



Cinema and the Study of Japanese Modernity in North America

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The Eternal Japan

- ▶ Japanese cinema comes to the attention of Euro-American critics when Kurosawa's *Rashomon* wins the Venice Film Festival in 1951
 - ▶ Daiei consciously markets *jidaigeki* abroad
 - ▶ Reinforcing orientalist visions of Japan
- ▶ Critical accounts of Japanese cinema initially focus on what is “Japanese”
 - ▶ Paul Schrader and Ozu as Zen
 - ▶ *The Transcendental Style: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (1972)
 - ▶ Noel Burch and prewar cinema as Heian aesthetics
 - ▶ *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (1978)
- ▶ Japan Studies as defined by a unique Japan that is not the West
 - ▶ Japan is by definition not modern



Cold War Japan

- ▶ Such accounts as products of their era
 - ▶ Donald Richie and J.L. Anderson as Cold War humanism
 - ▶ *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (1959)
 - ▶ Great Japanese film as universal humanism free from Communist influence
 - ▶ Modernization theory
 - ▶ Japan modernizes in a teleological fashion by following the example of the West
 - ▶ What makes it unique is an ageless Japanese culture outside of history
 - ▶ Japan Studies defined by the Cold War
 - ▶ Defining Japan within the West



A Critique of Modernization

- ▶ Burch in film studies
 - ▶ The reappraisal of early cinema
 - ▶ From pre-cinema to an alternative cinema
 - ▶ Relativize film teleology
 - ▶ Debt to Roland Barthes
 - ▶ An imaginary Japan that critiques logocentric Europe
 - ▶ Japanese prewar cinema as popular cinema counter to Hollywood ideology
 - ▶ Japanese prewar cinema as a critique of the naturalization of the Hollywood classical style
 - ▶ Modernity as multiple and non-teleological




Historical Modernity



- ▶ David Bordwell's historical poetics
 - ▶ *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (1988)
 - ▶ Film poetics based not in age-old aesthetics but industrial and social conditions
 - ▶ Japanese prewar film style as a complex historical reaction to Hollywood in a Japan that is modernizing
 - ▶ Critiques essentialist interpretations
 - ▶ Ozu the modernist?
 - ▶ Aware of but works against the rules of classical Hollywood cinema
 - ▶ Yet is unique—not “Japanese”
 - ▶ Bordwell and cognitive poetics
 - ▶ Universal cognitive processes
 - ▶ Reinforces the centrality of the classical Hollywood cinema



Different Ozus

- ▶ Paul Schrader
 - ▶ Ozu as transcendental—Zen
 - ▶ Sato Tadao
 - ▶ Ozu as the most Japanese
 - ▶ Donald Richie
 - ▶ Ozu as *mono no aware*—lamenting modernity
 - ▶ David Bordwell
 - ▶ Ozu as the modernist
 - ▶ Hasumi Shigehiko
 - ▶ Ozu as postmodernist
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A Japanese Modernity

- ▶ Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto
 - ▶ Modernity is defined by the West through difference from the East
 - ▶ By definition, Japan cannot be modern
 - ▶ Japanese cinema deals with contradiction between modernization and modernity
- ▶ Multiple modernities
 - ▶ Harootunian's "co-eval modernity"
 - ▶ Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity* (2010)
 - ▶ Japanese cinema as site of struggle over competing modernities, based in class, gender, and geography
 - ▶ Cinema in Japan a resolutely historical construction, not a cultural given



Vernacular Modernism

- ▶ Miriam Hansen: “vernacular modernism”
 - ▶ Cinema as a local means of dealing with modernity on a sensory level
 - ▶ The classical Hollywood style as a flexible model of envisioning the modern
- ▶ Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano
 - ▶ *Nippon Modern* (2008)
 - ▶ Shochiku Kamata style as vernacular modernism



Literary Modernism



- ▶ Shift in literary studies away from “pure” literature to understanding literature within historical modernity
- ▶ Cinema becomes a crucial intertext for understanding Japanese modern literature, which becomes modern in part by becoming cinematic
 - ▶ Seiji Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (2002)
 - ▶ William Gardner, *Advertising Tower* (2006)
 - ▶ Alisa Freedman, *Tokyo in Transit* (2010)
- ▶ Similar efforts in historical culture studies
 - ▶ Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense* (2006)
- ▶ Media studies as central to Japan studies today



Trends in Japanese Cinema Studies: War and Colonialism

- ▶ Influence of postcolonial studies, gender and ethnic studies
 - ▶ Critique of Japan as a closed, homogeneous nation
 - ▶ Japanese modernity as based in colonialism
- ▶ Studies of wartime cinema
 - ▶ Markus Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film* (2003)
 - ▶ Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen* (2003)
 - ▶ Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire* (2008)
 - ▶ Hikari Hori, *Promiscuous Media* (2017)
- ▶ Studies of colonial cinema
 - ▶ Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire* (2015)



Trends in Japanese Cinema Studies: Political Modernism

- ▶ Influence of studies of European political modernism (D.N. Roderick)
 - ▶ The post-1968 critique of classical Hollywood cinema (Godard)
 - ▶ The late-1950s “modernists” and the Japanese New Wave (Oshima, Yoshida)
- ▶ Studies of Japanese New Wave cinema
 - ▶ David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre* (1988)
 - ▶ Isolde Standish, *Politics, Porn and Protest* (2011)
 - ▶ Miryam Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan* (2011)
 - ▶ Yukiko Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality* (2013)



From Cinema Studies to Media Studies

- ▶ Recognition not only of shift towards digital and other screen media, but also that cinema was always intermedial
 - ▶ Anime
 - ▶ Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (2001)
 - ▶ Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine* (2009)
 - ▶ Marc Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix* (2012)
 - ▶ Television
 - ▶ Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Ecology* (2018)
 - ▶ Post-cinema
 - ▶ Alex Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema* (2017)



Rethinking Film and Film Theory

- ▶ The digital age sparks reconsideration not only of what cinema is/was, but also of what thinking about cinema was.
 - ▶ Permanent Seminar in the Histories of Film Theories
- ▶ Increased focus on Japanese film and media theory
 - ▶ Aaron Gerow, ed., *Decentering Theory* (RJCS 2010).
 - ▶ Marc Steinberg and Alex Zahlten, *Media Theory in Japan* (2017)
 - ▶ Gerow, Iwamoto, Nornes, eds., *Nihon senzen eiga ronshu* (2018)
- ▶ Consider how Japanese theorists thought about cinema and modernity
- ▶ Perhaps find clues to our new media situation in how past Japanese encountered new media