

TAISHO DEMOCRACY AND SHOCHIKU

The 1923 Kanto Earthquake continued what the Meiji Reformation had begun, the erosion of the Tokugawa-period foundations upon which traditional Japan had rested. Though “feudal” elements remained, the assumptions of the Tokugawa government were hardly useful in a world where many of its creations had vanished.

Actually, the erosion had been going on for decades—the earthquake merely provided a sense of closure. Upon the death of the Meiji emperor in 1912, the major oligarchies which had effectively ruled the country reluctantly withdrew from positions of direct political leadership. Though they continued to oppose many progressive ideals, including the idea of parliamentary rule, their influence gradually lessened. The modern, the new, and the foreign thrived in the new Taisho era, posthumously named after the emperor Meiji’s third and only surviving son, Yoshihito. The Taisho era was a period of lively artistic progress, severe economic stress, and a series of military crises that eventually culminated in the disaster of World War II.

The decade is now characterized as the period of “Taisho democracy,” a term coined by post–World War II Japanese historians to imply a contrast with the much less democratic Meiji period and the plainly repressive Showa era which was to follow. A period of social unrest and major change—particularly in media, education, and cultural matters—Taisho also saw the relaxation of governmental surveillance and censorship, those Tokugawa techniques adopted by the Meiji rulers. New emphasis on the individual and on addressing social inequalities meant that the traditional position of women was questioned, unions were formed to protect workers, parliamentary procedure was introduced, and big business was encouraged.

The cinema was hard hit by the earthquake. Many of the studios and theaters in the capital were destroyed or badly damaged, and the structure of the film industry was seriously shaken. Many old concepts had to be abandoned and many new methods and ideas had to be adopted.

One major change the earthquake hastened was the division of production. Jidaigeki production was now firmly centered in Kyoto, where there were still studios standing, and *gendaiageki* were exclusively made in Tokyo. This made sense. Kyoto was thought conservative and old-fashioned; it was also believed to embody traditional Japanese virtues. Tokyo, on the other hand, was seen as modern and new, and attractively Western. Whether anyone ever intended a division this complete or not, it occurred, and, until the collapse of the genre fifty years later, most jidaigeki continued to be made in Kyoto. Even today, historical television serials are still often shot in the old capital.

Post-earthquake Tokyo took to the movies and, as did Tokyo, so did Japan. Before long, new features were being turned out, eventually some seven hundred a year. By 1928, five years after the disaster, Japan produced more films annually than any other country, and would continue to do so for another decade, until World War II curtailed production.

Movies made money. As public entertainment, films had no rivals. Almost everyone in Japan, it would seem, went. This audience watched Japanese films, foreign films, and perceived all cinema, old-fashioned or newfangled, as mass entertainment.

This new post-earthquake cinema, as Komatsu Hiroshi has said, “virtually destroyed the long-standing and traditional forms on the one hand by assimilating American cinema and on the other hand through the imitation of avant-garde forms such as German expressionism and French impressionism.”¹

Tradition was thus challenged in late-Taisho and early-Showa movies, and no one more firmly flung down the gauntlet than did Kido Shiro when he became head of the Kamata Shochiku Studios in 1924. “There are two ways to view humanity . . . cheerful and gloomy. But the latter will not do: we at Shochiku prefer to look at life in a warm and hopeful way. To inspire despair in our viewer would be unforgivable. The bottom line is that the basis of film must be salvation.”²

This represented a new kind of bottom line. Usually, finances dictate the bottom line, and this eventually proved to be true at Shochiku as well, but initially, at least, the company was attempting to make a new kind of product. This it did—though not always an excessively cheerful one.

In fact, though Kido gathered around him some of the best directorial talent of the post-earthquake era, he could not, despite many efforts, impose such facile restrictions on directors as varied and as talented as Gosho Heinosuke, Shimazu Yasujiro, Shimizu Hiroshi, Ozu Yasujiro, and then Naruse Mikio, Yoshimura Kozaburo, Oba Hideo, and Kinoshita Keisuke. These directors all went on to make serious films, and by no means did most of their work fit the ideals of the “Kamata style,” that sobriquet under which Kido envisioned his salvationist product.

Actually a light and cheerful style was not a Shochiku monopoly. Attractive modern ways

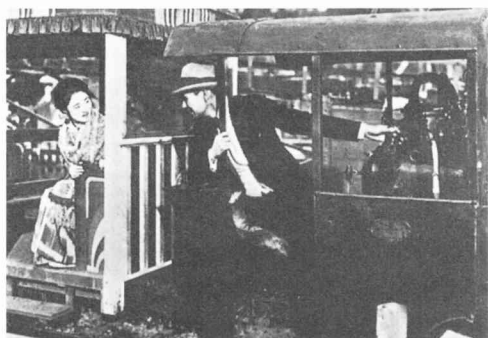


The Girl Who Touched His Legs, 1926, Abe Yutaka, with Okada Tokihiko, Umemura Yoko.

of presenting attractive modern experiences were by now fairly common. Even the more conservative Nikkatsu made a few modern *modan-mono* (“modern pieces”). Examples are found in the films of Abe Yutaka, a director who trained in Hollywood under Ernst Lubitsch and created such successful satirical comedies as *The Girl Who Touched His Legs* (*Ashi ni sawatta onna*, aka *The Woman Who Touched the Legs*, 1926).

Kido might not have been able to fully enforce the ideals he wanted but he was able to prevent what he did not want: “The shimpa style . . . failed to portray real people. Some immutable moral code of the times was taken as a point of departure, the character’s actions were considered to move within the confines of the code as though utterly ruled by it. We wish to resist blind acceptance of some banal moral rule, to use a criticism of morals as a point of departure to grasp the reality of human beings.”³

What was being criticized was nothing less than traditional Japan and those attitudes (a repressive kind of pessimism, a bleak spirit of self-sacrifice, etc.) which were still being fostered in some corners of the bright new Taisho world. However, the cheerful Kamata style could turn just as sober, as is indicated by the fate of several of its pictures. When Ozu Yasujiro’s *I Was Born, But . . .* (*Umarete wa mita keredo*, 1932) “came out very dark,” as Ozu himself phrased it, Kido delayed its release by a number of months and remained famously unmollified when this uncheerful film won the Kinema Junpo First Prize that year. And when Oshima Nagisa made the grave *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no yoru to kiri*, 1960), Kido ordered it yanked out of the theaters three days after its release.



He and Life, 1929, Ushihara Kiyohiko, with Tanaka Kinuyo, Suzuki Demmei.

Some directors, however, if they were cheerful enough, experienced no such difficulties. Ushihara Kiyohiko, one of those on the staff of *Souls on the Road*, returned effortlessly optimistic in 1927, from a year of study with Charlie Chaplin. Such consequent films as *Love of Life* (*Jinsei no ai*, 1923, n.s.) and *He and Life* (*Kare to jinsei*, 1929, n.s.) earned him the nickname

“*senchimentaru* [sentimental] Ushihara,” a title considered more complimentary than not. An example would be *The Age of Emotion* (Kangeki jidai, 1928), nineteen minutes of which still exist, a maudlin but cheerful romance, starring the “love team” of Suzuki Demmei and Tanaka Kinuyo.

Though Kido proclaimed optimistic intentions, he also spoke of “the reality of human beings,” and this not always cheerful quality found its way into the films he produced. Here his better directors were with him. They were young, they were equally sick of the dour shimpa product, and they did not approve of official repressive measures such as the “understood” moral codes the government was beginning to suggest. Having now glimpsed the outside world (even if only through American productions), these young directors were no longer satisfied with “traditional” Japan.

Since the Shochiku brand of gendaigeki was both pro-modern and pro-Western (that these two are not identical remains a major theoretical argument in Japan), anyone examining Japanese cinema must look beyond the storylines. One must inquire into the assumptions of the directors and their associates as well as examine their conjectures and surmises.

THE NEW *GENDAIGEKI*: SHIMAZU, GOSHO, SHIMIZU, OZU, AND NARUSE

A director who first—and some maintain best—exemplified the aims of the new Kamata style was Shimazu Yasujiro. Shimazu had worked on *Souls on the Road* and would become the mentor of Goshō Heinosuke, Toyoda Shiro, Yoshimura Kozaburo, and later, Kinoshita Keisuke, Nakamura Noboru, and Kawashima Yuzo—all directors who were at one time or another in their careers associated with Shochiku. He made nearly one hundred and fifty films and had a strong influence on those who worked under him.

Shimazu’s first notable picture, *Father* (Otosan, 1923, n.s.), was a light comedy about a baseball champion and a simple country girl. It apparently resembled American comedies of the period except that it seems to have relied more on character and mood than upon plot and slapstick. It also exposed class differences in a way unusual for Japanese films.



Father, 1923, Shimazu Yasujiro, with Masakuni Hiroshi, Mizutani Yaeko.

In the old-school *kyuha*, the samurai class was assumed to be on top and everyone else on the bottom; in the *shimpa*-based film, the distinction was not so much socialized as gendered—it was the men who were on top (however insecurely) and the women (however undeservedly) who were on the bottom. In the films of Shimazu and those who worked with him, issues of social class long apparent in Japanese life now became discernible on the screen as well.

The simple country girl in *Father* struggles with her rural, low-class social standing as does the hero of *A Village Teacher* (Mura no sensei, 1925, n.s.). This interest in “people just like you and me,” one of Kido’s original dictates, had the effect of emphasizing “the lower classes” in a manner hitherto rare in Japanese films. People liked the novelty of seeing “themselves” on the screen and the result was a genre usually called *shomingeki* or *shoshimingeki*. Such films about the “little people,” which would later turn pathetic or political or both, began in these light comedies of Shimazu and those who worked under him.



Our Neighbor, Miss Yae, 1934, Shimazu Yasujiro, with Aizome Yumeko, Takasugi Sanae.

The picture by which Shimazu is best remembered, *Our Neighbor, Miss Yae* (Tonari no Yae-chan, 1934), shows how the director and his associates portrayed everyday people and at the same time satisfied modern expectations.

The two neighboring families featured in the film, though lower middle-class, have enough income to be noticeably Westernized (the kids sing “Red River Valley,” for instance, and they all go to the movies and see a Betty Boop cartoon), but these lives are presented in a context very different from that of, say, Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night*, the big foreign hit of the same year.

In *Our Neighbor, Miss Yae*, there is no social subtext as there is in the Capra film, where the heroine is an heiress, spoiled and snobbish, and the hero a workaday reporter, poor but

honest. And certainly, there is no comparable melodramatic plotting. Instead we have an anecdote and, in the place of an assumed social text, we have aesthetic patterning, in the Japanese manner. The daughter (Miss Yae) of one family fancies the son of the other; Yae's sister, too, has her eye on the boy, but it is Yae who moves in with the neighboring family to finish her high-school studies when her own family moves away. Her last line is: "I'm not a neighbor anymore."

Though there is a degree of social commentary (one father says to the other: "If the boys knew how we talk about our jobs, they wouldn't have much hope for the future"), the interest is in the design of the narrative. The film opens, for example, with a slow dolly shot showing two houses with boys playing baseball on the lot in the middle. A missed ball breaks a window (one family has intruded upon the other) and the story begins. The opening scene thus encapsulates the entire plot. Throughout, highly selective realism reveals how a director can make things lifelike while retaining control through that very selection.

One of Shimazu's assistant directors was Goshō Heinosuke, who went on to enlarge the shōmingeki tradition, to deepen an interest in character, and, at the same time, continue to suggest ways in which the Western techniques of cinema could accommodate the Japanese audience.

Though some have said that Shimazu's was the first and only influence on Goshō, there were others as well. First, the younger director was an even more avid student of Western cinema than most of his contemporaries. He said he had seen Lubitsch's *The Marriage Circle* (1924) at least twenty times and named it (along with Chaplin's *A Woman of Paris*, 1923) the greatest Western influence on his work.

This influence is quite apparent in the earliest of Goshō films extant, *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine* (*Madamu to nyobo*, 1931). Usually referred to as "Japan's first talkie," though there were other earlier part-talkies, it remains interesting because of its deft use of sound. The film recounts how a struggling low-class journalist—one of the "little people" to be found in such shōmingeki as this—is kept from concentrating by the jazz-band racket coming from the house next door. Going to complain, he remains to be seduced by the noisy "madame" of the Japanese title. Along the way are various jazz selections, all of them quite loud, and a number of aural jokes—meowing cats, squeaking mice, crying children.

Like the later Lubitsch, Goshō found a way to incorporate sound as a structural element in this early film and to comment on the "all-talkie" as he simultaneously established its conventions. There is even a Lubitsch "touch" at the end, where a couple take their baby out for some air to the sound-track accompaniment of "My Blue Heaven" (a great favorite in



The Neighbor's Wife and Mine, 1931,
Gosho Heinosuke, with Watanabe
Atsushi, Tanaka Kinuyo

Japan). At the lines “and baby makes three,” the happy couple find that they have wandered off and left the baby carriage behind.

Another influence from foreign films was an unusual number of close-ups and the relative brevity of separate shots. As early as 1925, Gosho became known (in contradistinction to, say, Mizoguchi Kenji, already working at the Nikkatsu Studios) as the director who used three shots where others would use one. A later film, *An Inn in Osaka* (*Osaka no yado*, 1954), is composed of over one thousand separate shots, and the following year's *Growing Up* (*Takekurabe*, 1955) contained, in its now-lost integral version, even more. Other contemporaneous American films averaged only three hundred to seven hundred shots. Only rare films, such as *Shane* (1953) or *Rear Window* (1954), had one thousand.

Gosho was one of the Kamata directors most interested in literature—as differentiated from popular reading matter. As we have seen, early Japanese film was much indebted to drama. Many of the popular *shimpa* dramas had been adapted from popular novels. Consequently, films came more and more to rely upon the same type of source material. Some critics have justifiably maintained that the Japanese cinema is singular in its closeness to popular literature.

But melodrama (which is what most popular literature was and is) lends itself to stock situations and stereotypes. In the 1930s, those not satisfied with such limitations turned to another kind of reading. In Japan, this resulted in the genre known as *jun-bungaku* (pure literature), books more closely resembling real life, considered also as “serious” literature. Almost all Japanese novels known through translation in the West belong to this genre. Gosho and those who wrote his scripts were among the many in the Japanese film industry who were dissatisfied with stock plots and characters. In striving for something more approaching truth, they also—perhaps without intending to—prepared for a cinema which was more representational than presentational.

Gosho, however, the fastest cutter on the lot, was also a haiku poet. There is no contradiction in this. Even now, many Japanese (and back then, most Japanese) included in their modern (Western-influenced) lives a traditional pastime such as penning these short lyrics. Here is a haiku that Gosho sent to his friend Ozu Yasujiro as a seasonal greeting on January 2, 1935:

Hot springs here,
and there goes
my first New Year crow.⁴

His composition is conventionally expert, as it includes a seasonal reference, a definite place, and a movement—in this case the felicitous way that first things are awaited on the New Year: the first rice, the first hot bath, even the sight of the first crow. Note the Gosho-like touch of humor since, unlike the nightingale, this common bird is not pleasurably awaited.

Gosho's double-aesthetic heritage (Japanese and Western) naturally affected his cinematic style, which combined “the haiku and Lubitschian *découpage*—and how they function.”⁵ He sometimes used what we might call a haiku-like construction. One of the best known examples is in *Growing Up*. In one scene the young heroine, destined for a life of prostitution but never fully aware of it, innocently enters into a conversation with the adults, who avoid divulging her precise fate. As the scene closes, Gosho cuts to a bird in a cage. We have noticed this caged bird before; there was even a bit of business built around it. Now, however, Gosho makes a comment through cinematic metaphor. Brevity and lack of emphasis restore to the trite symbol much of its original freshness and power, just as in a haiku.

During his long career, Gosho made a total of ninety-nine films. These were of various genres: farces, light comedies, romantic melodramas, family dramas, social dramas. Most rewardingly, these genres are eclectically mixed. Just as he combined Western techniques with an often haiku-like construction, so he could infuse comedy with unexpected emotion.

This creative blending of genres was not thought well of in the West. Sergei Eisenstein once had an opportunity to see Gosho's early *Tricky Girl* (Karakuri musume, 1927, n.s.) and disliked it, saying that it began like a Monty Banks comedy but ended in the deepest despair. What he objected to was the mixing of genres. Indeed, over and over, the films of Ozu, Naruse Mikio, Toyoda Shiro—even Kurosawa Akira—have disconcerted the rigid West by successfully combining elements assumed to be antithetical.

The Japanese audience felt no such compulsion to adhere to strict categorizations. In fact, “Gosho-ism,” which became an accepted critical term often used by Japanese film critics, was defined as a style incorporating something that makes you laugh and cry at the same time. Chaplin was often mentioned as the single foreign example.

There are other similarities between Gosho and Chaplin besides the deliberate mixing of humor and pathos. Both directors—Shimazu Yasujiro as well—make much of the kind of humanism which the shomingeki encouraged and which is perhaps best expressed at the end of *An Inn in Osaka* when the hero, finally transferred to Tokyo, says: “None of us can say he is happy or fortunate, yet things still seem promising . . . we are able to laugh at our own misfortunes, and as long as we can laugh we still have the strength and courage to build a new future.” And so it goes in Gosho’s films. There is a sense of release—the circumstances remain the same but the outlook has changed. In his work we can clearly see the familiar pattern of joining modern methods to traditional assumptions.

Shimizu Hiroshi, a contemporary of Gosho’s at Shochiku, made more than one hundred and sixty films in his long career, though many of the earliest works are now lost. From the first, Shimizu seems to have fit the Kamata style well. Kido recalls that, even in his melodramas, “Shimizu composed his effects, not in terms of the facial expressions of the actors, but in terms of the story itself. His composition became the expressive media. This was his new method.”⁶

Even melodrama itself was apparently reformed in these early Shimizu films. At Nikkatsu, directors such as Uchida Tomu and Mizoguchi Kenji were at the time still staging shimpa drama, relying on stage sets and stage-trained actors. At Shochiku, on the other hand, directors such as Shimazu Yasujiro and Shimizu were using natural locations and young actors who had never been on the stage.

Shimizu’s early *Undying Pearl* (Fue no shiratama, 1929), based on a melodrama by popular writer Kikuchi Kan, used natural settings, such as harbors and stations, in conjunction with sets. *Mr. Thank You* (Arigato-san, 1936), a film about a bus driver, was shot in its entirety on real streets and roads.

Such methods affected the style of the films themselves. It has been suggested that one of the reasons for Mizoguchi’s signature long-held shots was that the actors needed time to generate their performances. If this is so, perhaps the shots were often short in Shimizu films because the actors could not handle long takes. Kido noticed this when he said: “Instead of using facial expressions to draw the drama out, [Shimizu] dissolves the actor’s movements into several fragments, each shot in a short take. This mounting tension of short shots becomes the propelling force of the story.”⁷

Indeed, acting had little to do with a Shimizu film. Oba Hideo remembers that when he was assisting Shimizu, the director rarely, in any usual sense of the word, directed his actors. Rather, he treated them as props, saying that if they acted, they would overdo it. If an actor

asked what kind of feeling was needed, the directive would be to just do the scene without any feeling.

Such treatment of actors was already a tradition—the “Taguchi method,” as we have seen being much practiced by directors such as Ozu. Though down at the Nikkatsu studios Mizoguchi was being equally difficult with his more famous actors, his motivations were different. He wanted outstanding performances and would go to great lengths to achieve what one critic has called the mainstay of Mizoguchi’s films: a grand display of the will of a woman who endures her fate in tears.

However indifferent Shimizu might have seemed to his actors, he was not so with the films themselves. If his treatment of his actors was untraditional (most Japanese directors, then as now, willingly accept whatever emotional interpretation the actor offers), he was much more traditional in his structuring. His films consist of a series of scenes in which the narrative is simply their common mutuality. Each episode comments upon and extends the story, but there is no heavily plotted narrative story to be told. Rather the content is (in the Japanese manner) shaped by the form.

In *Japanese Girls at the Harbor* (Minato no nihon musume, 1933), the story is both anecdotal and mundane: three high-school girl friends all like the same boy; when one of them marries him, the other two go bad and start working in a dance hall. He, no better than they, begins to dally with one of them; she, however, turns noble and leaves. The film opens as it ends: with scenes of an ocean liner leaving a port. This is followed by a patterned sequence of scenes showing two of the girls walking home from school, with the ship in the distance. A boy on his bike joins them. The next sequence is structurally identical, including the same pattern of scenes, but this time the boy appears only in the girls’ conversation. At the end of the film, it is to this same location that the boy and one of the bad girls (now married man and fallen woman) come. Again, the patterning is identical. This kind of structuring does indeed render matter subservient to the form.



Japanese Girls at the Harbor, 1933, Shimizu Hiroshi, with Oikawa Michiko, Inoue Yukiko, Sawa Ranko.

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There are four camera shots, each progressively closer (from frontal long-shot to frontal close-up). There is a shot of the girl, shot of the gun, shot of the boy and other woman (unhurt), and a reverse of the girl in long shot. Later in the movie, the girl finds the woman she aimed at in her bed (the boy having perhaps just left), and the structure is the same. Four short shots of the woman in bed, from long shot to close-up, recall in patterned and formalized form the former sequence.

Though the film has several exaggeratedly Western elements (art-deco dialogue titles, characters with names such as Dora and Henry, the boy listed in the credits as a “half-breed”), the style is not at all Western, though the cutting does perhaps owe something to whatever experimental cinema Shimizu might have seen.

The many parallels—the use of objects to contain emotion (the wife’s knitting becomes a motif almost Wagnerian in its permutations), the ellipses (the boy’s marriage is not shown, it is simply assimilated, after the fact), and the use of startling simile (when a person is no longer needed, he simply vanishes, visibly fading out)—all point to something other than Western models.

This is equally true of *Undying Pearl*, the earliest extant Shimizu film. The appearance of the film is so modernist that one wonders if the director had not viewed the Robert Mallet-Stevens decor for Marcel L’Herbier’s *L’Argent* (1929). In the Shimizu film, the cocktail lounge where two sisters disport themselves is all frosted glass and exposed structure; the dance hall is all spotlights and geometrical furniture. At the same time, this kind of minimalism was not only on display in modern Japanese coffee shops, it was also present in traditional Japanese architecture. Though the hero writes “I Love You” (in English) in the sand with the tip of his companion’s parasol, the elaborate playing with the curves of its opening and closing, employed to flesh out the composition and provide continuity, calls to mind the visual and structural strategies of the traditional Japanese artist.

One is also reminded in this and in many of Shimizu’s films of a kind of structure seen in Japanese fiction—Kawabata Yasunari, for example, particularly in his “modernist” phase, around 1930—where the work is filled with ellipses, unexpected metaphors, and a conclusion which merely stops when the pattern is complete rather than effecting a conclusion. One might say that Shimizu’s “new method,” where composition becomes the dominant expressive medium, can be seen as an assumption about narrative design and as an echo of Japanese literary heritage.

If this is true, then particularly “Japanese” is an eleven-minute episode in *A Star Athlete* (Hanagata senshu, 1937), where thirty consecutive dolly movements are used: “forward or backward along a country road, with the camera always preceding or following the students.” Of this sequence, Allen Stanbrook has also said that “by subtly varying the angles, now dollying forward, now dollying back, now marching at the double or letting the camera

break free to follow, Shimizu here created a sequence close to pure cinema in which the matter of the film is almost subservient to the form.”⁸ It is also an example of the usage of space as ancient as that of the *e-maki*, the painted handscroll where space is unrolled (unreeled) before us. It is also during this sequence that two of the marching students compare their situation with that of Gary Cooper in *Morocco*—an example of Shimizu’s fusing of Eastern and Western concerns.

The “modernist” aspect of the Kamata style found its fullest expression in the work of Ozu Yasujiro, who in his thirty-five-year directing career made fifty-four films, some thirty-three of which survive, though several of these are incomplete. From the first, Ozu was interested in Western films. He once proudly said that when he had his Shochiku interview he could recall having seen only three Japanese films.

Ozu was thus ideal for Kido’s purposes. Though Ozu was originally made merely an assistant cameraman and forced to lug the heavy machine around the set, he was later apprenticed to Saito Torajiro, known as something of a specialist in Western-style comedy. Thus, he soon met his Shochiku contemporaries (Shimizu Hiroshi, Goshō Heinosuke, Naruse Mikio) as well as his future scriptwriter, Noda Kogo, and his future cinematographer, Shigehara Hideo. All were involved in forging the new Kamata style, one which was more progressive than that emerging from Nikkatsu and other studios.

Japanese filmmakers borrowed extensively from native popular literature, from the theater’s reworkings of Western narrative principles, and from foreign (particularly American) films’ conventions of style and structure. It was traditions both native and foreign that gave a basic linear unity to early Japanese films.

New genres also emerged. One of the most engaging of these flourished under the euphonious designation of *ero-guro-nansensu*. None of these three components were new. All were characteristic of late Edo literature, especially *ero*, the erotic. The *guro*, or grotesque, was something often seen in art or drama, and *nansensu*—comic exaggeration or farce—had been a Japanese staple for centuries.

It was this latter characteristic which appealed to the young Ozu. When he was given his chance, he asked to work not under Ushihara Kiyohiko or the other prestigious directors, but under Okubo Tadamoto, a specialist in nansensu productions who called himself a truly vulgar director, a term which—with necessary qualifications—could be applied equally to Ozu and later to Kawashima Yuzo, who also worked under Okubo.

Ozu later explained that his choice of Okubo may have been due to his own laziness and Okubo’s notorious laxness—Okubo’s assistants never had to work very hard. Certainly

another reason, however, was the commonness of Okubo's material and its complete lack of pretensions. The difference between the two directors is that Okubo created from vulgar material; Ozu, from mundane material.

David Bordwell has discerned three principal tendencies at work in the creation of Japanese-style cinema narrative during the period when Ozu was emerging as a director. First, the "calligraphic" style, associated with *chambara* (Japanese sword-fighting), was flamboyant, full of fast action, rapid editing, and bravura camera movement, and had as its chief exponent Ito Daisuke. Second was the "pictorialist" style—derived from *shimpa* and influenced by Hollywood's Josef von Sternberg—where each shot was a complex composition with long shots predominating, in a style later exemplified by Mizoguchi. Finally, there was the "piecemeal" style (one bit of information per shot). In this style, the average shot length ranged from three to five seconds, and the narrative, comprised of neat, static shots, was associated with *gendaigeki* and derived mainly from Lubitsch. No doubt Ozu was drawn to this style because of Kido's partiality to it, but also in part because of the style's generic predisposition, including the fact that Okubo used it. Likewise, Ozu responded favorably to the style "because of the possibilities it holds for mixing playfulness and rigor."⁹ Finally, this resulted in a clean, transparent structure, something which Ozu admired both because it reflected Japanese tradition and defined modernism.

One of the reasons for this was that modernism as an international style was much indebted to Japan. Its continued use, now that it had become internationally fashionable, seemed but natural. The Bauhaus, a school which codified many modernist assumptions, sponsored a style which was comfortable to the people who had created the Katsura Detached Palace, that single structure which influenced the construction of the Bauhaus itself.

Ozu himself never paid close attention to theory. Nonetheless, he did, from film to film, incorporate a number of assumptions about structure. Such assumptions may be viewed as operating within the larger cultural nexus. One of Japan's structural assumptions has always been that visible structure is permissible. Thus, there are no façades in traditional Japanese architecture. In traditional drama, such as *noh*, anecdote takes the place of scenery and a *kata*-like structure takes the place of a plot. Whereas early cinema worldwide revealed its structural elements, false fronts were soon erected to hide these. In Japan, structure long remained visible, and not only because modernism insisted upon it. Thus Japan's visible structural assumptions contributed to the West's definition of modernism, just as Japan's later lack of consistent aesthetic theory contributed to postmodernism. Ozu looked at modernism and identified with what he saw there.

Many other Japanese at the time also related well to modernism. For most, however, modernism merely meant being up-to-date. All periods are "modern," though not all of them so label themselves. For traditionally-minded Japanese, modernism was a way of work-

ing with what they already knew. In the West, modernism questioned temporality, reevaluated it, opposed it, and thus defined itself against tradition. This was very difficult for Japanese, including Ozu, to comprehend. In any event, modernism in Japan was not the polemical affair it was in the West. It was merely one of a plurality of styles, though one which somehow reaffirmed traditional notions, reinforced earlier methods of construction.

Modernism as a Western style also shared with traditional Japan a freedom from accepted realism, a tendency to the formally complex, and a fondness for the elliptical. What is left out of *noh* and of the typical Ozu narrative can, in this case, be equated with what is left out in the stories of Gertrude Stein and the novels of Henry Green.

There is also in Western modernistic narrative a certain openness of structure. These works show how they are made. Even in Ozu's earliest pictures, so influenced by the conventional Western film, there is a like transparency of structure which is Western only in that some modernist Western films had inadvertently appropriated Japanese ideas. Despite all the American paraphernalia, even the early Ozu films show the pellucid structural exposure which we associate with both the traditional ethos of Japan and modernist foreign cinema.

There are many examples of such visible construction. In the eleven minutes that remain of *I Graduated, But . . .* (*Daigaku wa deta keredo*, 1929), a character is introduced in analytical manner: first a foot in a door, then the upper frame of the door, then a hat. In *A Straightforward Boy* (*Tokkankozo*, 1929), nine minutes of which are preserved, a series of gags is shown, each one scene long, with cause and effect plainly visible. *Fighting Friends, Foreign Style* (*Wasei kenka tomodatchi*, 1929), fourteen minutes of which still exist, announces itself as a Japanese version of an American film, *Fighting Friends*. The Japanese flavor was to be enjoyed more in the parallel sequences and the visible



I Graduated, But . . ., 1929, Ozu Yasujiro, with Takada Minoru, Tanaka Kinuyo.



I Was Born, But . . ., 1932, Ozu Yasujiro, with Sugawara Hideo (left), Tokkankozo (right).

linkage of like scenes rather than in the exotic buddy-bonding inherent to the original story.

When in Ozu's *I Was Born, But . . .*, the camera dollies past bored boys at their school desks, then cuts to a similar dolly maneuver past the boys' bored fathers at their office desks, the film reveals its construction through parallels. Its structure becomes visible; its content becomes its form and vice versa. At the same time, the origin of this particular type of sequence was not to be found in traditional examples of Japanese structural exposure but in René Clair's *A Nous la Liberté* (1931), a film released a year before the Ozu film in which parallel dollies connect and contrast bored prisoners in jail and bored factory workers on the job.

Ozu formed his style from all sorts of sources. By appropriating and then using or discarding as necessary, Ozu offers something of a paradigm for the way that Japanese directors often work. There is a great openness about influences. Not only did Ozu learn from Lubitsch, as did everyone else, but often from Mack Sennett and from the Hal Roach *Our Gang* comedies. He took from whatever he saw around him.

Thus Naruse Mikio's film *Flunky, Work Hard* (Koshiben gambare, aka Ode to a Salesman, 1931) was also a source for *I Was Born, But . . .*. The Ozu film, though made in 1931, was released a year later. The two films shared the same milieu, the Kamata suburbs, and the same indications of social inequality. In Naruse, the employee's son beats up the boss's son, and the aggressor's father implores the boy to go and apologize. In Ozu, the sons say they can beat up the boss's son so why does their father have to work for his.

The way in which Ozu combined influences created his methods. For example, Kihachi, the lovable no-good hero of a number of pictures—*Passing Fancy* (Dekigokoro, 1933), *The Story of Floating Weeds* (Ukikusa monogatari, 1934), *An Inn in Tokyo* (Tokyo no yado, 1935), and *An Innocent Maid* (Hakoiri musume, 1935, n.s.)—is based on a real person. Ozu said that when he was growing up he knew just such a person. Ikeda Tadao, his scriptwriter, knew the same fellow, so they created the character together.

Kihachi was also Ozu. In his journal entry for August 8, 1933, the director addresses himself: "Kiha-chan! Remember your age. You're old enough to know it's getting harder to play around with [in English] 'sophisticated comedy!'"¹⁰ At the same time the character is most certainly based on Wallace Beery in King Vidor's *The Champ* (1931). Later, Kihachi was to be metamorphosed in like fashion by another director, Yamada Yoji, in the popular Tora-san series.



The Story of Floating Weeds, 1934, Ozu Yasujiro, with Yakumo Rieko, Sakamoto Takeshi.

Kihachi may serve as an amalgam of the various influences that formed Ozu's way of doing things. In *Passing Fancy* one notices how Wallace Beery's eminently naturalistic performance has been choreographed and structuralized by Ozu and his actor, Sakamoto Takeshi. Their Kihachi could be seen as a modernist construction. His personal characteristics are surmised from his behavior: he always scratches himself in the same way, he stomps his way out of his trousers in the same manner, his typical gestures are typical. The result is humorous, since repetition is one of the techniques that comedians use, but at the same time, the spectator is allowed to see into the character, just as visible structure allows one to see into a film or, architecturally speaking, to peer into a building.

Ozu went on to further refine his means. He made some emerging techniques, such as color, his own. Others he abjured—the wide screen, he said, reminded him of a roll of toilet paper. In general, he minimized his technique: “While I was making *I Was Born, But . . .*, I decided to never use a dissolve and to end every scene with a cut. I’ve never used a dissolve or fade after that. They aren’t elements of film grammar or whatever you want to call it, but simply physical attributes of the camera.”¹¹ He later said that he had fully intended “to film the last fade-out of the silent cinema.”¹²

Such modernist sentiments created the traditional Ozu style, comprised of low-angle shots, a stationary camera, arrangement of characters in the scene, avoidance of movement, full-face shots of the speakers, stability of the size of the shot, linking by means of cutting alone, a prevalence of curtain-shots, performance-based tempi, and choreographed acting. In a completely contemporary setting, using the most modern and mundane of materials, Ozu was also using the tools of the earliest Japanese cinema.

Though the same can be said of some other directors, Ozu was much more rigorous. He is also emblematic of Japanese filmmakers of his generation, directors able to avail themselves freely of both national past and foreign future. Perhaps for this reason, critical opinion can even now find Ozu not only a conservative (“the most Japanese of all directors”) but also a radical modernist.

Looking more closely at Ozu's stylistic characteristics, we might inquire into their origins and nature. Ozu once told his cameraman that it was very difficult to achieve good compositions in a Japanese room, especially in the corners, but that by keeping the camera position low, the task was made easier. As for the veto on dolly shots, there were no dollies that could accommodate such a low camera position.

The majority of Ozu's stylistic means had a single end in view: the creation of a composition which satisfied him. This most traditional of aims he gratified through the most modernist of methods. Experimenting and refining, watching Western films, absorbing influences everywhere, Ozu was also, in his own way, concerned with a kind of traditionalism. This is not only true of his subject matter (throughout his career he only had one serious theme: the

dissolution of the traditional Japanese family) but also of his way of working with it.

Ozu, like many Japanese directors (Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, Ichikawa Kon), was a draughtsman. His pictures (usually still lifes, all in that rustic manner typical of the traditional amateur aesthete, the *bunjin*) are highly competent. Whether he so regarded them or not, his sketches, watercolors, and ink drawings are the opposite of modernist—they are deeply traditional.

Perhaps the most traditional aspect not only of Ozu's films but also of Japanese cinema as a whole is its long-lived and still-continuing concern for composition. Dictionaries define composition as the combining of distinct parts to create a unified whole, and the manner in which the parts are combined or related. This presentation of a unified view is one of the elements in Japanese culture—the garden, ikebana, the stage—and it is not surprising that an acute compositional consciousness should be part of the visual style of the country.

In Japanese film the compositional imperative is so assumed that it is the rare director who fails to achieve it. (If he so fails, as in the films of Imamura Shohei, it is intentional.) Usually, a concern for a balanced composition, symmetrical or asymmetrical, has become an identifying mark of Japanese films—right up to the films of, say, Kitano Takeshi, and beyond.

If Ozu's compositional interests can be seen as traditional, so too, can his thoughts on construction. Critic Nagai Tatsuo once mentioned that many of Ozu's titles refer to the seasons and asked Ozu if that meant he was interested in haiku. The director replied that he wrote maybe three haiku a year, although, in truth, his journals are filled with them—one a week or so. He would at times be self-critical, such as with the following haiku, after which he wrote, "What a bad poem."

Spring rain
Begins to fall
Poor *kotatsu*.¹³

The seasonal reference is certainly there. The fact that the foot-warmer is no longer needed now that the warm spring rains are falling is, true, a bit mawkish. Nonetheless, Ozu himself thought haiku of relevance to film: "Since *renga* [linked classical verse] is similar to film editing, I found it a good learning experience."¹⁴

Among the less traditional of the new gendai-geki directors at Shochiku, and perhaps consequently the last to be promoted, was Naruse Mikio. Naruse eventually made eighty-nine films (forty-four of which have survived), though he was not allowed to begin directing until 1930.

One of the reasons for this relatively late start was Kido Shiro's antipathy. Kido later told Audie Bock that he had disliked Naruse's "absence of highs and lows," his "monotone pace," characteristics, he believed, endemic to the director's style.¹⁵

Light, cheerful, diverting comedies that looked on the bright side were not characteristic of Naruse. The director is famous for having later said that "from the earliest age I have thought that the world we live in betrays us—this thought remains with me." He used to speak of his characters as being caught in this betrayal: "If they move even a little, they quickly hit the wall."¹⁶ He felt the home was simply too narrow a place, yet almost all Japanese gendaigeki films dealt with mainly the home, something which the director found a major fault. Perhaps he was influenced in this view by his reading of such novelists as Shimazaki Toson, Tokuda Shusei—whom he would adapt in *Untamed* (Arakure, 1957)—and Hayashi Fumiko, a number of whose works Naruse made into movies.

Naruse's mature style was probably more formed by the books he read rather than (as it was with most of the other young directors at Shochiku) the films he saw. His style, realistic yet carefully banal and devoted to the ordinary lives of ordinary people, was achieved through simplified scripts in which superfluous lines were cut. Location work, which he disliked, was avoided, as were elaborate sets (which he called nuisances); his camerawork was simple, even severe. The scripts themselves were usually adaptations from serious books, jun-bungaku.

This economy would later stand Naruse in good stead with his producers (when he went to work at Toho, his producers praised him for never exceeding the budget), but the earlier films were praised only by Ozu. After seeing Naruse's *Pure Love* (Junjo, 1930, n.s.), a film Naruse later thought a presage of his mature style, Ozu said that someone who could do that well on only his second film had real directorial strength.

Kido had also noticed, with disapproval, this affinity between Naruse and Ozu. As he later told Naruse, he didn't need two Ozus. In any event, the director's Shochiku days did not long continue. Among the last of the first group of directors to be taken on, Naruse was the first to leave. In 1931, fed up, he went to say goodbye to Gosho, the single director, besides Ozu, who had fought the company on his behalf. Gosho scolded him, saying he was still young and that he would never succeed by giving up.

Naruse did not give up. He went to another studio. In 1934 he joined the Photo-Chemical Laboratories (PCL) which later, under the leadership of Mori Iwao, became Toho. Originally concerned with developing and printing, PCL was by now producing films as well. Here Naruse fared much better. In his words: "At Shochiku I was *allowed* to direct; at PCL I was *asked* to direct. A significant difference."¹⁷ Working considerations were much less structured, producers were much closer to directors, and just one year after Shochiku had seen the last of Naruse, Kido suffered the embarrassment of this dismissed director's winning the prestigious Kinema Jumbo first prize with his *Wife, Be Like a Rose* (Tsuma yo bara no yoni,



Wife, Be Like a Rose, 1935, Naruse Mikio, with Chiba Sachiko, Fujiwara Kamatari, Ito Tomoko.

1935). Naruse's film was also one of the first Japanese pictures to achieve a long-held Japanese ambition of playing commercially (under the title of *Kimiko*) in the United States.

The picture came from a shimpa drama named *Two Wives* (*Futarizuma*; a more accurately descriptive title and one retained for the original release of this film). Naruse himself adapted the drama to film. In it, a daughter desires marriage but, as her mother has been deserted by her father, she must find him to get his consent. The girl's father is supposed to be disreputably living with a geisha, but when she locates him, she discovers that the ex-geisha is not only supporting him but also sending money to her and her mother. The ex-geisha is opposite in all ways from what the daughter had feared and contrasts starkly with the cold, selfish, poetry-writing intellectual woman whom her father deserted. Two wives—the one supposedly good is in reality bad, the other supposedly bad is actually good. And the father, brought back to give his blessing, returns to the good one, leaving the bad one to rue her fate. It is to the latter that the studio-selected title directs its pointed imperative: Hey, wife. Be like a rose! The daughter, Kimiko, has learned a lesson about life and she, too, becomes a better sort of wife.

The play from which the film was made, the work of Nakano Minoru, was a *shinsei* shimpa, or "new drama." The melodrama is toned down and the heroines are much more modern than usual. Kimiko (the daughter) certainly is. She wears the latest Western fashions of 1935, walks independently in front of her fiancé rather than respectfully behind, and is outspoken with her estranged parents. She has what was then called an "American" personality. Yet she is able to sympathize with the more traditional elements of Japan: she respects her parents and, at the end, defers to her fiancé.

When the film opened in New York in 1937, one critic understood it as an example of modern trends in that the heroine is a typical modern Japanese girl with a story that unfolds against a background of the old traditional and the newly Westernized Japan. Unlike Mizoguchi Kenji's *Sisters of the Gion* (*Gion no kyodai*, 1936), the film does not contrast these two elements at work in society so much as it makes a distinction between the modern (Kimiko) and two aspects of the traditional (the two mothers).

Tradition in its ordinary sense is belittled. Mother's classical poetry is made fun of and uncle's gidayu bunraku singing frightens his pet birds and makes Kimiko giggle. Later during kabuki, the father falls asleep to the scandalized irritation of his art-loving wife. At the same time, however, tradition in its better sense is seen in the generosity of the ex-geisha, the sincerity of the traditional father, and Kimiko's gradual awakening to the moral worth around her.

Modernity in this film is consequently not a foil to be encountered but a kind of modish decoration. An office boy whistles "My Blue Heaven," which is—transition—the very tune the boyfriend is whistling. Kimiko is a modern American-like girl who, initially at any rate, competes with her man. Also, she has seen American films. This she indicates when they cannot get a taxi and she says that she knows how to stop one, that she's seen how it's done in the movies. She then steps into the street and repeats Clark Gable's thumb-in-the-air gesture from *It Happened One Night*, a film released in Japan the year before. (She does not repeat Claudette Colbert's more successful gambit in that film, showing a bit of leg. This would have been impossible, even in the modernized Tokyo of the time.)

Other lessons Naruse learned from American films are evident in the plethora of sound effects (often used as bridges, as in the talkies of Ernst Lubitsch) and the constant use of background music. Equally "American" is a super-active camera which is always seeking ways to express itself. One of the most singular examples is a very high shot from over a wisteria trellis, by way of an elaborate aerial dolly, which shows the interiors of several rooms, in succession, of Kimiko's house, but has no other justification. There are also numerous dollies in and out which are not used for the emotional emphasis Westerners would expect, but as ornamentation.

All of this is decidedly unlike the mature postwar Naruse. Still, there is a moral concern present in all of his better films of that time (the quality which made Shochiku-style comedies an impossible genre for him) and a talent for simplicity, lending the films their emotional persuasiveness.

Film critic Iwasaki Akira has said "every Japanese film shows signs of the director's struggle with his Japaneseness—his identity, his tradition. Apart from the few directors such as Kurosawa and Yoshimura [Kozaburo] who try to avoid or go beyond this, there are two who are the most Japanese in both the good and bad senses: Ozu and Naruse."¹⁸ Though Iwasaki

did not stipulate what the bad is, Naruse did when he said: “We’ve continued living a life of poverty on these small islands . . . our aesthetics reflect this poverty. Plain tastes like green tea over rice are regarded as authentically Japanese and since the people are like this, a filmmaker has to resign himself to the limitations of this way of life. There’s no other way to work.”¹⁹

Nonetheless, though Naruse would not have expressed it this way, it is only within limits that creative freedom can be found. Further, the Japanese aesthetic has always found this rewarding—nothing but mud and, consequently, perfect pottery; too poor for furniture, and so *ma*, a geometry of space.

Kurosawa has left an account of how Naruse (whose assistant he once was in 1938) coped with temporal poverty: “His method consists of building one very brief shot on top of another, but when you look at them all spliced together in the final film, they give the impression of a single long take. The flow is so magnificent that the splices are invisible. This flow of short shots that looks calm and ordinary at first glance then reveals itself to be like a deep river with a quiet surface disguising a fast-raging current underneath.”²⁰ Okamoto Kihachi (also a former assistant) tells about Naruse’s *nakanuki* (“cutting out the middle”) technique “where an entire [dialogue] scene is shot with only one person’s lines, then the camera angle is reversed and the other actor’s responses are filmed.”²¹ This frugal method of work (to be encountered in the West mainly in films with smaller budgets) is, as Okamoto points out, very efficient for the director and his crew but terrible for the actors. Even Ozu, often cavalier about his actors, usually filmed his dialogue scenes as written, changing the camera position for each actor as the lines were spoken.

Such a technique might be likened to the attitude of traditional Japanese craftsmen: the carpenter observes the grain of the wood, the mason, the texture of the stone, and both working swiftly and economically with few tools and much skill.

One of the attributes of this attitude is also a tenet of the aesthetic tradition, something which Iwasaki recognized when he said that “Naruse Mikio, in both personal temperament and artistic vision, is totally and purely *mono no aware*, the essence of Japanese tradition, the most Japanese element of Japaneseness.”²²

This much misunderstood if venerable quality of *mono no aware* was perhaps first discussed in the work of Ki no Tsurayuki, a tenth-century theorizer of poetry, and is later mentioned fourteen times in *The Tale of Genji*, and to be evoked many times since then. There have also been many attempts at definition. All are agreed that *mono no aware* connotes a kind of contented resignation, an observance of the way things are and a willingness to go along with them. It advocates experiencing the basic nature of existence, savoring the comforts of being in harmony with the cycles of the universe, an acceptance of adversity, and an appreciation of the inevitable.

The novelist Kawabata Yasunari has been called the purest exponent of *mono no aware* in modern Japanese fiction, just as Naruse has in Japanese film. The director, in fact, worked often with the novelist. Kawabata is listed as “script supervisor” on *Repast* (Meshi, 1951), though it was based on a Hayashi Fumiko novel. Naruse adapted three of Kawabata’s works: *Three Sisters with Maiden Hearts* (Otomegokoro sannin shimai, 1935), *Dancing Girl* (Maihime, 1951), and *Sounds of the Mountain* (Yama no oto, 1954). All are contemporary, all are to some degree modernist, and all are, in their own way, deeply conservative in essence—*mono-no-aware*—esque oeuvres.

Perhaps it is this combination of the contemporary with the conventional, modern frosting on the traditional cake, that appealed to the appetites of the 1935 audience and which won Naruse his coveted Kinema Jumbo prize. The additions from the West are apparent, and retentions from the East are there to be discovered.

THE NEW *JIDAIGEKI*: ITAMI, INAGAKI, ITO, AND YAMANAKA SADAŌ

During the same period that the *gendaigeki* was being developed from, among other things, the *shimpa*, the new *jidaigeki* was being fashioned from the old kabuki-based *kyūha*. And just as the Shochiku contemporary-life films were much indebted to the *shingeki*, so the impetus for the new period-film was yet another recent theatrical form—the *shinkokugeki*, or “new national drama.” When the *shinkokugeki* appeared in 1917 and featured a more literal violence in substitute for the dancelike duels of the *kyūha*, this, in turn, created in the *jidaigeki* a kind of realism new to Japanese period-drama.

One of the first of these new *jidaigeki*, based on a popular *shinkokugeki* play, *The Purple Hood: Woodblock Artist* (Murasaki zukiin: Ukiyoe-shi, 1923, n.s.), was important in determining the future of the genre. The film was directed by Makino Shozo, who had by now broken with Onoe Matsunosuke and founded Makino Motion Pictures, and was written by Suzukita Rokuhei, a young *shingeki* director and playwright whose subsequent scripts would come to define the period-films of the 1920s. Suzukita’s major contribution to the genre was the application of what he called “realist” principles to period-films: “I gave Makino a script filled with real violence, real combat scenes, thoroughly realistic. He said it would have to be done with real weapons . . . what happiness I felt. Several of the actors were actually hurt by the flailing swords.”²³ Equally inspired by American action films and by such swashbuckling local novelists as Nakazato Kaizan and Hasegawa Shin, the Suzukita scripts, and the subsequent films of both the Makinos—Shozo and his son, Masahiro—were soon popular.

It was the apparent, if selective, realism that probably appealed to audiences. And realistic these films appeared, at least by comparison with earlier period-films. Onoe certainly had not depicted such desperate emotions as are to be found in these new heroes—all determined

jaws and defiant gazes. Perhaps this was because he had come from kabuki while these new heroes were drawn from the illustrations in popular novels. None of the sources of the new period-film had anything to do with any other kind of literature. It is estimated that some seventy percent of these films drew their ideas from serializations in newspapers and magazines.

The placement of the actors (as distinct from their acting) was, however, still stage-oriented. Makino's *The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin: A True Account* (Chukon giretsu: jitsuroku chushingura, 1928), a portion of which still exists, indicates the reforms he intended. The acting style was "realistic," that is, the gesticulation was toned down and even the oyama were persuaded to curb their more extreme mannerisms. Stagelike two-dimensionality was often abandoned, and some use was made of depth, particularly during the various processions, arrivals, and evacuations which stud the story. At the same time, Makino ("the D. W. Griffith of Japan") retained the dancelike patterns of the shinkokugeki (referred to as "shimpa with swords") with heavily and unrealistically choreographed blocking of action.

This combination of "realistic emotion" and formalized dueling distinguished the genre through its entire career: one may compare the period-films of Ito Daisuke, Yamanaka Sadao, and Kurosawa Akira and find them, in this respect, similar. One remembers an earlier ideal, *wakon yosai* ("Japanese spirit, Western culture"), a concept which continued to emerge during the Showa era, including this new kind of hero who was very much his own individual but was restrained by the national group-choreography imposed upon him.

This new hero was played by such popular period-film actors as Tsukigata Ryunosuke, Kataoka Chiezo, Okochi Denjiro, Hayashi Chojiro (later to become even more famous as Hasegawa Kazuo), and the most popular of them all, Bando Tsumasaburo. These were young, streetwise toughs who had about them nothing of the noble warrior as portrayed by Onoe. The sword fights of the new genre, as choreographed by Bansho Kammori, were heroic, but the heroism was that of the intrepid fighter of popular fiction: fast and calculated.

Also, as the director Masumura Yasuzo has stated, from the 1920s on, some directors self-consciously set out to study popular literary techniques, after which they incorporated their own findings. He mentions *kodan*—with its abbreviated statements, curt dialogue, and swift shifts of scene—a storytelling format which exerted a major influence on the structure of these new jidaigeki. The restrained *kodan* narrator was not, however, emulated. Instead, the acting consisted of lots of facial gestures plus influences from the fair and high-minded William S. Hart, and the daring and insouciant Douglas Fairbanks. This new sword-fighting samurai was thus an individual, even a nonconformist, a kind of kimonoed cowboy—as epitomized by Mifune Toshiro in one of his later appearances, in Kurosawa Akira's *Yojimbo* (1961).

When the young Bando began playing this kind of hero in 1924, the popular image of the young masterless samurai (*ronin*) as an intrepid but suffering rebel quickly became established. This type has been identified as the *tateyaku*, a term taken from kabuki to

characterize idealized samurai, warriors who are not only victorious in fights but also sagacious men, with strong wills and a determination to persevere. This new hero, however, was also often dispossessed. Though brave and occasionally victorious, he had begun to doubt the idealized code of conduct which had created him.

In the 1930s, another scriptwriter, Mimura Shintaro, extended the self-conscious tateyaku character. His heroes were malcontents in an age of repression. Though Mimura favored the Edo period as his setting, his screenplays also reflected the results of the so-called Showa “Restoration” (1933–1940), that period during which governmental repression began to push back Taisho “democracy.”

While the traditional-minded (including those in the government) criticized and eventually censored or banned works featuring the antisocial heroes of Mimura and others, figures of this sort obviously spoke to the larger audience. The popularity of the new jidaigeki was such that the hero’s role grew to encompass not only samurai and ronin, but also itinerant gamblers (presumed the early ancestor of the present day *yakuza*, Japanese organized gangsters) and the various hoodlums who loitered outside society. The post–World War II gang genre, one which continues even now on television and in the films of Kitano Takeshi, among others, has its roots in the jidaigeki of the 1920s and 30s.

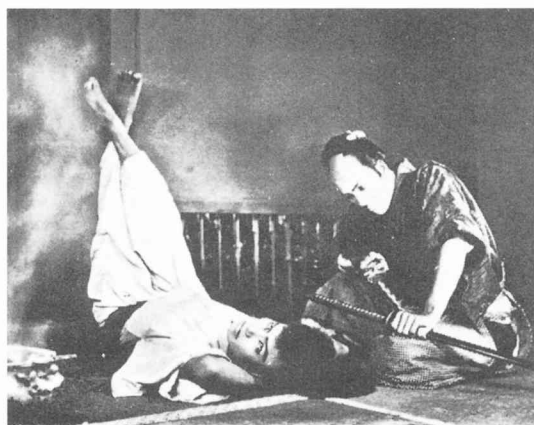
Early ronin, those in Makino Shozo’s *The Loyal Forty-Seven Ronin* (1912), for example, were bound by awful oaths to their former lords. But the ronin in the films of the later 1920s were loyal to no one. Not only did they lack feudal faith, they seemed to lack any faith at all. Indeed, “nihilistic” was a term applied to *Orochi* (1925), written by Suzukita, directed by Futagawa Buntaro, and starring Bando. In this film the ronin—one man against a whole gang of samurai—lives a misunderstood life. To his constant query as to whether there is justice in this world, the answer is always no. In fact, titles appear at the beginning and end of the film asserting that “there is no justice, society judges only by appearances, it is a world of lies.” This may have reflected the view that in turbulent modern Japan, an equally mindless authoritarian government was again emerging.

The multipart *The Street of Masterless Samurai* (Ronin-gai, 1928–29, n.s.), directed by Makino Masahiro, Shozo’s son, and scripted by Yamagami Itaro, was about two men who questioned the feudal code. It went so far that, even though it won the Kinema Junpo award for 1928, it was much cut before release. Nonetheless, it proved of lasting influence on the work of Yamanaka, Kurosawa, Kobayashi, and later filmmakers. The film was remade (sight unseen, though the original scenario exists) by Kuroki Kazuo in 1990, and the original director is listed in the credits as advisor.

Another film so outspoken that it ran into trouble was Ito Daisuke’s *Man-Slashing, Horse-Piercing Sword* (*Zanjin zamba ken*, 1929, n.s.). A young samurai is hunting for his father’s murderer—a common enough opening to the ordinary historical film. But, unlike



The Street of Masterless Samurai, 1928–29, Makino Masahiro, with Minami Komei.



Man-Slashing, Horse-Piercing Sword, 1929, Ito Daisuke, with Tsukigata Ryunosuke, Amano Jun'ichi.

the typical hero who always battles his way to the top, this samurai meets only reversals. Eventually, in order to live, he must steal from the farmers, who are just as poor as he is. When he learns that the reason for their poverty is the oppression of the local government, he joins them in their revolt, an act further motivated by his discovery that his father's killer is the local overlord.

Itami Mansaku further enlarged the role of the period-protagonist. A boyhood friend of Ito Daisuke, he later, along with Inagaki Hiroshi, became assistant to the older director. Itami's first films were for Kataoka Chiezo, who not only owned his own production company, but was an actor as well, capable of projecting the type of hero the new jidaigeki needed. He was heroic without being a superman; he portrayed an ordinary person who happened to do the right thing at the right time. For him, Itami created a series of ironic and sometimes satirical historical films.

Peerless Patriot (Kokushi muso, aka The Unrivaled Hero, aka A Dreamy Patriot, 1932) was a typical film with this new hero. In the existing twenty-one minutes, a decidedly irreverent young swordsman impersonates his high-born samurai fencing teacher. The situation was developed in a manner which ridiculed many of the feudal traditions, particularly those which had survived in modern Japan. That the imposter could not be distinguished from the lordlike teacher and bested him in a parody finale openly questioned basic feudal precedents.

Itami furthered his radical humanization of the samurai in *Kakita Akanishi* (Akanishi Kakita, 1936). In this adaptation of a Shiga Naoya story, the good-hearted hero joins other like-minded samurai to defeat the bad retainers who surround an essentially stupid lord. Itami Juzo, the director's son (who preserved this film and even made an English-titled print), maintained that the film was a political allegory. The bad retainers represented the militaristic government, and the intellectually challenged lord, the emperor. Good-hearted samurai Akanishi cleared the way for those later, postwar heroes who so resemble him. When Kurosawa's "yojimbo" first appears on the screen, swinging his shoulders in that characteristic manner, he is walking straight out of this tradition.



Kakita Akanishi, 1936, Itami Mansaku, with Sugiyama Shosaku, Kataoka Chiezo.

Along with new dramaturgy and characterization came new cinematic techniques. They exemplified the iconoclastic intentions of the new jidaigeki. Itami wrote (bravely, in wartime 1940) that "the first thing we learned from American movies was a fast-paced lifestyle . . . the next, a lively manner and a readiness to take decisive action . . . we learned to take an affirmative, purposeful, sometimes even combative attitude toward life."²⁴

In 1928, Itami, in collaboration with Inagaki Hiroshi, made *Tenka Taiheiki* (1928) one of the first *matatabi* ("drifters") movies. The dialogue titles used colloquial speech, and the heroes were contemporary with their audience. It was Inagaki who regarded the jidaigeki as

“*chommage o tsuketa gendaigeki* [gendaigeki with a samurai topknot].”²⁵ He consequently availed himself of all the new cinematic techniques coming from the West as had his mentor, Ito Daisuke (often called “Ito Daisuki” [“I Love Pan-Shots”] on the set because of his predilection for the latest imported cinematic styles).

Nonetheless, much of the dramaturgy of the traditional drama was somehow retained in jidaigeki. This was particularly evident in the sword-fight scenes, choreographed with details shown in sudden close-up: visual compositions which held the eye. Like the traditional prints upon which they were sometimes based, these compositions dramatized scene and encapsulated story. And, as in the traditional drama, one scene followed the other, impelled not so much by storyline as by aesthetic spectacle. As Donald Kirihiro has noted: in, say, *The Red Bat* (Beni komori, 1931) by Tanaka Tsuruhiko, all that flashy tracking, panning, spinning, canting, and fast cutting “is there for just that reason: flash.”²⁶

This combination—guided narrative and unleashed spectacle—is seen at its most spectacular in the films of Ito Daisuke. In *Jirokichi, the Rat Kid* (Oatsurae Jirokichi goshi, 1931), Okochi Denjiro, a Robin Hood–like robber (“a life rich in nothingness” says one of the titles), has a series of adventures which lead to a completely decorative finale. Festival lanterns in one compositionally perfect tableau after another stud the sequence, culminating in, not dramatic revelation, but aesthetic enjoyment.

A fine example of Ito’s prowess with regard to the pictorial is seen in *Diary of Chuji’s Travels* (Chuji tabi nikki, 1927), a film thought entirely lost until part of it (one hour and thirty-six minutes) was discovered in 1991. Its gambler-hero (Okochi Denjiro), predecessor of modern yakuza-movie heroes, is caught in the perceived opposition between *giri* and *ninjo*, the traditional conflict between duty to society and duty to oneself, rendered in terms easily recognized by the audience.



Diary of Chuji's Travels, 1927, Ito Daisuke, with Okochi Denjiro.

Much of the film looks like a modern—specifically American—movie. Yet it often segues into a decidedly Japanese sensibility. The dialogue scenes are in medium close-up, there are two shots with a forty-five degree shift of viewpoint, and eyelines follow international standards. Yet, in the sequence at the saké brewery, we follow a downward pan from darkness to patches of sunlight, beams, ropes, and finally to the men manning the works. A written title appears in this initial darkness and continues all the way through the pan—in effect turning the screen into a calligraphy surface, a two-dimensional page.

The following sequence, in the saké brewery yard, is Japanese aesthetic bravura. The area is littered with enormous empty barrels, some on their sides, and so the scene is filled with circles. Shot after shot emphasizes ceaselessly the resulting circular compositions. A girl wanders in circles; children play circular games: the design has become the story. And during the remainder of the film, scenes return to the compositions of this sequence, reminding us of it. The heroine goes to sit in the circle of a big, empty vat; later, children form a dancing circle around the distraught samurai hero.

Such apparent design-as-narrative reminds one of traditional printmakers, particularly Hokusai, and brings to mind the printmaker's insistence that visual schemes can take the place of plot. We can readily understand the role that traditional composition plays in Japanese cinema. At the same time, decorating this pictorial balance are details of a quotidian realism. One of Ito's characters is shown realistically brushing his teeth, realistically spitting. After all, the director had originally been a scripter for Osanai Kaoru, one of the first "realistic" shingeki authors.

The joining of concern for aesthetic design and realistic ("undesigned") acting in Ito's film is evident in the stylization of the sword fights which ornament the storyline. These are striking combinations of movements, both those of the actors and those of the camera. Long, racing dollies, flashpans all over the place, close-ups of the various deaths, and lots of shinkokugeki extras scampering about. The last of these fights concludes with a slow march through the forest, the survivors bearing the fatally wounded Chuji through the (blue-tinted) night, the water glistening, the leaves softly moving. This procession is far more beautiful than it need be and it is beautiful for its own sake: an aesthetic display which enhances the charm and pathetic vulnerability of our dying hero.

Set in contrast to this is the finale sequence, in which the hero in his hidden fortress holds a long dialogue through which the mysteries of the plot are unraveled (a conclusion typical of this genre), while elsewhere the authorities search for him. After the open-air excitement of the fight, and the nocturnal beauty of the journey, the close-ups are now tight. A gun is produced to ward off the attackers who have forced open the door; we turn and look at the dying hero, his breath visible in the cold. All the exhilarating choreography has brought him to this, a close-up which chronicles his last moment. He smiles acceptingly—

this is what the feudal world has done to him and he (a modern man in Edo times) smiles.
The End.

Perhaps the finest of the directors of the new jidaigeki was Yamanaka Sadao, though, dying at twenty-nine, he made the fewest films. He completed twenty-three pictures in seven years, only three of which have been preserved. Yamanaka's ambition was to further modernize the period picture. Such modernization was the stated manifesto of a group of eight young Japanese filmmakers who called themselves the Narutaki-gumi [Narutaki gang], after the area in Kyoto where they lived and where they jointly wrote under the collective pseudonym of Kimpachi Kajiwara.

Yamanaka, who worked with the Nikkatsu studios, was not interested in a nihilistic hero nor in a savior of the common man. Rather, he wanted "to shoot a jidaigeki like a gendaigeki,"²⁷ the kind of picture that Inagaki called contemporary drama with a topknot.

The differences between Yamanaka and the more representative Itami can be seen in a comparison of their separate versions of the same story. In 1935, they both made a film about Kunisada Chuji. Itami's was *Chuji Makes a Name for Himself* (Chuji uridasu, 1935, n.s.) and Yamanaka's was simply *Chuji Kunisada* (Kunisada Chuji, 1935, n.s.). The former picture was oriented toward social criticism and dealt only with the young Chuji after he had abandoned farming because of oppressive taxes and a despotic government. That a farmer had turned into a gambler was the concern of the picture. Yamanaka, on the other hand, was interested only in character. His Chuji, under an obligation to a man who hid him from the authorities, must kill to pay back his moral debt. This moral dilemma was used to create an atmosphere. Yamanaka was not specifically concerned with social criticism but with emotional problems and the way in which they reflect character.



Humanity and Paper Balloons, 1937,
Yamanaka Sadao, with Suketakaya
Sukezo, Kawarazaki Chojuro, Naka-
mura Gan'emon.

Yamanaka's finest film was his last, *Humanity and Paper Balloons* (Ninjo kamifusen, 1937). In the opening sequence, a former samurai has committed suicide. His neighbors talk about the death and one says: "But he hung himself, like a merchant. Where was the man's spirit of *bushido*? Why didn't he disembowel himself like a real samurai?" To which another replies: "Because he no longer had a sword—he sold it the other day for rice." This is the familiar death-theme opening, so typical of the conventional period-drama, with its reference to *bushido*, "way of the samurai." But there is an enormous difference. In the conventional product, the hero would have come to a glorious end. Not so, however, in this critical, contemplative, and contemporary film. The sword, which supposedly symbolizes a samurai's life, has been sold so that the samurai, ironically enough, might live.

Sato Tadao has said that this film is "a consistent endeavor to shatter old stereotypes."²⁸ The characters speak modern Japanese instead of the thees and thous of sword-fight melodramas; the samurai behavior is no longer ritually stylized; there are no conventional generalizations, and those that do appear are used for ironic purposes. The result is a freshness, a freedom, in which serious problems are treated lightly.

In the first of Yamanaka's surviving films, *The Million Ryo Pot* (Tange sazen yowa: hyakuman ryo no tsubo, 1935), the hero is a *chambara* (sword-fighting) character as famous as Kunisada Chuji. Tange Sazen is meant to be a superhero despite his missing eye and lopped-off arm. Here, as played by Okochi Denjiro, however, he is a shambling swordsman, slow to think things through and incorrigibly lazy.

Yamanaka's hero does not realize just where the priceless pot is, though this has been obvious to the spectator since the beginning of the film, and his attempts to find it are consequently amusing. Like Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* (Tsubaki Sanjuro, 1962), a picture in many ways indebted to this Yamanaka film, he is limited as well as skillful, and therefore completely human. Such was not Nikkatsu's original intention. *The Million Ryo Pot* was to have been a film by Ito Daisuke, who would have created a much more serious and heroic picture had he not left the company to go to Dai Ichi Eiga. Yamanaka was a very different director from Ito.

The second of Yamanaka's surviving films is the Nikkatsu feature, *Sosbun Kochiyama* (Kochiyama Soshun, 1936). Written by Mitsumura Shintaro, it was originally conceived as a period-melodrama, after a kabuki play by Kawatake Mokuami. In the rewriting and directing, Yamanaka changed the underworld thugs



Million Ryo Money Pot, 1935, Yamanaka Sadao, with Okochi Denjiro (right).

into warm-hearted, good-natured people. He did the same thing to Mitsumura's kabuki-based script for *Humanity and Paper Balloons*. The original version has intrepid villains fighting each other, but in the finished film there is little of such action: the people are quite ordinary, incapable of such heroic resolve. Among the reasons Yamanaka so humanized his scripts at the very time when there was a governmental call for heroics is that he valued *ninjo* rather than *giri*, personal rather than institutionalized feelings.

In Yamanaka's last scenario, *Sono Zenya* (1939), which he did not live to direct, *ninjo* becomes something like bravery. A family running a Kyoto inn during the Meiji "revolution" is caught in the midst of the Shinsengumi uproar. The Shinsengumi, a pro-government army usually portrayed as a benevolent band of Boy Scouts, is here depicted as something approaching the Red Guard. When one considers the date of the work, one realizes what Yamanaka is doing. The wonder is that he could have gotten away with it—implicitly comparing a violent and destructive Shinsengumi with a violent and destructive contemporary Japanese army. Maybe he did not get away with it after all. He was drafted shortly after.

Yamanaka had much in common with Ozu, one of his closest friends. Both were what we would now call liberals, both inculcated unpopular truths, and both used what we now recognize as minimalist techniques. They stripped sets of all but essentials; they limited gestures; they expressed ideas indirectly through jokes, asides, and short, suggestive conversations. Like Ozu, the younger director began early on gathering about him actors with whom he could work. Though Yamanaka used such stars as Arashi Kanjuro and Okochi Denjiro, he also cultivated his own group. In his later films, he used members of the Zensenzu, the Progressive Theater, in addition to such new actors as the now famous Hara Setsuko, who appears in *Sosbun Kochiyama*.

The acting in both *Sosbun Kochiyama* and in *Humanity and Paper Balloons* is noteworthy. There is an ensemble quality which is rare on the Japanese screen and was only duplicated in such perfect form in Kurosawa's later films, such as *The Lower Depths* (Donzoko, 1957). In Yamanaka's films, there is also a reliance upon performance which is rare in Japanese films of the 1930s. For example, in *Sosbun Kochiyama*, the entire sequence in which two of the minor characters attend an auction consists of a medium shot of the two alone. We never see the rest of the crowd, and we have no idea what they are bidding for, but the ensemble acting, one actor playing off the other, allows us to follow the action with interest and amusement.

Equally minimal are the interiors, often filmed from slightly below (just as Ozu's films were being shot), showing limited period-detail as well as ceilings. Story structure is also kept to what is necessary, and only that. Series of scenes (younger brother in a fight, elder sister in trouble, complications over a fake sword) are kept separate, with many purposeful ellipses in the story. In one such scene, the younger brother takes his knife and creeps into the house of

one of the bad men. The camera stays outside the closed *shoji* door. We hear voices and see shadows against the paper panes. There is a glimpse of the knife silhouetted. The light is suddenly extinguished. We hear an exclamation. That is end of the sequence. We are never directly told the outcome (though we learn it from the context of the rest of the film), nor what it might mean.

Plot in its causal sense is missing, but all the story strands are forcibly pulled together in the action-filled finale during which repressed anger erupts and the full panoply of *chambara* swordplay is displayed. The whole town, all those sets we have been obliquely viewing, is now used as the men battle up and down the narrow alleys. Though the pace is very fast, the editing never loses us. From a narrowly framed alley we are turned forty-five degrees to a bridge crossing a ditch, a perspective that affords a view of three different fights (on three different bridges) going on in town. In the end, the main ruffian dies a samurai's death as he allows the unhappy younger brother to escape.

Action leads to resolution, though that is not its only purpose in the film. This violence (like so much Japanese blood-letting) is an aesthetic spectacle. The patterns of disorder are composed into compositions which filter the excitement and render beauty from chaos. By simplifying action, reducing it to its individual elements, excitement may not be enhanced, but appreciation is.

We recognize this forced simplicity in the concluding night sequences. This is expressionism (of which more will be said later), the nominally German style for indicating a single frame of mind through everything the artist shows. By the 1930s, the style had been completely Japanified. Expressionism no longer contained any deranged *Doctor Caligari* connotations and was used, instead, as one more element of a complete presentation—the mind of the viewer made visible.

There are many other Western influences in the work of Yamanaka, particularly in story development. Hasumi Shigehiko has discovered elements from an American comedy *Lady and Gent* (1932) by Stephen Roberts in *The Million Ryo Pot*, and sections of Jacques Feyder's *Pension Mimosa* (1934) in the final shots of *Humanity and Paper Balloons*. Yet there is also much that indicates earlier Japanese models. For example, Yamanaka uses a narration technique, taken from both *kodan* and the balladlike *naniwabushi*, where the authoritative voice, at first anonymous, is later revealed as a character in a subsequent segment. The first scene of *The Million Ryo Pot* is a castle, whole and in some detail, which we examine as a voice begins the tale. When the director finally cuts inside the castle, the voice is revealed as that of a retainer telling the daimyo the secret of the pot.

At the same time some of the dialogue might have come out of Lubitsch. Bride turns to groom and says: "That old pot is going to look pretty strange to our wedding guests," a remark which sets the desirable container on its adventures, just as firmly as the loss of the

lottery-ticket-carrying coat sends that garment on its journeys in René Clair's *Le Million*, a 1931 film that was enormously popular in Japan. Like the Clair film, this Yamanaka piece is also conceived as an operetta. There are festival dances and songs—"Just a pinwheel turning in the wind" sings the entertainer heroine, presumably of herself.

There is also much ridicule of the foolish paraphernalia of the old-fashioned *kyuha* plot, often concerned with military secrets. One such secret is hidden in a pot, hence its apparent value. The samurai searching for the important container says that all the fuss "makes it sound like a vendetta," a line repeated twice in the film, lest differences from ordinary period films not be noted by the viewer.

And since the ordinary period picture is about decision and intrepid action, we have Yamanaka's hero absolutely refusing to do something and in the next scene doing it. This adamant refusal—followed by an inexplicable reversal indicating something less than a resolutely courageous decision—is used on three different occasions in the film, attesting to its satirical usefulness. The film is, in effect, a loving parody of the *chambara*. That Kurosawa learned much from this film is evident in *The Hidden Fortress* (*Kakuishi toride no san akunin*, 1958), where the adventures of the gold bars parallel those of the missing pot.

Technically, Yamanaka melded native and foreign influences into a most persuasive style. In speaking about his technique he said that once he found where to put his camera, his problem was solved. "As regards this position," he added, "I do the reverse of what Pudovkin taught."²⁹ (What Pudovkin taught was that montage was "the highest form of editing . . . the foundation of film art.")³⁰ Yamanaka, like most Japanese directors, edited relatively little, at least in comparison with the Russians. Editing usually simply involves *découpage*, nothing like what Pudovkin meant by montage. Yamanaka's concept of space was different, hence the prime importance of the camera position, his vantage point.

In *Humanity and Paper Balloons*, Yamanaka presents a contrast of two areas of space—the only ones shown. One is the world inside the gates of a tenement quarter, the other is the world outside them. The difference between these worlds, the demonstration of their separateness, is emphasized in both the opening and closing sequences. In the first, the gates are closed and the residents confined while the authorities investigate a suicide. In the last, the gates are again closed, this time to check the deaths of the hero and his wife. This reticulation of space—a network of scenes describing a specific area—is fitting in other than cinematic terms. The film is based on *Kamiyui Shinzo*, a Mokuami kabuki drama that, like most in its genre, is geometrical in its use of space.

The concern for the concepts of inside and outside is also a very Japanese one. *Uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) are considered much more defining, and limiting, than they are in the West. There is also a Japanese assumption that the former is safe and the latter is not. The assumption therefore fittingly delineates a story where the outside is a repressive

governmental area distinguished by its lack of ninjo, the quality of human feeling so touchingly depicted inside the tenement, the closed quarter.

In the second sequence of the film—a lane outside the tenement—we find that the camera is placed level with the human eye and that all shots are economically edited along a single axis. In this, Yamanaka was certainly influenced by Ozu. Though there are asides during the length of this sequence (one of them is to introduce Unno, the masterless-samurai hero of the film), in the main the camera placement of each scene during the progress along the alley varies not at all—the angle coinciding with the axis.

This way of working is not often seen in American or European films of the period because these scenes could be said to “not match,” also because their sequence violates one of the assumptions of international cinema style, namely, that a film progresses by opposing shots. Shots which are compositionally similar are thought to confuse, though this Yamanaka sequence is proof that this is not necessarily so. The theory about opposing shots seems to be based upon a Western assumption that narrative can proceed only through conflict and confrontation, compositionally as well as otherwise. The idea of a narrative proceeding through harmony and similarity, not often encountered in Western cinema, is seen again and again in Japanese movies.

What this sequence does provide, and this would seem to be Yamanaka's concern, is a literal depiction of the alley. Once we have been led so carefully along it, we become thoroughly familiar with it, and we believe in it. One is reminded of the old Japanese studio rule that in the initial seven cuts the whole house, or main location, must be established. Such ritualized rules were commonly disregarded when the exigencies of production took over, but in some pictures, such as those of Yamanaka, something like the old rules prevailed, and overall concepts as to how space was to be depicted remained.

In showing us the tenement alley, the director moves along its length, shot after shot. A precise rendering of the street is given, a believable accounting of its space, a logical introduction of the characters, and the setting up of half of the spatial metaphor. This is the closed and crowded alley itself which, though invaded by officials from time to time, is really the safer part of the world.

When the outside world (the town outside the tenement district) is delineated, we are given no such spatial grounding. We do not know the location of the pawnbroker's house in relation to our alley, nor the location of the bridge where one of the main characters will be killed. The temple gate, the fairground, all those “outside” locations are separate, distinct, cut off from each other. They lack the continuity of the tenement, which we were shown whole and complete. Consequently, it is the tenement which feels safe, like home, and it is the outside which is dangerous, or alien. “Spatially, Yamanaka—having set up this opposition of spaces, having fully reticulated one and left the other carefully and threateningly

unreticulated—has created for himself a bipolar structure.”⁵¹

Among these new jidaigeki, these “gendaigeki with topknots,” it was commonly thought that Inagaki Hiroshi’s works were sentimental but lyrical, that Itami Manasaku’s were intellectual but ironic, and that Yamanaka’s, with their minimal elegance and beautifully flowing rhythms, were in a class all by themselves—the highest. It is also conceded that with his early death (sent to the front as a common private, he died of dysentery) Japanese cinema lost one of its finest directors.

NIKKATSU AND THE SHIMPA: MIZOGUCHI KENJI

Though the *kyuha* had been effectively transformed into something more complicated, shimpa-based films continued (and indeed still continue today in the daytime serials of contemporary television) in their established pattern. Nevertheless, some changes were taking place.

Nikkatsu, home of the shimpa-film, allowed Suzuki Kensaku to make a more involved kind of drama in *Human Suffering* (*Ningen ku*, aka *Human Anguish*, 1923, n.s.), a multi-stranded story, with nocturnal photography, dialogue titles, faster editing, and a kind of realism: since the film was about the hungry poor, Yamamoto Kaichi, the leading actor, was not permitted to eat before and during his performance.

Murata Minoru, who had directed *Souls on the Road*, left Shochiku and went to Nikkatsu, where, in 1924, he made *Seisaku’s Wife* (*Seisaku no tsuma*, n.s.), the first of several “new style” films. In it a young wife, unable to tolerate her husband’s return to the Russo-Japanese front, deliberately blinds him. After prison she returns to her sightless mate, begs his forgiveness, and drowns herself. When Seisaku learns this, he forgives her, then jumps in after her.

This was all very shimpa-like, but there were differences. For one thing, the unhappy wife was played not by a man but by one of the first Japanese actresses, Urabe Kumeko, an amateur shortly to become a star. Here, too, was a heroine who was active and forceful, if in a subversive manner. Also, since the story is that of a soldier about to go to the front to fulfill his sacred duty to the divine emperor, the picture would become, in the eyes of some critics, one of the first antiwar films.

To create this movie, Murata used what he called “symbolic photographicism,” a realism in which all the characters were lifelike, yet their actions had symbolic, almost allegorical meanings. In her final sequence, for example, Seisaku’s wife is shown, or rather displayed, bound in fetters—both a real character and an abstract symbol. That this particular image had been borrowed from Karl Heinz Martin’s film *Von Morgens bis Mitternacht* (1920), and would again be borrowed for the final scene of Kinugasa Teinosuke’s *Crossroads*