A Cinematic Challenge to Modernity
Critical Theory in Postwar Japanese Cinema:
An Introduction to Fukasaku Kinji

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Contents

Abstract:

The social critique of Post World War II society was reflected in part by an international avant-garde film movement of the 1960s. In Japan, a new generation of directors challenged past and present issues, such as militarism and capitalism, by looking unflinchingly at the contradictions inherent in a diametric change of social perspective ushered in by the phenomena of postwar democratization. At the opening of the 20th Century the emergence of the motion picture came to redefine visual representation and the narrative elements of dramatic expression. As a modern pastime, the adoption of cinema among the working class allowed for a "deepened and critical consciousness" of society. This study aims to visit a period in Japan's post-World War II history and contextualize the discourse of Fukasaku Kinji's films in the critique of Japanese society.

Introduction

Film in the study of Humanities[1]

For centuries, historical, philosophical and literary works have been the foundation by which the disciplines of the Humanities have examined the human experience. Storytelling and performing arts have been a utility of humankind's expression of culture and history even before the written word was available to record it. The power of technologies like the printing press made possible the widespread distribution of cultural morals through religious texts and literature. Like the printing press to the written word, the emergence of the motion picture in the late 19th century would eventually yield the same effect on the performing arts. Transforming static imagery into motion, cinematic art came to redefine the elements of visual style (*mise-en-scène)* within its own niche of dramatic representation. Early in its inception, film was criticized by literati like French writer George Duhamel who saw the emerging art form as an "abattoir of culture" that was nothing more than "an amusement for the illiterate, for poor creatures stupefied by work and anxiety…a spectacle that demands no effort…" (Stam 2000, 64). Although biased, Duhamel's concern is not without merit. Within his lifetime overt nationalist film propaganda such as the *Triumph of the Will* (1935), produced by the Nazi party in Germany, would come to prove the inherent power of imagery to indoctrinate the masses, illiterate or not.

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[1] Note on Japanese names: In respect to the Japanese culture, names are presented family name first and given name last (e.g. Akira Kurosawa into Kurosawa Akira) Also, film titles will be presented in their original Japanese name followed by a parenthetical English release title.

With the age of the industrial revolution in full swing, the adoption of cinema as a modern pastime for the working class was seen by some cultural critics as a threat or an aesthetic distraction from the purpose of art in expressing and reflecting on the human condition. In contrast, Walter Benjamin, an advocate of the Neo-Marxist Frankurt School, saw the potential of film to "democratize culture" by allowing access to culture that would lead to a "deepened critical consciousness of reality" that could in-turn promote critical attitudes towards politics and society in general. Benjamin also stated that art in the age of mechanical reproduction (industrial revolution) would be inherently based on the practice of politics (Stam 2000, 65). As a revolutionary form of art, film must permit creative and unconventional ideas to counter the bourgeois fomalities of classical art in order to allow insight into cultural study. If not, then the "culture industry" of media in the industrial era could become the sole mediator of popular culture (Stam 2000, 68).

Film in Japan

Donald Richie, an American scholar of Japanese cinema, explains that unlike some countries like France or America, motion pictures have been held as a respectable art form by the Japanese since the very first Kinetoscope showcase at the turn of the century (Richie 1971, 3). Motion pictures in Japan were regarded as a new art form, rather than just a new form of photography. In Japan, early motion picture audiences were composed of the emerging middle class who could afford the theater-priced movie tickets. As most moviegoers expected an enlightening and entertaining program, most of Japan's earliest films featured the works of Kabuki plays, as Edo-Period theater, flamboyantly radical and better suited to common people. The Meiji Restoration of 1868 ended Japan's two-hundred-fifty-

year isolation and allowed the arrival of many Western ideas from national industry to drama. The shift to modernization would certainly have an effect on Japanese authors who became interested in contemporary themes. A modern style known as *shimpa* was created directly in opposition to Kabuki stage conventions, by employing modern settings within varieties of comedy, suspense and melodramas as new theatrical genres (McDonald 1994). By lending itself to Western style, *shimpa* revolutionized the classic dramatic narrative and in turn replaced antiquated acting techniques and speech styles with the modern colloquial style. Japanese authors, influenced by playwrights like Shakespeare, began writing new melodramatic dramas in both contemporary (*gendaigeki*) and period settings (*jidaigeki*).

A flood of European and American plays and films into Japan offered a new perspective of narrative possibilities and *shimpa* helped to reinvigorate the repertoire of Japanese drama that had since become out-dated to the modern urban audience. Richie notes that a series of silent films known as *Bluebird* "photoplays" (c. 1917) had a key role in this narrative change. The *Bluebird* plot dealt with the changing lifestyle of American rural youth who were attempting to cope with modern urban ways, much like the youth of many other industrializing nations, including Japan. Scenes were cut shorter than conventional long takes, the camera began to stray from the stationary long shot and close-ups were used to highlight a character's emotions and create a sense of intimacy with the audience. Japanese youth who were exposed to this unconventional method became fascinated with the intimacy and sincerity that was provided through Western film. As a boy, the film director Kurosawa Akira recalled the sense of intimacy the close-up shot provided the viewer, so much that he noted he could almost smell the sweat percolating upon the actor's skin (Richie 2001, 28). The impact of Western technique would resonate throughout his career and undoubtedly

influence his directorial style. Japanese directors came to embrace the liberation and versatility that Western *mise-en-scène* provided over antiquated theatrical methods used in the fledgling days of Japanese cinema.

Postwar Turmoil

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese Imperial endeavor was called to a halt with unconditional surrender during a radio broadcast by Emperor Hirohito, who also denounced his own divinity shortly thereafter. The entire world as the Japanese had known it, including past experience and values, was rendered illegitimate during the radio broadcast that afternoon (Gordon 2009, 224). Some Japanese were left in shock and disillusion, while others were angered by the obvious deception of authorities to kill others and sacrifice their livelihood in the name of the emperor. Nevertheless, Japan would have to face up to the bleak uncertainties of the oncoming Allied Occupation led by General Douglas MacArthur. According to Japanese historian Andrew Gordon, the American occupation strategy in Japan was summed up in two words: demilitarize and democratize (2009, 227-232). Concerning the latter strategy, the Allied Council for Japan (working with a certain sense of optimism) considered Japan merely a foreign land that was led astray by a fascist and militaristic faction (Hirano 1992, 5). Americans, believing in the power of media to remold Japanese society into American-style democracy, seized all media sources, including radio, television, print and film. Examining pre-war and wartime Japanese motion pictures, the American forces recognized the dramatic and realistic power of these feature films, which exceeded their anticipation of crude foreign propaganda. Much like American director Frank Capra's government-funded seven-part wartime film series *Why We Fight* (1942-1945), the artistic and high-technical standards of cinema were realized by the Japanese government as an

excellent medium through which the imperial movement could influence war-time support, or in another sense indoctrinate the public.

Before the war, Japan ranked only second to the American Hollywood industry in terms of quantity of movie releases. By 1941, it decreased by almost 50-percent (about 250 releases per year) and by the end of the war in 1945 diminished to a paltry 26 releases (Richie 1990). The Allied powers hoping to re-educate the Japanese, sought to rehabilitate the film industry. Within the Allied Occupation, the Civil Information and Education Section (CIE) was assembled to regulate new motion picture laws and define what was permissable to create and show to the public, working essentially as a censorship board. The CIE issued a list of thirteen forbidden subjects such as (and most importanly) 'feudal loyalty' which was considered inherently anti-democratic. Even the customary act of bowing was not allowed on screen for a period (Hirano 1992, 44-46).

American authorities really wanted to see production of an American- style *gendaigeki* that was fast, modern, democratically-optimistic and full of romance. Upon the latter suggestion, some displeasure was expressed by writers and directors since open displays of affection and sexual inclinations had long been a taboo in Japanese culture, even when on a movie screen. Oddly enough, the CIE did approve the production of some *jidaigeki* (period pieces) films because they were persuaded that the protagonist as a low-class *yakuza-bakuto* (mafia gambler) was an individualistic and democratic fighter that the public could cheer for (Richie 1990, 42).

With the Allied occupation lifted in early 1952, individuality in the film industry offcially recommended with liberation of writers and directors to explore their personal creative inclinations for a drama-starved audience. The Western camera cinematic process as

a shot-by-shot narrative exposition was quickly adopted in place of the typified long-shot seen in earlier Japanese film. The Japanese audience enamored with the new *chambara* films of samurai-style swashbuckling, à la *Seven Samurai* (1954), swarmed to movie theaters and thus financially secured struggling studio systems. Creative freedom also incited the conception of new genres such as the debut of monster-genre and the immortal *Gojira* (*Godzilla* 1954), a film initially about the fear of nuclear proliferation before it evolved into a camp-aesthetic series.

Selection Process

This study will analyze three films by Fukasaku Kinji and their critique of social phenomena in post-World War II Japan. In particular the films are divided up into three themes: anti-war, youth and capitalism and finally the yakuza genre. The choice to focus specifically on Fukasaku arose by my own personal interest in his films from the early 1970s. Regrettably, there is little English literature that delves into this director's work, which I find especially distinct among the Japanese New Wave film canon (though his status within this group is disputed). The intent to focus on one director and not several, like Oshima, Kurosawa or Imamura, is not to be rebellious or unkind towards their timeless bodies of work, rather it is an attempt to analyze less exposed works from a director of a new period in Japanese film. There are several dozen videos available in America from each of these aforementioned directors and even more explanatory texts, editorial and academic, to supplement their respective careers.

I would agree with the late Japanese film scholar Keiko McDonald that the works of prominent directors like Kurosawa and Ozu have been widely discussed for decades to the point that it is difficult to add anything new or constructive. On the basis of this premise I

believe that there is a relatively large amount of respect given to these two directors, subsequent to their international success, that tends to overshadow the breadth of cinematic perspective from lesser-known, yet culturally significant directors. In an American director analogy, it would be like comparing the more recent and modern career of David Lynch to the extensive (now classic) career of Alfred Hitchcock. The nature of artistic merit is usually in direct relation to the time period within which it was produced and the long-term significance of its supposed originality.

Taking a note from film scholar David Desser, the Japanese New Wave cinema is basically defined as a film, not genre specific, that "takes an overt political stance" critical towards its own society and is "deliberately disjunctive" (*avant-garde)* in its imagery by comparison to its predecessors and even contemporary film norms (Desser 1988, 4). The choice to classify chapters by social themes lends itself most easily to a Critical/Neo-Marxist focus in the postwar modernization of Japan. Considering the experimental attributes inherent in the disjuctive style of New Wave film, and its critique of social politics, working along the lines of the neo-Marxist Critical Theory is the most natural lens to evaluate this era of Japanese history and its impact on filmmaking. Critical Theory in the study of culture industry is chiefly concerned with the increasing domination of individuals in society by powerful forms of media that have the ability to condition people in a subtle and pervasive manner (Ritzer 2007, 104). If this is so, I think it is reasonable to assume that an experimental and unorthodox approach to drama (in sound, image and dialogue) is a relevent means to deflate the domination of trends and ideals prevalent in the economy of film production and a stern studio system.

I will use Desser's explanation of New Wave film qualities as a point-of-departure in an examination of Fukasaku's films. As a student of sociology my inclinations are to historically contextualize the film's setting and to interpret meaning (both manifest and latent) behind the narrative and images depicted. Since I am only a fan of film and not a formal student in the discipline, this study will not be primarily based on film theory or even the cinematic process. Like Desser's seminal work *Eros plus Massacre* (1988), this study is an attempt to visit a period in Japan's history, and to analyze and uncover the discourse of several unique films in the critique of society.

The term "modernity," as noted in this study's title, is concerned with multiple socio-political aspects in Japan's postwar period, such as: capitalism, urbanization, bureaucratization, individualism, etc. Taking into account the postwar strides to catch up with Western society—"economic recovery, political reorganization and institutional rationalization"—the ideas of Japanese tradition and nationalism faced a schism when coupled with Western socio-political modes (Miyoshi 1989, 147). This sudden shift in the socio-political policy in Japanese government and the implications of "progress," no doubt, created the social turmoil as seen historically in Japan's turbulent 1960s.

How do Fukasaku's films criticize society, while distinguishing themselves from the products of a homogenized Japanese studio system? How can an experimental approach democratize film and the Humanities for society at large? That is, rather than only being entertainment, how can Fukasaku's historically bound films engage an audience complacent with a commercial studio production?

Chapter One
"Independence No. 1": Youth in Cinema

Postwar Youth

If one is to understand the greater socio-cultural significance of the international New Wave movement, it would not be enough to focus on one country alone. However, the Japanese *Nuberu Bagu* ("New Wave") genre of the 1960s had much in common with the international emergence of a new and unique cinematic technique, style and voice. Considering the social-political upheaval prevalent in the 1960s, Japan, like America and France, experienced a great deal of political turmoil. The 1960 AMPO demonstrations, over the renewal of the US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, served as a catalyst for the subsequent momentum of protests (Desser 1988, 46). The socialist and anti-war zeitgeist supported by the protests of college students and Japanese social activists permeated every field of media, even cinematic exposition of the emerging director. In view of the deaths of millions during World War II, and the population boom in the prevailing years, Japan's population demographics shifted dramatically.

Globally, the wartime draft of millions of young men left a void in the industrial workforce that forced hundreds of thousands of women and children to labor in factories to fuel the war effort. In stark contrast to the immediate post war prosperity in America, Japan, a defeated and demoralized country, had little civil industry and even less food to feed its starving citizens (Gordon 2009, 226).

Following the Japanese surrender and the beginning of the reconstruction period, a void of perished Japanese left a vacuum in a national industry pushing to recover and rebuild. By the mid- to late 1950s, the Japanese economic recovery required a great amount of

manpower to fill the expanding heavy industries producing steel, automobiles and, of course, electronics (Gordon 2009, 244-247). By 1960, over 50 percent of employees in industry were middle school graduates and 42 percent were high school graduates. Since the younger employees could be paid lower wages they became the most attractive work prospects for industry employers. Thus almost 60 percent of middle school graduates were absorbed into the workforce (Roberson 1998, 85). These young workers, dubbed *kin no tamago* ("golden eggs"), were recruited from communities all over Japan. The major industry centers of Yokohama, Osaka and Tokyo were supplied by chartered trains with tens of thousands of young adults from the islands of Kyushu and Shikoku, and the greater Honshu countryside (Roberson 1998, 86-88). In light of this development the urban population rose from 38 percent of the nation in 1950 to almost 75 percent by 1975 (Gordon 2009). Many of these young workers claimed the large size of their families and poverty stricken communities as justification to work in factories at such young ages. In the countryside, only about 10 percent of high school graduates could afford to attend college. Still most young men were bound to the 'eldest son' tradition that expects the first-born male to work and support the family, while the other siblings could transfer homes during marriage. These elder sons supplied the base of employment for the heavy industries for well over a decade.

Early Youth film and the *Taiyozoku*

In America, the breakaway hit *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) heralded a new era of film that explored the rebellious, sometimes nihilistic, pathos of alienated youth and powerless antiheroes (Desser 1988, 39). The coming of age in film was personified by a defiant and spirited antihero intentionally setting himself (and his generation of baby

boomers) against the authority of the status quo. Donald Richie noted that most other

countries in the mid 1950s saw the rise in various youth culture and cinematic antiheroes,

like James Dean, whose onscreen persona sought to oppose authority and values of the elder

generation. In Japan this age of rebellion was especially pronounced with the sudden

popularity of college-aged novelist Ishihara Shintaro, whose works focused on a sense of

alienation within Japanese postwar youth (Desser 1988, 40).

　　　With the debut of the novella *Taiyo no Kisetsu* (Season of the Sun, 1955) Ishihara

won the prestigious Akutagawa literary prize, consequently making him the spokesman for a

new, young generation of Japanese. The novel garnered a major cult following and even

spawned a subgenre of films known as *Taiyozoku,* or "Sun Tribe," that explored teenage

sexuality and glorified the nature of violence in young adults. Though the *Taiyozoku* genre

was short lived, with only five films to its catalogue, the most popular adaptation, *Kuratta*

Kajistu (Crazed Fruit 1956), was equivalent to *Rebel Without a Cause* in its impact on

Japanese cinema and youth culture. Even famed Japanese New Wave director Oshima

Nagisa's renowned *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari* (Cruel Story of Youth, 1959), was heavily

influenced by the depiction of teenage recklessness. "The sound of the girl's skirt being

ripped and the hum of the motorboat slashing through the older brother, sensitive people

could hear the wailing of the seagulls heralding in a new age in Japanese cinema,"

commented Oshima (Desser 1988:41).

　　　Throughout the 1960s, "sex and crime increasingly became the transgressive

mediums through which dominant values were challenged," especially by youth culture

(Standish 2005, 222). By the early 1970s these social deviations became the expression of

radical individuality that directors abided by in their approach to film and depictions of a

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restless youth. Critical of the modern hypocrisies of the government and the widening rift in

Japanese conservative and social political values, new directors examined the notion of

socially consciousness values, like democracy, depicted in the mainstream media. Overall,

youth culture and youth-centered films became inextricably linked with the beginning of a

new democratic period by the defeat of Japan's wartime militant repression (Yoshimoto

2007, 170). Even though the Taiyozoku's explicit sex and violence were eventually ended by

critics and political interest groups by the late 1950s, the representation of youth as restless

and frustrated civil agitators continued to be a dominant theme in Japanese cinema.

Kimi ga Wakamono Nara (*If You Were Young: Rage,* 1970)

Fukasaku's first independent film outside his contract with the Toei studio, *Kimi ga*

Wakamono Nara deals with issues of young adulthood and youthful indiscretion confounded

by social troubles of a postwar society. Toei, a major commercial studio, was not interested

in straying from the mainstream system, especially with the personal 'visions' Fukasaku

often pitched. In 1970, he took both *Kimi* and *Gunki Hatameku Motoni* (Under the Flag of

the Rising Sun 1972) to the small film company Shinsei Eigasha (lit. "New Star Film

Company") and begun production on two of his most personal projects to date.

Kimi centers on five young men (Asao, Kikuo, Ryuji, Kiyoshi and Ichiro) in the early

1960s, fresh out of middle school and drafted as "golden eggs" into one of the thousands of

factories in Japan's period of economic resuscitation. Putting off high school and entering

manual labor as teens, they sacrifice their youth for the sake of their poor families and

Japan's economic future. However, within several years many overworked employees submit

to the influence of union strikes; and without sufficient labor the factory closes shop soon

thereafter. The guys, unemployed and undereducated, find themselves far behind the prosperous times and lost in the urban sprawl that their generation helped to create. Homeless and with nothing to lose, the five young men take up menial day jobs and pool their money in hopes of buying an industrial dump truck that will surely induct them into the prosperity of entrepreneurship. With renewed hope and vitality, they work their hands to the bone to make a down payment. Maintaining stability and friendship, however, becomes a major predicament in the face of hormones, hot tempers and fledgling identities in the fast-paced Tokyo setting.

In the spirit of the *Taiyozoku*, Fukasaku tends to explore inner conflicts of sexuality and violence inherent in the hungry, testosterone driven males. As for the inner conflict of violence, the depictions in *Kimi* are hardly grotesque or even gratuitous as some critics point out of his later works dealing with warfare and the mafia. Neither are they ostentatious, nor sadistic; rather Fukasaku's use of violence is deliberate, yet delicate in its purpose and meaning. Fighting is not simply for violence's sake or a visual outlet for the male audience's tempers, but an expression of spontaneous passion and frustration among the hormonal males.

The same day that the guys are kicked out of their factory dorm they go into the city to watch Ryuji's first boxing match. Among the spectators at the tiny gym are a group of loud-mouthed men, drunk on alcohol and thirsty on the prospect of blood. Upset by inept ability and apparent "cheek dancing," the men proceed to scream and mock Ryuji until Asao and Kikuo are set off and advance on them, fists in the air. The dizzying handheld camera work during the scuffle effectively disorients the viewer and lessens the typified objectivity of violence when viewed from a distance. Also, comparing the single opposition in the

boxing match, Fukasaku juxtaposes the two fights to display the visceral nature of violence. The boxing match is formalized with rules and a sporting rapport, while the brawl has an uneven amount of contenders and no holds are barred, it is simply winner take all. Even some nearby females are accidentally caught up in the mix, however, before the brawl scene has a chance to mature Fukasaku makes a jump-cut to the guys being processed at the police station. Locked in a cell, disheveled and spiritually bruised by society, they make a pact to become sovereign adults by procuring a truck, which Ryuji aptly names "Independence No-1."

Among all the guys, Ryuji is thought to be the toughest. Raised as a farmer in the tundra of Hokkaido and a boxing enthusiast, Ryuji is the epitome of masculine grit. Though he rarely talks on account of a stuttering problem, he embodies a loyal, fraternal spirit to his buddies. During a strike, Ryuji's boss offers employees a cash bonus if they help break up the brigade of young picketers blocking the front gate. Perplexed by the decision of either being a capitalist stooge or siding with his young brethren, he takes the cash to supplement his share of the truck down payment. The team fends off the brigade, composed of many young women, until the police arrive with nightsticks in hand. At the horrible sight of a young and helpless woman being brutalized, Ryuji snaps and recklessly attacks an officer, only to be beaten to death. Loyalty to his friends and their dream of independence compels him to take the boss' offer, but the sight of authorities' brutality on the weak causes him to lash out. A seemingly incompatible combination of anger and empathy proves to be Ryuji's undoing.

Kiyoshi, a dead fisherman's son, increasingly concerned about his decreasing income and the money he is obliged for the truck, falls in with a group of thugs to loot a stockroom

in the middle of the night. An approaching security guard sends the group scattering except

for Kiyoshi, who is promptly tackled. In fear of being caught he panics and bashes the guard

with what looks to be a shovel. In this sequence, Fukasaku uses the freeze frame at the

moment of impact and allows the soundtrack to continue. In my opinion, this scene is

poignant punctuation of a moment when Kiyoshi's masculine impulse is faster than his

consciousness. Thus, the use of the freeze frame during a fighting sequence is not to satisfy

an element of sadism but a spontaneous mode that parallels and enhances the display of

unwieldy, primal masculinity. Kiyoshi is ultimately apprehended and is sentenced to jail for

assault. Two down, three left.

Even when the bane of violence fails to destroy the remaining three, the introduction

of females creates a second destructive catalyst in the form of lust. Being sexually immature

and emotionally underdeveloped, Ichiro falls into an affair with a female he meets as a waiter

in a nightclub. Thinking himself able to "handle a woman" he disregards his friends' cautious

advice, and in a matter of weeks she accidentally becomes pregnant and rejects his plea for

an abortion. With a child on the way, Ichiro implores his buddies to reimburse his portion of

the truck payment in order to prepare for his new family.

Finally collecting enough money, Asao and Kikuo acquire a bright green truck with a

large insignia across the side reading "Independence No. 1." On the rearview mirror they

hang a miniature pair of boxing gloves with the same insignia, a charm left behind by Ryuji.

With only two childhood friends left in the alliance, there seems little personal volatility to

threaten them. With a steady paycheck and bound by brotherhood their future is looking

brighter, until Kiyoshi's younger sister Yukiko arrives at their apartment.

Yukiko being rather young also exemplifies a traditional female role when she cooks and cleans for the guys. Kikuo remarks that it has been a long time since anyone has cleaned up for him, and begins to fall for Yukiko as a mother-like figure, pure and caring. Conversely, Asao has issues with women that stem back to his childhood when his father died in a mining accident and his mother took to prostitution to put food on the table.

During a flashback sequence the fatherless Asao is depicted as a curious and voyeuristic boy when he spies on his mother 'working.' In this scene Fukasaku utilizes a green sepia-styled filter not only to portray the event as a distant memory (in relation to the full color film), but also to enhance the covetous emotions of Asao's adolescence. His family's sense of normalcy and pride is completely shattered when he calls her out and throws his new shoes back in her face. Asao's distrust of women continues into adulthood where his feelings of resentment and lust alienate him from any female prospects. When he visits Ryuji's sister at her bar in Shinjuku he works up the courage to talk to her by drinking excessively and by subsequently sleeping with her by accident. Interestingly, while they have sex Asao's imagination flips back and forth between images of Ryuji's 'loose' and witchy sister teasing him and a naked Yukiko playfully rolling on a soft bed. It seems Asao cannot reconcile his infatuation and natural sexuality, which he takes as uncompromisingly lustful. Realizing this, he swears off both women.

The final conflict arises when Kiyoshi, having escaped from prison, is found hiding in the truck by Asao. With Kiyoshi now a fugitive, Asao and Kikuo are at odds on whether to call the police or hide him. Kikuo realizing the consequences of harboring a fugitive wants to call the cops, but Asao is a bound by his dependence on friends and allows him to hide out. Unbeknownst to anyone, Kiyoshi suffers a mortal wound during his escape. In panic he begs

Asao take him to see the ocean before he expires, but dies in transit. In the rising action, grief stricken Asao wrecks the truck off the side of a cliff and the scene climaxes with the truck catching fire with Kiyoshi's corpse trapped inside. The truck "Independence No. 1" explodes into a ball of flames, a pyre for youthful dreams.

Fukasaku's depiction of youthful deviation in *Kimi* is not intended to be socially amoral or even condoning the actions of a disaffected generation. Instead he creates a historical setting with a social dilemma for his characters, who are coincidentally immature young men. There is an equally powerful outside force beyond the control of the individual men that affects their lives in a very profound and often harmful way. At some point these five young men feel their power as a generation is idealistic in the new 'democratic' age, but the time old pathos of youthful indiscretion proves to be a powerful counteragent. Each lives with sense of his own past, present and future. The past is a broken "golden egg," and the present is alienation. With an unknown future ahead, Fukasaku's exposition on behalf of the fraternal generation is one of confusion created in the wake of social and political transformation of Japanese society. These young men represent a historical demographic of Japanese youth worked and spent in the national effort for economic recovery. Subsequently left behind by a booming economy, Fukasaku seems to point to class turmoil and the constantly evolving Japanese landscape as the cause of a disenfranchised young generation. However, Fukasaku is not condoning the callous actions of his characters or even alluding to any sort of pessimistic or apathetic attitude towards society as a reasonable conclusion, instead one must be willing to put on the gloves and fight tenaciously for independence.

Chapter Two
Convictions Under the Flag: Militarism and Humanity

Anti-war Film

If movies reflect existing social attitudes almost as much as they shape them, then pacifist films in 1960s Japan have could have much to say about the charged political climate of the era (Mellen 1976, 196). The political struggle between the Japanese Socialist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the sanctioning of the 1960 American-Japanese military peace treaty defined the decade's social tumult (Gordon 2009, 277-279). In fear that Japan would be drawn into American military efforts, massive protests outside and inside the Japanese Diet attempted to impede the signing and ratification of the treaty, to no avail. Shortly after the enactment of the treaty in June 1960, the anti-war demonstrations gradually calmed down for several years. For the time being, the socialists' "political energy quickly shifted to a battle over jobs" concerning the union control over the workplace and job security for the working class in the increasingly corporate Japanese business economy (Gordon 2009, 275). By the end of the 1960s the socialist protestors changed direction in challenge to any and all problems with the consequences of the influence of American ideals and modernization. Problems with pollution, changing energy markets (from coal to oil) and the legitimate acquisition of land in Chiba prefecture (outside of Tokyo) by the government for the construction of Narita international airport were just a few of the heated issues of the era.

With the memory of war in the distant past and focus placed firmly on Japan's peaceful and economic future, many anti-war films in the late 1960s, such as *Nihon no ichiban nagai hi* (Japan's Longest Day 1967), were somewhat "gratuitous" in their depictions of the horrors of war (Mellen 1976, 196). Within Japan's transition into an economic

superpower, the reconstitution of the former *zaibatsu* corporate conglomerates, as well as the emperor's reinstatement as figurehead were several major social reversions that required decisive examination. A critical lens was necessitated to look toward the power structures in Japanese society that led them astray into frantic militarism. Rather than criticizing the nature of the Japanese military specifically, a film like Fukasaku's *Gunki Hatameku Motoni* (Under the Flag of the Rising Sun, 1972) focused on the wartime Imperial despotism and the consequences it had on the postwar society.

Gunki Hatameku Motoni (*Under the Flag of the Rising Sun* 1972)

Gunki received an unusually large praise from the left-wing (socially liberal) film critics that readily criticized Fukasaku's early Toei produced *yakuza* films. As the *yakuza* genre was typified as formulaic during its period of popularity, Fukasaku was relatively ignored as a Toei studio stooge by leftist critics (Yamane 2003). This is of course before the inception of his famed docu-drama *Jingi Naki Tatakai* in 1973 that helped revamp Toei's redundant *yakuza* genre altogether and reconsidered Fukasaku as a critical voice in the cinematic canon, for the time being. However, since *Gunki* was produced and released by the independent Shinsei Eigasha studio, a great amount of liberties were available to the filmmaker. According to Japanese film expert Linda Hoaglund, the film was adapted from Yuki Shoji's non-fiction book documenting the abuses of military authority on the war front (Hoaglund 2005). Critic and biographer Yamane Sadao comments that Fukasaku was so stirred by the short story that he bought the film rights with his own money (acquired as a second-director of *Tora! Tora! Tora!* in 1970) and adapted it shortly thereafter (Yamane 2005). Perhaps the story struck a nerve with Fukasaku's boyhood experiences during the war

in which he worked in a munitions factory that was bombed by Allied Naval ships. As Fukasaku witnessed his peers take cover under the mangled corpses of fellow classmates, he realized that faced with the dehumanizing effects of war people will do anything they can to survive in the most extreme circumstances.

Though left-wing critics lauded the adaptation, Yamane explains that to interpret the work simply as an anti-war film is to miss a valuable aspect of the Fukasaku approach, the exposition of individual experience (Yamane 2005). The film's theme centers on the lives of ex-soldiers and how each dealt with identity transformation from wartime up through Japan's economically prosperous years into the film's setting in 1971. With Japan headed full-speed into the future not everyone was able to keep up, especially those still dealing with the nightmare of war in the not so distant past.

Fukasaku opens the film with the Japanese military decree "Our nation's military has always served at the discretion of our emperor." The first image, a gravestone at the National Monument to Fallen soldiers, is accompanied by the voice of Emperor Hirohito in a speech given to the affected families. Real footage from 1971, Hirohito's sober voice hauntingly resembles that of the declaration of surrender he gave only twenty-six years prior. The monument adorned with hundreds of chrysanthemums, a symbol of peace and the Imperial seal, the emperor pays tribute to the dead military and makes a prayer to the progress of world peace. Even as the ceremony appears formally sincere, Fukasaku retorts "and yet among the three million dead, some are denied tribute." Already in the first few moments of the film, Fukasaku makes a rebellious but poignant statement on the contradictions still prevalent in Japan that seeks to be a peaceful and honorable postwar society.

The narrative of *Gunki* is constructed a lot like Akutagawa's *Yabu no Naka* (In a Grove, 1922), better known adapted into the film *Rashomon* (1955) by Kurosawa. In essence it relies on conflicting testimonies of ex-soldiers as representation of the truth. The lack of a cohesive narrative emphasizes every character's egoistic self-defense, thus the truth becomes relative in juxtaposition (Yoshimoto 2000). In an interview with Linda Hoaglund, Fukasaku explains that he intentionally choose the Rashomon-esque structure in order to represent the individual voices of the soldiers as well as different aspects of military abuse during the war (Hoaglund 2005). The testimonies and flashbacks of each character combine as an amalgamation of experience that does not require a *benshi* (voiceover narrator), that in effect implores the viewer to carefully weigh out the plausibility of each case. The film's overarching idea may be contemptuous towards the wartime Japanese government but it does not achieve this by monotonous, overt commentary that leads its viewer to the conclusion.

As Yuki's novel lacked a central character, Fukasaku along with screenwriters Shindo Kaneto and Osada Norio created both Sergeant Togashi and his wife Sakie to link the multiple narratives through a linear plot. The narrative bridge in the film adaptation is centered on the court marshal and subsequent execution of Sergeant Togashi at the end of the Pacific War. Following the war, Sakie receives the death certificate of her husband only to find that a date of his death is missing and the cause of death has been modified by hand from "died in combat" to "deserter." Despite her tenacity, the bureaucratic Ministry of Welfare sticks with an 'unreliable' record of deaths and has little to offer her in terms of changing this status. Sakie laments that her only wish is to offer a chrysanthemum to the emperor in honor of her husband's sacrifice. It seems her frustration lies in the bureaucracy that keeps her from achieving her goal, her husband's honor in the graces of the emperor.

Sakie treks out into Tokyo to find members of her husband's detachment to acquire them as living witnesses in hopes of piecing together the truth and officially restoring his honor. Her journey, however, will prove that the dilemma of truth is more complex than a clerical problem.

The first meeting is with a rather homely character, former First Class Private Terajima. Living on a virtual garbage mound on the outskirts of Tokyo, a former Korean shantytown during the black market era, Terajima lives alone with a drove of hogs. The backdrop of the Tokyo skyline serves as a contrast to the dump; a retrospective representation of the black market slums adjacent to the modern reconstructed urban sprawl. Terajima narrates to Sakie the Japanese military experience during the final year of the Pacific War. With the Allied forces closing in on the Imperial Army, the members of the detachment are cut off from communication and supplies from the larger *guntai* (military) and forced to fend for themselves in the jungles of New Guinea. Despite orders to attack the Allies, Sergeant Togashi advises they avoid being flushed out to slaughter. Vexed by his insubordination, a superior officer threatens to court marshal Togashi. According to Terajima, the officer attacks alone and is mowed down by machine guns in a matter of moments. In this account, Togashi embodies rationality in relation to the invincible-warrior complex that typifies high-ranking Japanese officers bent on a glorious victory at all costs.

Terajima maintains that Togashi was anything but a deserter; he paints him as a tactical genius leading brilliant offensives, and caring leader who willingly surrendered his own food and weapons to his weaker subordinates and most of all a soldier who died nobly in battle. However, when Sakie requests he enlighten the Ministry, arguing "you're a living witness, nobody's going to accuse you of lying," Terajima refuses to return to the city.

Apparently he feels resentment toward and detachment from a reconstructed society that he has little moral stake in. During his repatriation, the sickly Terajima found comfort in the black markets where, like himself, everyone was poor and hungry. Despite the chaos, it was a time in Japanese history when every citizen was equally demoralized and deprived; an equilibrium of suffering in a sense. Throughout his life, he continually moves further away from the construction sprawl of Tokyo into the last vestiges of the black market era. His plight speaks of the "in-ruins" generation's failure to adapt to the new modern and democratic age. Thus, Terajima, the damaged soul, is marginalized by modernization.

Sakie finds former Corporal Akiba working as a comedic actor in downtown Tokyo. In character of Japanese officer just emerging from the jungle and ignorant of Japan's defeat, Akiba stages a satire of the Japanese imperial militancy. The routine lampoons the disheveled officer as a lunatic, so filled with pride and fanatic loyalty to the empire that rumors of the Emperor Hirohito's surrender cause him the immature conniption fit of a small child. During the skit, Akiba's militant officer desperately implores the audience if the rumor of Japan's defeat is true, to which a younger audience member quips "we got creamed!" These Tokyoites attending such a showcase are representative of the socially critical progressives of 1960s Japan, aiming to criticize the absurdity and manipulation of Japan's wartime imperial mentality.

In the backstage dressing room, Sakie shows a picture of Togashi and pleads with Akiba for information on her husband's fate. Still Akiba hardly recognizes him, remarking that back then malnutrition caused everyone to look the same with "skinny necks and bulging eyes." The only sergeant he remembers was shot in the back for stealing potatoes from a vegetable patch near division headquarters. Furthermore he contradicts Terajima's claim,

explaining that the imperial army on New Guinea was in no condition to charge anything, even when they wanted to. Compared to the Allied forces, the detachment was ill equipped with busted cannons, one machine gun and too few rifles, and yet the Japanese army forced its soldiers to fight to the death with sharpened bamboo sticks. According to Akiba, the heads of the army had no tactical prowess to fend off the powerful Allied offensive and the war effort quickly became a lost cause. Still Japanese soldiers were forced to die in the name of the divine emperor, lest they be executed for desertion. Throughout the monologue Akiba applies new make-up for his next routine, his face is hardly shown and it seems that his own identity is in constant shift. The masks change so quickly, it is hard to get a true sense of his character. Unsure of the accuracy of his own version, he apologizes claiming he cannot tell the difference between his memories and his stage acts anymore. The stage has become Akiba's escape from the dregs of his adult life.

Sakie finds ex-military officer (MP) Ochi living in an old wooden house in the middle of modern Tokyo. Taking into account the extensive destruction of Tokyo at the end of the war, his odd little house sitting stubbornly atop a hill is symbolic of a very recent past overcome by the momentum of modernity. The house is likely no older than twenty-six years, but in the midst of Tokyo's high rise apartments it could be mistaken for a relic. As for Ochi's condition, upon repatriation he succumbed to drinking so much black-market alcohol (a.k.a. "bomb") to cope with post war stress that it made him blind. Early in the post war era, alcohol was highly abused and deaths caused by homemade liquor were commonplace (Gordon 2009, 227).

In an ironic twist, the visual horrors that Ochi was trying to snuff out by drinking heavily are the only visual memories he has left. His visual memories locked in a horrific past, he has no sense of what Japan currently looks like and his hermit lifestyle detaches him all the more from modern society. Ochi, like Terajima, stands as a symbol of the disenfranchised soldier in post war society, absent in the present and trapped in the past.

Over tea, Ochi explains to Sakie the reason Togashi was executed. After the detachment was abandoned on New Guinea by the *guntai* (army) Togashi took to wandering the island and trading mysterious meat to hungry soldiers, which he claimed was from wild boars. Suspicious of this claim a scout was sent to shadow Togashi, but never returned. On his next visit with another package of meat the MPs interrogated him on the whereabouts of his platoon when he confessed to killing and eating one of his peers. Cannibalism, claims Ochi, is the reason he was executed.

Former Second Lieutenant Ohashi is found working as a high school teacher in Chiba prefecture, directly underneath the flight path to Narita International Airport. While Ohashi recites an ancient poem about a traveler pining for his wife at home, the howl of an American jetliner overhead interrupts his reflection and the class breaks out into disorder. Fukasaku uses the passing jetliners as a metaphor of the unbearable noise and speed of the modern era. Ohashi as a member of the older generation does little but frown at the ruckus. On top of the roof Ohashi and Sakie watch the students play tennis and rugby. Ohashi comments that Western sports once only played by the elite have become common recreation in public school. Westernization of Japan, it seems, has begun saturating the traditional educational system. Speaking about the execution he had forgotten just after the war he reflects on the meaning of life for himself and his friends that has diminished after the surrender; he has

come to justify the loss as a "precious sacrifice that was essential for a new and peaceful Japan." Once again, a jetliner passes overhead interrupting his reflection; the scream of the engine shakes loose the memories of recent social unrest.

Here Fukasaku uses a montage of still imagery in an economical, yet profound way to illustrate the turmoil of the decade, with photos of the 1960 Security Treaty renewal and the riots that ensued as well as the public assassination of Asanuma Inejiro, the Secretary General to the Socialist Party. Also included is a famous photo of Mishima Yukio's *Tatenokai* militant faction atop the Japanese Self-Defense headquarters in Tokyo. In a failed attempt to inspire the Japanese Self-Defense forces to an imperial coup d'état, the *Tatenokai* faction, imbued with the militancy of *bushido* (warrior code)*,* committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*) in November of 1970. The use of real historical stills emphasizes the social-political tumult in Japan and adds to the film's general critical context.

Ohashi notices students gathering on the roof of the next building, hanging banners reading "American bases out of Japan!" and "Fight against the construction of Narita!" The legality of land acquisitions in the construction of the airport and its use as an American military supply port during the Vietnam War was a rather heated issue, especially in the student movements. Ohashi finally comments that his harrowing experiences in battle and the black market period have left him exhausted, so much that he feels completely overwhelmed by the era of political 'progress.' The experiences of his generation and repatriated soldiers, sometimes considered burnouts, fall to the wayside in the momentum of the young Japanese progressives.

The truth, it seems, is difficult to discern and moreover the context of it depends on who is telling it. Each soldier, coping with the atrocities of war, bends the truth to his own

reality during and after the event. One thing runs common to every testimony: the brutality of war strips away the humanity of all those involved and forces every human to compromise individuality for the good of the national war effort. Furthermore, the military decree ("Our nation's military has always served at the discretion of our emperor") stated in the beginning takes on a different nuance by film's end. In the light of the emperor's tribute, the dedication of chrysanthemums appears honorable in its affection. However, after the harrowing tales of starvation and abuse by superior officers, the decree becomes more critical of a tyranny dictated by an authoritarian government bent on conquest. "The government didn't ask anyone's permission to start the war, but we're the ones stuck paying for all of it," remarks Sakie in the final scene of the film.

The adaptation of the film and its subsequent release during the 1960s, no doubt, takes on a dissenting tone. As adaptation is essentially a form of repetition aside from imitation, change is unavoidable even when unintended. The adaptation process in itself corresponds to modifications and takes on the political valence of its re-creators (Hutcheon 2006, 92-93). Since the original work is being reinterpreted into a different medium (film) it is inevitably filtered through the personal and political motives of Fukasaku, Osada and Shindo. Additionally, Fukasaku's incorporation of wartime photo stills is an extremely powerful symbol of protest in their depiction of Japanese suffering. Living under the military flag, as it seems, is a life of feudal loyalty and involuntary sacrifice under the emperor. The film's title, "Under the Flag of the Rising Sun," not only represents the historical context of the film's theme but also stands as a powerful symbol of wartime repression of individuals "at the discretion" of authority.

Chapter Three
Out of the Black Market: A New Yakuza Genre

Ninkyo and the Yakuza genre

After the decline of the samurai swordplay *chambara* films of the 1950s, an old genre of hero reemerged from tales of the Japanese mafia, or *yakuza*. The bulk of the yakuza genre was produced by Toei studios in the form of chivalrous period pieces, popularly known as *ninkyo* films, which roughly translates into "film of chivalry." The typical *ninkyo* presented the protagonist as a sort of Robin Hood of gangsters who was good, honorable and fought to preserve righteous tradition in opposition to his corrupt and opportunist brethren. This formula resonated well with audiences in its typified and dichotomous conflicts (good/evil, individual/group) and easy to identify star marketing strategy, which popularized actors like Takakura Ken in the commercial film market (McDonald 1992, 167)

Although the *ninkyo* genre was a very popular sub-genre for a period, its themes became repetitive and obvious. Like most low-budget and predictable Spaghetti Westerns, the audience could quickly identify the hero and the dialogue over morals, even if internal criticism was less than thought provoking. According to film critic Yamane Sadao the studio-system sacrificed originality for commercialism and rightly so with a successful model, but like most repetitive genres the plot became bland and the audience was merely killing time at the local movie theater (Yamane 2003). Although this cycle can be seen routinely with the rise of sub-genres and popularized themes throughout international cinematic history, what is important is that genre (and sub-genre) indicates a reflection in the shifts of tastes and social consciousness. Within nearly a century of radical social change, from the Meiji Era, through the era of Japanese Imperialism to the complete reconstruction of the Japanese social

infrastructure, the *yakuza* genre stands as an interesting model of democratization of culture in its ability to be reinvented, its overall longevity and especially its popularity.

Unfortunately the "generic nature" of *yakuza* films that were aimed at the "working class urban, male audiences" has been disqualified from any serious or meaningful study of genre, even to long time experts like Donald Richie or Joan Mellen (McDonald 1992, 166) This bias may also influence a lack of international video releases of *yakuza* films when compared to the amount of classic works released by established directors.

Jitsuroku

By the early 1970s, the fervor over chivalrous criminals was in sharp decline. Even with a booming economy, Japanese audiences were subjected to the commercial monotony of the *ninkyo* (Yamane 2003). As a part of the commercial studio system, Toei knew it was time to shift gears and find its new cash cow. Luckily for Fukasaku this would be the opportunity to apply innovation in the genre by employing the *jitsuroku* ("actual record") film style in his five-part, ground breaking series *Jingi Naki Tatakai* (*Battles without Honor and Humanity,* 1973-74). Essentially, Fukasaku would create a yakuza sub-genre as a documentary-drama adapted from the autobiographical memoirs of Iiboshi Koichi, a former gangster reformed at the end of the Allied Occupation. Written while serving jail time, Iiboshi recounts his harrowing experiences as a member in the *boryokudan,* a relatively unorganized "violence group." Born out of the black market era, the *boryokudan* faction would make its way into the burgeoning ranks of the larger Japanese mafia amidst the chaos in war-torn Hiroshima prefecture (McDonald 1992, 185).

During the adaptation process, screenwriter Kasahara Kazuo took a trip to Hiroshima to interview several yakuza mentioned in Iiboshi's memoir, with the author's blessing of

course (Yamane 2003). Kasahara's venture in uncovering the memoir's back story would have a profound effect on the portrayal of conflict and the structure of a series that empathizes with the struggles of lower echelon characters. Interestingly this sub-story structure would in effect break down the prevalent studio star-system by relying on an ensemble cast to create a multi-dimensional story. Rather than solely relying on a heroic protagonist to guide us through the drama, the audience is exposed to a veritable array of sub-stories during periods when he is completely out of frame, especially since he is invariably in and out of jail.

Yakuza entrepreneurship amidst the rubble

With the exception of the former Japanese capital of Kyoto, which was spared by the U.S. government as potential target for atomic bombing, by the end of 1945 almost all major Japanese cities were destroyed by the incendiary bombing of American B-29s. The Japanese military force was in shambles; wounded, lost, and hungry, the repatriated roamed through burnt-out cities trying to survive among homeless civilians. Nationwide, one-quarter of wealth, one-third of manufacturing machinery and four-fifths of shipping (imports and exports) were disabled or destroyed (Kaplan and Durbo 2003, 33). With the surrender and demobilization of the military and with industry left idle, civilians and soldiers flocked to the black markets, buying and selling anything they could. Interestingly, many of the supplies sold were stolen from the American Base Exchange (PX) by young thugs whose entrepreneurship would create a "New Yen Class" (Kaplan and Durbo 2003, 34) for Japan's hustlers, ex-soldiers and desperate youth.

The purge of Japanese war-time politicians and military leaders, and disassembling of any and all pre-war authorities, by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) left most of Japan essentially lawless for several years (Kaplan and Durbo 2003, 37). Public clashes were common between Japanese and Korean gangs, the latter of which had some backing of the SCAP to act as informants on any imperialist right-wingers including the *yakuza.* A breakdown in the civil authoritarian hierarchy meant that the police force was incapable to deal with the mayhem and the American MPs were hardly concerned as long as the violence was not directed toward the Allied Occupation. This lawless rift was exploited by the *yakuza* in the callous fight for black market dominance. This ruthless "New Yen Class" was known as *gurentai* (thugs), a newer and more violent group of gangsters acting as the muscle for the profiteering peddlers and gamblers of the Japanese mafia. The collapse of the larger nationalist party, including the upper echelons of government, police and ultra-nationalist *yakuza* leaders created a power vacuum for these ambitious *gurentai* groups. The strongest in number and sheer willpower rose to the occasion and thousands of homeless young men would gravitate towards the alluring opportunity of an organization that sought to stake claim in entrepreneurship of the re-constructive period. Interestingly, the Korean War and the Allied fear of Japanese left-wing labor movements as inherently communist presented an opportunity for the right-wing, ultra-nationalist mafia. SCAP eventually gave official sanction for the ultra-nationalist thugs to break up the socialist labor unions that were becoming more prevalent in Japan. This sanction on behalf of American anti-communist sentiment effectively gave the Yakuza a "new lease on life" (Kaplan 2003).

Jingi Naki Tatakai (_Battles without Honor and Humanity_ 1973-1974)[2]

Fukasaku's brisk-paced *boryoku* (violence) dramas in the 1970s are synonymous with action, and *Battles* is considered by Yamane to be the zenith of this period. The pentalogy starts off with a bang; literally, the first several moments of the film's opening is a black and white still of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima with an emblazoned red title spattered across the screen, "Jingi Naki Tatakai." The opening image of the mushroom cloud is so universally powerful it needs no explanation, its detonation so specific to a point in human history it transcends the definition of time. However, from the Japanese side of history it is an uncompromising and uncomfortable shift in history and national identity. Fukasaku's use of the still in the opening of the film is less a time stamp or bold gesture, rather he intentionally sets this gangster-drama apart from its romantic predecessors with a blunt reality check. It is a gesture that is neither forced nor easily ignored, serving as the age-old analogy of the 'elephant in the room'; an atomic-elephant. While many postwar dramas are subtle and delicately work almost at a subconscious level in stimulating the tumult of emotions in Japanese postwar society, Fukasaku uses blatant imagery that picks at the scab.

The term *jingi* representing the *yakuza's* code of honor (or duty) is fundamental to the composition of a *yakuza* film. The honor code in effect is the element of drama that creates inner and outer conflict for the protagonist as he attempts to reconcile *ninjo* (personal feelings) with what is expected of him in his relative social circle. In opposition to the *ninkyo, Battles* does not advance its plot with clear-cut oppositions or obvious dichotomies,

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[2] Note: To avoid confusion with the Japanese term *jingi,* the film title *Jingi Naki Tatakai* will be abbreviated henceforth as *Battles*.

"good/evil or individual/group" (McDonald 1992, 186), instead it relies on a proximity to the historical account of the chaos in post war society. The introduction of the protagonist Hirono begins as a typical loner story of a wanderer looking to land a home and a job in a society that cannot possibly offer it, but what sets Hirono apart from the *ninkyo* predecessors is that he is not alone. Among thousands of homeless soldiers and civilians, his struggle is hardly internal or unique. He, like the rest of the residents in the greater Hiroshima region, is lost, demoralized and hungry. The catalyst for Hirono begins when he witnesses a young Japanese girl chased down and raped by American GIs. While the rest of the demoralized public either ignores the spectacle or watches indifferently, Hirono and his companion boldly, albeit clumsily, fend off the four GIs long enough for the girl to get away and as they flee being shot by arriving American MPs. From the very beginning, the audience is imbued with some sense of trust in Hirono by his gallant attempt in saving the girl. He possesses some bit of sensibility and decency in the midst of the disorder.

During the clumsy scuffle it becomes apparent that Fukasaku's approach to fighting is anything but choreographed. While the fight between good and evil in the studio formula is proudly stylized as sexy and sometimes epic, Fukasaku makes no qualms about the lumbering nature of fighting. This approach may be perceived as somewhat silly to an audience conditioned by the studio formula, but anybody who has witnessed or been involved in a fight can admit that the physical struggle is anything but well maneuvered. Whether or not Fukasaku is attempting to illustrate fighting 'realistically' is not as important as the portrayal of primitive conflict of man against man. Fighting in his films is depicted as unsophisticated, unattractive and hardly glorified, even for a character that runs wildly against the odds. In Fukasaku's world, even if the hero were favored to win, the odds are

stacked brutally high; he will lose more fights and even more friends to violence. The spotlight on violence against violence is a statement by Fukasaku about the mire and illegitimacy of human brutality in an era that resembles Dante's seventh circle of Hell.

The use of violence in Fukasaku's larger body of work has been described by fellow directors of 1970s action films (like William Friedkin of *French Connection* fame) as a raw and visceral element that creates realistic action (Friedkin 2003). As characters are allowed to begin as simple subjects free of presumption, the fragility of humanity is inherent and the action comes alive naturally rather than a forced affair. As most characters, like the repatriated soldiers, are emotionally damaged from the scourge of warfare, clichés markers like a scar on the face or a kitschy eye-patch are avoided as devices to indicate wickedness. In this, Fukasaku seems to be suggesting that malevolence is more than skin deep; betrayal is insidious and trust is simply blind.

Throughout the five-part epic of underworld alliances, rivalries and plots, violence towards key members of organizations is used far less often than of underlings who are slaughtered in herds. The slain foot-soldiers, dubbed "human bullets" by Fukasaku, represent the means by which the establishment obtains its power and the insinuation that authority is political when a man is ordered to use violence against another. The implication is that loyalty as a virtue is nullified under the coercion of opportunistic authority; a man consciously follows his duty because he knows the consequences of contravention.

Battles is one work that explicitly considers humanity from the voices of subordinates who live by a code that compels them to accept orders and forfeit individuality. A man is told to kill, lest he be ostracized by his own group. It seems to me that Fukasaku is inferring that loyalty is an easily corruptible and wavering virtue of humanity. That is, there

is a fine line between a chosen personal obligation and an ultimatum given to an individual

that is sometimes difficult to distinguish. Put into the context of Japanese history during

World War II, for instance, obligation towards the emperor was met at all costs including

rambunctious suicide attacks. In Japanese culture, honorable suicide in the *bushido* code is

one example of loyalty to an extreme degree. The obligation to authority and the political

implications of loyalty tend to be central issues in Fukasaku's critique of Japanese society.

Considering the heightened political climate after the war and admonishment of wartime

militancy, Fukasaku contributes to critical awareness by examining certain insidious aspects

of his culture.

  Jingi and *ninjo* are still prevalent themes in the *yakuza* world, but Fukasaku places

emphasis on the human inclinations before duty. As Friedkin comments, characters

regardless of social status must be considered human beings in tune with inner feelings

before conflict and action is realistically possible. The assessment in a character's

vulnerability to social convictions is one consideration on the nature of humanity and its

consequences to individuality. Thus the sub-stories adapted by Kasahara become a vehicle

for the film's examination of the individuals who are caught in the politics of the deviant

Japanese social system.

  As for Hirono's character, once he is recruited into the Yamamori group he makes an

explicit statement about his moral fiber and commitment to his *Oyabun* (boss) when he

commits *yubitsume*, the traditional Yakuza atonement of severing the small finger. Though

this ritual dates back hundreds of years, the symbolism is in the weakening of the sword hand

and the strengthening of dependency to the boss (Kaplan and Durbo 2003, 14). Interestingly,

the whole process of *yubitsume* is unknown to the fledgling Yamamori family and so the

whole procedure is so ostentatious and awkward that it almost serves as comic relief. Hirono is endowed with a kind of goodness in a society gone sour that his allegiance and sincerity acts as a barometer in the raging, chaotic yakuza underworld; a world where hierarchy is unstable, alliances fail while profiteering becomes the "be-all and end-all" (McDonald 1992, 185).

In a historical context, the series spans twenty-five years of significant Japanese history, from the end of the war up until 1970. In a time of rapid reconstruction known as the Japanese "economic miracle" the *yakuza* finds that its venture into the postwar power vacuum has paid off well. Episode one exposes mingling of postwar politicians with underworld opportunists when the Yamamori family (Hirono's group) abducts a district representative on voting day to throw the election to a conservative party. The scheme is placed on the table by a local politician who offers the fledgling Yamamori group private access to large amounts of interest-free loans that it desperately needs to become a legitimate organization. Much like the use of the yakuza to break left-wing labor strikes by the SCAP, Japanese politicians employed the muscle of the Yakuza to manipulate the power structure in favor of the right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (Maruko 2003). Considering the historical right-wing association of the Japanese mafia, the budding capitalist economy and the political interests it served, associations with the conservative LDP provide a viable resource for the *yakuza* to blossom into a relatively legitimate organization.

In the politically charged climate of the late 1960s, Fukasaku effectively uses the docu-drama as a retrospective exposé of underworld business and political interests that have been prevalent since the end of the war. The corruption in the Japanese political system and its involvement with the gangland becomes a repetitive theme throughout the series. By

episode four *Chojo Sakusen* (*Police Tactics,* 1974), the Yamamori group has shed its

gangster image and acquired itself several businesses in tourism and sports in a legitimate

free enterprise façade. However, the violence between rival families in competition hints to

the audience that legitimacy is an illusion, deceptively used by opportunist leaders to secure

their interests in Japan's future. By the final episode the audience would be hard pressed to

view each of the bosses as a compassionate parent, but rather to see them as a tyrannical

profiteer who is "not above pitting one of his men against another if that removes obstacles to

his ambitions" (McDonald 1992, 185). The period of corporatism in Japan's booming

economy included underworld bosses climbing to the position of "legitimate" corporate

heads that controlled business principle (money) and a team of thugs to out- muscle any

opposition.

Admittedly the grand scope and epic complexity in plot limits the amount one can

discuss about the series. Taking into account pace, rhythm and the richness in imagery of the

film medium, trying to deconstruct the entire series could easily fill a book. Fukasaku's

jitsuroku approach to the yakuza genre is, however, a refreshing and realistic offering to the

Japanese audience in that it directly challenges the prior depiction of the Japanese mafia,

mainly by way of primal violence and the persistent power struggles throughout the social

and economic shift in a twenty-five year segment of Japanese history. Considering the

demographics that comprised the *yakuza* genre audience in the 1970s—young, middle class,

urban males—the series offers a dramatic glimpse into the recent past in a fictional but

historically modeled plot that does more than serve as passive entertainment.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the purpose of art in humanities and the examination of the human condition it is fair to say that Fukasaku, as one of several unique directors of his generation, offers a fresh cinematic perspective on Japanese society. What sets Fukasaku's catalogue apart from the rest of the New Wave is that his works are not particularly in the spirit of the 'art house' or 'high art.' That is, the idea that 'art house' cinema is not produced for mass consumption is central to the dispute of him being labeled thusly. However, considering the definitive purpose of the New Wave, that the films were politically critical and visually disjunctive from early and contemporary films, Fukasaku does achieve critical dialogue and innovative imagery in a unique way. The raw simplicity of the documentary-drama format (*jitsuroku),* becomes representative of his style. A Japanese kin to the Italian Neorealist cinema of postwar Europe, films like *Kimi* focus on the everyday lives of working class citizens struggling with moral conditions of an evolving society. Also, in the same principles of Neorealism, Fukasaku shoots 'on location' with less-than-familiar actors, breaking down the control governing the studio set and abandoning the marketable star-system.

Incorporating historical and political aspects of society, films like *Gunki* are an exposition of the burden that modern society has on the Japanese psyche. Sakie is caught in a morally 'progressive' society that is attempting to forget its past while redefining its tradition. While films like these were not commonplace, there exists a catalogue of such critical works, so I am in no way saying that Fukasaku is so unique that he is completely apart from other directors of this period. His voice is one of several, but apparent nonetheless.

Fukasaku, among others, offers a personal-political slice of his generation's turbulent era, intentionally examined through the political/social lens. Still, even though it seems apparent that he is repulsed by the ultra-nationalist faction that led Japan into the mire of war; he does not coddle the ultra-new American-style democracy either. In retrospect to the politically charged "60s," a politically dichotomous 'with us or against us' attitude, Fukasaku seems to have been lumped into the non-right category. To claim his style is more left, or less-than-conservative, is an interesting idea but not the sole anchor of his work, that being humanism. Presenting the audience a drama setting within actual history, with the human face experiencing it, along with contemporary issues and an intimate experience is central to the humanist aim. Humanism, as a rational investigation of morality and truth, is the essence of the three aforementioned films. Sakie's journey through rebuilt Tokyo where she vicariously experiences the testimonies of a wartime horror is the exploration of historical 'truths.' In search for the lost tradition of 'honor,' Hirono tenaciously transits the vicious battles of a corporatizing Japanese underworld through twenty-five years of modernization. The friendship of Asao and Kikuo is put to the test by contrasting their convictions of fraternal loyalty and hope for financial independence in a modern era.

Fukasaku's struggle in producing these films is a testament to the prevalence of the commercial studio system's power structure. With the domination of commercial interests in films as a marketable commodity, the revolutionary aspect of the film art is diluted considerably. In this, the working class and undereducated audience may become complacent with the entertainment-laden values of commercial cinema. With the creation of formulaic and monotonous themes, like the *ninkyo* sub-genre, the diversity of artistic influence suffers noticeably. This is where artists like Fukasaku stand to gain a voice, or to suffer depending

on production sanctions. Having his most personal works produced by independent studio Shinsei Eigasha being the only feasible alternative is exemplary of the power struggle that exists in the creation and distribution of unconventional film. In short, profiteering becomes the bane of artistic idiosyncrasies that seeks an audience through film.

I would agree with Japanese-American scholar Masao Miyoshi, that "the humanities is not a province of the corporate manager but of the humanist" (Said 2004, 14). The commercialism of film has ultimately precluded the critical questions of the humanities, that being the valence of history with values and liberties of mankind. Further examining Fukasaku in the cult of the *auteur*, which had a life span during the same period of Neorealism, his films do offer the essential humanist existential experience (Stam 2000). Taking great care not to separate his characters from their society or focus on them at a microscopic level emphasizes history as a catalyst. Additionally, the economical use of still photography in film's like *Gunki Hatameku Motoni* are not merely supplemental, but enhance the sense of time and actual history for the viewer. In the context of commercialism and film, George Duhamel was not entirely wrong in his apprehensive attitude of cinema being a potential "abattoir of culture" or meager entertainment for the "illiterate masses," however dystopian. My view, which may be relatively more utopian, is that film does, in fact, have the power to stimulate a socially critical mind, thus expanding the critical consciousness of society. In the voice of ex-soldier turned school teacher Ohashi, in *Gunki,* Fukasaku states a critical mission, "If I have the right to teach anyone anything, it is only to convey the misery of war to new generations."

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