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**From Parody to Simulacrum:
Japanese SF, Regionalism, and the Inauthentic in the
early works of Komatsu Sakyō and Tsutsui Yasutaka***

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In this article, we will examine the place of the *local* in parody and satire in early works of two Osaka-born writers, Komatsu Sakyō and Tsutsui Yasutaka, who played leading roles in the development of postwar Japanese science fiction.¹ While perhaps better known for his “serious” hard science fiction such as *Hateshi naki nagare no hate ni* (At the End of the Endless Flow, 1966) or his bestselling and influential disaster narrative *Nihon chinbotsu* (Japan Sinks, 1973), one of Komatsu’s many jobs as an apprentice novelist was as a scenario writer of news satire and manzai comedy for Radio Osaka (1959-1963).² This immersion into Osaka comedy and oral culture paved the way for his *Nihon apacchi zoku* (The Japanese Apache Tribe, 1964), which is surely one of the strangest and most ingenious works of twentieth century Japanese fiction. Likewise, satire and parody have always been in the arsenal of Tsutsui Yasutaka, whose prolific and diverse output includes the juvenile literature classic *Toki o kakeru shōjo* (The Girl Who Leapt Through Time, 1967) telepathic domestic drama *Kazoku hakkei* (translated as What the Maid Saw, 1972), the academic satire *Bungakubu Tadano kyōju* (Professor Tadano of the Literature Department, 1990), the cyberfiction *Papurika* (Paprika, 1993), and even a parody of Komatsu’s *Nihon chinbotsu* entitled “Nihon igai zenbu chinbotsu” (“Everywhere But Japan Sinks,” 1973).³ After briefly exploring the multi-layered parody of Komatsu’s *Nihon apacchi zoku*, I will examine Tsutsui’s early

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¹ All Japanese names are presented in the Japanese order, with family name first and given name second. Research for this paper was supported by an ACLS/SSRC/NEH International and Area Studies Fellowship. Special thanks to Keio University Faculty of Letters and Professor Tatsumi Takayuki for hosting my research position in 2007-2008.

² See Schnellbacher 2007, pp. 38-42, for a discussion of Komatsu’s *Nihon chinbotsu* (*Japan Sinks*). For information on Komatsu’s experience as a *manzai* comedy writer, see Komatsu 2006 pp. 48-50, 181.

³ See Gardner 2007 for a study of Tsutsui’s involvement with new media in the 1990’s.

short story “Tōkaidō sensō,” (“The Tōkaidō War,” 1965) and argue that the propagation of media-saturated hyperreality and accompanying erasure of regional difference posited in this story thwart the operation of parody seen in Komatsu’s text.

Komatsu Sakyō’s Nihon apacchi zoku (The Japanese Apache Tribe)

As described in Tatsumi Takayuki’s *Full Metal Apache: Transactions Between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America* (2006), the term *apacchi* was coined by journalists to describe scrap thieves, primarily ethnic Koreans, scavenging metal in the postwar ruins of Osaka’s wartime infrastructure.⁴ Specifically, it referred to scavengers raiding the gigantic ruins of the Osaka Army Arsenal in Sugiyama ward to the northeast of Osaka castle, which was destroyed by American B29 bombers on August 14, 1945—the day before Japan’s surrender. It is estimated that a population of around 800—primarily ethnic Koreans mixed with some ethnic Japanese and Okinawans—lived in shantytown dwellings and scavenged the extensive bombing site, where over 30,000 machine relics are said to have remained as late as 1952.⁵ The term “*apacchi*” seems to have emerged from press reports describing the scrap thieves, drawing an analogy with the outlaw status and ethnic otherness of the Apache Indian tribe, whose fierce resistance to white American domination of their territory was familiar to Japanese popular culture through such Western movies as the John Ford/John Wayne Western *Fort Apache* from 1948. The term was then further popularized, and given its first literary interpretation in Kaikō Takeshi’s 1959 novel, *Nihon sanmon opera* (Japan’s Threepenny Opera), a sensationalized account of life among the scrap thieves.

Five years later, Komatsu Sakyō’s *Nihon apacchi zoku* (1964) performed an outrageous parodic transformation of Kaikō’s Korean-Japanese *apacchi* narrative. Komatsu’s transformation derives from literalizations of two metaphors embedded in Kaikō’s *Threepenny Opera*. First drawing on the scavenger slang phrase, “eating metal” (*tetsu o kuu*), referring to stealing scrap, Komatsu imagines a population of Osaka “*apacchi*” whose digestive system has actually evolved to digest and subsist on scrap metal. Secondly, he literalizes the name “*apacchi*” itself, imagining this band of mutants or “digestively evolved” post-humans as a tribal society who wear Native American dress and speak in a ludicrous blend of Osaka dialect and Hollywood Indian-speak. In

⁴ Tatsumi 2006, 155-168; see also Tatsumi 1998, pp. 38-51.

⁵ Tatsumi 2006, p. 158.

the process, Komatsu not only spoofs Kaikō's novel and the journalistic terminology on which it drew, but also the influence of Hollywood Westerns and American "junk" culture, both of which are hybridized with a parody of classic Western novels and science fiction narratives such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Karl Capek's *War With the Newts*.

Nihon apacchi zoku is narrated in the first person by Kida Fukuichi, a former low-level salaryman who is arrested by the totalitarian government of a near-future Japan for the crime of being unemployed. His punishment is being released to a special penal zone, a no-man's land in the middle of Osaka surrounded by an impenetrable security fence, on the very site of the ruins of the Osaka Army Arsenal. The penal zone has practically no sources of food or potable water and is populated primarily by fierce wild dogs, so Kida and other prisoners are essentially released there to die. However, Kida's chances for survival improve when he meets Yamada, a thought criminal modeled on a 1960's activist, who develops an ingenious escape plan. Yamada also warns Kida about the *apacchi*, a mysterious band of survivors in the penal zone, whom Yamada describes as "not human."⁶ When Yamada's escape plan fails and he is killed, Kida is rescued from starvation by the *apacchi*, who soon initiate him into their tribe. The following passage conveys Kida's first direct exposure the *apacchi* and their strange argot:

What is an Apache? The cop said they were scrap iron thieves, Yamada said over and over again that they weren't human. To put it simply, an Apache was the guy who had rescued me from being a feast for the wild dogs, and was now carrying me away. While being carried folded in two over his shoulder, I was looking at the real thing from the closest possible distance. Since I was so close, I couldn't see anything but his back, but the back in front of my nose was certainly something strange. At first glance, you could only conclude it was a single plate of iron with some bumps on it. It looked like it would go "ping" if you tapped on it. What's more, what looked at first like copper was actually more like rust if you looked at it closely. There was something inhuman about the coolness of that skin. Nevertheless, his appearance remains vividly etched on my retina. His black hair hanging down to his shoulders, a band of cloth wrapped around his forehead, a bow slung over his naked torso— what else could this be than the style of the Apache Tribe, the young buck American Indian that I knew so well from western movies?

⁶ Komatsu 1971, p. 56.

[. . .]

Before long I heard some voices. It sounded like Japanese, but on the other hand there were unfamiliar words like “how” and “a-how” that sounded like an Indian language. Still, thinking it over, it seemed closest to Osaka dialect. When I listened closely, I realized it was indeed Osaka dialect. Red Cap, the man to whom I owed my life, threw me down on the ground like a piece of hand luggage. And, mouth still sealed tight as a suitcase, I hit the ground.

“O-how!” he said in ‘greeting’ to his brethren.

“A-how!” someone gave the ‘greeting’ back to him. “You brought another one?!”

“He almost got ate by the dogs” answered Red Cap.

“Woulda been awright if he got ate. Guess even a dog wouldn’t eat um.”⁷

The *apacchi*, it turns out, are scrap scavengers who formerly lived freely on the site of the penal zone, until it was enclosed by the security fence. The government carried out an extermination campaign against the remaining lumpen proletariat on the site, but a few remained and found a way to survive by learning to digest the scrap metal that so abundantly covered the territory. Moreover, to supplement their subsistence on scrap, they developed a black-market exchange with a settlement of Koreans on the outside perimeter of the penal zone. As their skin turned hard and reddish as a result of their new diet, the outcast tribe began to literalize their identity as “Apache” based on their knowledge of Hollywood B-movies. With their new cultural and dietary adaptations, the tribe live more or less happily in the penal zone or would-be reservation, until the government, alarmed to the continual presence of the *apacchi* by Yamada and Kida’s near-escape, begins a new and total extermination campaign. Forced to flee their iron-rich homeland, the *apacchi* must find a new mode of survival as a truly alien and threatening ethnic minority in the midst of Japanese urban society. However, while humans in positions of power generally see the *apacchi* as a threat, the *ferro-tification* of Japan proceeds almost virally, as many on the margins of society across Japan begin eating metal and enter into alliance with the *apacchi* tribe. After many twists in their fate, the *apacchi* declare total war on the Japanese humans and, in an apocalyptic finale, eventually overturn the government and destroy Japanese civilization as we know it.

In an interview in the book *SF e no yuigon (Last Words for SF, 1997)*, Komatsu describes Karel Capek’s *War with the Newts* (1936) as one

⁷ Komatsu 1971, pp. 74-76.

of the inspirations for writing *Nihon apacchi zoku*.⁸ Komatsu cites as inspiration both the novel's satiric humor, as well as its apocalyptic narrative, in which a race of anthropomorphic salamanders, initially enslaved by human beings, proliferate and overthrow their human captors. However, Komatsu also asserts a critical difference from Capek's work:

What's a little different from Capek, though, is this: [in *War with the Newts*] there's a salamander who walks upright, and since it's quite clever, [the humans] begin to train it, and realize they can exploit it however much they want, just like a laborer, and they can even freely send it into battle since it isn't human. After that the salamanders become gradually stronger and more intelligent. In Capek's novel, it's all written from the perspective of the humans, first in using the salamanders as slaves, then in depicting them as a kind of monster who destroys mankind.

But, in our case, we lost the war. Seeing it from the viewpoint of the Allied Forces—the whites—it might just be that *we* are the salamanders. So, finally, when asked “will you die as humans?” we replied “we want to live, even as monsters (*bakemono*).” That's the key phrase for the novel.⁹

Nihon apacchi zoku, then, could be read as a rewriting of Capek's *War with the Newts* from the perspective of the newts, that is, the non-Western Other, in the wake of Japan's defeat in the Second World War and occupation by Allied forces. Without a doubt, Komatsu's novel is a complex defamiliarization of Japan's wartime and postwar history, focusing on the motif of survival through the double trauma of a coercive wartime regime and occupation by a hegemonic foreign power. However, the *apacchi* identity is not merely an assertion of otherness versus American cultural hegemony. Rather, in the novel's dystopic postwar setting, the *apacchi* resistance is primarily a resistance against *Japanese* officialdom and other cultural elites, and furthermore to all mainstream “humans” in Japanese society outside of the *apacchi* tribe. Thus the *apacchi* resistance cannot take the form of a righteous resistance by intellectuals or would-be elites such as the activist Yamada, but rather by dregs of society eating junk and internalizing junk culture. Ironically, their resistance comes through a symbolic identification with the Apache, an icon of trashy American popular culture, but also a minority depicted as resistant to the white American majority.

⁸ Komatsu 1997, p. 120.

⁹ Komatsu 1997, p. 121.

While the reader may partially identify with Kida, an outsider who is absorbed into the *apacchi* tribe, nevertheless at several chilling points in the novel Kida specifically addresses the reader as a human, a non-*apacchi*, and thus as an enemy. For example, at one point during the *apacchi*'s initial incursion to the human world, Kida feeds information on the *apacchi* to a sympathetic leftist legislator. Nevertheless, the narrative describes the legislator as only a temporary ally, who, like the reader, remains a human, the enemy who cannot truly understand the *apacchi*:

For the time being, we'll send our information through the K Newspaper and the Social Renewal Party. Anyhow, the *enemy* doesn't really know anything about the true situation regarding the Apache. This favorable state of affairs won't be easily overturned. As for the "*enemy*"—of course, this refers to all of you non-Apaches, in other words, all "*normal human beings*."¹⁰

While such passages evincing the *appacchi* antagonism to "Japanese" and "human" society are indeed provocative, the most humorous aspect of *apacchi* identity, and indeed a crucial component of the novel's effectiveness, is the juxtaposition of the *apacchi*'s mutant Native American appearance and Hollywood Indian affectations with their working class Osaka dialect. (While the narration is in standard Tokyo Japanese, much of the novel is comprised of dialogue passages in Osaka dialect.) This dialect roots the *apacchi* in a very specific local culture and socio-economic world, at a polar extreme from the speech of officials and cultural elite who identify with the speech of the Tokyo capital. Unlike other works where regional identity sometimes is called on to represent a more pure and authentic form of Japanese identity forgotten by the modernizing mainstream of Japan,¹¹ however, the *apacchi* identity is precisely impure and inauthentic. It is not purity but *adaptivity* and the will to survive that prepare the *apacchi* for their ambivalent victory over human Japanese.

¹⁰ Komatsu 1971, p. 207.

¹¹ See Ivy 1995.

Tsutsui Yasutaka's "Tōkaidō Sensō" ("The Tōkaidō War")

Regional specificity is also an important element in Tsutsui Yasutaka's short story "Tōkaidō Sensō."¹² In this story, set in the present-day of 1965, the narrator and protagonist, a science fiction novelist originally from the Tokyo region simply identified by the gruff masculine first person pronoun "ore," wakes up one morning to find a war suddenly erupting in Japan. Attempting to get a grasp on the situation, he makes his way by train from his home in Senri, a suburb of Osaka, to central Osaka, where he joins a newspaper reporter in a press car to the battlefield, which is located mid-way between Osaka and Kyoto. The suspense of the story lies in the reader, together with the protagonist, trying to understand the causes and nature of the sudden conflict. The protagonist gradually determines that the war is a civil war between the Kantō (Tokyo area) and Kansai (Osaka area) battalions of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. As for the cause, it is revealed that the war is being conducted to satiate the demand for stimulating news stories in the mass media, marking the story as the one of the first instances of Tsutsui's "psuedo-event science fiction," which often makes explicit reference to historian Daniel Boorstin's theory of the psuedo-event "planned, planted or incited. . . for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced," whose "relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous."¹³ The narrator's journalist friend Yamaguchi explains the situation as follows, making reference to the television coverage of the massive demonstrations against the renewal of the Japanese-American Security Alliance (ANPO) in 1960:

"I don't get it," I said. "What's this war about? What's going on here? I don't understand the real situation at all. And yet I can see the war happening-- right in front of my eyes! But I don't understand the cause. My consciousness is in total confusion."

"It's the same way for everybody," said Yamaguchi. "In the ANPO struggle, confusion was caused just by bringing in a television camera. The demonstrators wanted to be on television so they went to the place where the disturbance was happening, and then went home and watched the scene where they appeared on the evening news." He glanced over at me. "At times like that, do you know what the cause was? When even the participants

¹² Tōkaidō (Eastern Sea Road) refers to the famous road, established in the 17th Century, from Tokyo to Kyoto, and later extended to Osaka.

¹³ Boorstin 1974, p. 11. The term "pseudo-event science fiction" to describe Tsutsui's early work is derived from Tatsumi 1998, p. 215.

in the event don't know who is the subject of the action, or how the chain of command is working, then it's next to impossible for the citizens to make a correct judgment about the truth. The demonstration is all a set-up. A pseudo-event."

"In other words," I said, "you're saying that the masses were hungry for news, and so the mass media responded to their demand and fabricated this war?"

"Exactly," he answered.¹⁴

Tsutsui's story can thus be seen as a direct and explicit reaction to the role of television in establishing social "reality" in 1960's Japan.¹⁵

Although Osaka or Kansai dialect does not play a major role in "Tōkaidō Sensō," specific place names of the Osaka region do. The story minutely records the railroad lines, stations, highways, and interchanges as the protagonist makes his way from Senri to Umeda and Osaka Station, and then back out along the Meishin Expressway to the front along National Highway 171. Much of the story's distinctive texture derives from the contrast between the banal specificity of place names along the heavily traveled Osaka-Kyoto transportation corridor, which would be very familiar to readers from the Kansai area, juxtaposed with the surreal events of troop movements, panicking or thrill-seeking civilians, and open warfare involving tanks, fighter planes, and all forms of modern weaponry.

A product of the high-growth period in Japan's modern development, the transportation infrastructure referenced in Tsutsui's text expanded dramatically with the opening of the Meishin Expressway in 1963 and the Tōkaidō shinkansen (bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka) in 1964, timed to coincide with the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. The new transportation infrastructure in both Kantō and Kansai regions forms an economic and cultural continuum with the permeation of television in Japan in the 1960's, as well as such massive media events as the Tokyo Olympics and the coming 1970 Osaka Expo, both of which are also referenced in Tsutsui's story. Indeed, in "Tōkaidō sensō," the cynical newspaper reporter questions the protagonist about the reality of the Olympics, challenging his expertise as an SF writer to prove that the Olympics didn't actually occur in another dimension:

¹⁴ Tsutsui 1978, pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ For a historical study of the diffusion of television in Japan and its impact on society, see Chun 2007.

The [Tokyo] Olympics were Japan's largest pseudo-event. But there's actually a deeper problem than that..."

He fixed his eyes on my face. His eyes had a strange glimmer to them.

"In the first place, were those the real Olympics? We believed that they were the Olympics, and kept our eyes glued to the TV for fifteen whole days. But are we certain that that was really the Olympics? Can anyone say for sure that that wasn't an illusion cooked up by the mass media? Who can say that they weren't an act of national self-hypnosis? You're a science fiction writer, right? If you think about it from the perspective of multiple universes, can you say that it necessarily had to have been the Olympics?"

"Yeah, maybe the real Olympics happened on a world in another dimension. Maybe that was just an illusion projected onto this world..."¹⁶

Tsutsui thus offers the simulation of a "media event," demonstrating the virtualization of experience in a media-saturated society, which Baudrillard and other theorists of postmodernism would later describe as hyperreality or simulacra.¹⁷ While the specificity of local geography is heavily invoked in Tsutsui's story, and indeed the Tōkaidō war described therein would seem to pit the Kansai region against the invading Kantō forces, paradoxically it is the very lack of solid pretext for such a regional conflict that is the crux of the story. Instead of serving as the locus for local identity or resistance against national authority, the place names in Tsutsui's text mark the points along a modern transportation infrastructure that, in radically altering patterns of mobility and communication in concert with television and other mass media, actively undermine the assertion of regional difference.

On the other hand, conventional parody, as described by Linda Hutcheon, requires an assertion of difference, a twisting or taking-down of a master text or texts.¹⁸ The linguistic and class identity of working class Osaka provide the basis for the assertion of difference in *Nihon apacchi zoku*, although this "identity" is mutated, creolized and radicalized by the junk by-products of American military domination and cultural hegemony. While *Tōkaidō sensō* does provide a reproduction of journalistic and novelistic accounts of modern warfare that could be in some senses be considered a parody, it is a reproduction that

¹⁶ Tsutsui 1978, p. 37.

¹⁷ See Baudrillard 1994.

¹⁸ See Hutcheon 1985 pp. 31, 37.

posits an infinite and arbitrary mode of reproduction that obviates the authenticity claims of any original. In this sense, the story's textual strategy anticipates the distinction between parody and pastiche developed in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.¹⁹

Despite its minute iteration of Kansai place-names, there is no place for the assertion of difference, versus either American or Kantō cultural hegemony, in the media-saturated hyperreality of Tsutsui's text. Tsutsui thus takes the stage as a prescient early avatar of a now-familiar Postmodernism, whereby the public colludes with the mass media to produce an unending series of arbitrary narratives or distractions that govern contemporary social experience. Perhaps it is the very pervasiveness and banality of this phenomenon that makes Tsutsui's story appear less fresh or compelling when read today. Rather, it is Komatsu's vision of postwar *zoku*, self-constituting, virally spreading minority tribes of outré tastes that may at any moment overtake conventional human society, which seems at once more interestingly strange, and yet strangely recognizable.

¹⁹ Jameson 1991, pp. 16-18.

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William O. Gardner's book *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity and the 1920's* traces the links between the subculture of anarchist/dadaist writers and artists in Tokyo, and the emerging media of 1920's Japan. His current research explores Japanese science fiction and the relationship between fiction, architecture, and virtuality. Recent works on this topic include “The Cyber Sublime and the Virtual Mirror: Information and Media in the Works of Oshii Mamoru and Kon Satoshi” (*Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 18.1).