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Japanese film and television

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Although the motion pictures and television have sometimes been rivals in Japan, they share a complex history of shaping and being shaped by struggles over defining a new modern mass culture in a country that was itself experiencing conflicts over how to delineate the Japanese nation and its culture within capitalist technological modernity. Even the very definition of these media – their essence, meaning, and function – was the focus of debates. The question was not just how film and television should represent – or construct – Japanese culture at a time of increasing Westernization and a rise in Japanese global power, but also how meaning was to operate in an age of mass cultural production and consumption. As Japanese authorities both worried about and attempted to manage these media and their viewers, foreign audiences appropriated them, and their asserted difference from norms in the West or the rest of Asia, for their own ends. This chapter outlines these conflicts chronologically, focusing particularly on cinema.

Introduction

As the first non-Western cinema to achieve considerable success competing with Hollywood film both abroad and at home in Japan, Japanese film has been a singular focus of enquiries regarding the source of its achievement. For American critics like Donald Richie (Anderson and Richie 1982) or Japanese writers like Satō Tadao (1982), this was due to the difference of Japanese cinema, which they located in continuities between Japanese film and traditional principles found in haiku, picture scrolls, noh, kabuki, Shinto, or Zen. Noël Burch (1979) offered the most potent and stimulating version of this argument, countering teleological histories of world cinema, which saw more "cinematic" methods replacing the "theatrical" models of early film by the 1910s, by pointing to a Japanese cinema that he argued maintained aspects of "primitive" film up through World War II because it had consciously chosen its aesthetic traditions (the "presentationalism" of theater, the foregrounding of formal play, etc.), over the realist representationalism of Hollywood film. While Burch saw the difference of Japanese cinema largely disappear in the postwar, with a few exceptions like Kurosawa Akira, he still valued Japanese film for showing there were alternatives to classical Hollywood filmmaking that could exist on a popular level.

Fans and scholars of cinema have thus sought out alternatives to dominant modes of Western cinema in Japanese film, but their desire for difference has led many to project their fantasies, colored sometimes by Orientalism or the politics of film studies, onto Japanese film, reifying it as a singular entity and ignoring historical divisions within film culture. This is unfortunate not only because it creates inaccurate histories, but also because attempts to define Japanese cinema often do not reflect how such efforts, both in Japan and abroad, have operated to foster, manage, restrict, or liberate cinema and its spectatorship. It is important to remain conscious of the politics of working with Japanese cinema – and television – when viewing and narrating its history.

The beginnings of Japanese cinema

Japanese film history can thus be narrated as a series of struggles over its definition, particularly in relation to society and the nation. From the beginning, cinematographic apparatuses may have occasionally been billed as examples of Western scientific wonders when they arrived in late 1896 and early 1897, but they were not always seen that way. When he watched his first movie, the scientist and essayist Terada Torahiko remarked, "I was not as surprised as the first time I saw *gentō*." Many thus connected cinema to a series of pre-existing visual entertainments, including the *gentō*, or magic lantern, which in Japanese hands had developed into a complex narrative medium with motion effects. As a social or even legal entity, motion pictures in the first decade were presented and defined as "*misemono*," a carnival-like spectacle of oddities and one of a myriad of sideshow entertainments that date back to the Edo era (1603–1868).

Cinema did not necessarily offer the shock of the new because it was inserted into a variety of existing practices that, while accommodating it to Japanese spectators' modes of understanding, also failed to distinguish it from other misemono. Motion pictures were first exploited by showmen whose introductory orations were as much part of the show as the pictures, and shown alongside other misemono in traveling shows or in existing entertainment districts like Tokyo's Asakusa, where the first movie theater opened in 1903. Cameramen like Asano Shirō and Shibata Tsunekichi began producing the first Japanese works after 1897, mostly short actualities or recordings of kabuki scenes like *Momijigari* (1899), but foreign films would continue to dominate domestic product until the mid-1920s. The movies enjoyed their first popular success during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, setting the first of many examples of Japanese cinema being fostered by war. Crowds flocked to see Japanese victories, but the fact that they even cheered images from other wars cinematically sold as Japanese triumphs testifies to how discourses outside the film – for instance, nationalism – were often more important than the visuals. Profits from war films helped capitalize the industry, which opened more theaters and built the first movie studios between 1908 and 1910, regularizing production. A sort of "kabuki cinema" emerged, based on filming scenes from famous plays in a long-shot, long-take style that replicated the kabuki experience down to the *onnagata* (men playing female roles) and "voice-imitation" (*kowairo*) of stage actors during screenings. Cinema was again wrapped in existing procedures, but this was less an unbroken continuation of tradition than a practice invented 10 years after the medium first appeared. Film emerged through such redefinitions.

In 1912, four companies merged to form Nikkatsu, Japan's oldest motion picture company, but their weak attempt at a monopoly soon failed as Tenkatsu emerged as a major rival. Nikkatsu remained the leader, establishing the industry-wide pattern of making period films (*kyūgeki*) in Kyoto (under director Makino Shōzō, mostly featuring Onoe Matsunosuke, Japan's first film star) and contemporary films in Tokyo. Unlike American companies, however, which were primarily producers making products for sale, Japanese studios originated from exhibition

companies making films to supply their own theaters. That partially explains why these companies, despite utilizing a technology of mechanical reproduction, often made only one print of a film, sometimes on order from a single Tokyo theater. This represented both a business practice in which companies opted to produce more movies over producing more prints, as well as a culture that privileged the local experience of a film, especially as narrators in the theater, called *benshi*, became central to both narrative understanding and the pleasure of watching – or "hearing" – movies. Each performance could differ, even with the same film. This was a hybrid experience, as audiences would enjoy Onoe Matsunosuke (complete with kowairo benshi and kabuki music), an Italian historical epic, and Charlie Chaplin, all in the same program. The melange of movies reflected what some termed the "obscene" bustle of modern urban spaces like Asakusa, which mixed neon and elaborately ornate Western theater facades with tatami mat seating.

To Burch, the benshi was emblematic of a film culture very different from that of Hollywood. Early films, lacking such devices of visual narration as close-ups, relied on the benshi for narration, and could not, argued Burch, create the illusion of a self-sustaining fictional world, but remained a text for the benshi and audience to read. Spectators never "entered" the film, but experienced it as a live performance in the theater. Some benshi were a greater attraction than the film, and benshi can be cited as one reason why silent cinema lasted a decade longer in Japan than in the West. Yet while it is true that some benshi did play with the film text in their performances, it is debatable whether they disturbed the diegetic illusion as Burch says. Benshi developed different methods to enhance audience understanding and pleasure. When they were criticized, it was often for doing what Burch praised them for. Starting in the early 1910s, intellectual film fans condemned benshi for interfering with the art of foreign films and for becoming an obstacle to the development of a visual cinematic language in Japan.

In journals such as *Kinema Record*, critics advocated for the kind of cinema Burch believed Japanese film was resisting. Loosely called the Pure Film Movement, they envisioned a text free of the trappings of other arts, such as the theatrical onnagata or benshi. In their more industrial cinema, the center of meaning production would shift from the space of exhibition, where the interaction between benshi and audience completes the film, to the space of production, where directors and stars would author a work on the basis of the screenplay. The text would become a secure receptacle of meaning received by viewers turned into passive consumers. The reformist critics' dream of exporting Japanese films helped structure their ideal cinema, as producing works understandable abroad necessitated formulating a universal text that relied neither on benshi nor on the live experience. The need for foreign recognition underlines not only how much overseas film culture, first from Europe and then from America, influenced the concept of Pure Film, but also how Japanese film, if not Japan itself, defined itself through the Western gaze.

Another gaze was that of authorities, as the Pure Film Movement intersected with efforts by public officials to manage the new medium. These first came to a head in 1912 when Tokyo police banned the phenomenally successful French film *Zigomar*, claiming that it bred crime amongst children. With *Zigomar*, they sensed something new to this visual medium, something that demanded new censorship methods like pre-screening films. Public officials not only sought to regulate content but also demanded that film meaning not change with each performance. Censors and Pure Film critics thus shared certain goals, in part because of their similar social concerns. If the Pure Film Movement often represented the hopes of higher social classes, disgusted by lower-class tastes for hybrid film experiences, so public officials would remain wary of a medium favored by the new urban masses, especially when they believed that dark movie halls fostered asocial feelings. That is one reason why authorities, instead of banning benshi, decided

to train and license them, hoping to stop improper explanation while also promoting the benshi as the representative of public mindedness in the dark.

The Pure Film Movement became one of several factors outside production that reshaped cinema. Some critics, like Kaeriyama Norimasa (*The Glow of Life* [*Sei no kagayaki*, 1918]), became filmmakers, while figures like Tanaka Eizō at Nikkatsu introduced methods from realist theater. Two companies were formed in 1920, Shōchiku and Taikatsu, which declared their intentions to produce quality films for export. Both companies imported filmmakers with Hollywood experience and relied on the advice of literary or theatrical elites (including novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō at Taikatsu) in such films as *Souls on the Road* (*Rojō no reikon*, 1921) and *Amateur Club* (1920). Films now featured more devices like close-ups to visually narrate the scene, and even the old guard Nikkatsu eliminated onnagata by 1923. Benshi lasted until all films converted to sound, but it became the norm for them to explain the scenes rather than narrate them, offering narration that served the text rather than dominating it. The earthquake that toppled the Tokyo studios in 1923 helped propel further changes by shifting reformers to the Kansai region, where the period film studios were still intact. Those who had helped create a new style of contemporary film (*gendaigeki*) brought along those methods of filmmaking to establish a fresh kind of period film called the *jidaigeki*. Makino Shōzō himself left Nikkatsu to produce sword-fighting films (*chanbara*) defined by speed, visual excitement, and solid scriptwriting, some of which were directed by his son, Makino Masahiro. Their success was bolstered by the rise of the star system, which saw the first female stars like Kurishima Sumiko, and such *jidaigeki* stars as Bandō Tsumasaburō and Ōkōchi Denjirō. Films now featured stars with defined personalities and commodified faces, and star photos became the rage. Their feats helped revive the industry to the point that, by the mid-1920s, domestic films beat out foreign product in the market, establishing Japan as one of the few national industries to successfully compete against Hollywood for over half a century. Stars attempted to get their share of that success by starting their own independent production companies after 1925.

These transformations, however, were neither smooth nor uniform. Some old fans lamented the departure of onnagata, and reports continued of benshi ruining good movies with suspect narration. Intellectual film critics would continue to criticize the inadequacy of Japanese movies for decades to come. Film studios were able to prevent chain theaters from showing other studio's films by block-booking contracts, but had neither the capital nor the personnel to transform themselves into the modern industry reformers desired. They established vertically integrated businesses, controlling production, distribution, and exhibition, but were not powerful enough to prevent the star-centered independents from gaining a hold. Excess production and questionable business practices (as some exhibitors had ties to yakuza) continued to taint the industry.

While a dominant conception of cinema did emerge by the mid-1920s, not all intellectuals and reformers could agree with it. Social theorists like Gonda Yasunosuke still tried to imagine a film experience centered on spectator involvement, while literary figures such as Tanizaki and fellow novelist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke sought new forms of visuality through the cinema. The experimental work *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ichi pēji*, 1926), produced by Kinugasa Teinosuke with the help of literary modernists like Kawabata Yasunari, surveyed some of these forms, but also reflected disagreements over whether Pure Film should signify like language but without use of words, or be free of meaning itself. European film movements like German Expressionism, French Impressionism, and Soviet montage cinema offered stylistic models that Japanese filmmakers adopted and adapted to varying degrees, creating a sort of modernism on a popular level that, in an age of "erotic grotesque nonsense" (*ero guro nansensu*), both reflected and attempted to come to grips with the trauma of modernity in a non-Western nation. In some cases, these efforts became political in nihilistic samurai films, left-wing tendency films, or the agitprop

documentaries of Prokino, but such attempts soon ran into the wall of film censorship, which was nationalized in 1925 and emboldened by the Peace Preservation Act of the same year.

Studio and government control: the 1930s and a hardening of style

The 1930s are often termed the first golden age of Japanese cinema, but scholars still debate how much it differed from the Hollywood norm that had come to dominate world cinema. Burch points to directors like Ozu Yasujirō, Mizoguchi Kenji, Naruse Mikio, and Ishida Tamizō as exemplifying a film culture that, with the Pure Film Movement, could have opted for the classical continuity system,[1] but chose not to. David Bordwell (1988), however, argues that the majority of Japanese films from the 1920s and 1930s, save those by exceptional directors like Ozu (whose editing violates the rules of classical continuity) and Mizoguchi (whose long takes articulated a different standard for camera movement), did follow the Hollywood code, the difference in Japanese cinematic style being in the moments of stylistic virtuosity – decorative flourishes – that directors added to films without changing their fundamental stylistic structure. Such debates foreground the importance of historically analyzing the struggles over film form in the spheres of both production and reception, as well as raise issues about how we relate that form to culture, define industry-wide norms, and compare them to Western cinema.

Some critics did complain about what they saw as needless cinematic virtuosity, fostering debates that pitted a playful and often hybrid use of film form not completely reducible to meaning against a structured and Fordist film culture centered on meaning. That these two poles loosely overlapped with class (lower versus higher) and with attitudes towards modernity (the former celebrating its disjunctive side, the latter its rational face) underlines how cinema became a locus for conflicts over defining Japanese identity and modernity. Film in fact came to be associated with American culture as public officials and intellectuals debated the threat of "Americanization" at a time when some artists espoused a "return to Japan." In conjunction with these debates, Japanese cinema saw a "hardening of style," a term Abé Mark Nornes (2003) has used to describe the establishment of a standard form of narration in contemporary Japanese documentary film.

A significant factor in this was industrial transformation. One factor that delayed the introduction of sound technology was an industry that was perpetually underfunded, especially during the economic depression. The gradual shift to sound – bolstered by the first all-talkie, *Madam and Wife* (*Madamu to nyōbō*, dir. Gosho Heinosuke), in 1931, but concluding only at the end of the decade – effectively pushed out smaller companies like Chiezō Productions, founded by the *jidaigeki* star Kataoka Chiezō and home to such innovative directors as Itami Mansaku and Inagaki Hiroshi. Bulky sound equipment also hindered camera stylists like Itō Daisuke, whose fast and kinetic camera movements less narrated swordplay than embodied their visual energy. If sound began to corral stylistic virtuosity, it also signaled changes in business practices because it was well-capitalized corporations like Hankyū, which founded the Tōhō film studio, that could help finance sound films. These promoted a different film culture, favoring top-down management (the producer system) over the director-centered system at studios like Shōchiku. At the same time, all the studios hardened their own styles, settling on subgenres or series to serve as brand images in the market, such as the *shōshimingeki* at Shōchiku (tales of the urban lower middle class combining tears and laughter by directors like Ozu, Gosho, and Shimizu Hiroshi), *jidaigeki* and realist *gendaigeki* at Nikkatsu (by Yamanaka Sadao and Uchida Tomu), and musical comedies and eventually war films at Tōhō (Yamamoto Kajirō providing both).

It was government involvement and World War II that did the most to harden Japanese film style. Concerned about the images of Japan created by Japanese films both at home and abroad,

government and industry officials formed the Greater Japan Film Association (Dai Nihon Eiga Kyōkai) in 1935 to promote and improve Japanese cinema. Concern for the centrality of film in a spreading modern mass culture led the National Diet to pass the Film Law (Eigahō) in 1939. While hoping to improve the quality of films, the laws also instituted pre-production censorship, required licensing of film companies and personnel, and gave government the authority to regulate the industry. Bureaucrats used this not just to regulate content, but also to reshape the industry to facilitate mobilization for war and nation building. Most films were being made for theaters still largely concentrated in urban centers, thus preventing government-supported "national films" (*kokumin eiga*) from being easily seen by the majority of citizens. Officials forced the industry to reduce the number of titles, increase the number of prints, and eventually merge companies, reducing the number of feature film companies to three and distributors to one. They also mandated the screening of "culture films" (*bunka eiga*) in theaters, which proved a boon to documentary filmmaking and helped an animation industry oppressed by Disney (importation of which was eventually, like most American films, banned after Pearl Harbor), enabling such technically advanced works as Seo Mitsuyo's two Momotarō features (see Napier, Chapter 18).

Just as spectator choices were controlled, so censorship was tightened and directors and film critics like Kamei Fumio and Iwasaki Akira ended up in jail. Movies became the tool of propaganda, as war films like *The Sea War from Hawai'i to Malay* (*Hawai Marē oki kaisen*, dir. Yamamoto Kajirō, 1942) proclaimed the victory of Japanese spirit (and special effects technology), and a series of movies starring Ri Kō Ran (Li Xianglan, later Yamaguchi Yoshiko) celebrated the colonized woman appreciating – and falling for – the dominance of the Japanese man (and his nation). Wartime works such as Mizoguchi's *The Loyal 47 Rōnin* (*Genroku chūshingura*, 1941–42) answered the question "why we fight" less by detailing enemy evils than by reconstructing a national aesthetic, reifying it almost at the expense of the story. Such works remind us that "traditional" sources for Japanese cinema were often constructed for modern reasons, but they also sparked debates over what constituted a "national film," or even a national style, when studios also made musicals like *Singing Raccoon Palace* (*Utau tanuki goten*, 1943). Some argued that works in the classical Hollywood style were more effective at home and in the colonies (and, in fact, Tōhō's product increasingly accommodated continuity editing). Many were unsure of what it meant to make a "national film," but as Peter B. High (2003) has argued, such confusion only enabled further bureaucratic control as many filmmakers opted to play it safe. This might also have reflected ambiguities in national ideology, as wartime films could embrace a modern machine aesthetic while celebrating traditional spirit, or hail the emperor while also offering the first films of humanists like Kurosawa Akira and Kinoshita Keisuke. In this environment, where the films themselves could not fully guarantee official meaning, it is not surprising that bureaucrats talked of "training spectators" as a way of ensuring message transmission.

The postwar cinema boom and the "New Wave"

August 1945 may have marked the end of the war, but it did not constitute a complete break in Japanese film history. Although Burch argues the Occupation brought Japanese cinema into Hollywood's orbit, it is more accurate to say that industrial rationalization and reform during the war years established not only the structure but also perhaps even the style of postwar cinema. The Occupation also carried on the wartime era in another ironic fashion: by continuing the basic techniques of censorship, even if for different aims, Allied forces prevented a cinematic investigation of the state of film during the Occupation, the subjectivity (and responsibility) of film producers and audiences, and the relationship between the wartime era and the postwar.

Authorities banned films considered militaristic, which limited the number of *chanbara* films made, and purged industry executives whom they believed had used cinema to wage war. The promotion of democratic themes encouraged new topics in film – including Japan's first screen kiss in 1947 – but Itami Mansaku was one who criticized the industry's abrupt shift from military nationalism to democratization without proper introspection into filmmakers' own war responsibility. Hara Setsuko, who starred in such fascist films as the German–Japanese co-production *The New Earth* (*Atarashiki tsuchi*, 1937), suddenly became the goddess of democracy in Kurosawa's *No Regrets for Our Youth* (*Waga seishun ni kui nashi*, 1946) and Imai Tadashi's *The Blue Mountains* (*Aoi sanmyaku*, 1949). Directors on the left attempted to pursue this problem in a limited fashion (often by hiding their own wartime collaboration), but when right-wing politicians succeeded in pressing General Headquarters (GHQ) to ban Kamei Fumio's *A Japanese Tragedy* (*Nihon no higeki*, 1946), a documentary arguing for Emperor Hirohito's war responsibility, such cinematic discussions were impaired. With the Occupation's reverse course, the labor strikes at Tōhō were forcibly suppressed, and a "red purge" of purported communists was undertaken, not long after the purged "militarists" were reappointed. This forced the left to pursue its polemical filmmaking in the 1950s through independent companies that, because of oligopolistic agreements between the majors, had little access to regular theaters. In the end, the Occupation's tendency to treat audiences as immature viewers in need of management differed little from that of wartime officials.

Nonetheless the motion picture industry experienced a postwar boom that would establish the 1950s as the second golden age. With television developing later than in the United States, cinema served as Japan's primary source of entertainment in the first 15 years after the war. Postwar inflation helped the industry finally spread nationwide, as investors bought into cash-rich theaters. Restrictions on foreign movies, designed to prevent the flow of yen abroad, protected the domestic industry. A new film company, Tōei, successfully reintroduced double features in 1954, and with its productions of slick swordplay and bright musical entertainment, became the top industry player. The victory of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashōmon* at the 1951 Venice Film Festival helped introduce Japanese cinema to the world. As foreign observers like Donald Richie began their efforts to explain Japanese cinema, usually through the lens of traditional culture, the industry again attempted to make films with export in mind, citing these same foreign visions of traditional Japan in films like Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu monogatari*, 1953).

With production centers finally taking control of an industry long dominated by exhibition forces, the studio system was at its peak and companies reconfirmed their styles through mass production of genre films and series. Top-level directors also had the means to support their art. A kind of domestic humanism took center stage as Ozu and Kinoshita tracked the travails of middle-class families, Mizoguchi and Naruse focused on the problems of women, and Kurosawa wove tales of student–teacher relations and individual human action. On a popular level, movies became a central medium for Japanese to represent themselves: melodramas like *What Is Your Name?* (*Kimi no na wa*, dir. Ōba Hideo, 1953–54) and Daiei "mother films" (*hahamono*) aestheticized and personalized Japan's wartime and postwar suffering, selectively constructing Japan as the victim; and special effects films like *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, dir. Honda Ishirō, 1954), with defeat and the atomic bomb still difficult to portray in film, represented instead genuine fears of atomic war and the Cold War, while sometimes also forgetting Japan's atrocities in Asia. (Honda's *Atragon* [*Kaitei gunkan*, 1963] would in fact imagine Imperial Japan defending humanity.) Left-wing independent filmmakers like Imai and Yamamoto Satsuo made acclaimed films protesting the war or social injustices, but by reproducing the film style of the majors, failed to make aesthetics or spectatorship a political issue. Critical voices, if not also techniques, may have been

most audible in black comedies by directors like Kinoshita, Ichikawa Kon, Kawashima Yūzō, and Okamoto Kihachi.

Movements arose in the late 1950s that attempted to break through this industrial monolith. The rise of a consumer-oriented leisure lifestyle centered on youth, coupled with trends in mass media representation (like weekly magazines and television), marked the emergence of new realities that a family-centered humanism had difficulty representing, ones that initially came to public consciousness in *taiyōzoku* or "sun tribe" literature and films. Young "modernist" directors like Masumura Yasuzō at Daiei (*Kisses* [*Kuchizuke*, 1957]) and Nakahira Kō at Nikkatsu (*Crazed Fruit* [*Kurutta kajitsu*, 1956]) reacted against the melodramatic resignation and "naturalism" of their elders, which not only imposed a dominant, humanistic perspective on reality, but also encouraged acceptance of this status quo as "natural." Masumura valorized active individuals who stood out by being "unnatural." Young assistant directors at the time, like Ōshima Nagisa at Shōchiku, praised these attempts, but worried about their effectiveness. One consequence of such filmmaking was Nikkatsu Action cinema, which tried to imagine a free individual played by such stars as Ishihara Yūjirō and Kobayashi Akira, but could do so only by rendering Japan a fictional "nationless" (*mukokuseki*) space.

With the tumultuous and massive political protests against the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1959–60, a "New Wave" in Japanese cinema emerged centered on filmmakers like Ōshima (*Cruel Story of Youth* [*Seishun zankoku monogatari*, 1960]), Yoshida Yoshishige (*Good-For-Nothing* [*Rokudenashi*, 1960]), Shinoda Masahiro (*Dry Lake* [*Kawaita mizuumi*, 1960]), and Imamura Shōhei (*Pigs and Battleships* [*Buta to gunkan*, 1961]). This wave was in part brought about by crises in the industry. Although the fact that young filmmakers were allowed to experiment was a sign of the studio system's wherewithal, it was a system showing cracks due to overproduction (few studios other than Tōei were making money), the rise of television, and demographic shifts such as the rise of suburbia, which took audiences further away from urban theaters. Film attendance would peak at 1.127 billion tickets in 1958 and then drop by three-fourths within a decade.

Clashing with studio executives over form and content, New Wave directors left the studios to independently produce films, eventually distributing them through new venues like the Art Theater Guild. Their efforts to combine an alternative politics with an alternative filmmaking occurred just as experimental cinema was emerging (e.g. the Film Study Group at Nihon University) and theorist/filmmakers like Matsumoto Toshio were endeavoring to meld avant-garde film form with documentary. Documentarists like Tsuchimoto Noriaki and Ogawa Shinsuke explored means to represent perspectives suppressed by the modern capitalist metropolis, not only filming the Minamata mercury poison incident or the farmers protesting the building of Narita Airport, but involving their subjects, if not also their spectators, in the process. Some veterans of experimental cinema began working in "pink cinema" (*pinku eiga*), a form of soft-porn filmmaking that came to prominence from the mid-1960s when marginal theaters, suffering from declining business, latched onto sex as a survival strategy. Directors like Adachi Masao, Wakamatsu Kōji, and Takechi Tetsuji used the genre as a form of political and aesthetic protest. When Takechi's *Black Snow* (*Kuroi yuki*, 1965) was cited for obscenity, one of several major film censorship cases in the 1960s and 1970s, not only sexual expression, but in some cases sexual violence, came to be viewed as a site of radical political struggle.

Censorship battles centered not just on sexual expression: even as the total audience declined, the 1960s saw the burgeoning of a celebration of spectatorship and interpretation. As New Wave directors pursued aesthetic strategies attempting to free viewers of conventional or "naturalized" readings of narrative, spectators themselves ranged over films and genres with a degree of hermeneutic freedom, going to underground films in Shinjuku one night and cheering Takakura Ken's tradition-loving yakuza when they killed modern capitalist gangsters in Tōei's

yakuza films the next. While such interpretations were often political, this was also the start of a cinephile culture, as cine clubs arose to praise the stylistics of directors like Suzuki Seijun and Katō Tai. Film viewing could be bottom up, resisting the tendency to nationalize media and reception. This was possible in part because the studio system was breaking down and did not have the power to control the market or the consumption of its own product.

The rise of television

As the studios declined and the movies ceased to be a medium viewed on a mass scale, television rose to replace it as a national medium, presenting media events consumed by the citizenry in a presumably uniform fashion that helped further the postwar image of a country that was "all middle class." There were experiments in television technology and even test broadcasts before the war, but regular broadcasting would not begin until 1953, with two stations, first NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai), the public channel, and then NTV (Nihon Terebi Hōsōmō), a commercial channel. They established two basic industrial modes for television: one centered on receiver fees and thus on the number of televisions, the other on selling commercial time if not the act of viewing itself; one emphasized the spread of the medium and the top-down transmission of nationally valuable ideals (while remaining politically neutral), the other focused on increasing viewers, structuring them as consumers of products and television. Thus while NHK was hampered in the early years by the prohibitive cost of television sets, NTV could function by setting up sets in public spaces, multiplying the number of viewers per set through mass viewing of national spectacles such as the pro wrestler Rikidōzan defeating American opponents. Commercial television was thus not innocent of nationalism.

At the beginning, television had to rely on previous media, in part because of technological restrictions, but also, as with film, because it had yet to be defined. Television sets in public spaces replicated the mass viewing of movies, while movie studios provided some of the first television personnel. Cinema helped define the nascent medium, not only by providing standards of directing and scriptwriting, but also, in films like *Godzilla*, by portraying television as a visual and simultaneous imagination of the national community, or, as in *Good Morning* (*Ohayō*, 1959), as a manifestation of mass consumer culture invading and reshaping the postwar home. Yet if the film industry allowed television a live quality it had largely abandoned with the benshi, it resisted television's encroachments into cinema's territory, and so in 1956 it began restricting movie broadcasts and contract players' television appearances. Such moves had ironic consequences. First, they helped define the medium by forcing television to develop its own talent and styles (for instance, a visual grammar centered on close-ups), as well as to seek out programming from America. American shows like *I Love Lucy* and *Ben Casey* had a profound effect on not only Japanese television, but also on Japanese imaginations of family, suburbia, and America itself. Second, cinema's resistance to television only hurt the studios themselves when Shintōhō's bankruptcy caused the release of its catalog for broadcast, opening the floodgates and leaving the studios ill prepared. Some like Tōei (*jidaigeki*, anime, and superhero team shows) and Daiei (detective series and home dramas) significantly impacted television, and famous directors like Kinoshita Keisuke became big names on the small screen. Nevertheless, the lines of influence would reverse and, starting with directors like Gosha Hideo and Jissōji Akio, television personnel would enter film.

Cinema's definitions of television meshed with those of other discourses. While dramatic programs like *I Want to Be a Shellfish* (*Watashi wa kai ni naritai*, 1958) garnered critical appeal, the culture critic Ōya Sōichi, citing vulgar variety programming, worried that television might lead to "a nation of a hundred million idiots." Like film before it, television was gaining an identity

through negative appraisals (Chun 2007). If the cinema's threat was that private feelings would gain free rein in public spaces, television's was that public space would break down as Japanese became atomized in their homes, beholden to their basest desires. Like the movies before it, television eventually improved its image by wedding itself to the nation. This was most evident in its coverage of Crown Prince Akihito's marriage to the commoner Shōda Michiko in 1959, an event that bolstered television ownership. Television wore the mantle of the nation, getting closer to the Japanese imperial family than cinema did during the war.

Television's definition of the nation and the public sphere, however, was different. If prewar officials attempted to meld, from top down, the spectators in the theater space as public citizens, or if 1960s radical filmmakers looked to alternative exhibition practices as means of sparking a different, participatory public sphere, television viewers would watch, and not go to, national spectacles from their homes, becoming part of a nation of viewers, but with fewer forms of public and social interaction. Viewers could now consume the nation like they did the ads on TV, while national messages could now enter the home without the mediation of public spaces. The home and the family in fact became the central topoi for the televisual nation: as the Japanese imperial family came to represent the bourgeois nuclear family at home, so television programs, from *Father Knows Best* to the "home dramas" that came to dominate Japanese fiction programming, concentrated on visions of home life that projected imaginations of postwar transformations in the family (see White, Chapter 10). The programming schedule accommodated patterns at home, with short NHK "television novels" before the family headed out, "wideshow" talk shows in the afternoon for the housewife, and late-night news or sports programs for salarymen after work. Television incorporated patterns of home life into the visual style itself, developing repetitive forms of narration that could accommodate the distracted viewing practices of the housewife, and shaped behavior in the home, from how families held their meals to the layout of living spaces.

Television quickly developed national networks from the initially scattered local stations and asserted a national, more homogenous visual culture centered in Tokyo that ostensibly bridged regions (urban and rural), dialects, and classes. This bolstered the belief that Japanese were all middle class, one that was played out through rituals of uniform viewing, as some shows, ranging from yearly national rites like the *Red and White Song Competition* (*Kōhaku utagassen*), held each New Year's Eve, to hit dramas like *Oshin*, could boast a viewership of over half the nation. Live events like the 1972 Asama Sansō incident, in which United Red Army members held a woman hostage in a mountain cottage, could affect or even traumatize the nation. In this environment, overtly political programming sometimes met with disfavor, as prominent cases of political suppression of fiction shows or documentary programming in the late 1950s and early 1960s set a pall over subsequent television culture.

The construction of television as a national institution did not mean that programming was uniform. First, there was the difference between NHK's official educational culture and the commodified culture of commercial television. Even the latter could offer the politically informed documentaries of Uchiyama Jun'ichi, Ōshima Nagisa, Imamura Shōhei and TV Man Union, the experimental style of Jissōji Akio (*UltraSeven*), or the ribald space of late-night programming. As fictional programming privileged interpersonal drama, screenwriters like Mukōda Kuniko, Kuramoto Sō, and Yamada Taiichi became central, branding the top television dramas of the 1970s and 1980s with their individual styles. While "wideshow" programming was often accused of tabloid journalism, even the nightly news on commercial channels would allow anchors to comment in a way unseen in American network news.

The pillars of television would be commercials and the *tarento* (talent) system. Commercial programming – by definition created for the advertising – and television stations devised a variety of techniques, such as abruptly interrupting an action midstream (and repeating it after

the break), to focus attention on the commercials; but from the late 1960s ads themselves became as or more interesting than the programming. Advertisements moved beyond selling the product to selling a style or even a narrative, progressing to the point that major intellectuals like Yoshimoto Takaaki would celebrate commercials in the 1980s for becoming an art in themselves, divorced from capitalism, and open to free interpretation. Commercials and their viewers, however, were never free from economies of attention and personality. In fact, commercials became a central means of creating television personalities, as Japanese ads did not simply take advantage of existing fame (most famously of Hollywood stars), but also created it, particularly for young female idols or for the songs used. Commercials thus formed an important sector of the *tarento* system, which Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (1996) has termed the "currency" of Japanese television. There the worth of a show is determined not just by ratings, but by its array of *tarento*, whose fame is derived less from talent than exposure. Yoshimoto has described the *tarento* system as a kind of low-tech participatory media in the postmodern age, as viewers become involved not only in identifying the myriad of *tarento*, but in creating and sometimes destroying them. From star search shows like *A Star Is Born* (*Sutā tanjō*) in the 1970s to program-planned idol groups in the 1980s, the construction of idols was both a central business and pleasure of television. The election of *tarento* to political office is testimony to the centrality of personalities and television in Japanese society.

With transformations in television comedy sparked by the *manzai* boom in the 1980s, variety programming as a whole, as Ōta Shōichi argues, created a space of "friends" which invited the viewer into the televisual space through inside jokes and amateur participation. A comedic stance that was both knowing and uncritical, both delivering the joke and evaluating it externally, produced spectators who were a combination of what Ōta termed audience and viewers, both part of the space of "friends" and outside it. Such a cynical stance could allow audiences to consume supposedly serious drama as comedy, but also support the rise of so-called "trendy dramas" at the end of the 1980s as spectacles of consumption and sensationalism, a postmodern surface of fashion, music, and conventionalized emotion (Ōta 2002).

One can debate how much viewers really bought into these spectacles, but televisual style worked to bring these modes of viewing into the economics of attention. The appearance of the VCR and other media made the mass viewing of programs a relic of the past, but the late and limited shift towards a multichannel industry meant that programming after the 1980s was still relatively uniform and consumer choice restricted. Within this industrial context, some criticized television for pursuing excessive explanation, not only through non-fiction programming that provided surplus commentary – something augmented from the 1990s in variety programming by subtitles that doubled the dialogue – but also by a visual style that, despite the occasional visual flourish, was wedded to an obviousness of narration reminiscent of classical Hollywood cinema. This may have supported distracted viewing in the age of channel zapping, but the spectacular nature of narration – such as the visual style and use of titles – sought to bring viewer eyes back to the set. To some culture critics, television became a monolithic apparatus enveloping the viewer in a comfortable, pre-digested world bereft of alterity (Abe 2005). With no real disagreements, the distinction between subject and object is lost, and all within the televisual realm is absorbed in an all-encompassing, homogeneous identity. There is no other in this space, for television ultimately refers only to itself.

Late twentieth-century transformations

With television becoming the dominant medium, film history after 1960 featured a variety of reactions to television and the forms of spectatorship it offered. Mainstream commercial cinema

explored various types of representation, from widescreen to big-budget spectacle, to distinguish itself from the small screen, but in many ways it ended up abandoning the mass audience. Popular series like *It's Tough Being a Man*, featuring an itinerant peddler named Tora-san, still brought in family viewers, but most films increasingly targeted young male viewers with sex and violence unavailable on television. The industry, however, suffered such a plunge in attendance that several major studios (Shintōhō and Daiei) went bankrupt, and one, Nikkatsu, abandoned regular film production for adult movies. With older companies in disarray, the publisher Kadokawa Haruki intervened in the 1970s with a new strategy promoting big-budget spectacle through a multipoint media strategy that included television. Increasing budgets in a declining industry led to committee film production, with outside players such as ad agencies, publishers, and increasingly television stations sharing the load. Yet with the poor domestic reputation of the resulting works, the animated films of Miyazaki Hayao and others were in some years the only Japanese box office hits. Exacerbating this situation was an uneven industrial structure in which the majors, having largely given up producing films on their own, had turned into distributors and exhibitors controlling the majority of theaters showing Japanese films, leaving the independents, who now made the majority of films, able to show in only a small number of theaters. Market share for Japanese films dropped from a high of 78.3 percent in 1960 to 27.1 percent in 2002.

With the majors mostly abandoning their role in training and investing in new film talent and facilities, new filmmakers emerged from alternative circles such as 8 mm filmmaking or pink films. Following such events as the Asama Sansō hostage incident, these filmmakers shared the larger cultural disillusionment with politics. Against the rise of television, influential critics like Hasumi Shigehiko promoted a cinephilia that, in the lighter, more postmodern 1980s, helped found the cinematic pastiches of Morita Yoshimitsu, Itami Jūzō, and Ōbayashi Nobuhiko, or the virtuosic use of the long take by Sōmai Shinji, who explored the unsteady connections between adolescence and mortality. It was only at the end of the 1980s that a more concerted film stylistics emerged, with what I call a "detached style," to combat a sort of tyranny of knowledge represented by television, using devices such as long shots and long takes to strip the image of excess explanation, encourage viewers to read the film on their own, and allow the "others" in the film to subsist in their alterity. Especially after the burst of the bubble, the Aum Shinrikyō sarin gas incident, and widespread disillusionment in social institutions such as the family, the company, and the school, many directors sought a "real" free of the postmodern fictions of the 1980s, one from which interpersonal relations could be rebuilt from zero.

At the same time, the Japanese film industry was also transforming, but not always in positive directions. The popularity of horror cinema helped spur a revival of live-action films not only at the domestic box office, but also abroad. Asia was the first market success, and that occurred at the same time Japanese trendy dramas were becoming a hit on Asian television screens. Hollywood discovered "J-horror," creating a series of remakes at a time when the popularity of anime and Japanese games was generating a fashion for "Cool Japan" amongst foreign youth. Japanese film and television increasingly had to think globally, and the meanings of these texts, and their spectators, could no longer be simply managed domestically. The influx of multiplex theaters, some foreign-owned, loosened the majors' stranglehold on distribution and exhibition, and allowed some medium-sized companies to make a mark. With the additional success of melodramatic love stories, in which one partner inevitably dies, Japanese cinema topped foreign films at the 2006 box office, a feat few other countries could boast. The benefits of this, however, were mostly enjoyed by Tōhō, which commanded over 50 percent of the Japanese film pie, and by television stations, which after 2000 became the dominant player in the film industry. The success also caught the eye of the government, which enacted policies not only to

promote domestic production and film education, but also to utilize "Cool Japan" to elevate Japan's standing in foreign opinion and in the world contents industry. Thus, despite the apparent liberalization and revival of Japanese film, voices continue to warn of collaborations between media conglomerates and government, in which Japanese cinema, absorbed by the television industry, becomes merely one "content" amidst the anime, manga, and trendy dramas that are being marketed for consumers both at home and abroad. In this situation, the struggle over defining these media and their spectators will continue.

Note

1 A system of film editing associated with classical Hollywood films that creates seamless continuity of space and time between shots.

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