

## Recent Japanese Film

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## Recent Japanese Film

### Hirano Kyoko

What does film mean to Japanese today? Is it an important part of their entertainment and cultural life? Or is it something trivial for distraction? We will first consider the film industry's position in the Japanese entertainment business. In the year 2009, 448 Japanese and 314 foreign films, a total of 762 films, were released; and a total of 169,297,000 people went to see movies at theaters in Japan. According to Japanese government statistics, the Japanese population in 2009 was 127,510,000, and so a Japanese in average went to see from one to two (1.32) movies in 2009. It is hard to judge how important film is to Japanese from these figures.<sup>1</sup>

The size of movie attendance in 2009 was merely one sixth of its highest point of 1,088,111,000 people who went to see movies in the year 1958. Film used to be a primary entertainment form and business until the late 1950s when television came on the scene, and immediately became its fierce competitor. Today film and television have been threatened by more diverse forms of entertainment from DVD, and video games to the internet, and have endeavored to secure their places.<sup>2</sup>

In 2006, box office income from Japanese films (107,944,000,000 yen) became larger than that from imported films (94,990,000,000 yen) for the first time since 1985. This phenomenon took place again in 2008 (115,859,000,000 yen vs. 78,977,000,000 yen) and in 2009 (117,309,000,000 yen vs.

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<sup>1</sup> Eiren, "Statistics of Film Industry in Japan." The Japanese population statistics for 2009 were taken from the information on Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications website. The updated 2010 figures indicate that 408 Japanese films and 308 foreign films were released, a total of 716 films. The movie admission in the year 2010 was 174,358,000, according to the above Eiren statistics; and the Japanese population for the year 2010 was 128,056,000, according to the above Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications website. For the latest comparison of Japanese film attendance with other countries, see "Cinema: Exhibition of feature films" in UNESCO Institute for Statistics. The average movie attendance in the year 2006 in the US was 4.7 times per year, the third largest in the world; Japan was 1.3 times per year, the 29<sup>th</sup> in the world; and Indonesia was 0.2 times per year, the 59<sup>th</sup> in the world.

<sup>2</sup> Eiren, *ibid.* In Japan, many households purchased TV sets in 1959 wanting to see the royal wedding parade of the then Crown Prince Akihito and commoner Michiko, which took place in April 1959. TV's supremacy over film now began. According to "Contentsu gurōbaru senryaku kenkyūkai ni okeru ronten: Sōkatsuhyō, sankō shiryō 3-1," the Japanese contents industry domestic market share in the year 2005 was as follows: movies for 198 billion yen, anime for 234 billion yen, games for 314 billion yen, TV programs for 3,700 billion yen, music for 601 billion yen, and character merchandises for 1,610 billion yen.

88,726,000,000 yen).<sup>3</sup> Hollywood films had been predominant in Japan for a long time. However, they seem to have become less exciting to the Japanese viewers, constrained by the big budget formula using the same kind of marketable stars and predictable stories in order to reduce risks.

In addition, Japanese youth have recently lost interest in foreign culture. Young people in Japan are no longer interested in studying or working abroad. They are content with listening to Japanese pop music, reading Japanese manga and watching Japanese films.<sup>4</sup> There have also been changes in the Japanese entertainment business. Japanese television stations are more aggressive in promoting the films they co-produced through their advertising spots, faced by the bad economy, reduced advertisement income and competitions coming from games and internet. Once the market for Japanese films expanded, more filmmakers began to participate with films of various subject matter and style, thus

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<sup>3</sup> Eiren, *ibid.* and “Box Office Leaders.” According to the above statistics, in 1985, box office income from the Japanese films was 35,295,000,000 yen and that from the imported films was 34,080,000,000 yen. In the year 1985, there was no significantly large box office hit among Japanese films (the top box office leader, *Biruma no tategoto* made 2.95 billion yen) compared to the box office leaders among imported films (top box office leader, *Ghostbusters*, a Hollywood production, made 4.1 billion yen), and a combination of the high grossing Japanese films seemed to oustrip imported films. In 2006, the two top grossing imported films, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* made 11 billion yen, and *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* made 10 billion yen respectively, while the two top grossing Japanese films, *Gedo senki* made 7.65 billion yen, and *LIMIT TO LOVE Umizaru* made 7.1 billion yen respectively, so again, the combination of high grossing Japanese films made better business than the combination of high grossing foreign films did. In 2008, there was a mega Japanese box office leader, *Gake no ue no Ponyo*, which made 15.5 billion yen, contributing significantly to the Japanese box office income, while the top grossing imported film was *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, which made 5.71 billion yen. In 2009, the top grossing Japanese film, *ROOKIES: Sotsugyō*, made 8.55 billion yen while that of the imported film *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* made 8 billion yen. The updated statistics for the year 2010 from the Eirin website show that the box office income from Japanese films was 118,217 million yen and that from imported films was 102,521 million yen. The box office leaders were *Karigurashi no Arietti* at 9.25 billion yen; *THE LAST MESSAGE Umizaru* at 8.04 billion yen; and *Odoru daisōsasen THE MOVIE 3* at 7.31 billion yen. *Umizaru* is also based on a popular manga, which was adapted to TV drama series. Its drama is about the dangerous rescue missions of the Japan Coast Guards, and is based on real-life incidents.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see “Naze wakamono wa kaigai ni dete mushashugyō shinai no ka.” According to this article, the number of young people aged between 15 and 29 who traveled abroad decreased by 34% during the last 10 years. Various reasons have been discussed such as economic reasons (they do not want to spend money), and the system in the work place (the job-hunting period starts early now, and the corporate system will not utilize people returning from abroad with special skills and experience). The lack of incentive comes from the high Japanese living standard, so that young people do not want to leave the comfort of Japanese life to experience hardship; the wealth of information on foreign countries and cultures easily acquired on the internet may help explain the phenomenon as well. I would argue that all these elements contribute to the formation of conservatism among young Japanese who want to avoid physical and philosophical challenges, and be content with what they already know or are familiar with. As for how the film business fared from 2009 to 2010, four companies distributing foreign films went out of business (Wise Policy, Movie Eye, Cine quanon and Tornado Films) due to a lack of interest in foreign films and the shrinking market in video and DVD rentals. See “2009 nen Nihon eiga sangyō gaikyō.”

making Japanese films more attractive to Japanese viewers.<sup>5</sup>

The film boasting the largest box office income in Japan in 2008 was *Gake no ue no Ponyo*, an anime or animated film by Hayao Miyazaki (1941–), making 15.5 billion yen. The story of a fish named Ponyo falling in love with a human boy is marvelously rendered by the world renowned animator Miyazaki, without using computer graphics technology. Miyazaki's films have consistently attracted huge commercial and critical success in Japan, and are widely recognized internationally, for example, *Majo no takkyūbin* (the top grossing Japanese film of 1989, making 2.15 billion yen), *Mononoke hime* (the top grossing Japanese film of 1997, making 11.3 billion yen) and *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (the top grossing Japanese film of 2001, making 30.4 billion yen).<sup>6</sup> Rich and sophisticated in his visual design and stories, Miyazaki changed the notion of anime, traditionally considered to be made for children, to an art form fully appreciated by adult viewers as well.

The top grossing film of 2009 in Japan was *ROOKIES: Sotsugyō*, making 8.55 billion yen. This is a high school baseball drama based on a popular manga by Masanori Morita, which first appeared in a weekly manga magazine from 1998 to 2003, and later became a manga book in 24 volumes. Thereafter, television network TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) adapted it to its drama series in 2008. The film version was made in 2009 featuring young male pop stars, including Ryūta Satō, Keisuke Koide and Hayato Ichihara; and directed by Yūichirō Hirakawa (1972–) who also directed some of its television episodes. The story is quite simplistic: a bunch of losers guided by an enthusiastic teacher prove that they can win while they learn about life, friendship and themselves. It is hard to find the reason why this film attracted so many people, but it was probably owing to the heavy promotion through repeated television advertising and wide exposure of its story and talents in all facets of broadcasting, print, and internet media.

In 2010, a television network led film like *Odoru daisōsasen THE MOVIE 3 Yatsura o kaibō seyo!* directed by Katsuyuki Motohiro (1965–) achieved a strong showing. This film stems from a television comedy series created by network Fuji Television in 1997, and its first movie version in 1998 grabbed 10 billion yen, and its sequel in 2003 earned 17 billion yen, both record-breaking hits.<sup>7</sup> The film's success is much ascribed to its star Yūji Oda, writer Ryōichi Kimizuka and director Motohiro, all immensely popular in television; they know how to appeal to the masses. As a police drama, the approach of *Odoru daisōsasen* is refreshing, making its detectives and policemen struggle in the situations normally found in typical Japanese corporate culture. For example, the protagonist must retrieve the missing receipts for his petty cash expenses, while frictions between the “main office” and “local branch” are constantly created.

Even more popular is *Karigurashi no Arietti*, an animated film from Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli, planned and written by Miyazaki and directed by newcomer, Hiromasa Yonebayashi (1973–). Based on a Western children's story, the film is about the friendship between 14 year-old Arietti of the tiny people,

<sup>5</sup> “Genki na hōga butaiura wa? Terebi to no korabo de seichō.”

<sup>6</sup> These box office income figures are taken from the aforementioned Eirin website.

<sup>7</sup> These box office income figures are taken from the film's official website. Using some of the same characters but not the main character, Detective Aoshima played by Yūji Oda, two “spin-off” films were also made in 2005, *Kōshōnin Mashita Masayoshi* directed by Katsuyuki Motohiro and *Yōgisha Muroi Shinji* directed by Ryōichi Kimizuka.

and a human boy. The story is somewhat less complicated than Miyazaki's. However, this new director's visual style and color design are sufficiently elaborate.

The producers of these four box office leaders during the last two and a half years consist of the film studio Toho; production companies like Studio Ghibli; the American studio Disney and the French production company, Wild Bunch; combined with TV networks like Nippon TV, TBS and Fuji Television; and local TV stations like Chubu-Nippon Broadcasting and Hokkaido Broadcasting; the music and entertainment company Amuse; talent agencies, Hori Productions and Watanabe Entertainment; advertising agencies, Dentsu and Hakuhodo DYMP; major newspaper companies like Yomiuri Shimbun; internet media company Yahoo! Japan; and telephone company NTT Docomo.

If the film is based on a book, as in the case of *ROOKIES*, its publisher Shueisha will join in. In addition, companies from other fields also participate, such as the trading company Mitsubishi Corporation, insurance companies MS & AD Holdings, drink manufacturer Asahi Soft Drinks, tea manufacturer Ito En, the confectionary giant, Lotte, Myojo Foods known for *rāmen* instant noodles, detergent and toothpaste manufacturer Lion, and local store chain, Lawson. A project like *Odoru dai-sōsasen THEMOVIE 3* aroused particular kinds of interest. Because this is a police drama, automobile giants like Toyota wanted to get involved by providing police cars; and because its story is about an office moving, transportation company. Nippon Express came in.

Nowadays, box office income cannot solely cover the film's production cost, and filmmakers have to depend on broadcasting and foreign sales rights, merchandising license fees of character products, and tie-ups with all sorts of media-related companies and manufacturers. As seen above, companies from a wide variety of trades participate in big budget filmmaking in Japan. Investing money or tying up is alluring for businesses coming from other areas, in exchange for their company name's exposure in successful films.

Television network led films featuring pop stars and based on manga or TV drama series should guarantee such commercial hits. *Okuribito*, which received the Foreign Language Academy Award in 2009, is a unique case because it was made thanks to a TV network's participation in production, but not based on a manga or TV drama series. Deeply inspired by his experience of watching how people bid farewell to the dead in India, actor Masahiro Motoki initiated this project, which portrays a former musician who returns to his home town in the north and becomes an encoffiner who prepares bodies for the funerals. Nobody wanted to finance this project about death. Finally TBS came in, and other companies then joined, forming the *Okuribito* Production Committee [*Okuribito* Seisaku Iinkai].

The serious theme of the film, of how to face death, is handled deftly in an entertaining form full of laughter and tears. The conflict between father and son, and that between husband and wife, are universal themes, and both are solved nicely in the end. The protagonist also overcomes the sense of social discrimination against his chosen profession, and learns to be proud of his work. The beauty of nature is also portrayed in cherry blossoms and green mountains. These factors are essential for the film's international embrace. The film's success is much due to the high craft of its screenplay writer, Kundō Koyama, who is popular in television; its director Yōjirō Takita (1955–) known for making skillfully entertaining films who started his career in the "Pink Film" (adult film) genre;<sup>8</sup> and Motoki's passion in maintaining this project for more than ten years.

More films recognized internationally have been made independently based on the original ideas of filmmakers, carrying strong messages and distinctive styles. From the year 2008 to 2009, a number of international film festivals screened *Okuribito* in addition to *Tōkyō Sonata* by Kiyoshi Kurosawa (1955–), *Aruitemo aruitemo* by Hirokazu Kore-eda (1962–) and *Jitsuroku rengō sekigun: Asama sansō e no michi* by Kōji Wakamatsu (1936–).

Kiyoshi Kurosawa has been popular for his unique horror films including *Cure* (1997), *Kairo* (2001) and *Loft* (2005), attracting international fans. International financing is thus behind *Tōkyō Sonata*'s production. Like Takita, Kurosawa started his career in the “Pink Film” genre, has published books on film criticism, and is teaching filmmaking at a university.

*Tōkyō Sonata* portrays a dysfunctional family of four: a father lost his job but cannot tell his family and keeps dressing up in the morning and pretends to go to work; the mother as a full-time house-wife feels a void in her life; the elder son, a university student, enlists himself in the US Army in order to fight in Iraq; and the younger son, a sixth grader, secretly studies playing piano.

They gather at the dinner table, but nothing is discussed. Kurosawa has stated that in typical Japanese family dramas, family members sit together at the dinner table, and there the main dramatic development takes place, such as a fight starting or a secret being revealed. He consciously de-constructs the dinner table symbol as a family's unity, and instead makes it a symbol of a ritualistic gathering place for family members who cannot communicate with one another.<sup>9</sup>

His story realistically reflects the contemporary Japanese social problem of white-collar unemployment and job shortages. The young generation's frustration with the stagnated Japanese society is also depicted through the son, who seeks some thrill in extreme action in war zones.

Kore-eda started his career as an independent TV documentary maker, pursuing such controversial subject matter as people who are HIV positive, and the fingerprinting requirement for foreign residents in Japan. He achieved international acclaim for his contemplative look on memories and death in his films *Maboroshi no hikari* (1995) and *Wondafuru raifu* (1998), and his observations on the stark survival of children abandoned by their mother in *Dare mo shiranai* (2004).

*Aruitemo aruitemo* is about a family reunion in which each member has an awkward relationship

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<sup>8</sup> The “Pink Film” genre has been recently internationally recognized for the ideological and stylistic radicalism of some directors. In Japan, some critics in the 1960s began to pay attention to this extremely low budget genre. Pink films are typically made for 2 to 3 million yen, in all location shooting in a week or so, with a complete film running for about 60 minutes. As long as the directors fulfill its commercial requirement of including several sexual scenes, or once they attain commercial success, they are given artistic freedom in subject matter and styles and some directors experiment in narrative, visual and auditory modes. From this genre, there emerged main stream directors such as Yōjirō Takita, Kiyoshi Kurosawa and Masayuki Suō (*Shall We Dance?* [1996]). In the Japanese film industry, there is no strict hierarchical distinction between adult film and main stream film, and directors can shift from the former to the latter without much trouble unlike in the US film industry.

<sup>9</sup> Kiyoshi Kurosawa at the press conference of the New York Film Festival following the screening of *Tōkyō Sonata* on 9 October 2008.

with one another. Nothing dramatic takes place, but feelings are quietly ebb out. The parents still mourn the accidental death of the eldest son from 15 years ago; the younger son, who has brought his wife and her young boy from her previous marriage, encounters a mixed response from his parents; the daughter and her husband covet the parents' house so that they can move in with their children, an idea not welcomed by her parents. Some English writing critics compared this film to the classic films on family by Yasujiro Ozu (1903–1963), particularly *Tōkyō monogatari* (1953), in which the parents realize their disappointments with their children.<sup>10</sup> Kore-eda's film is rich in detail and powerful in feelings.

Wakamatsu is a celebrated political activist and was a pioneer in the "Pink Film" genre from the 1960s. In *Jitsuroku rengō sekigun* he examines the human dynamics of internal struggles of the ultra-radical group of student activists of the United Red Army. The group became a focus of the Japanese media and captured the whole Japan's attention when they prepared for a military uprising and trained in the snowy mountains in 1972, ending in their taking hostages and fighting with police.

Wakamatsu followed his political analysis of the Japanese society with this year's film *Catapillar*, through the eye of a wife during World War II whose husband has returned from the front, with his arms and legs missing and half his face disfigured. His sexual and eating desire continues to her dismay, and she gradually begins to resist the conformist attitude of the village to place him on a pedestal as a living "military god" with her as the "honorable wife of the military god." Meanwhile, the husband begins to be haunted by his memory of raping and murdering women in China. Shinobu Terashima's powerful performance brought her the Berlin International Film Festival's Best Actress Award, and makes *Catapillar* a harsh indictment of the militarist ideology and of Japanese war crimes in China.

In 2009, two films made by the old and young generations were much talked about: *Tsurugi-dake: Ten no ki*, the directorial debut of 70-year-old acclaimed cinematographer Daisaku Kimura (1939–); and *Dear Doctor* by 35-year-old female director Miwa Nishikawa (1974–).

Kimura adapted his screenplay from Jirō Nitta's book on the dedication of the men who ventured in the last uncharted area on the top of Mt. Tsurugi in order to complete the map of Japan. He also shot the magnificent landscape. Top-level Japanese actors collaborated with this project and, inspired by Kimura's passion, endured severe physical conditions high in the mountains. The shooting took place at real locations for two years, and the actors created a sense of authenticity in the grand-scale nature. The film's story contains a nationalistic ideology of the mission imposed by the government in preparation for the upcoming wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. There are not many films for mature audiences in Japan and *Tsurugi-dake* attracted many older film-goers.

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Holden in *The New York Times* (16 April 2009), Joshua Rothopf in *Time Out New York* (25 August 2009), Anthony Kaufman in *The Village Voice* (25 August 2009), Don Willemott in *filmcritics.com* (28 August 2009), James Bernadinelli in *reelreviews.net* (23 September 2009), Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian* (14 January 2010), and Tom Charity in *The Times* (16 January 2010). Kore-eda himself commented on this comparison, saying that it is probably because foreign audiences are limited in what kind of Japanese films are available to them. In my interview with Kore-eda on 29 April 2009 in New York, he wondered why nobody cited another Japanese film classic master, Mikio Naruse. Naruse is known for his *shomingeki* or the film about common people.

*Dear Doctor* is the third film that Nishikawa wrote and directed. The film features popular comedian Tsurubei Shōfukutei as a man who pretends to be a doctor and works in a remote village. Nishikawa ingeniously depicts the subtle human relationship of the doctor, his capable nurse, an idealistic intern and villagers surrounding them. Nishikawa's film also addresses the current Japanese social problem of the lack of doctors in provincial areas inhabited primarily by an aged population.

Nishikawa started her career working for Kore-eda, who produced her first film *Hebi ichigo* (2003) about a dysfunctional family. She writes her own screenplays, and her keen observations of human behavior and psychology, demonstrated masterfully in her first and second film (the latter being *Yureru* (2006) on the relationship of two brothers), has been widely praised.

Japan has seen the emergence of more and more female directors. Another talented female director is Yuki Tanada (1975–) who, in 2001, came through from the PIA Film Festival's competition for new talent. She has since made a documentary on musician, Wataru Takada, in 2003; this was followed by seven films, one screenplay, and one TV drama. She appeared as an actress in two films and has published one novel. Tanada wrote and directed *Hyakuman-en to nigamushi-onna* (2008), featuring popular actress Yū Aoi as a 21-year-old girl taking a series of part-time jobs. The heroine has difficulty expressing herself and communicating with others, but is serious in her own way. Once she saves one million yen, she packs her things and moves on to another town, working at a seashore restaurant, picking peaches at a farm in the mountains, and at a home appliance center in the suburbs. This is a refreshing youth drama, vividly portraying a sensitive young woman surviving in contemporary Japanese society. The heroine projects the image of a typical Japanese youth, not wanting to make any commitment in life and work.

During 2010, one of the most controversial films was *Kokubaku* by Tetsuya Nakajima (1959–), based on the first novel written by local housewife Kanae Minato, about the revenge of a high school teacher whose infant daughter was murdered by two of her own students. Nakajima is a successful television commercial director, and employed stylistic music video-like usage of close-ups and slow motions in adapting this serious subject matter: the apathetic attitude and violent nature of troubled teenagers in today's Japan, and how education at school and at home fails to cope with this problem.

*Confession* was praised as a film not produced by a TV network led scheme but by the film producers at Toho Studio, and was selected as Japan's entry to the Academy Award Foreign Language Section for 2011. It made the short-list of the semi-final nine films.

As can be seen, Japanese films take diverse approaches in portraying the trends of Japanese society and culture in the manner in which only the camera can capture. Whether it be a compelling human drama set against grand scale landscape, or nuanced feelings of a human relationship which cannot be easily verbalized, the aforementioned films succeed in expressing these elements in the cinematic medium of the three dimensional world on the big screen.

It is encouraging that some Japanese directors like Miyazaki, Kurosawa and Kore-eda have been internationally recognized, and received international financing. However, the majority of Japanese films, particularly by young directors, are remarkably domestic in their cinematic vision. They are only interested in themselves or the very tiny world of a young couple, with the addition of a few more uninteresting young people, trying to "find themselves [*jibun sagashi*]." These young directors in their twenties and thirties totally lack the consciousness of where they stand in relation to their national



history and to the world, unlike young directors emerging in other countries. These Japanese films of the younger generation are provincial and self-indulgent, infantile in thinking and immature in style.<sup>11</sup>

Another problem in the current Japanese film industry is the prevailing production committee [*seisaku iinkai*] system, which makes copyright issues complicated. For important decisions, permission from all parties involved in production is required. This process takes a long time and sometimes meets the opposition. For example, the entry of a film to the Academy Award Foreign Language section cannot be done easily. During the last few years, only twenty some films have been submitted. If one party from the Production Committee opposes, for example, by complaining that it will be costly to make an English-subtitled 35 mm film print, the film cannot be entered.<sup>12</sup> This will be also true of the submission of the film to international film festivals. Such decisions could result in shutting out the possibilities of a film being recognized internationally, and gaining potential financial profit. More enlightened thinking is necessary both philosophically and financially in order for Japanese film to be recognized internationally, and become part of the global cinematic map.

In the end, I would like to mention the interesting questions that were put in response to this paper from the floor at the University of Indonesia on 6 October 2010. The first question addressed the issue of whether Japanese filmmakers were conscious of foreign recognition. In the case of independent filmmakers, they are likely to be because they depend on success at foreign film festivals in promoting their films in Japan. If they are commercially successful directors domestically, they do not have to worry about foreign successes. Traditionally, the internationally recognized directors such as Yasujirō Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi (1898–1956) and Nagisa Ōshima (1932–) have been art house directors, not necessarily successful in the box office but among critics in Japan.

A second question related to the fact that, in Indonesia, horror films are very popular and how this genre fares in Japan. Coming from the stage convention, Japanese film studios used to screen ghost story films during the summer *obon* festival period when dead spirits are believed to come back to this world. The chilling effects that these ghosts may exert on the viewers are also welcomed during the hot weather season. Therefore, as a profitable entertainment form, ghost stories have been made consistently in Japan. However, from the 1990s, a new type of horror films, represented by *Ringu* (1998) by Hideo Nakata (1961–), began to be produced and became popular domestically and internationally. Hollywood began to remake these films, which are labeled “J-horror.” J-horror films are typically set in the present, combining the image of technology such as TV and the internet. The motivation for the supernatural power to appear is not necessarily vengeful. In traditional Japanese ghost stories, ghosts are usually women victimized in male-chauvinistic or feudalistic society, and thus appear to weak revenge in response to their

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<sup>11</sup> Literary critic Mitsuyoshi Numano stated that the literary world of young Japanese is currently represented by the same kind of problem. The young writers only interested in themselves or one young couple, totally lacking the historical and social consciousness (in my conversation with Prof. Numano at the University of Tokyo on 16 June 2010).

<sup>12</sup> I was a member of the selection committee for Japanese films to be entered for the Academy Award Foreign Language Category in 2009, and wondered why only 24 films were submitted after the success of *Okuribito* and was given this answer by its administrator Eiren. In 2010, 25 films were submitted for the selection.

having been wronged. In J-horror, in general, supernatural attacks are rendered random, thus, it could be scarier.<sup>13</sup>

The last question was a unique one, and concerned with how to cope with handicapped audiences in Japan. The notion of “barrier-free screenings” has only recently emerged in Japan, and some festivals have begun to respond to the requirement for those with impaired hearing and sight. Some film companies have also begun to make film prints with specifically designed subtitles including sound effects described in letters, and run these subtitled prints regularly at commercial theaters. Local government social welfare departments are working in collaboration with outsource services for the needs of handicapped people, sending equipment and staff to accompany the needy to screenings, as well as providing DVD libraries with specific subtitles.<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank the students who asked these stimulating questions.

#### **Acknowledgment:**

I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity to present my paper at the symposium on 6 October 2010, sponsored by Nichibunken, University of Indonesia and The Japan Foundation, and the moderator of my panel, Dr. Bachtiar Alam, my fellow presenters, and participants of the panel. The Japanese names are spelled by their first names first, their family names second.

#### **The list of films made in 2008–2010 included in this article:**

*Odoru daisōsasen THE MOVIE 3 Yatsura o kaibō seyo!* 踊る大捜査線 THE MOVIE 3 ヤツらを解放せよ!, 2010. Directed by Katsuyuki Motohiro. Produced by Fuji TV and INP (talent agency) in association with ROBOT (film production company), and supported by NTT Docomo, Nippon Express, Lawson, and Myjo Foods; and distributed by Toho.

*Karigurashi no Arietti* 借りぐらしのアリエッティ, 2010. Directed by Hiromasa Yonebayashi. Produced by Studio Ghibli, Nippon TV, Dentsu, Hakuhodo DYMP (Hakuhodo’s movie making section), Disney, Mitsubishi Corporation, Toho and Wild Bunch, supported by MS & Ad Holdings, in association with Lawson and Yomiuri Shimbun; and distributed by Toho.

*Catpillar* キャタピラー, 2010. Directed by Kōji Wakamatsu. Produced by Wakamatsu Productions.

*Kokuhaku* 告白, 2010. Directed by Tetsuya Nakajima. Produced by the *Kokuhaku* Production Committee

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<sup>13</sup> When I was Film Curator at the Japan Society of New York, from December 2003 to February 2004, we presented a Japanese horror film series, introducing films spanning from the 1950s to the present. At the panel discussion comparing Japanese and American horror films, Prof. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto of New York University argued this point about women’s revenge in feudal society, in contrast to the random attacks in contemporary horror films. American film critic Kent Jones pointed out that American horror films from the 1940s to 1960s were also often metaphors of social criticism against the Cold War period red scare, the Viet Nam War, and so on, while contemporary American horror films have usually no subtext intended to criticize certain trends or attitudes in the society and culture.

<sup>14</sup> The last information was provided by Mr. Shinkichi Okada of Kawakita Memorial Film Institute in my conversation with him on 14 October 2010, in Kamakura, Japan. The institute often hosts screenings designed for the handicapped.

- consisting of Toho, Hakuhodo DY Media Partners, Face Wanda Works (film and entertainment company), Futabasha (publisher), Nippon Shuppan Hanbai (major book distribution company), Sony Music Entertainment, Yahoo! JAPAN and Tsutaya Group (video rental and retail).
- Dear Doctor* デイア・ドクター, 2009. Directed by Miwa Nishikawa. Produced by the *Dear Doctor* Production Committee consisting of Engine Film, Bandai Visual (video company), Tvman Union (independent TV production company), Dentsu, Eisei Gekijō (Cable TV), Denner Systems (Tsurubei Shōfukutei's agent), and Yahoo! JAPAN.
- Okuribito* おくりびと, 2009. Directed by Yōjirō Takita. Produced by the *Okuribito* Production Committee consisting of TBS, Sedic International (film production company), Shochiku (film studio), Dentsu, Amuse Soft Entertainment, Shogakukan (publisher), Mainichi Broadcasting, Asahi Shimbun (major newspaper), TV-U Yamagata (local TV station), and TBS Radio.
- Hyakuman-en to nigamushi-onna* 百万円と苦虫女, 2008. Directed by Yuki Tanada. Produced by the 2008 *Hyakuman-en to nigamushi-onna* Production Committee consisting of Nikkatsu (film studio), Pony Canyon (film and music company). Itō Company (Yū Aoi's agent), WOWOW (cable TV), Dentsu, Gentosha (publisher) and Express (film and TV production company).
- Gake no ue no Ponyo* 崖の上のポニョ, 2008. Directed by Hayao Miyazaki. Produced by Studio Ghibli, Nippon TV, Dentsu, Hakuhodo DYMP, Disney, Mitsubishi Corporation, Toho, in association with Asahi Soft Drinks, Lawson, and Yomiuri Shimbun; and distributed by Toho.
- ROOKIES: Sotsugyō* ROOKIES—卒業, 2009. Directed by Yūichirō Hirakawa. Produced by the *ROOKIES* Production Committee consisting of TBS, Toho, Shueisha, S.D.P. (Star Dust Picture, a talent agency/filmmaking company), K Factory, Mainichi Broadcasting, Amuse, Horii Productions, Watanabe Entertainment, Chubu-Nippon Broadcasting, RKB Mainichi Broadcasting, Hokkaido Broadcasting, and Yahoo! Japan; supported by Ito En, Toyota, Lion, and Lotte; and distributed by Toho.
- Aruitemo aruitemo* 歩いても 歩いても, 2008. Directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. Produced by the *Aruitemo aruitemo* Production Committee consisting of Engine Films (production company), Bandai Visual, Tvman Union (Kore-eda belongs to this company), Eisei Gekijō, and Cinequanon (film production company).
- Tsurugi-dake: Ten no ki* 剣岳 点の記, 2009. Directed by Daisaku Kimura. Produced by the *Tsurugi-dake* Production Committee consisting of Toei (film studio), Fuji TV, Sumitomo Corporation (trading company), Asahi Shimbun and Kitanippon Shimbun (local newspaper).
- Tōkyō Sonata* トウキョウソナタ, 2008. Directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Produced by the *Tōkyō Sonata* Production Committee consisting of Entertainment Farm (production company), Hakuhodo DY Media Partners, Pix (film import, distribution and promotion company) and Fortissimo Films (Dutch film company).
- Jitsuroku rengō sekigun: Asama sansō e no michi* 実録・連合赤軍 あさま山荘への道程, 2008. Directed by Kōji Wakamatsu. Produced by Wakamatsu Productions.

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