famous enough cinematographer to have his name listed in bold as one of the selling points for the film in ads appearing in *Eiga junpō*, for example the ad in the unpaginated end matter of the May 21, 1943 issue.
[122] Yasumoto had also served as cinematographer on a Narutaki-gumi project, Yamanaka Sadao's 1935 *Tange Sazen*.
[123] Nor do the beautiful images of, say, the shavings left over from Chōji's chisel, illuminated on the floor of his sculpting studio, seem to participate or contribute to a fascist aesthetic; they certainly cannot be said to glorify death.

played by Entatsu and Achako.[124] Contra the 'sacrifice art for politics and the nation' preferred reading, which is conveyed primarily through the dialogue, the visual story is one of the triumph of art over politics, romance over nationalism. Close-up after close-up on the stars' faces show them ravaged by emotion, including after Chōji's supposed conversion into patriot, and as for Outa, there is ample visual evidence to doubt the script's claims that it was patriotism that motivated her to kill Gamatoku. The loyalist Kusakabe is harsh, even brutal, in his conduct towards Chōji, as is the pro-Tokugawa representative Gamatoku, with both acting as barriers to Chōji and Outa's love; as such, audiences using this film to evaluate their own assumptions about Bakumatsu history had the option of viewing any such political radicalism or call to duty as an unwelcome intrusion into ordinary people's lives—as of course it was for many people in 1943.

The filmmakers of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, working within the restrictive boundaries of what censors were likely to approve, managed to create a film that undermines its own hegemonic reading. The weapons they employed against this dominant reading include the mood-puncturing comedic interludes in the form of the periodic appearance of the *manzai* duo, as well as the unmotivated (narratologically speaking) aestheticized shots that 'freeze' the narrative, suspending the progression of the plot to allow audiences to take a moment to appreciate the beauty of the cinematography. The extradiegetic musical score is also deployed to great effect in mitigating moments in the script that would otherwise have felt excessively propagandistic, for example by the melodramatic, bittersweet melody coloring the scene of Chōji's supposedly climactic political speech about finding the meaning of life in the act of dying.

[124] Hagiwara, Yamanaka's most favored apprentice/disciple (*deshi*) according to Inagaki Hiroshi (*Hige to chonmage*, p. 162), had eagerly taken on the role of director for the populist-themed *Sono zenya*, which was dedicated to his mentor. This 1939 film was the last undertaken by the Narutaki-gumi as a group.



Fig. 29: Outa appears as avatar of Varacaina to Chōji, gazing at a pond for inspiration (*Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, 20:55)

Had the filmmakers selected a more patriotic or upbeat soundtrack here, perhaps Chōji's words might have remained the focus of the scene, but through the combination of the melancholy music, tugging at the viewer's heart-strings, and frequent CU of Outa's tear-streaked face, it is clear the true focus of this sequence is on Outa's emotional state, specifically the emotional toll Chōji's harsh words are having on her. This is probably the most important scene in the entire film, so let us turn now to close visual analysis.

The Romance: Analyzing the Climax of the Film, 66:12 to 68:50

The scene begins when Tetsukichi, Chōji's servant, bursts in, mortally wounded, to say they've been betrayed. The camera lingers often on Outa's face as this news is delivered, and she eventually bursts out crying in close-up. Cut to a close-up of Chōji in profile, who turns slowly

to glare at her.[125] He rises, and as he leaves the frame, there is a cut to a medium-long shot from behind Outa where she leans against the shōji for support; Chōji, facing the camera, walks slowly towards her. He says 'Outa-san....ya...' and then we cut to a close-up reaction shot on Outa's tear-streaked face. Back to a close-up on Chōji as he softly snarls, "...squawked to Gamatoku, didn't ya!' Cut to her guilty face as she hangs her head, then back to Chōji from over her shoulder as he stalks forward and slaps her once with a shouted "Fool!" The camera lingers on him as, struck, she falls out of frame, and his anger melts away into confusion as he half-sobs "Why?! How could you do such a foolish thing?" Cut to a low camera height shot of Outa sitting up into the frame, facing away from Chōji; she holds her cheek as she chokes out, trembling from excess emotion, "I...I just wanted to save you! If I hadn't told him where Kusakabe was hiding, you would have been killed!"

Then she turns dramatically to face him, a move whose effect is amplified by expert editing, seamlessly suturing the beginning of the turn with a frontal high-angle close-up of her looking up at Chōji (off screen). She tearfully says "The most important thing in the world to me...is you!" Cue the extradiegetic background music (a mournful, melodramatic melody which continues for the remainder of the scene), and cut to a low-angle reaction shot of the emotional Chōji, who plaintively murmurs, "You just don't understand the heart of a man, do ya!" and turns away, overcome. Then, back in medium-long shot, he proclaims "There are times when it is precisely by dying that men can find their path in life!" Note that by cutting wide to a medium-long shot for Chōji's pompous speech about men and death, there is a sense of distance between the audience and him (or his politics), whereas with Outa's heartfelt speech about loving him, we

[125] This is a violation of the 180 degree rule: according to the spatial logic of the preceding sequence, he should be on the right side of the frame looking left (as he was when cradling Tetchan), yet he turns dramatically over his *right* shoulder to look at Outa—in a direction she cannot have been. This may have been due to Hasegawa's insecurity about the scarred left side of his face being shown in detail, but more likely was done to heighten the drama of the moment (it being more dramatic to look over one's shoulder than to glance up in the direction one is already facing).

are in close-up—the most intimate position, creating a much stronger identification with Outa than with Chōji. On a formal level, then, this scene privileges Outa's perspective and focuses on *feeling*, not Chōji's somewhat incoherent comments about *duty*. Given this subtle endorsement, female and perhaps male viewers alike probably tended to identify 'introjectively' with Outa here and throughout the film, seeing her conduct and desiring to incorporate it into themselves.[126]

Outa wails and turns away upon hearing Chōji's speech. Due to the arrangement of the lights, this is one of the only times in the entire movie Yamada is not lit with high-key glamour lighting, but instead in low-key; her face is at its most expressive because it is backlit.[127] Chōji continues, "Even though I'm alive [thanks to your treachery], to live with this knowledge is just like being dead!" This sends Outa spiraling into a new fit of histrionics, groveling on the *tatami* mat. Cut to Chōji looking down on her (off-screen) in medium close-up; he says "If you really loved me, why didn't you just get me killed [i.e., confess my involvement so I could die proudly] at the guard-house?" Close-up on Outa as she raises her head, weeping, to respond, only to hang her head again without a word.

The high average shot length of this climactic scene identifies it not as an action sequence but as possessing a more sedate pace consistent with a romance film. And at every turn, the director and cinematographer employ close-ups (usually of Outa) which focus the audience's attention on the emotional side of a scene and heighten audience identification; in this case, that means emphasizing the cost of political action, and privileging romance visually over the politically correct dialogue about "only in death can men find their purpose in life" and so forth.

[126] On the spectator's instinct for 'ocular introjection', i.e. the desire for "what I see to enter into me," see Otto Fenichel, "The Scoptophilic Instinct and Identification," in Evans and Hall eds., *Visual Culture: a Reader*, p. 330.
[127] As Daisuke Miyao points out, backlighting, in addition to bathing faces in shadow, also makes them more expressive by reducing their three-dimensionality and thus in some sense dematerializes them. Miyao, p. 33.

The Victory of Love: Outa's Motivation

Near the end of the film, Outa intercedes for Chōji again, in even more dramatic fashion. She takes matters into her own hands, stabbing Gamatoku (despite knowing it would mean her own death) with a highly symbolic weapon—Chōji's chisel—to give Chōji time to escape to Mito. But what would audiences of 1943 have concluded was her primary motivation? To help Chōji sacrifice himself for the nation, or simply to keep him alive? True, she says all the right words politically as she slumps over, dying: "Please, Chōji-san, hurry on to Mito [to join the loyalists]!" but she says it with a delighted smile, because Chōji, clutching at her desperately and begging her to be strong and stay with him, has just (counter-factually) called her his wife. What is more, it had become too dangerous for Chōji to remain in the tenement-house (*nagaya*) any longer anyway, so letting him go to Mito was in effect the only way for Outa to save his life. Love trumps politics, for Outa—and judging from this tender final scene between them, for Chōji too, as well as the filmmakers themselves. All the deputized policemen with their "arrest" (*goyō*) lanterns, who just seconds earlier had mortally wounded Outa and rushed out to search for Chōji, have by now returned, but, improbably, remain waiting in the eaves, so to speak, for this love scene to end before once again menacing Chōji.

Outa's transgressive love for Chōji also jumps into sharp relief in the interrogation scene earlier in the film. In that scene, it is Chōji's worried face on which the camera initially lingers as, off screen and in a separate though adjacent room, Gamatoku wears down Outa, whom he correctly suspects knows something, with questions about Kusakabe's whereabouts and Chōji's involvement with him. But when Chōji begins to speak, the camera shifts into a medium close-up of Outa's face as his words, "Go ahead and tell them [I'm involved with the loyalists]; make

me a man!" drive her nearly to tears.[128] Yet Outa refuses, insisting she knows nothing. A bit later, however, after Gamatoku's men have apparently worked Chōji over within earshot of Outa, Gamatoku comes to see her again, and she cannot conceal her fear that the sudden silence from next door means Chōji has been killed. This reveals beyond all doubt her feelings for Chōji and gives Gamatoku the leverage he needs to convince her to betray Kusakabe, whose location, in any case, she knows by accident, not because of any commitment to the cause. But Outa does not accept Gamatoku's agenda passively; she stands to face him, as though signaling she is ready to act, and it is this sign which prompts Gamatoku to say, "You can save Chōji with a single word."

Gamatoku says "Think it over" and rather theatrically blows out the candle in her room, and the camera lingers in close-up on the hypnotic trail of smoke coming from the extinguished candle, then cutting to a medium close-up of her kneeling form facing the camera, with Gamatoku visible in the background standing in the doorframe and barking "Hey! Don't ya feel sorry for Chōji?" She refuses one last time, but then, as he mutters the ominous "Okay, there's nothing for it then" and makes as if to go into Chōji's room, she visibly comes to a decision and leaps up, turning to shout "Oyabun!"[129] and running out into the alley after him. There is a cut to a hand striking a bell—sounding the hunt—and a swell of melodramatic and rapid-tempo music, and a small army of men with 'arrest' lanterns rushing at the camera, all of which seem to confirm that Outa must have chosen to save Chōji no matter the cost to his cause. Here, too, though, the filmmakers remain playful and circumspect, first by refusing to show us either Outa's actual conversation with Gamatoku or, more importantly, any of the ensuing pursuit of Kusakabe, and then by half implying this entire dramatic sequence with the music and lanterns was merely a

[128] Since admitting he was involved with the pro-imperial faction would mean his execution, the implication is "make me a man [by letting me die bravely as an ally of the loyalists, since I would rather die than betray Kusakabe]." The Japanese is "Heiki de itte kure...Chōji wo otoko ni shite kure!"
[129] Gamatoku's title, roughly equivalent to "Boss!"

pain-induced nightmare of the injured Chōji. The scene ends suddenly when he wakes up with a start in Outa's house, whereupon the camera tracks out and the confrontation scene analyzed above begins. Outa has refused to grant Chōji the glorious, manly death he so desires, a stinging rejection of sacrifice for politics' sake. Moreover, she is assertive in other ways, at one point plunging the emotionally volatile Chōji into a deep and petulant depression when she tells him frankly, when asked what she thinks of his new sculpture, that it "just doesn't seem like it has a soul." And while Outa herself later sacrifices her own life, it is not for the cause—only for the individual man, out of "selfish" love.

Chōji the Famous Sculptor is not, from the perspective of the total war state in 1943, an effective national policy film. Close analysis reveals ambivalence, on a formal level, toward the film's own dominant reading, conspiring to undermine the most potent political moments. It is difficult to interpret Outa's decision to kill Gamatoku at the cost of her own life as motivated by either politics or patriotism, but rather seems to be a victory for *feeling* over *duty*. The ambiguities discussed above would have offered to 1943 audiences ample opportunity to negotiate their own meanings of both the past, as depicted in *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, and by implication the present.

Vengeful Virtue: a Woman's Vendetta in *Bijomaru the Famous Sword*

Midway through Mizoguchi Kenji's February 1945 Bakumatsu history film *Bijomaru the Famous Sword* (hereinafter "Bijomaru"), is a parting scene between a master sword-maker and his two journeymen. The master is in the process of dying from ritual disembowelment, which he says he is performing out of shame at having ever made swords for the pro-Tokugawa forces. He exhorts his journeymen to forge swords only for the pro-imperial loyalists, and with that breathes his last. This sort of histrionic speech is just the kind of thing censors demanded of feature films

at this point in the war, and if the rest of the film were supportive of this 'give your all to support the imperial cause' message Mizoguchi might have earned the dubious distinction of having made a true national policy film. However, the surface message lauding sacrifice for the imperial nation is constantly being undermined by the film's focus on the budding romance between protagonists Sasae (Yamada Isuzu again) and Kiyone and her personal, rather than political, vendetta against her father's killer, Naitō. Moreover, even the putatively pro-state, pro-war reviewer for the February 15, 1945 issue of *Nippon eiga* found fault with *Bijomaru*'s script, calling it disconnected from the beautiful cinematography and "heavy-handed and unconvincing in many places."[130] Worse yet, this unnamed reviewer was dismayed to hear that theater-going audiences, far from taking it seriously, were laughing spontaneously and uproariously at the final love-scene on the boat, and particularly at Sasae's line, "Stay with me always, together with this sword."[131] This over-the-top line undermined the positive impression audiences should have formed about Japanese swords, harming the dignity of the nation and its history.[132] The laughing audiences of February, 1945 had good company; famed director Shindo Kaneto, after the war, dubbed *Bijomaru* "a dreadful work, one that Mizoguchi rushed through and must have done just to earn his director's salary" while Sasō Tsutomu advises, "Laughing while you watch—that's one way of getting through it."[133]

Sasae's quest for revenge is half-heartedly framed in national policy terms as a hunt for a pro-Tokugawa reactionary. Thus, the film potentially offers women in the audience the chance to write themselves into the main narrative of Bakumatsu history as militant warriors fighting for

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[130] *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, pp. 670-671. The reviewer says, for example, "ketsuron to shite kyakuhon ga gōin de muri ga ōku." He also calls the acting of Ishii Kan, who plays Kiyone's assistant Kiyotsugu, "especially bad."
[131] Yamada Isuzu, after delivering this line, looks down in embarrassment, but one wonders whether she was acting out Sasae's likely bashfulness at uttering such an astonishing thing, or herself embarrassed at having to say it.
[132] Particularly since, as the reviewer points out, Kiyone and Kiyotsugu's swords kept breaking or bending. Ibid.
[133] These comments on *Bijomaru* were reported by Aaron Gerow in "Miyamoto Musashi to senchū no kankyaku," in Yomota Inuhiko ed., *Eiga kantoku Mizoguchi Kenji*, p. 226.

the pro-imperial side, and by extension the Emperor. This subject position, however, is neither expressed nor developed in political terms, except for when Sasae, closing in on her quarry, has to explain her presence on the battlefield to a suspicious pro-imperial officer—then, for the first and last time, she argues her vendetta is helping the imperial cause, since the man she is tracking down has joined the pro-Tokugawa side. It is intriguing to consider how similar this is to the process the filmmakers went through to get the film approved, with informal meetings at which censors would raise doubts about the film that would then have to be assuaged with, no doubt, this very same sort of claim to being on the right side of history.[134] Mizoguchi himself, after the war, spoke very critically of his late wartime output, saying "I had no choice but to swindle people, and that with this [low level of] work."[135]

Ads for *Bijomaru* emphasize the exciting cast, pairing superstar Yamada Isuzu (on loan from Tōhō) with Shōchiku's own Hanayagi Shōtaro. However, it was no great surprise this was "the first time they've been seen on screen together!" as *Asahi shinbun* ads proclaimed exultantly, since Hanayagi was only a mid-level star and Yamada, besides being out of his league fame-wise, was also under contract at Tōhō, making any such pairing impossible except under the unusual circumstances of the late wartime period, when so few films were being made that even major stars were having difficulty finding work.[136]

The cinematography places *Bijomaru* firmly within the tradition of what Peter High dubs "spiritist" films, especially the sequence in which the spiritual essence of the heroine joins the

[134] After the 1939 Film Law, censorship was no longer a matter of careful record; instead, filmmakers would have several preliminary "advisory" meetings with censors in which the censors would verbally make "suggestions" (and only if these were not being followed to the censors' satisfaction would formal demands for cuts, etc. be made).
[135] Aaron Gerow, "Miyamoto Musashi to senchū no kankyaku," in Yomota Inuhiko ed., *Eiga kantoku Mizoguchi Kenji*, p. 226. Mizoguchi said, "Semete konna mono de gomakashiteiru hoka nakatta."
[136] See for example the ad appearing in the final page (page two) of the morning edition of the Jan. 11, 1945 *Asahi shinbun*, from which this translated quotation was taken.

swordmakers to raise an ethereal hammer and aid them in forging the eponymous blade.[137] This spiritist visual slant is no surprise, however, as the cinematographer, Miki Shigeto,[138] also shot *Kaizoku hata futtobu*, discussed in chapter four, along with several other rekishi eiga with a national policy message.[139] But the visual reinforcement of spiritism is not the only dimension to *Bijomaru*; Sasae's assertive declaration of love in the film's final moments suggests *Bijomaru*, too, is offering a proactive definition of femininity.

Conclusion

Japan's worsening war situation had a somewhat liberating effect on the portrayals of women, or rather the range of actions and behaviors considered appropriate for women, in historical films. As the war progressed, especially from mid-1943 onwards, the image of the modern girl as sword-wielding, gun-toting warrior gained currency, and became a key marketing tool for *Chōji the Famous Sculptor, The Woman Who Wields a Sword* and *Bijomaru*, along with several others (see Appendix D). This empowerment of female characters also represents a reinterpretation of Bakumatsu history, and a new engagement with that history which moved beyond the 'male samurai hero' paradigm so pervasive in period films of the 1920s and 1930s to examine the effects of Bakumatsu events on other types of people. While experiments along these lines began earlier, with films such as *Flowers Have Fallen*, it was not until the 1940s that the paradigm was decisively overturned. Moreover, I do not see this trend as simply being a reflection of the state's growing awareness of the potential need to mobilize women as soldiers in

[137] High p. 223 and passim, especially chapter six, "The Time for Rationality Is at an End."
[138] Shogakukan's Digital Daijisen Plus entry on *Bijomaru* (accessed via Japan Knowledge on Jan. 17, 2015 at: http://japanknowledge.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/lib/display/?lid=5091000905000) claims there was a second cinematographer/cameraman, Takeno Naoto, but it is difficult to corroborate this as the in-film credits in the extant version do not mention any crew except director Mizoguchi.
[139] Other such films shot by Miki include *Ōmura Masujirō* and *Ishin no kyoku* (1942) and *Kahō no hibiki* (1943).

the event of an Allied invasion; if so, one might expect women taking up arms en masse in these history films, but instead they choose violence for personal, not political reasons.

What sort of impact did these films, with their new perspectives on history, have on the film audiences of the early 1940s? In short, did such films inculcate the populace with a potent dose of patriotic feeling, or instead offer multiple meanings? Evidence from the films analyzed in this chapter, and *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* and *Bijomaru* especially, confirms the utility of the Birmingham School decoding model of film reception, which argues the audience is empowered to make their own meaning of a visual text, and in the process can challenge the existing historiography on wartime Japan's cultural history. Close visual analysis of such late wartime film projects as *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* does not support a culture industry, ideological indoctrination model, because the films themselves are at the very least ambivalent about, and quite possibly actively resistant to their own surface messages lauding sacrifice for the nation—and even if they were resolutely committed, in content and on the level of the film industry and apparatus, the 'guerilla' audiences of John Fiske and Michel de Certeau (and the derisive audiences for *Bijomaru*) would nonetheless be able to poach their way out of the 'interpellative' prison Adorno, Horkheimer and Althusser describe.[140] Much as Itami Mansaku once claimed, films are in fact a poor vehicle for explicit ideology, and even a movie like *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay* (1942), the crown jewel of the national policy film subgenre, contains plenty of productive ambiguities from the filmgoers' perspective, such as the jazz music

[140] Even if the ideological apparatus of the state, or the involuntary interpellations of the film medium itself, appear to be formidable, even then, as de Certeau says on page xii of *The Practice of Everyday Life*, "Everyday life invents itself by *poaching* in countless ways on the property of others."

emanating from the radio as the Japanese fleet approaches Hawaii, justifiable as expressing the decadence of the enemy but also enjoyable as a poachable (because outlawed) pleasure.[141]

As such, wartime Japan, it would seem, was neither culturally dour nor ideologically unified. Indeed, the tremendous popularity of films such as *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* indicates film audiences continued to wield some influence over the direction of the film industry, and popular culture more generally, by rewarding those projects that contained healthy doses of melodrama and/or comedy with their business and shunning films too heavily invested in a pro-state message (*Sayon's Bell*, for example). Contemporary critics blasted *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* for not presenting a pro-state political message in a believable way, and focusing too much on what they considered a vapid love story, but rail as they might, people kept going to see *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* and films like it, not pro-state paeans like *Sayon's Bell*. Rather than laud the studios or filmmakers as brave artists standing up against an oppressive state, however, I would argue that much of the credit for the continued liveliness of Japan's wartime popular culture should go to the consumers, or in other words the people: the ultimate arbiters of taste.

[141] In the late 1930s Itami spoke out against ideologically loaded films, arguing that the medium of film cannot handle a weighty ideological payload, and is ill-suited to the depiction of abstract debates (spiritism over rationality, for example), a problem compounded by the fact that most viewers saw a given film only once. See High, p. 247.

Epilogue

Transwar Japan

Each of the preceding chapters proceeds roughly chronologically and identifies a specific genre of Bakumatsu films for analysis. Chapter one discussed what might be called 'heroic tragedies' early in the interwar Bakumatsu boom; in it, I argue their main social function was the conversion of all the heretofore villains of Japanese history into heroes for 1920s viewers. Chapter two focused on comedies of the late 1920s and mid 1930s, advancing the hypothesis that laughing at on-screen parodies of Bakumatsu history was an outlet for viewers to laugh at the unsatisfactory present. The third chapter, devoted to the long-running film series *Kurama Tengu*, explored diachronic changes in depictions of the eponymous cowled hero and his heroic persona's ready adaptability in the wartime period to both censor-pleasing pan-Asian propaganda and crowd-pleasing pure entertainment. Chapter four continued the theme of pan-Asianism by looking at the other side of the coin, hate the enemy films, and the ways in which filmmaker and viewer could exploit these ostensibly pro-state propaganda films and carve out meanings of their own. And the fifth and final chapter, on Bakumatsu romances, further developed the idea that a Bakumatsu setting allowed filmmakers and audiences greater license to enjoy themselves than the increasingly stilted films set in the present could hope to offer.

Throughout, drawing on cultural studies theorists like John Fiske, I have conceived of the viewer as the primary meaning-maker in the intersection between filmmaker, screen and viewer. The evidence from interwar and wartime Japanese films set in the Bakumatsu does not seem to support the more pessimistic theories of Adorno and Horkheimer or Louis Althusser regarding how audiences are affected ideologically by cultural products like films. Instead, the films

analyzed herein, some of the most popular and commercially successful films of the interwar and wartime periods, offered abundant opportunities for audiences to resist ideological domination by the state. Taken as a whole, then, these five categories of Bakumatsu films suggest that interwar and even wartime Japan was not so gloomy a 'dark valley' as has been claimed by some.

The problem is that the categories of Bakumatsu film neatly delineated here are neither all-inclusive nor quite so easily distinguishable as I have suggested. It was difficult to decide, for example, whether *Enoken Plays Kurama Tengu*, a parody of both the Bakumatsu period and of the Kurama Tengu film series itself, should 'belong' in the chapter on comedy or the chapter on Kurama Tengu. And some films set in the Bakumatsu do not fit into any of these five categories very well. For instance, *Last Days of Edo* (*Edo saigo no hi,* dir. Inagaki Hiroshi), a 1941 film with an all-star cast depicting Katsu Kaishū and his war-ending surrender of Chiyoda castle to Saigō Takamori in 1868, is neither particularly tragic in its register, nor at all parodic, romantic, serial, or pan-Asian/anti-Western; it resists easy categorization. Since I have discussed only a small fraction of Bakumatsu films, and indeed only those that correspond relatively closely with the generic categories I have created, it might appear that I have chosen to introduce only those films which best support my conclusions and ignored any which might challenge the conceptual categories I have imposed. And if all films set in the Bakumatsu deserved equal weight of attention, it might well be the case that my account is suspect.

In fact, the films I introduced in the chapters above were chosen neither because they were the only extant Bakumatsu films left—they are not—nor because they fit neatly into my categories, since many do not, but because of their unusually significant social impact. Traces of this impact are still decipherable in each film's popularity (as evidenced in box office returns,[1]

[1] As Furukawa 2003 has shown, truly reliable box office data is available only for 1942, 1943, and the first half of 1944 (and was gathered by the government precisely because it was apprehensive of the effect of entertainment

marketing and advertising campaigns and so forth) and through the quasi-official opprobrium each faced for its ambivalence over how to interpret the Bakumatsu period.[2] A film like *Last Days of Edo,* by contrast, ruffled no feathers at the Cabinet Information Bureau, since its take on Katsu Kaishū[3] and the surrender of the Tokugawa's seat of power was perfectly in line with the official interpretation of the period's history visible in sources like textbooks. In fact, it was considered so unobjectionable from the perspective of the state that the Ministry of Education actually honored it with an official recommendation—and a monetary prize of 3000 yen.[4]

This dissertation is not an exhaustive study of the Bakumatsu period in film, nor is it, in fact, really concerned with the Bakumatsu per se; it is about the Japanese audiences of 1925 thru 1945, and the various possibilities available to them to negotiate with the screened depictions of the Bakumatsu. As such, merely cataloging the dozens of Bakumatsu films produced in this twenty-year boom period would serve little purpose, so instead, I have identified and analyzed those motion pictures most useful to viewers in the interwar and wartime periods, those films that correspond best to John Fiske's notion of 'producerly' texts. Rich in ambivalence about the history they portray, many of these films possess a transgressive underbelly, striving to contain the maximum amount of resistance to state aims any film of this period could hope to conceal and yet pass pre- and post-production censorship. But this attempt to encode a muted hidden

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films on the populace, and eager to tabulate the success of national policy films); for other years, the written record supplies some evidence (via contemporary reviews noting it was a hit or failure, etc.) of a film's success or failure.

[2] Box office results are the only marker of a film's social influence, of course, but for the war years, these results are highly suggestive. Furthermore, many theorists and officials within Japan at the time took the controversial stance that a film's popularity or lack thereof indicated the degree to which the film resonated with audiences and their societal concerns in the present. Aaron Gerow cites the example of a 1933 debate between the Marxist-elitist view of Iwasaki Akira, regarding the predilections of "the people", and Ueno Kōzō, who championed the above populist viewpoint. See Gerow, "Critical Reception: Historical Conceptions of Japanese Film Criticism," in Daisuke Miyao ed., *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, p 68.

[3] Unlike Ii Naosuke, the subject of *Sonnō jōi*'s transgressive revisionism, Katsu Kaishū had never been officially vilified and indeed had long been recognized as an unobjectionable hero thanks to his ready submission to the imperial army, so a film valorizing him had little potential use-value to audiences looking to criticize the present.

[4] Salomon p. 214. Salomon also points out that the real value of the yen had fallen a great deal by this point due to inflation, to as little as one-third its value in 1939, and that awards were paid to the studios; see Salomon, p. 199.

transcript in such films is best understood, not as a courageous act of defiance by a handful of progressive filmmakers or studios, but rather as sound commercial sense, with the production side having correctly divined what audiences wanted to see and producing accordingly.

In other words, it is actually film audiences who deserve much of the credit for shaping the content of the films they saw, especially in subgenres like Bakumatsu-period films, where there was a constant flow of adaptation of that period's history to the big screen. Directors and producers were rewarded with financial success when they made films that subverted the propagandistic aims of the state, and, with very few exceptions, punished with box office failure when they were unable or unwilling to include the types of content audiences apparently desired, especially comedic and romantic elements. To ensure audience approval, moreover, it was not enough simply to tack on romantic subplots; instead, what was required was something more along the lines of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, in which the romance 'subplot' is actually the main plot, and the supposedly central political drama has been relegated to underdeveloped subplot status. *Kantarō of Ina* went even further, including the political story as a mere framing device for the love story at its heart. And sure enough, both of these films won the adulation of millions of fans nationwide, in marked contrast with *Last Days of Edo,* whose ponderous, hegemonic tone and Ministry of Education recommendation—especially since this sort of government intervention in the free market all too often proved to be box office poison—left the viewing public unmoved.[5] Nor could a film like *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* safely rely on the strength of its casting; even an expensive film featuring an all-star cast was not enough to guarantee financial success, as Daiei learned to its chagrin with *Song of the Restoration* (*Ishin no kyoku*,

[5] The box office results were below average despite (or, I would argue, partly due to) its glowing critical reception; see Salomon, p. 309. The disconnect between wartime Japan's professional movie critics and its viewing public led, with few exceptions, to a diametric opposition between critical success and box office failure, and vice versa.

1942, dir. Ushihara Kiyohiko).[6] What the audience demanded was something *more* than a politically correct tale, and no amount of star power or skilled acting[7] by itself could hope to match the draw of the potentially transgressive undercurrent in the film's encoded message.

Beyond 1945: Bakumatsu Films and Transwar Japan

Donald Richie, the noted scholar of Japanese cinema, once made a fascinating analogy comparing filmmakers on either side of 1945 to the xenophobic *shishi* before and after 1864. In both cases, Richie noted, the ideological conversion to a diametrically opposite point of view was accomplished instantaneously. Just as the *shishi* prudently dropped their xenophobia (after military defeat convinced them it was unfeasible) and began vociferous support for the opening of Japan, so too the national policy filmmakers of the wartime period cut all ties with the spiritist pro-war themes of their wartime films and, with equal fervor, began creating pro-democracy films almost from the moment of defeat.[8]

Interesting as Richie's comparison may be, it fails to take into account the considerable continuity in the film world, and in many respects society at large, between wartime and Occupation-era Japan. Precisely at the point many casually assume the existence of a severe rupture, at the moment of defeat, some voices, including for example those of Andrew Gordon[9]

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[6] *Ishin no kyoku* (1942) offered the full line of Daiei's A-list *period film* stars, but failed to make the box office top ten for 1942 nonetheless. See Furukawa, p. 173. One possible reason was the heavy-handed dialogue, with its improbable speeches by Sakamoto Ryōma (played by Bantsuma) that he is not struggling for Satsuma, or Chōshū, but for 'okuni no tame' (the sake of the country), a common wartime expression in 1940s Japan used especially on the occasion of being drafted, when men were expected to say "I will go give my life for the sake of the country." Another is the simple fact that with so many male stars, the film ended up being a very male story, with little that could potentially appeal to female viewer-consumers, thereby ignoring the demographic trends in viewership.

[7] Bantsuma apparently left the set of *Ishin no kyoku* one day without telling anyone where he was going, alarming everyone involved with *Ishin no kyoku*, but according to close friend Inagaki Hiroshi, he had actually gone to Tosa (Kōchi) in an attempt at method-acting, since he had once again been cast in the role of Tosa's most famous son Sakamoto Ryōma, and wanted to create a new, never before seen Sakamoto. Inagaki, *Hige to chonmage*, p. 93.

[8] Peter High noted this comparison made by Richie; see High, p. 510. It can be found in Anderson and Richie, p. 164.

[9] For example, see Gordon, "Consumption, Leisure, and the Middle Class in Transwar Japan," in *Social Science Japan Journal* (2007) vol. 10 (1), pp. 1-21.

and John Dower,[10] have rejected the traditional periodization of Japanese history into the prewar/wartime (thru August 15, 1945) and postwar (after August 15, 1945) eras, favoring instead the concept of transwar Japan. I argue this notion of the transwar is surprisingly useful in explaining the subtle continuities in the realm of popular culture, particularly the film world, and propose that Japan's film historiography of interwar and wartime Japan can usefully be extended beyond 1945 into the U.S. Occupation.

On the surface, 1945 is such an obvious point of rupture in terms of Bakumatsu film production that the idea of applying the concept of transwar Japan to the movies might seem far-fetched. The U.S.-led Occupation of Japan quickly banned the production of virtually all period films (including, of course, more historically minded films set in the Bakumatsu), condemning the entire super-genre for its purportedly feudalistic and anti-democratic themes, glorification of violence and sacrifice, and other values deemed unsavory to the American occupiers of Japan. They even went so far as to hold a film print bonfire on the banks of the Tama River, having banned 236 of the worst offenders from among the films they had confiscated, nearly half of the total, and ordering most of these to be burned.[11] Moreover, unlike the prewar and wartime filmmaking prohibitions of the Home Ministry and the Cabinet Information Bureau, which had concentrated primarily on explaining which types of films and content were unacceptable rather than providing clear guidance on what sort of film was desirable, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), in addition to demanding that all film scripts be translated into English for ease of review, eventually issued both negative and positive guidance (so-called

[10] In his article "The Useful War" John Dower argues convincingly that much of Japan's postwar economic and industrial success was thanks to the skills and societal infrastructural developed during the war. See Dower, "The Useful War," in *Daedalus*, vol. 119, no. 3, Summer 1990, pp. 49-70.
[11] Kitamura, p. 35.

'suggestion control', established in weekly meetings with the studios[12]), demanding the film industry not only cease making stories deemed feudalistic[13] but also begin producing pro-democracy films and stories that celebrated the individual and the value of human life.[14] And then SCAP began purging the film industry of some of its most important names and personalities, including, most famously, Kido Shirō of Shōchiku as well as Kikuchi Kan and Nagata Masaichi of Daiei, labeling them war criminals and banning them from involvement in the film world for life, thereby ostensibly ensuring there would be little continuity from pre- to post-1945 film production.[15] How then can I claim that such continuity not only existed, but was sufficiently robust to justify the appellation 'transwar'?

The answer is twofold. Firstly, the surface-level interference by SCAP into the inner workings of the film industry, as annoying as it must have been to filmmakers at the time, was actually rather superficial, with many of the changes being temporary in nature and/or relatively easy to arrange without disturbing the fundamental mission of the film industry: to please the audience (that is, to make money). And many who had been "permanently" banned from filmmaking were rehabilitated as quickly as 1948, less than three years after the lifetime ban was announced, and all major players had returned to the industry by 1950.[16]

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[12] Ibid., p. 35.
[13] SCAP's de facto decision to ban the ever-popular period film genre might have been influenced by Hollywood lobbyists, who had lamented Japan's increasingly stringent requirements for Hollywood film exhibition (not to mention censorship) in the late 1930s and early 1940s and certainly sought to recover something of their market share in the new, more congenial environment of the U.S. Occupation. Planning on how to re-enter the Japanese domestic market had begun, in Hollywood circles, as early as 1943. See Kitamura, p. 26. The industry and its advocates, notably the CMPE's Charles Mayer, first took steps to require many theaters to exhibit mostly Hollywood films, then turned around and demanded exorbitant 50% rental fees to show Hollywood films (much higher than such fees were on average in the U.S. at that time) as well as the exhibitors' capitulation to the block-booking system, meaning exhibitors had to buy 26 or 52 films en masse, without knowing the titles or content. Kitamura, p. 115.
[14] Anderson and Richie, pp. 160-161.
[15] Ibid., p. 163.
[16] Ibid., 164. Note that this rapid about-face also occurred in the realm of politics, with many politicians purged "for life" as war criminals able to return to politics within a few years. Both of these changes of direction can be attributed to the infamous 'reverse course' in American policy, a shift from the liberalization and democratization of Japan in the first two years of the Occupation towards a more pronounced anti-Communist policy by early 1948.

Secondly and more importantly, the *experience* of making films under the U.S. Occupation was eerily similar in many—though admittedly not all—respects to that of making films in Japan after the passage of the 1939 Film Law. SCAP's Civil Censorship Division (CCD) was responsible for film review and censorship, and their duties were later transferred to a unit of the Civil Information & Education (CIE) section in March 1946, but as had been the case in wartime Japan, films were required to undergo pre- and post-production censorship, and the savviest filmmakers quickly learned what sorts of themes and content CIE censors were most likely to object to, much as they had learned how far they could push CIB censors during the war, and up sprang much the same conservative culture of self-censorship as had existed in wartime Japan, in which studios, from the project planning stage onwards, tended to err on the side of caution for fear of wasting capital on a project the CIE might not ultimately approve.

Wartime and Occupation-era censorship, despite being diametrically opposed in their ideological justifications, also forced filmmakers to include a similar kind of political distortion of reality. Just as in wartime Japan it was virtually impossible to have a film character, at the moment of his death in battle, say anything but "Long Live the Emperor!" no matter how unrealistic that might have been, so too in the Occupation, filmmakers figured out that CIE censors would object to depictions of what ordinary people would actually do in many situations, revising their projects—and indeed reality—to reflect how CIE censors *wanted* the Japanese people to act.[17] This hortatory aspect of the pro-democracy push in Occupation-era Japan was doubtless experienced as a mirror image of the militaristic or spiritist exhortations of wartime Japan, since in both cases, the reality of ordinary Japanese and their behavior was subsumed to an overweening political ideology. Once again, many filmmakers and filmgoers alike must have been left thinking, "If only the powers that be would just leave us alone!"

[17] Ibid., p. 162.

In wartime Japan, official disapproval for the period film genre, considered frivolous entertainment which often times contained only the barest gesture to historicity, had resulted in the gutting of the industry and the forced production of an acceptable alternative, namely the history film (*rekishi eiga*). Similarly, under the Occupation, making period films was almost impossible, with fewer than ten produced each year for the first three years after the defeat, forcing filmmakers to come up with new formulas to balance the ongoing demand of the film-going audience for pure period film entertainment, especially *chanbara* sword-fighting scenes, with CIE demands for pro-democratic films without a whiff of feudalism or swordplay.[18]

Specifically with regards to history films, the most significant difference between wartime and Occupation-era history film output is that, during the latter period, the same continuity claims that had made Bakumatsu film projects prima facie so attractive to the censors during the war made them deeply suspect. In other words, if the decisions and the course taken in the Bakumatsu indeed gave rise to a teleology of modern Japan, leading directly thru the Meiji and Taishō periods into the militarism of the Shōwa period, then any film purporting to show that originary period would have to resort to extraordinary theoretical acrobatics in order to suggest an alternative teleology.

The stakes were very high. The economic survival of the film studios—which, in Daiei's case especially, pay-rolled numerous high-profile actors and other personnel specialized in period films/history films as well as maintained an entirely separate production arm for period films—and thus the actors and crew themselves depended heavily on someone finding the ingenuity to overcome these limitations. There were essentially only two viable ways of accomplishing this: either they could try to thrust period film stars into movies set in the present

[18] Kitamura, p. 60. Kitamura notes that the pent-up demand for period films, left unsatisfied for the Occupation, found expression in a post-Occupation boom, with more than 100 period films made each year from 1954-1961. Ibid., p. 61.

or near-present (*gendaigeki*), as was most notably done with Kataoka Chiezō in the Occupation-era *Tarao Bannai* series, re-branding Kataoka as a modern-day super-detective and master of disguise, or they could try to think up a justification to get the period film casts and crews together for a project Occupation censors might tolerate.

For example, a studio wishing to set a film project in the Bakumatsu could attempt to claim that, in fact, the seeds of Japan's democracy were planted in that period, and had simply not flowered until the Occupation era. And there is one film, *The Last Expulsionist Party* (*Saigo no jōitō*, dir. Inagaki Hiroshi) dating from December 1945, which tries to argue precisely that, claiming democracy in Japan was born in the Bakumatsu/early Meiji period via the peaceful interactions between erstwhile xenophobes and benevolent foreigners. In the final pages of this dissertation, I will analyze *The Last Expulsionist Party* and argue its considerable similarities (to say nothing of its 100% continuity in personnel) to films of the wartime period indicate the concept of the transwar can be very useful in understanding Japan's popular, and especially film culture of the entire decade of the 1940s.

A Period Film with a Buzz Cut: the Case of *The Last Expulsionist Party*

The Last Expulsionist Party was released on December 20th, 1945 by Daiei and produced—naturally enough given the temporal setting of the film and the fact that Tokyo lay in ruins—at their studio space in Kyoto. It was directed by period film master Inagaki Hiroshi, who, with Yamanaka Sadao and the other members of the Narutaki Group, had famously championed a somewhat subversive approach to period films back in the mid- to late 1930s, creating films that were, in essence, all about the present, and rejected historicity or real engagement with the

past; they were "modern dramas with top-knots tacked on."[19] The main role went to period film veteran superstar Arashi Kanjūrō (Arakan), best known for frequently playing the titular role in the long-running *Kurama Tengu* film series, discussed at length in chapter three. Arashi's film output had suffered greatly in the wake of the Pacific War and the crack-down on period films, plummeting from an average of ten films per year for the decade from 1932-1941 to just four in 1942, three each in 1943 and 1944, and two in 1945, both of which were released after August 15th.[20] His career did not begin to pick up again until 1949, making *The Last Expulsionist Party* one of only a handful of film projects for Arakan in the late war and early Occupation years.

Arakan was the period film star most quintessentially associated with the Bakumatsu period, and with swashbuckling prowess with the sword, due to his portrayal of Kurata Tenzen (Kurama Tengu). As such, Daiei's casting of Arakan in *The Last Expulsionist Party* was an interesting choice; his presence in the film, considering the intertextuality any big star brings, hinted that audiences might be able to enjoy exactly those features now strictly forbidden by the Occupation authorities, namely good old-fashioned swashbuckling (*chanbara*) entertainment and an engagement with Bakumatsu history. This intertextuality is further increased given the casting of frequent Arakan collaborator Ichikawa Haruyo in the heroine's role; Arakan and Ichikawa had starred together in a variety of films, including Inagaki's *Record of Hideyoshi's Rise* (*Shusse Taikō ki*, 1938), two Kurama Tengu films, the 1940 *Tengu Circular Letter Part II* (*Zoku Tengu kaijō*)[21] and the 1941 *Kurama Tengu and the Secret Messenger to Satsuma (Satsuma no misshi)*,

[19] This famous phrase is sometimes attributed to Inagaki himself, or to Yamanaka, or to the entire Narutaki-gumi. See Richie, *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, p. 77.
[20] Statistics (like the average of 9.6 films per year from 1932-1941) on Arakan's film output can be calculated based on the data provided by Nihon Eiga Database website here.
[21] Ichikawa's starring role in this film also forms a cautionary tale about overreliance on Nihon Eiga Database, which does not record this pivotal role at all.

as well as in *Birdman* (*Chōjin*, 1940, dir. Marune Santarō), the historical tale of a mid-nineteenth century inventor obsessed with human flight—much as amateur pilot Arakan was in real life.[22]

The crew of *The Last Expulsionist Party* holds some surprises as well. Director Inagaki Hiroshi was not a frequent collaborator with Arakan by any means, with the two of them teaming up only three times despite many years of working at the same studio; Inagaki, moreover, has little to say about the actor in his writings, unlike for example the very cordial relationship he reports having had with Bantsuma or the great respect that he had for Ōkōchi. Perhaps this relative silence on Arakan indicates a frostiness in their relationship, but even if no such subtext existed, he probably did not think very highly of Arakan or he would have written about him more, as he did with all the other major stars with whom he worked. Alternatively, Inagaki's silence on Arakan might be due to his simply being embarrassed by the thematic nature of the projects on which he collaborated with Arakan, especially *The Last Expulsionist Party* itself, a nakedly pro-democratic ideological conversion narrative.

The plot of the film is simple enough. It is 1876, and Ōba Shingo (Arakan) is one of the last remaining members of the now discredited *shinpūren*, a political group dedicated to the expulsion of all foreigners and all trace of Westernization—especially Christianity—from Japan. Fervently committed, he encounters and attempts to murder the Hutchinsons, a nuclear family of Caucasian missionaries living near his hiding place in Nagasaki (he is staying with a *yūjo*, or prostitute, who has taken a fancy to him despite her older brother having been murdered by jōi forces and hides him from the authorities), but is wounded in the attempt and is nursed back to health by the very missionaries he had tried to kill in cold blood. In the face of this unexpected mercy, he experiences an inner struggle not unlike that of Javert's (and Jean Valjean's) in *Les*

[22] See chapter three for more on the Kurama Tengu film; *Chōjin* is available on Nikkatsu VHS. Arakan's financially crippling obsession with flying, meanwhile, was reported in the tabloids of early 1940s Japan.

Miserables,[23] but unlike Javert or the historical members of the *shinpūren* (virtually all of whom perished in their assault on the Kumamoto garrison, or committed ritual suicide in the immediate wake of their defeat), he is converted, much as Valjean was, to a more politically and ethically moderate stance through the kindness of the Hutchinsons, accepting their aid in being smuggled out of the country, to see with his own (now opened) eyes the West he had hated so vehemently.

The film carefully and creatively sidesteps the main prohibitions against death-glorying or feudalistic-themed content and structure. The script by Fujiki Yumi (one of Inagaki's most frequent screenwriter collaborators), and based on a story by Kikuchi Kan, delivers periodic speeches prioritizing life over a romantic but quixotic death, as when the *yūjo* Kogiku (Ichikawa Haruyo) passionately demands that Ōba promise to live, come what may—at exactly the same moment films heretofore would have had the lovers pledging to die together.[24] Their relationship is obviously about to end, but instead of ending in grandiose fashion with *shinjū* ('expression of sincerity', usually a double-suicide), nothing is more important to her than that he live, even if that means he must leave her, never to return. There are intriguing echoes here of the final parting of *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*, discussed in chapter five, in which the woman values her lover's life above everything else, including, I would argue, his duty to the political cause.

Moreover, at a time when showing the flash of the sword on screen was almost impossible due to Occupation disapproval, Arakan is downgraded from sword to dagger in the moment he attempts to murder the Hutchinsons. He is defeated by the resourceful wife, who

[23] The story of Les Miserables was relatively well-known in Japan, and had actually been adapted to the silver screen by Itami Mansaku in the 1938 *Kyojinden* (Tale of a Great Man, Itami's last film), with Ōkōchi Denjirō in the Valjean-esque role and Hara Setsuko as Chiyo/Cosette. The story was transposed to the very early Meiji period, with the failed revolution of the Hugo novel written onto the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, a fascinating historical transposition in its own right. Aside from the difficulties in attempting to categorize such a film as tragedy or romance or even comedy (it has plenty of light-hearted moments), it did not perform well at the box office, making it difficult to justify analyzing it in this dissertation, but aesthetically it might well qualify as a near-masterpiece.

[24] She demands a 'kokoro no yakusoku' (heart pledge [to live]), and wails, "shinja iya!" (I couldn't bear it if you died!"), at the same point in the narrative flow we expect a pledge (to die) and something like "I can't bear to live!".

shoots him twice point-blank, in a symbolic defeat of tradition (dagger) versus modernity (the pistol). Interestingly enough, however, this is not a defeat of the sword; the dagger's limited reach prevents him from striking any of the family before he succumbs to his wounds, but it is possible a sword's greater reach might have led to a lethal outcome after all. The lethality of the sword is ironically preserved in latent form, then, by the Occupation attempt to ban swordplay on screen; had the filmmakers been allowed to put a drawn sword in Arakan's hands, they would have been forced, given the film's theme, to show the decisive defeat of the sword/Japan by the gun/the West, but the prohibition on using drawn swords in films leaves a hint of ambiguity in the result, an 'out' for those in the audience who might have wished to believe, "If he'd only had a sword, he wouldn't have been gunned down so easily."[25]

Ōba lies near death after his wounds, and sees fever-dreams of battle, a clever narrative framing which could excuse the filmmaker's inclusion of fighting scenes after all. Since it was 'only a dream,' and one moreover based on historical events (the assault on Kumamoto garrison by the *shinpūren*) the film is justified in showing swords in action. In fact, this dream sequence, which starts from the very moment Ōba collapses to the floor, is remarkable in a variety of ways, including the psychedelic spirals, swirling smoke and extradiegetic music on display, and the montage of seemingly unrelated images that follows, including of the attack on Kumamoto.[26]

The Last Expulsionist Party also shows occasional glimmers of aesthetic greatness, due in large part to the combination of skilled direction from Inagaki, the excellent and nuanced lighting and the fine cinematographic work of Miyagawa Kazuo. One scene in which a character

[25] It goes without saying that my John Fiske-inspired view of the empowered audience should not be taken to mean that everyone in the audience negotiated universally appealing readings of the films they viewed; just as, during the war, some filmgoers must have negotiated a reading that was more liberal and leftist than the preferred reading, so too during the Occupation some must have done precisely the opposite, rejecting the surface-level pro-democracy reading in favor of a more nationalistic or right-wing interpretation.

[26] This montage lasts for over a minute, beginning at minute 48, and is probably the closest to virtuoso filmmaking that *The Last Expulsionist Party* comes.

peels an apple in close-up, glistening in the moonlight, is particularly memorable, and probably influenced the famous apple-peeling closing scene of Ozu Yasujirō's 1949 *Late Spring,* in which the apple is handled, and peeled, in exactly the same way, and with the same type of knife.[27] Much of the film is shot at night, shrouded in darkness which gives physical expression to Ōba's mental turmoil, while after his conversion, daytime scenes predominate, creating a powerful if subtle visual analogy between the just-ended Bakumatsu period and Japan's defeat in 1945, and between the hopefulness of the early Meiji period and that of post-defeat Japan, in which the long night of oppressive militarism has given way to the dawn of a bright new age.

Ōba's final political conversion occurs near the end of the film, and is clearly the emotional climax of the narrative. He stares into the fireplace, fire-light flickering over his face, tortured by a discordant melody—discordant because the up-beat Western music echoing diegetically from the other room, where the Hutchinsons are celebrating Christmas, is clashing with a non-diegetic Japanese melody in a minor key, evidently an internal soundtrack of sorts for Ōba. Inagaki intercuts low-angle shots of Ōba's emotion-ravaged face in close-up with shots of the fire itself, snow swirling outside and above all with a spinning Christmas tree, exploiting the Kuleshov effect to suggest a new dimension to Ōba's political conversion: a potential religious conversion to go with it. As the scene ends, we see a tear glistening on Ōba's face as he stands up, overcome, and prepares to commit seppuku. Physically stopped mid-act by the Hutchinsons' daughter, he has a long conversation with Father Hutchinson (both in the sense of being the patriarch and, judging from his collar, a Catholic priest), at the end of which he leaps to his feet and seizes his dagger, alarming all the Hutchinsons. But the only violence he intends is against the stultifying traditions of the past: he resolutely slices through his topknot, symbolically breaking with the past. His capitulation to the moral superiority of the foreign priest is total; his

[27] Compare 32:55 of *The Last Expulsionist Party* to the final moments of *Banshun*.

eyes shining, in one of only two high-angle shots of Arakan in the entire film,[28] he gazes up almost adoringly at Hutchinson off-screen to the right and says "I see!"[29] He has killed the samurai in himself, and, redeemed, can now take his place among the citizens of the world.

As in virtually all other Inagaki and Narutaki Group films, there is a persistent and sympathetic emphasis on the people, and an undercurrent of disapproval towards the self-styled political elites. Thus the film privileges Ōba's conversion from a former elite trying to cling to samurai status into a member of the ordinary people, who are consistently portrayed as long-suffering at the hands of political radicals of all sides. One example is the half-comical conflict between the volatile Ōba and his newfound friend Kanishi Wataru (played by Ryū Chishū) who is sporting crutches due to a crippling injury, visually identifying him as a war veteran and creating a figure sure to evoke the domestic situation in Japan in late 1945, with its waves of wounded returnee soldiers. Their argument over whether groups like the *shinpūren* were misguided in adopting an expulsionist (*jōi*) platform escalates into a (still half-comical) physical altercation and forces Ōba to flee since a policeman takes notice of their fight; as he runs away, he, and then a succession of others, almost bumps into an ordinary man carrying five bowls of noodles, and the latter manages to keep his precarious grip on the bowls only with difficulty, but in the end (around thirty minutes into the film) he is knocked over by the last few cops as they dash after the fleeing Ōba. The noodles go flying, and the man kicks the air after their receding forms and screams curses at them all, because the political alignment of the people who rush by is irrelevant; only the fact of the pursuit has affected him, and he condemns, in a sense, politics itself for interfering with his otherwise placid life, and worse yet squandering precious food with

[28] The other is right at the end, in the parting-at-the-dock scene between Ōba and the Hutchinsons' daughter, between whom a platonic friendship has sprung up; Arakan stumbles through a few lines of (painfully) phonetic English, with an uncharacteristically open smile on his face, as he gazes up at the daughter from his little boat.
[29] "Wakarimashita!"

their foolish squabbles—a theme that would surely resonate with audiences of late 1945, then in the midst of Japan's worst food shortage since the 1830s Tenpō famine.

If Inagaki is being true to form, then this film, too, should be seen as a modern drama with only the visual accoutrements of the period film.[30] But what might that mean? In addition to the analogy connecting the Bakumatsu with wartime Japan and the early Meiji period with the immediate postwar period, the film may also contain all the raw materials for audiences to negotiate a rather negative reading of the rulers of each of these periods, including the American overlords of the Occupation period. The cops pursuing Ōba, in other words, can be seen as a symbol of unwanted interference by the Meiji government/the Occupation into the ordinary lives of the people, represented by such figures as the man carrying the noodles and more importantly by the over-determined prostitute and, like Ōba, still redeemable[31] Kogiku, who in late 1945 would certainly have resonated with audiences confronting in their daily lives the ambivalent savior/whore of the pan-pan prostitute standing between them and the American occupiers, especially since her madam tries to set her up with some customers, who are not depicted (representing a threat to the budding romance between her and Ōba which is left deliberately faceless, perhaps, so as to signify not only the 1876 but also the 1945 realities of sexual servitude, and after all Americans could not be shown on screen per censor directive). She refuses all such customers so as to take care of Ōba, and focus on repairing this damaged specimen of Japanese

[30] A contemporary review (probably by Tsumura Hideo given the disapproving tone) in the *Asahi shinbun* notes with consternation the film's lack of interest in depicting the actual history of the Shinpūren. See "Eiga: Saigo no jōitō" in *Asahi shinbun*, Dec. 24, 1945, morning ed., page 2 bottom.

[31] The film ends with Kogiku in long shot looking out over the ocean towards America, where Ōba has journeyed, and waiting for his return, having received Ōba's message (via his new friend Kanishi, with whom he makes up and admits he was wrong in their earlier squabble over the validity of the jōi concept) to wait for him, since he had promised in his heart to live, and would come back for her no matter what. Ironic as it sounds considering he has gone to the United States, one possible reading is that Ōba, representative of the virile Japanese man, will be able to return and redeem the virtue of Kogiku, the Japanese woman forced to prostitute herself due to 'the times' (with the implication being due to, and with, the American occupiers), just as soon as the Occupation itself ends. For Arakan personally, the end of the Occupation in 1952 certainly saw the re-flowering of his career, as he was at last able once again to portray his most popular role, the quintessential superhuman samurai Kurama Tengu.

masculinity. This possible reading would somewhat undermine the visually positive darkness-into-light story being told cinematographically, allowing those audience members with a more ambivalent take on late 1945 Japan and its rulers a forum to consider the unmentionable and the invisible: the Occupation itself.

Insofar as *The Last Expulsionist Party* successfully managed, despite the strictures of the times, to contain sufficient ambiguity for audiences to negotiate a variety of meanings from it, both the experience of making and of watching this film must have been very similar indeed to that of the late wartime films discussed in chapters four and five. Like all of the popular films analyzed in this dissertation, *The Last Expulsionist Party* sought to push back against the prohibitions of the censorial authorities, coming up with often quite clever justifications for the inclusion of the sorts of normally forbidden elements sure to please viewers in search of period film-style entertainment. Based on the surviving evidence analyzed in this dissertation, especially chapters two, four and five, my conclusion is that Bakumatsu films constituted something of a haven for transgressive entertainment, a forum for passive dissent that can help explain the easy, indeed almost incident-free transition to American overlord-ship and democratic ideology in late 1945. The lesson of the transwar, illustrated by *The Last Expulsionist Party*, is that the supposed rupture of August 1945 in both production and reception is less extreme than it may appear at first glance, and that Occupation audiences who wished to could practice much the same passive dissent as had been possible while watching—and in the act of watching—wartime films of the Bakumatsu.

The Bakumatsu period continued to fascinate filmgoers after the Occupation ended, flowering into a second Bakumatsu film boom from 1953-1968, which not coincidentally corresponds to exactly one hundred years after the Bakumatsu itself. With the 2002 release of

Twilight Samurai (*Tasogare Seibei*, dir. Yamada Yōji), a third Bakumatsu boom (this one more of a media mix combining feature films, manga, television and anime series and various products like action figures) has begun, and is still alive and well as of this writing (2015).

The Bakumatsu is modern Japan's origin story. As such, the social relevance of the Bakumatsu period can never really end as long as Japanese audiences continue to be interested in the deep connection between Japan's present and its historical birth and emergence as a modern nation—and continue to enjoy these sometimes subversive, usually finely crafted and always entertaining films about Japan's past and ultimately, what it means to be Japanese.

Appendix A

The Aftermath of *Signal Fires over Shanghai* in Japan and China

It is remarkable how differently Japan's defeat colored the involvement of the Chinese versus Japanese cast and crew members in *Signal Fires*.[1] For example, Bantsuma's career was essentially unaffected by this Home Ministry-approved propaganda film; he went on to great postwar success. Likewise, new heights of fame awaited director Inagaki in the postwar years, though judging from how little he has to say of *Signal Fires* in his autobiography, he was probably embarrassed to have made a film so easily identifiable as propagandistic. His embarrassment may have been shared by many who worked on the film, but time quickly dulled any shame over working on a Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere propaganda film.

Perhaps the case of Okazaki Kōzō best exemplifies the ease with which filmmakers could rebound from involvement in such a project. Just twenty-five years old in 1944, he worked as an assistant cinematographer on *Signal Fires* and later went on to a flourishing career as a high-profile cinematographer; more importantly, he gave a lengthy interview about the film and his involvement in which any sense of shame at the final product is quite minimal.[2] In the interview, Okazaki does mention the presence of anti-Japanese sentiment, which translated into a considerable sense of danger while shooting; he recalled the regular occurrence of having those movies being played in a movie theater, even in those zones of the city considered safest for Japanese, paused at the beginning to show a public service announcement slide asking

[1] Actually, according to assistant cinematographer Okazaki Kōzō's eyewitness account, because only six Japanese cast members came to Shanghai for the shoot, many of the Japanese crew were dressed up and put in front of the camera as extras, blurring, for this film at any rate, the supposedly clear line between 'cast' and 'crew'. See *Bantsuma,* pp. 57-8. Okazaki himself, as a cinematographer, was behind the camera and so naturally didn't appear on screen.
[2] This cinematography assistant, Okazaki Kōzō, went on to become a high-profile director in his own right. For the interview, see *Bantsuma*, pp. 57-59.

theatergoers to check under their seats for bombs.[3] His interview is full of fascinating details of the film's production, one of the more memorable of which being his first-hand observation of Bantsuma's unique dialogue memorization method, which required him to memorize all his lines, in order, only then being able to produce them on queue; as Okazaki notes, this obviously precluded any last-minute changes to Bantsuma's lines in the script, as it would throw his entire process off.[4] Bantsuma was thus particularly unlikely to cause studios problems related to extemporaneous changes from the written script during filming, which censors strongly opposed.

In any case, whatever embarrassment Okazaki or the other Japanese cast or crew may have felt due to the production of this film had faded by 2001, when a nearly complete print of *Signal Fires*, the only one known to have survived the war, was stumbled upon in the Russian archive Gosfilmofond, having been seized after the Soviet invasion of Manchukuo just prior to the surrender in 1945. Because that year was the hundredth anniversary of Bantsuma's birth, *Signal Fires* appeared in several film programs and retrospectives throughout Japan that year, with little sign of political concern over screening a wartime pan-Asian propaganda film decrying Anglo-American treachery.[5]

This muted embarrassment, fading over time, on the part of the Japanese participants in *Signal Fires* stands in great contrast to the genuine distress participation caused Chinese actors and filmmakers. The careers of almost all the Chinese who were known to have participated suffered greatly, and unlike with the embarrassment of the Japanese, the black mark showed no signs of fading over time; Lu Yukun in particular remained bitter about the damage this film had caused him even decades later.[6]

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[3] *Bantsuma*, pp. 57-58.
[4] Ibid., p. 58.
[5] Fogel, p. 141 n. 8.
[6] Fu, "The Ambiguity of Entertainment," p. 79.

None suffered more for involvement in *Signal Fires* than Chinese movie producer Zhang Shankun, the most influential (and perhaps the most innovative, especially as concerns film promotion and marketing) moviemaker in 1930s and 1940s Shanghai. Zhang was eventually persuaded by Kawakita Nagamasa to join him in founding and then, in titular fashion at least, running the only movie company remaining in Shanghai after the wartime reorganization of the industry, the Zhonghua lianhe zhipian gufeng gongsi (China United Productions, hereinafter CUP, later further streamlined into the China United Motion Picture Company, or CUMP). Many even at the time, and especially after Japan's defeat, thought Zhang's participation in this venture a rank act of collaboration and denounced him as a hanjian (traitor), but as Poshek Fu points out, he also thereby saved thirteen hundred people involved in the Shanghai movie industry from unemployment and, potentially, starvation.[7] But in January 1945, very soon after the completion of *Signal Fires* (which was released in Shanghai in November, and in Japan as a New Year's Film (*oshōgatsu eiga*) in very late December)[8] he was arrested for a month by the Kempeitai under suspicion—later confirmed—of ties to the nationalist GMD government and involvement in the anti-Japanese resistance; after his release, which Kawakita secured, he fled to a GMD-controlled area only to be immediately re-arrested by the GMD government for the crime, as evidenced most prominently in the film *Signal Fires*, which was produced under the auspices of his company, of collaborating with the Japanese![9]

[7] Fu, Ambiguity, p. 71.
[8] According to the data available in *Nippon eiga*, *Signal Fires* was originally scheduled to be released in the Red Group the week of Oct. 26th thru November 1st (1944) in Japan, and paired with Riken's culture film *Kyōshitsu kōjō*; it is unclear why the release was then delayed till late December. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31 (1944), p. 408.
[9] In fact, of the many films with which Zhang was involved, virtually none were pro-Japanese; for much of the war, indeed until forced to make an anti-West film in early 1943 with the smash hit *Wanshi liufang* (Eternity), a big-budget collaborative production with the Manchukuo Cinema Association filmed locally but featuring superstar Li Xianglan (Yamaguchi Yoshiko), he managed to keep the CUP's output almost entirely apolitical, focused firmly on entertainment. See Fu, pp. 73-4. For information about Zhang's bizarre fate of double arrest in 1945, see Fu, p. 80.

Appendix B

Historical Alterations in *Signal Fires over Shanghai*

In contrast to the depiction in *Signal Fires* of the deep inspiration given by the Taipings to Takasugi in his mission to reform Japan, there is no evidence Takasugi ever met any Taiping rebels. In fact, he was equally interested in the tactics and composition of the Western-led armies opposing the Taiping.[1] Furthermore, the Taiping army did not withdraw from the area around Shanghai until several weeks after Takasugi and the other Japanese had returned to Japan, making the climactic meeting in the film chronologically impossible.[2]

There is one other noteworthy point about the two "American" characters decrying Chōshū domain's bombardment of the *Pembroke* in 1863, which concerns the content of their remarks. Their conversation gives the distinct impression that Japan's foreigner-expelling forces were much more successful than they actually were, since they claim their ship was so heavily damaged it is "useless for the time being."[3] In fact, the *Pembroke* escaped virtually undamaged, with no casualties at all, and it was Chōshū itself that suffered severe damage as a result of the Western retaliatory strikes in the subsequent months.[4] This back-projection of greater strength and success onto Japan's earliest military clash with the United States was no doubt intended to

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[1] Huber, p. 152. Though he mentions being intrigued by the Taiping rebels in his diary, Takasugi patterned his subsequent career fighting the Shogunate on the very same Western-style army tactics and armaments featured by the Ever-Victorious Army in their consistent triumphs over the Taiping forces. In particular, Takasugi's *Kiheitai*, much vaunted in Japan as the first military troop to include non-samurai as full-fledged members, enjoyed a similarly glorious career against their more tradition-hampered pro-Shogunate foes. Since the 1850s, Takasugi had favored the idea of modernizing Chōshū's fighting forces by adopting modern Western arms, drill tactics, and command structure, a notion passed on to him by his teacher Yoshida Shōin, so his inspiration for the founding of the *Kiheitai* was not entirely from his hearing of the reports of the Ever-Victorious Army's successes; nonetheless, he established the troop in mid-1863, relatively soon after returning from Shanghai in late summer 1862 and, incidentally, just after the shelling of the *Pembroke* and other ships and subsequent reprisals in the first battle of Shimonoseki in mid-1863. For more on Takasugi's early life and post-Shanghai career, see Huber, chapters 7 & 8.

[2] Fogel, "A Wartime Cinematic Recreation," p. 137.

[3] The Japanese subtitles for this (heavily accented) English dialogue use the phrase "ana darake" or "full of holes."

[4] See McDougal's official correspondence to the U.S. Secretary of the Navy on the retaliatory engagement by the *Wyoming* (mentioned in *Signal Fires*) in July, 1863, for more on the (lack of) damage to the *Wyoming*.

change the audience's view of the period and of U.S.-Japan relations, and thereby has an important message for those watching in 1944: we Japanese/Asians have driven off the Americans before, and we can do it again. How many in the Japanese, let alone the Chinese, audience would have known the "true" events of 1863? The film re-views this historical moment for an uninformed audience, transforming it from the first in a chain of events leading to a humiliating defeat (the Western powers soon retaliated) into a proud initial blow justified retroactively by the obvious racism of the untrustworthy American characters in the scene.[5]

Finally, there is a telling chronological conflation at work in the scene of the *Pembroke's* return to Shanghai. The Japanese trade mission to Shanghai dramatized in *Signal Fires* is known to have lasted ten weeks, from late spring to summer of 1862.[6] But the *Pembroke* was not shelled until June of 1863.[7] Apparently the thought of showing the opening salvo of armed conflict between Japan and the United States, despite being almost a year later than the time frame ostensibly portrayed, was too good to pass up for the filmmakers. The film alters time twice, adjusting the timeline to have both the *Pembroke* attack and the Taiping departure occur while Takasugi et al were in Shanghai.[8] Since the film's rhetorical force hinges on these two associations, I do not fully agree with Joshua Fogel that the filmmakers "need not have tinkered with the history of the Taiping Rebellion and its links to the Japanese to have told the story they ultimately wished to tell."[9] Without these alterations, the historiophotic impact of the film would have been virtually nil, and even with them, the film fails to land a true hate-the-enemy punch.

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[5] In stressing early victory, *Signal Fires* is similar to *Kaizokuki futtobu* (see chapter four), a film on the 1863 Anglo-Satsuma war which also ends with initial success—made so soon after Pearl Harbor, the analogy is quite clear.
[6] Fogel, *Articulating the Sinosphere*, p. 51.
[7] Under the lunar calendar, the imperial order to expel the foreigners, which of all the domains only Chōshū actually sought to implement, took effect on the 10th day of the fifth month of 1863, i.e. June. See Craig, p. 200.
[8] Needless to say, the pro-state ideologues writing in the pages of Japan's few remaining film journals, *Nippon eiga* especially, made no mention of this massaging of history despite otherwise almost histrionic attention to historical accuracy, particularly the need to capture the essence of the *shishi* spirit.
[9] Fogel, "A Wartime Cinematic Recreation," p. 139.

Appendix C

Echoes of the Bakumatsu in Films Set in the Wartime Present: *Army*

References to the Bakumatsu crop up in a number of wartime films not normally categorized as period films or history films. The most fascinating such example is *Army* (*Rikugun*, Dec. 1944, dir. Kinoshita Keisuke), one of the last major film projects released in wartime Japan. *Army* is known almost exclusively for its remarkable final sequence, in which the camera lingers in an extended tracking shot on the frantic and prolonged attempt by a mother of a young soldier departing for the front to lay eyes on him again for as long as possible before he leaves forever. This sequence, capturing the mother's turbulent emotional state and displaying her hands clasped in a prayerful gesture, sparked considerable controversy, pleasing fans but irritating pro-war ideologues, who censured him in what little film-related press remained in late 1944, and infuriating some in the Imperial Army (official sponsors of the film), provoking one officer to burst in to Shōchiku headquarters to condemn Kinoshita as a traitor.[1] As fascinating as the film's emotional conclusion is, it is *Army*'s little-studied beginning that interests me.

Army opens with an extended, almost five-minute period film sequence[2] showing the Bakumatsu, the temporal site of Japan's emergence as a modern nation, as part of its diachronic project to show the development of the martial spirit in one Japanese family, and in Japan more generally. In fact, *Army* attempts to tell the entire history of modern Japan, particularly its wars, as seen and experienced by the Takagi family: the story begins in the Bakumatsu, and winds its way through succeeding generations of the Takagi family and their attempted involvement with

[1] High, p. 402. Impressive as the final tracking shot through the crowd is, I would argue the most emotionally powerful and (due to its anti-war overtones) daring scene in the film is actually the one immediately preceding the tracking shot; in it, the mother, played by Tanaka Kinuyo, simply sits and the camera remains glued to her face for almost two minutes in close-up, slowly but surely removing all ambiguity, making incontrovertible just how unhappy she is at her son's departure for the front and entirely subverting, through the power of the image, the politically 'correct' speech she has uttered to her neighbor about why she hasn't gone to see him off.

[2] Peter High mentions this sequence, arguing it feels disjointed from the rest due to the 'stilted' acting; High, p. 388.

the various wars in which Japan participated, especially the Russo-Japanese War. Most of the film's running time is devoted to the present-day generation, and the parents' attempts to transform their weak-willed 'crybaby' son into proper soldier material. The father Tomohiko's insecurity and shame at having been unable to enter combat in the Russo-Japanese War due to a weak, illness-prone constitution makes him quite prickly regarding matters of honor, and the notion of having a son potentially unable or, worse yet, perhaps unwilling to serve as a soldier horrifies him.[3] But because the film, in both themes and structure, makes such a strong continuity argument tying Japan's wartime present back to the Bakumatsu, privileging this initial conflict as fundamental, the remainder of *Army* is best understood via analysis of this opening sequence.

After an initial credits sequence overlaid on an aerial long shot of a huge parade ground filled with contemporary soldiers in orderly ranks, *Army* dramatically shifts back to the 1860s. It is a time of ship-borne cannons, and the camera tracks in excitedly into a close-up of one such cannon as it fires before an overlaid intertitle announces that the time is the second year of Keiō (1866), during the Second Chōshū Expedition, and the setting is Kokura in Kyushu, with Chōshū's famous Kiheitai troop under attack by the forces of the Shogunate.[4] Another intertitle announces, as the scene shifts to the Shimonoseki Straits and a Western ship captain greedily looking through a spyglass at Japan, that American and British warships are gathering to launch an attack on Japan, and that the fires of war have spread throughout the country, which faces an

[3] Ryū Chishu, who plays both the earlier generation patriarch Takagi Tomosuke and the latter-day father, failed soldier and schoolteacher Takagi Tomohiko, begins teetering on the edge of parody at times, especially in the ridiculous argument between the volatile Tomohiko and his friend and employer Sakuragi over the latter's offhanded comment that Japan would likely have been defeated by the Mongols had the divine winds not blown providentially back in the thirteenth century; Tomohiko is furious at this suggestion, and after arguing loudly, storms out in a huff.
[4] Peter High is one of the key film scholars to have discussed *Army*, and in many respects his analysis is convincing. He is, however mistaken in claiming that *Army* is showing the Anglo-Satsuma war, since that war occurred in 1863; moreover, the scenario for the film was penned, not by silent-era period drama film director Ikeda Tomiyasu, as he claims (pp. 386-388), but by established screenwriter Ikeda Tadao.

unprecedented crisis. But the focus soon shifts from Bakumatsu chaos in general to the Takagi family in specific, and its conversion from apolitical merchant townsfolk (*chōnin*) to martially minded patriots, samurai-in-spirit, in the face of Japan's dire position in 1866 vis-a-vis the imperialist powers of the West.[5]

If we examine *Army* from the same audience-centered perspective used throughout this dissertation, we discover something no synopsis of the film's script or plot can reveal. In fact, much of the entertainment value, such as it was, of this Imperial Army-sponsored film lay precisely in the exciting battle sequences of the Bakumatsu opening, despite the fact that these sequences depicted what was essentially a civil war between the Japanese themselves, and the dialogue intended to re-frame this civil war in hate-the-enemy terms may not have convinced the audiences for the film, many of whom were surely seeking the spectacle of combat and action, not lectures on how to interpret Japanese history. If they ignored the latter, by now obligatory in any war-related production, in favor of enjoying the former, their own negotiated reading of *Army* may have yielded a far less politically useful message. At this point, late in 1944, it was a rare film that was able to show any of the exciting swordplay and combat once ubiquitous in Japanese period dramas, and all such displays had to justify the inclusion of these elements by recourse to historical continuity arguments: showing Bakumatsu-era combat is appropriate, films like *Army* argued successfully, because the Bakumatsu was the crucible in which the modern nation, and the martial national character, was formed.

[5] One intriguing implication of this expository stance is that, inasmuch as Japan's martial spirit (which overcomes Tokugawa-era caste distinctions and converts everyone into an incipient soldier-patriot) is shown as arising only after being provoked by the encroaching West, Japan's military prowess is not being portrayed as innate or natural but rather at least partially a reaction to the power of the Western enemy. The film's portrayal of the period is startling for another reason: Chōshū was successful in this 1866 war largely because of its importation via British merchants and Satsuma intermediaries of modern arms (including Minie rifles from the United States, where the just-ended Civil War had resulted in a surplus of weapons) and Western military techniques, yet the film's inter-titular and spoken rhetoric identifies the Western powers (the source of Chōshū's success) as the primary antagonist.

Appendix D

Visual Traces of Growing Proactivity in Women's Roles in Late Wartime Cinema

The sorts of liberated gender roles on offer in Tōhō-produced Bakumatsu films like *The Woman Who Wields a Sword* and *Chōji the Famous Sculptor* and Shōchiku's *Bijomaru* (all discussed in chapter five) were also visible in a wider swath of history films by Shōchiku, and also by Daiei.[1] For example, Itō Daisuke's 1942 Daiei hit *Kurama Tengu*, discussed in chapter three, gave a critically important salvific role to Oriki. For Shōchiku, the most prominent anticipatory ad for the late August, 1943 historical drama *Hoppō ni kane ga naru* ("[Warning] Bells Ring in the North"), a two-page spread in the front matter of the August 11, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō*, displays a woman in the foreground brandishing a pistol against the waves of enemies bearing down on her. The film, made by Shōchiku at their Shimogamo studio in Kyoto, could have been marketed any number of ways, and indeed, the text of this very ad stresses 'awesome nature' as the background for the story of human conquest over the natural world; but the image of the woman preparing to shoot is so visually arresting it leaps off the page. She is in the foreground, in focus, while the only male protagonist is relegated to the middle ground and is slightly out of focus, formally confirming what the positioning already suggested: the woman with the gun is the true focal point here. On offer was the spectacle of women engaging in violence, which potentially could excite film-going men and women alike, and alerted even those who did not ultimately go to see this film that the possibility of gun-slinging women existed.[2]

[1] The rise of a cinema of proactive women, most visible in history films of the 1940s, had an antecedent of sorts in *Kojima no haru*, a 1940 modern-day film about a female doctor struggling to make sense of her experiences working at a leprosy hospital on Nagashima. Yet *Kojima no haru* was lauded by the state's film recommendation apparatus, so it evidently ruffled no feathers with its portrayal. See Salomon, pp. 222-223, for more on this film.

[2] In fact, as with most films by the struggling Shōchiku Shimogamo studio (which among other problems did not have access to any A- or even B-list stars), *Hoppō* was not a financial success, placing 53rd (out of a total of 68) in the *Nippon eiga* ranking of 1943 films by total admissions and box office revenue. That said, it still sold over



Fig. 30: Ad for *Hoppō ni kane ga naru* in Aug. 11, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō*.[3]

Nor was Shōchiku Shimogamo the only studio that attempted to capitalize on the potential popularity of the 'woman as armed and dangerous' trope. Most notable is the hit Meiji drama (that is, a history film set in the Meiji period) called *Maria Rūzu gō jiken: Doreisen* ("The 'Maria Luz' Incident: Slave Ship"), made by Daiei.[4]

600,000 tickets, and many people who chose not to see the film might have nonetheless seen the advertisement while browsing through *Eiga junpō*. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 107.

[3] This image can be found in the front matter of the August 11, 1943 issue of *Eiga junpō* (vol. 50).

[4] A true hit, *Doreisen* ranks 11th in the 'total admissions' *Nippon eiga* chart for 1943, one spot above *Chōji the Famous Sculptor*. See *Nippon eiga* vol. 31, p. 106.



Fig. 31: Guns and Women in *Eiga junpō* advertisement for Daiei's Meiji drama blockbuster *Doreisen*[5]

Given Daiei's impressive line-up of period films talent—they had four of the top period films action stars, lacking only Hasegawa—naturally the film features a star-studded cast, headlined by Ichikawa Utaemon. But it is surprising, given Ichikawa's fame, that the advertisements for the film do not always give him pride of place. Instead, in the below ad his image is relegated to the side and is smaller than that of his female counterpart—who, sure enough, is clutching a pistol.[6]

[5] Image is from page 85 of *Eiga junpō* vol. 50 (Aug. and Sept. 1943).
[6] Especially because the woman pictured, who is apparently Aizome Yumeko (in the role of "Martha"), was not even the top-billed actress in the movie (that was Ichikawa Haruyo), meaning the choice to display her in such a dominant

Note, also, that all of these films are offering a more proactive view of women **before** Prime Minister Tōjō finally relented in January 1944 to the idea of women participating in the war effort directly, via entering the work force.[7] To the extent that these films empower their female characters, they are preceding legal and social changes in Japanese society at large.



Fig. 32: Another image of armed, and empowered, woman from *Doreisen*. Front matter of *Eiga junpō*, Aug. 21, 1943 issue.

position in the ad was certainly an intentional marketing tactic, as was the choice to feature the gun so prominently: it was an attempt to excite potential audiences with the spectacle of women committing violence.

[7] High, p. 418. High believes that the film industry did not begin depicting women more proactively until after this point, but the evidence from the historical romance genre suggests otherwise.

Appendix E:
The Meiji Drama

After wartime exigencies made it almost impossible for filmmakers to continue to make period films, many seized upon an innovative solution: to make Meiji dramas (*Meijimono*). These Meiji dramas, perhaps because of their often virulent anti-Western rhetorical tone, have received almost no scholarly attention, except from Peter High, who claims that, with Meiji dramas as with wartime hate the enemy films in general, there is a undercurrent of ambivalence towards the British in Japanese wartime film production, suggesting that Japanese, or at least Japanese filmmakers, may have been more conflicted about seeing the British as enemies than they were the Americans. He cites the example of the villainous yet also culturally refined and rather impressive Elliot cousins in Makino Masahiro's 1943 hate the enemy film *The Opium War*.[1] In support of High's theory of ambivalence towards the British, we could cite the sympathetic British character Medhurst who mourns Great Britain's rapacious imperialism in the 1944 *Signal Fires* (see chapter four), which after all is also a hate the enemy film. But it would be misleading to suggest that Japanese film culture as a whole treated the British ambivalently. My own survey of wartime history film production turned up only these two examples of potential ambivalence toward the British, and moreover, the Eliot brothers' refinement is undercut by their villainous plotting and by the histrionic exuberance with which they arrange to shell Canton at the end of the film.

Even if it were the case that many hate the enemy films showed the British in a slightly more favorable light, it is far from clear whether occasionally exposing Japanese audiences to a more nuanced view of the British would have made much difference given the larger body of

[1] High, p. 369.

more straightforward hate the enemy films and the visual, linguistic, and political similarities between the allies, British and Americans alike. Many more hate the enemy films were produced than are extant today, and without an opportunity to view such films, it is difficult to generalize about whether strategies for depicting the British might on balance have differed from strategies for depicting the Americans. Moreover, even among the surviving films, there are several which show not the slightest ambivalence toward the British, notably *Kamen no butō* (about the infamous Normanton incident in the Meiji period) and *Pirate Flag*, which depicts the British, in their 1863 attack on Kagoshima, as malevolent, indeed maniacal thugs. And there are also cases of sympathy or ambivalence shown towards the Americans, notably the character of Hepburn from Itō's *Kurama Tengu*.

As a consequence, I would argue that cases of ambivalence towards the British do not indicate a bias in favor of Great Britain and against the United States. They are instead part of a more general and not unexpected ambivalence towards the West in general. The decision to portray Western characters favorably is probably thanks more than anyone else to the directors of those specific film projects, namely Itō for *Kurama Tengu*, Makino Masahiro for *The Opium War* and Inagaki Hiroshi for *Signal Fires*, none of whom ever fully capitulated to state pressure for more propagandistic films, instead adding spectacle for entertainment value wherever they could, as in Makino's infamous dance number—to the tune of Tchaikovsky's "Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy" no less—which featured the Toho chorus line in *The Opium War,* or Inagaki's crowd-pleasing choice to have opera star Li Lihua sing in *Signal Fires*.[2] Even *Pirate Flag*, the most straightforwardly committed to its hate the enemy theme of either of the films discussed in

[2] On the subject of entertainment value in *Ahen sensō*, see Washitani, "The Opium War and the Cinema Wars", and Desser, "From Opium War to the Pacific War". Desser also points out on page 42 of the latter article that *The Nutcracker Suite*, from which this song was taken, was not written until 1892, more than fifty years after the events purportedly being depicted in the film.

chapter four, includes elements like songs and dances calculated to increase entertainment value, not the force of the film's ideological message. It seems that Japanese filmmakers, even at the height of the war, were unwilling to abandon their commitment to making entertaining and financially successful films, even at the risk of upsetting the ever watchful censors, and they used the Bakumatsu setting of their films to facilitate this passive resistance.

However, the steadily increasing pressure on the industry to end frivolous swashbuckling period films from the late 1930s onwards, accelerating in the 1940s, led some to try their hands at a new subdivision of the genre: the Meiji drama. Because of the traditional division separating period films (set any time before 1868) and "modern" films (*gendaigeki*) set after 1868, technically any film taking place post-Restoration would be classified as a modern film, but in fact very few films set in the Meiji period were made until the early 1940s. Modern films, as the term implies, were about the present, after all, and to viewers in the 1940s, the Meiji period, especially the first half, was almost as temporally and socio-culturally removed from the present as the Bakumatsu. As a consequence, some filmmakers began turning to the Meiji period as a strategy for making a period film in disguise, precisely the reverse of Inagaki Hiroshi's famous comment that the period films he was making were "films set in modern times but with topknots stuck on." Now, many—including Inagaki himself, with *Muhō Matsu no isshō*, which starred none other than period drama superstar Bantsuma—were making what we might call period films with buzz-cuts.[3]

Virtually all of the most high-profile Meiji drama projects of the early 1940s had a period film megastar in the starring role. Largely defunct after 1941, the period drama production

[3] Sybil Thornton has pointed out that while men certainly experienced a radical break with tradition in hairstyles post-Restoration, women's hairstyles continued to evolve with much greater continuity, so in 1920s thru 1940s films purportedly showing the past, women were shown not in nineteenth-century but in ultra-contemporary styles. See Thornton, *The Japanese Period Film: A Critical Analysis*, p. 25, or location 351 of the e-book version.

industry lent both cast and crew to production of films set in the Meiji era, a natural step considering studios had contracts with these stars, still quite popular, and very few outlets to cash in on their popularity.[4] Some period film stars, notably Ōkōchi, were deployed in films set in the present, often war films, but most shifted gears into the production of history films and, wherever historical justification for a film could be found, Meiji dramas. This was the easiest way of continuing to make entertainment period drama-esque films while circumventing censorship restrictions by setting such films in the 'modern' period—though almost all Meiji films were set in the first half of the period, the years immediately after the Restoration and thus the period of maximum continuity with the Bakumatsu.[5] The narratives of some such films even featured flashbacks to Bakumatsu events.[6]

Pressure on studios to produce hate the enemy—and love the self—films was considerable, and early Meiji history furnished several episodes conducive to such storytelling. For example, the Maria Luz incident of 1872 came to the big screen in 1943 with Daiei's *Slave Ship* (*Doreisen,* lost), the very title proclaiming its incendiary interpretation of the incident, in which a Peruvian ship in port in Yokohama was found to contain Chinese passengers suffering from harsh conditions. Peter High points out that the facts of the incident were considerably altered to convert the United States into the evildoer—for example, in the movie, the passengers are bound for the U.S., not Peru, and director/screenwriter Marune Santarō wrote of his desire to indict the United States for its cruel history of slavery and for its continuation of other inhuman practices like sinking Japanese hospital ships and so forth.[7]

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[4] Anderson and Richie, p. 138.
[5] Ibid., p. 175.
[6] *Eiga junpō,* June 1, 1941 issue, pp. 42-43. The flashback in *Musume tabi geijin*, which is set in the third year of Meiji (1870), turns the clock back to 1860.
[7] High, p. 426.

Significantly, the early Meiji setting and the hate the enemy framework were enough to get approval for the project for period film veterans Marune and Ichikawa Utaemon, the star of the film. They then proceeded to make a film very much in the period drama storytelling mode, full of melodrama and weak on historical accuracy, a situation which pro-state critics were quick to lament. But the ire of quasi-official ideologues that the film failed to deliver a hate the enemy punch, combined with its spectacular success at the box office, is telling evidence that Marune knew exactly what he was doing: he was making the sort of film audiences actually wanted to see, displacing it away from the beloved Bakumatsu era by a mere five years and ensuring it had plenty of melodrama and entertainment value.[8] Yamazaki Masao, movie division head of rival studio Tōhō, which even in 1943 was still committed to making pure entertainment films whenever possible, had even gone on record claiming that such entertainment films could be said to aid the war effort by alleviating subjects' anxieties for a time.[9] Perhaps he genuinely believed in this entertainment-as-morale-booster line of argument, but it seems more likely a thinly veiled attempt to justify making, despite the wartime climate, the sort of "low-brow" entertainment movies Tōhō was good at making and which had continued to generate big box office returns.

This desire to entertain, rather than propagandize per se, is the common thread uniting Meiji mono ideologically with the Bakumatsu history films analyzed throughout this chapter. Films like *Slave Ship* or *Masquerade Ball* (*Kamen no butō*), also from 1943 and also about an infamous international incident in Meiji Japan, were eye-pleasing spectacles full of ballrooms and dresses, lush displays of luxury in a time when luxury had been branded the enemy.[10] In that

[8] *Doreisen* placed seventh overall in 1943 at the box office. See Furukawa, p. 173.
[9] Furukawa, p. 176.
[10] One can get a sense of the film's attempt to depict the luxury of that time period through several surviving stills, including one showing Ichikawa Utaemon standing in immaculate Western dress with Ichikawa Haruyo, garbed (in what must have been a very colorful ensemble) as a Chinese supplicant kneeling before him. See *Daiei jidaigeki senzen hen*, p. 97. On the previous page there is another woman from *Doreisen* (Aizume Yumeko, a Japanese actress coded as foreign via her hairstyle, clothing and other iconography) decked out in gorgeous Western dress.

sense, the desire to show this sort of Rokumeikan-style luxury served a potentially two-fold purpose: it pleased the audience, starved for any kind of visual stimulation in daily life thanks to the proliferation of the bland, shapeless trousers (called *monpe*), and it may also have registered a hidden transcript of protest against the state forbidding such luxuries.[11] Dressing male period film stars up in Western suits and mustaches, as was done with Arakan in *Kahō no hibiki*, was also critical to the marketing effort for Meiji dramas.[12] It was these entertaining features, which had worked so well in history films depicting the Bakumatsu,[13] and the displacement effect of using period film stars and crews who could no longer produce true period dramas and shifting them into an early Meiji setting, which won Meiji dramas immense popularity at the box office during the war.[14]

[11] The film *Kamen no butō* (The Masquerade Ball) features the Rokumeikan itself and the lavishly costumed people at its dances quite prominently, ostensibly to criticize this opulence but also, perhaps, to put it on display.
[12] See the stills from the film, all medium close-ups of Arakan in formal Western dress and mustache and goatee, in *Daiei jidaigeki senzen hen,* pp. 101-103.
[13] Not all Bakumatsu films met with box office success, of course. The big-budget epic *Edo saigo no hi* (1941), starring Bantsuma as Katsu Kaishū, was one notable flop, and *Ōmura Masujirō* another; see Salomon, pp. 309, 317. The decision by the Ministry of Education to recommend these films is itself likely one of the reasons they did not succeed with audiences, as filmgoers equated a recommendation by the government as evidence the film would not be entertaining. See ibid., p. 78.
[14] In 1943, *Muhō Matsu no isshō*—starring Bantsuma and featuring strong hints, even after censors demanded cuts, of an illicit romance budding between Matsu and a war widow—came in second and *Sugata Sanshirō,* with Ōkōchi as top-billed star, third. See Furukawa, p. 173.

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