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Abstract: Many scholars in Literature and Film Studies have focused on the Western literature adaptations made by Kurosawa in the 1950s and subsequent decades, when Japanese cinema began to receive worldwide acknowledgment. However, not much attention has been drawn to adaptations of Western works produced in Japan from the dawn of cinema to the end of American occupation in 1952. Searching in different movie databases, in newspapers and cinema magazines of that time, and archives of Japanese cinema studios, it has been possible to identify around fifty movies based on or inspired by Western literature shot mostly during the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. This research paper aims to survey the adaptations of Western works made before 1952, and to describe the socio-cultural and ideological context in which they were made. This study aims to broaden existing academic literature in the field, going beyond the large number of investigations examining transpositions of Western literature into Japanese films produced from the 1950s.

Keywords: Japanese cinema; Western literature; film and literature; cross-cultural adaptation; intertextuality

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1. Introduction

In 1868, imperial power was restored in Japan, initiating the Meiji era (1868–1912) and ending more than 200 years of isolation imposed by the clan Tokugawa. The country opened, eager to leave behind its feudal past and reach the cultural, economic, technological, and military level of the Western nations. The growing curiosity and interest in Western culture is manifested in the large number of translations of literary and philosophical works that were made during the Meiji Era.

Western literature and philosophy invaded the country, having a profound influence on Japanese writers of the Meiji and Taishō (1912–1926) eras. They contributed to the development, during both eras, of two new forms of theater: *shinpa* (new school) and *shingeki* (new drama), which coexisted with the classical forms, such as kabuki and *noh*. *Shinpa* theater appeared in the 1880s as a potential replacement for kabuki, whose feudalistic forms were no longer capable of reflecting the mores of a modernizing Japan (Sato 20). *Shinpa* plays dealt with contemporary themes in a realistic but melodramatic style, although they still shared a number of features with kabuki. *Shingeki*, on the contrary, was a Western-style theater that aimed at realism. It tended to be highbrow, avant-garde and political, and until the 1920s it was alien to the vast majority of people. Even so, from the first decade of the twentieth century and especially throughout the 1920s, *shingeki* theaters staged translations of plays or adaptations of novels by remarkable Western authors and also plays by Japanese writers (Pinar 243).

Both new movements encouraged the development of Japanese cinema. On the one hand, *shinpa* theater made possible the beginning of a more sophisticated type of cinema. On the other hand, *shingeki* dramatists were an important influence on the emergence, during the 1910s, of the 'Pure Film Movement' (*Jun'eigageki undō*). This movement championed the use of new narrative techniques, and thus contributed enormously to modernizing Japanese cinema, which was still using the original kabuki methods. Several film directors who adopted the ideas of the 'Pure Film Movement' adapted a significant number of Western literary works for the screen, some of which had previously been performed on stage in *shingeki* theaters.

2. Early Japanese Cinema

Cinema arrived in Japan in 1896, during the Meiji era, soon after its invention. The Cinématographe Lumière was shown in Osaka, while Thomas Edison's Vitascope was seen in Tokyo shortly after. In the same year, the first motion-picture camera was imported, and, as in many other countries, the first cameramen began filming scenes in the streets. In 1899, Komada Koyo formed the Association of Japanese Motion Pictures (*Nihon sossen katsudō shashin kai*), and thus the Japanese film industry was born. It grew rapidly during the last decade of the Meiji era and developed economically and artistically during the Taishō and

subsequent eras. Unfortunately, only 4% of the films produced before 1945 remain extant (Houston 69). Most were destroyed in natural disasters, such as the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake that devastated Tokyo, where the majority of the studios and film companies were situated; and unnatural events, such as the continual fire-bombing of the main cities during the Pacific War, and the post-war Allied Occupation burning of banned films (Richie 4).

The first shorts made by Komada's company showed Geisha dances and excerpts of well-known kabuki plays such as *Maple Viewing* (Momijigari, 1899),[1] shot by Shibata Tsunekichi to record the performances of Ichikawa Danjurō IX and Onoe Kikugorō V, the most famous kabuki actors of that time. Soon, other companies were founded and started to offer screenings of Japanese and foreign shorts to large crowds of spectators. The tickets were sold at a similar price to those for theaters, but unlike theater performances, these films lasted seconds or a few minutes at most. The exhibitors had to find a way to lengthen their shows, so they began to offer film sessions in which they screened sets of joined shorts. Another way to make shows last longer was to use a commentator who could entertain audiences by explaining, for instance, what the films were about, or describing cultural elements that appeared in the Western movies. These live commentators, known as *katsuben* or *benshi*, were readily accepted since they fitted into the common theatrical forms and other popular narrative genres of Japan such as kabuki, *bunraku*, and noh.[2] These professionals were often more popular than the movies they narrated. They became such important figures that it was common for people to go to the cinema to hear their favorite *benshi* rather than to see a particular star or director. The scope of their importance can be seen in the fact that until the 1920s they had a strong influence on the final production of films, suggesting or asking for modifications to make the movie suitable to their talents (Anderson 260).

The growing cinematic industry of the first decade of the twentieth century noticed that kabuki scenes attracted the audience, so the studios increased the production of adaptations of kabuki sections and also started to shoot *jidai-geki* films: that is, period movies set before or during the downfall of feudal Japan. The genre often erroneously described as 'samurai' film,[3] emerged from the practice of filming scenes of *tachimawari* (kabuki sword combat), such as the short Momijigari. Directors such as Makino Shōzō soon began to shoot longer films with simplistic plots based on *kōdan*, a traditional Japanese oral storytelling that had its origins in the fourteenth century and derived from the oral explanation of the Buddhist canon, as well as Shintoist or classical literature texts (Mastangelo 207). Those films depicted at first the vicissitudes of samurai or supernatural spirits, and actors' performances were stylized as in a kabuki play. This theatrical acting was replaced by a more realistic fighting style, which prevailed until the early 1920s.

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[1] This short film by Tsunekichi Shibata, whose original running time was 3 minutes and 50 seconds, is the oldest extant Japanese film.

[2] One of the main elements of those traditional theater is the presence of one or more chanter-narrators, called *gidayū* in *kabuki*, *jōruri* in *bunraku*, and *jiutai* in *noh*, whose role is to sing commentaries on the action and describe the mental state of the characters.

[3] The term 'samurai film' is not appropriate to define period films, since not all the main and supporting actors are samurai. For instance, the subgenre *yakuza* period films depict outlaw thieves or gangsters' who challenge the authorities to protect the downtrodden.

Along with kabuki passages and *jidai-geki* movies, studios also started to film *gendai-geki* (films with a modern setting), screening scenes of *shinpa* plays. In contrast to kabuki, which addressed historical subjects set in past ages, using old Japanese language, *shinpa* dealt with contemporary themes in a melodramatic style, using a colloquial language and relaxing the formalized and stylized movements that characterized the kabuki. *Shinpa* theater, however, maintained many features of kabuki, such as the style of declamation, the mannerisms in acting, and the presence of *oyama*: male actors playing female roles. *Oyama* actors, also known as *onnagata*, had taken kabuki female roles since 1629, when the Shogunate issued a decree prohibiting all women on the stage after considering that women's acting had a negative effect on public morals (Scott 40).

Although some scholars consider that *shinpa* plays "enriched the dramatic literature of modern Japan very little" (Keene 396), this form of theater had a strong influence on the development of the early Japanese cinema, since it made possible the beginning of a more complex type of cinematic narrative. While kabuki-based movies "continued to be constructed of various snippets abstracted from popular stories long part of the collective consciousness," adaptations from the melodramatic *shinpa* theater "provided a stronger narrative and thus generated longer films" (Richie 23).

However, film adaptations of *shinpa* plays, such as *My Sin* (Ono ga tsumi, 1909) by Kichizō Chiba,[4] were stuck with the theatrical conventions characteristic of those days. For instance, male actors continued to play female roles, the pace of gestures was slow, and the camera was static – without variations in angle or distance – following the "one-scene, one-shot" technique and evoking kabuki and *shinpa* stage plays (McDonald 5). Moreover, the pictures' narrative depended on the *benshi* explanations or the prior knowledge of the audience. That procedure prevented Japanese cinema from assimilating Western forms of filmic narrative techniques, such as the use of intertitles and shot organization (Komatsu 417).

3. First Adaptations of Western Literature

At the beginning of the 1910s, studios also started filming short adaptations of *shingeki* plays. The first were filmed in 1910. In April of that year, the short *Ah, no Mercy* (Aa mujō) was released. It was based on Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and was produced by the companies Kinen Daishokan and M. Patê, but its director and cast are unknown. It was common practice at that time not to include credits showing the names of the director and cast. The same year, in June, the short *Resurrection* (Fukkatsu) appeared, produced by the Yoshizawa Shoten Company, and based on Tolstoy's homonymous novel. Again, the names of the director and the cast are unknown, except for one of the main actors, Satō Toshizō, a well-known *shinpa* performer. It is likely that those shorts, like the adaptations of kabuki or *shinpa* plays, followed a theatrical mise en-scène consisting of 'one-scene, one-shot' that would be explained by the *benshi*.

[4] This film was the first adaptation of a *shinpa* play, which was itself an adaptation for the stage of the popular homonymous novel written by Kikuchi Yuho in 1900. No copy of it survives.

The Meiji emperor passed away in 1912. During the subsequent years, known as the Taishō era, progressive and democratic ideals took over from the restrictive post-feudal governmental policies adopted during the Meiji era. A period of cultural change and of artistic progress began, in both literature and film, in which "the modern, the new, and the foreign thrived" (Anderson and Richie 48). As mass media expanded, the Japanese became estranged from many of the traditional cultural practices (Bordwell 352). In the cinema, the so-called 'canned theater' mode of representation of pictures, consisting of long shots and long takes, continued in force until the mid-1910s, when the theatrical mode of filmmaking changed drastically. The film industry then increased the production of *shingeki*-based plays, starting at the same time a process of Westernization of Japanese cinema. This was crucial for the evolution and modernization of Japanese film (Richie 38).

The first successful adaptations of Western literature works made following the realistic narrative style of the *shingeki* plays were released in the mid-1910s by the directors Hosoyama Kiyomatsu and Tanaka Eizō. In 1914, Hosoyama filmed the short movie *Resurrection* (Kachusha) based on parts of the *shingeki* adaptation of Tolstoy's novel. Due to the popularity that the film achieved, Hosoyama made two more shorts in 1915, also based on parts of the *shingeki* adaptation of Tolstoy's work: *Katyusha Afterwards* (Nochi no Kachusha) and Katyusha, Part Three (Kachusha zoku zoku hen). Hosoyama also adapted in 1915 two films based on Western literary works, both now lost. One of them was *The Lady of the Camellias* (Tsubakihime), a short based on the theatrical version of the Alexandre Dumas fils' novel. The other was *The Officer's Daughter* (Shikan no musume), a short based on Pushkin's novel *The Captain's Daughter*.

The success of Hosoyama's adaptation of Tolstoy's Resurrection stimulated the Nikkatsu Company to produce during the 1910s more films based on Western literature that had previously been successfully staged in *shingeki* theaters. Thus, new adaptations, inspired by Western screen-acting techniques, were directed by Tanaka Eizō, a former actor in the *shingeki* theater influenced by the 'Pure Film Movement'. Tanaka Eizō directed four films based on *shingeki* plays. *The Cherry Orchard* (Sakura no sono), an adaptation of Chekhov's play, was released in April 1918. Just one month later, in May 1918, *The Living Corpse* (Ikeru shikabane), an adaptation of Tolstoy's play, was premiered. Subsequently, in 1919, Tanaka filmed a new version of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* entitled *Resurrection (Katyusha)* (Fukkatsu (Kachusha)), released in February, and *Othello* (Osero), an adaptation of Shakespeare's play released in March. As shown in the plot summary of Tanaka's *Fukkatsu (Kachusha),* published in the magazines *Katsudō no sekai* (March 1919) and *Katsudō gaho* (April 1919), both directors sought to make faithful adaptations to the hypotexts, preserving the main events of the plot, creating a realistic atmosphere, and recreating the cultural milieu of the story through the settings, mise-en-scène, costumes, and the like.

4. Western Literature in Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s

The filming innovations and acting techniques defended by the 'Pure Film Movement' and adopted by filmmakers such as Hosoyama Kiyomatsu and Tanaka Eizō became so prominent that, by the 1920s, the traditional form of Japanese cinema had become old-fashioned. The first years of the decade saw the emergence of new companies such as Shochiku Kinema and

Taikatsu Co., which aimed to produce movies following European and American filming and narrative techniques. Studios and filmmakers progressively abandoned some theatrical conventions such as the use of *oyama*, and created movies with close-ups, flashbacks, more elaborate mise-en-scène, and complex editing. Adding intertitles also became common practice, minimizing the scope of *benshi* rendition. In that sense, Japanese silent film began to intersect different forms of narration: the verbal narration of the *benshi*, the explanations of dialogues using intertitles, and the film's capacity to show the story. From that moment, the former 'canned' filming style gave way to one similar to the American and European movies, which by 1920 had taken 75% of the Japanese market (Gerow 8).

The first innovative adaptation of a Western work made following the 'Pure Film Movement' cinematic modes of filmmaking and adapting the story to the Japanese cultural context was *Souls on the Road* (Rojō no reikon, 1921), directed by Murata Minoru in cooperation with *shingeki* theater director Osanai Kaoru. *Souls on the Road*, based on the play *The Lower Depths* by Maxim Gorky and the drama *Children on the Street* by Wilhelm Schmidtbonn, achieved general acclaim due to its technical innovations, the way in which the characters' identifiable misfortune is portrayed, and the message it depicts. A new trend appeared in the country. People demanded to see Japanese films about Japanese life, and to see heroines and heroes who were much like everyone else, with ideas of their own and modern consciences. There was no longer space in these adaptations for realism and faithfulness to the 'original' story. From that moment, most of the films based on Western literature were free adaptations in which the story was suited to the Japanese cultural context, making it more appealing to the new demands of the audiences.

The year 1923 is regarded as a crucial date in the history of Japanese cinema. On Saturday, September 1, an earthquake devastated Tokyo and Yokohama. Despite the destruction of many movie theaters and filming studios of important companies such as Nikkatsu, the earthquake gave "the decisive impetus for the development of the new kinds of Japanese film" (Komatsu 413). After the disaster, Nikkatsu, Shochiku, and other companies moved to Kyoto and stimulated innovation and the production of *gendai-geki* 'pure film' movies, so old forms were abandoned. Many directors adopted American cinema techniques or imitated avant-garde European cinema trends, such as the newly introduced German and French impressionism.

Film directors' interest in Western literature continued during the 1920s, adapting works that had been previously staged in *shingeki* theaters, and they also began to make free adaptations of plays, novels, and short stories that had never been performed in theaters. Most of them were based on popular Western literary works of the time, written by contemporary authors, some of whom had won or would go on to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The theatrical practices followed in former adaptations, such as the 'faithful' reproduction of the plot and the use of realistic Western-style settings and customs, were discarded. Filmmakers and scriptwriters were no longer concerned with theatrical conventions or with imitating the cultural framework. On the contrary, the adaptations were made following intercultural and intertextual processes in which the hypotexts were freely modified and adjusted to the Japanese socio-cultural sphere, transforming the structure,

content, aesthetics, narrative discourse, and narratological elements such as locale, plot, characters, and time.

The director who made the largest number of Western literature adaptations during the 1920s, while working for the Nikkatsu company, was Mizoguchi Kenji, who had previously worked as an assistant to Tanaka Eizō. The first Western works that Mizoguchi adapted in 1923 before the earthquake were *813: The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* (813 - Rupimono), based on the novel *813* written by Maurice Leblanc in 1910, and *Foggy Harbor* (Kiri no minato), an adaptation of Eugene O'Neill's play *Anna Christie*. Inspired by German Expressionism, *Kiri no minato* aimed to transmit the intensity of the human drama by employing a realistic style to present psychological events in a stark, European-inspired style (High 76). The critique of the film published in the magazine *Kinema Junpō* (Ikeda 4) shows that Mizoguchi's picture was inspired by the main characters of the play and by the foggy harbor in which they live. The film recreated the dark atmosphere of the drama, but it actually depicted a different story.

After the 1923 earthquake, Mizoguchi Kenji moved to Kyoto and continued working at the Nikkatsu studio, where he made several silent adaptations of Western works during subsequent years. Before the end of 1923, he shot two more films based on Western literature: *Yoru* (The Night), based on Jack Boyle's character Boston Blackie, and *Blood and Soul* (Chi to rei), an expressionist movie. Chi to rei was an experimental film influenced by German Expressionism, especially Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920). It was based on the novel *Chi to rei*, an adaptation by Ōizumi Kokuseki of E.T.A. Hoffmann's novella *Mademoiselle de Scudéri. A Tale from the Times of Louis XIV*. The review of the film published in *Kinema Junpō* (Uchida 4–5) allows us to observe that the movie followed the hypotext storyline and portrayed the main characters, although it kept the changes in novelistic events and the ending depicted in Ōizumi's adaptation. In the film, the expressionist aesthetics – the actors' make-up, the dark streets, the dramatic lighting, and the distorted houses and furniture – and the oppressive atmosphere became a symbolic representation of the duality of human nature.

In 1924 Mizoguchi directed ten movies for Nikkatsu, four of them based on Western literature: *The Sad Idiot* (Kanashiki hakuchi), and *The Trace of a Turkey* (Shichimenchō no yukue), both loosely inspired by Western literature works, although Mizoguchi did not recall their titles (Mizoguchi 16); *The Song of the Mountain Pass* (Tōge no uta), inspired by Murata's *Souls on the Road* and Wilhelm Schmidtbonn's *Children on the Street*; and *This Dusty World* (Jinkyō), based on the play *Martha of the Lowlands* by Àngel Guimerà. Mizoguchi's films based on Western literature entailed modifications in the plot and in the depiction of certain events and characters, making them suitable for the cultural context and understandable for the audience. For instance, the plot of the film *Jinkyō* summarized in *Kinema Junpō* (Furukawa 10) shows that the movie's storyline was similar to Gumerà's play, although cultural codes were modified. For instance, a symbolic episode of Guimerà's drama in which the main character recalls a fight against a wolf – an extinct animal in Japan, regarded in Shinto beliefs as a messenger of the Gods rather than a symbol of violence and evil, as in Western countries – is transformed into a fight with a bear, an animal perceived as a danger in rural areas of Japan and as a threat to humans in Japanese folklore (Pinar 247).

Besides the films mentioned above, the 1920s saw the production of several adaptations of popular Western literary works created by Russian, French, Spanish, and German writers. Based partially on Russian works were shot the films *Smoke* (Kemuri, 1925), by Itō Daisuke, slightly inspired by Turgenev's story *Smoke*; and Kōjirō Sasaki's *Back Alley of Life* (Jinsei no uramichi, 1929), based on – as seen from the plot summary by an unknown reviewer published in *Kinema Junpō* (84) – an account that Myshkin, the protagonist of Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* explains. In that story, depicted in the first part of the novel, Myshkin reveals his relation he had had with a homeless woman suffering from tuberculosis, for whom he feels pity and provides aid until she dies.

In 1924, Murata and Shigenori Sakata filmed movies based on the Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibáñez: *Osumi and her Mother* (Osumi to haha), based on the short story *La vieja del cinema* (The Old Woman of the Movies) and *Farewell to Youth* (Wakasa yo saraba) based on the novel *La maja desnuda* (Farewell to Youth). Murata's movie followed the main story line of *La vieja del cinema*. Although the novella denounces the consequences of the World War I and the effects of its cinematic use on individuals and on society, the film highlighted the contrast between tradition and modernity, within the constriction and the materialism personified by the old mother and the protagonist called Otsumi (46). The most remarkable differences between Wakasa yo saraba and Blasco's novel revolved around the approach towards art of the main characters, both artists. In the film, the protagonist rebels against Japanese aesthetics, based on Chinese tradition, in which he was educated, and chooses the Western style of painting. Sakata's film explored the controversial relations between tradition and modernity, and the dilemma – latent since the end of the nineteenth century – of how to adopt Western aesthetics and techniques while keeping or developing the Japanese essence (George 51).

Regarding German literature, apart from Hoffmann's novella and Schmidtbonn's drama, several works of Gerhart Hauptmann's – awarded with the Nobel Prize in 1912 –were adapted. His play *Drayman Henschel* was taken to the screen by Shimazu Yasujirō in the film *The Crossing Watchman of the Mountains* (Yama no senroban, 1923) and in a different version shot by Saegusa Genjirō entitled *Crossroads of Lust* (Aiyoku no kiro, 1925). Both films modified the plot to introduce Japanese motifs or social concerns of the period. Based on a film review (by an unknown critic), published in *Kinema Junpō* (5), we can deduce that Shimazu transformed the story to depict violence against a child by a cruel stepmother – a familiar narrative trope in traditional medieval Buddhist oral tales named *mamako ijime* – and to include the motif of *kataki-uchi* (blood revenge), common in Japanese literature and film. On the contrary, in the summary of Aiyoku no kiro published in the magazine *Kinema Junpō* (Suzuki 25) it is possible to observe that Saegusa's adaptation focused the story on the adultery of the second wife of the protagonist, which was a punishable crime (if only for women) in Japan until 1946.

Hauptmann's plays *The Assumption of Hannele* and *The Sunken Bell* were adapted by Kaeriyama Norimasa and Ikeda Yoshinobu respectively. Kaeriyama shot *Where is Father Going?* (Chichi yo izuko e) in 1923, while Ikeda made the fantasy film *Sad Visions of Love* (Kanashiki koi no gensō) in 1925. The review published in the magazine *Kinema Junpō* (26) shows that Ikeda's film highlighted the fantastic elements of the play and the plot focused on

the impossible love of the main characters. Since Japanese spectators were not accustomed to fantasy films, and due to the fact that the movie was too sentimental and plain, it had a poor reception and a negative critique.

Several French works of literature were also adapted in those years: *The Dark Woman* (Chairo no onna), based on Maurice Leblanc's novel *Andre Lupin contre Herlock Sholmes* – Sherlock Holmes' name was disguised for copyright reasons – was directed in 1924 by Saegusa Genjirō; *The Lady of Camellias* (Tsubakihime, 1927), based on the Alexandre Dumas fils' novel, was made by Murata; *A Woman's Life* (Onna no isshō), a version of Guy de Maupassant's novel *Une vie*, directed by Ikeda Yoshinobu, was released in 1928, and this director also filmed the picture *The Lady of Camellias* (Tsubakihime), a new adaptation of the Alexandre Dumas novel, in 1932. Alongside Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables* was the most frequently adapted Western literary work. Between 1923 and 1931, three different versions were released. In 1923, the films *Ah, no Mercy- Part 1: Wanderer's Reel* (Aa mujō - Dai ippen: Hōrō no maki), directed by Ushihara Kiyohiko, and *Ah, no Mercy - Part 2: Mayor's Reel* (Aa mujō - Dai nihen: Shichō no maki), filmed by Ikeda Yoshinobu, appeared. Both films, following the Japanese cinema industry line of the 1920s, included *shinpa* melodramatic elements. Thus, both adaptations depicted only scenes from the first and second part of Hugo's novel – the most dramatic ones – omitting decisive narrative events such as the battle in the barricades.

In 1929, Shiba Seika presented his particular transliteration of the story, a period film in two parts entitled *Ah, no mercy: Part 1* (Aa Mujō: Zenpen) and Ah, no mercy: Part 2 (Aa Mujō: Kohen). Two years later, Uchida Tomu's movies *Jean Valjean: Part 1* (Janbarujan: Zenpen) and *Jean Valjean: Part 2* (Janbarujan: Kohen) were released, named for the main protagonist of Hugo's novel, albeit slightly modified for Japanese pronunciation. In both movies, the events, with the aim of providing credibility to the story, were framed in real historical occurrences. Shiba's version was set at the time of the so-called Chichibu Rebellion, an extensive peasant revolt against the new taxation system that harmed and impoverished farmers, tenants, and peasants, that took place in the Chichibu district in November 1884. Uchida's adaptation was set during the samurai's Satsuma Rebellion, an insurrection of the discontented samurai to the reforms of the Meiji Government, which abolished the social status of the samurai class, lasting from February to September 1877.

5. The Arrival of the Talkies

The Talkies arrived in Japan in the 1930s. In this decade, over the Shōwa era, the number of Western literature adaptations decreased considerably in comparison with previous years. This era, in contrast to previous years, was a less democratic and more repressive period marked by economic strain, social unrest, and the emergence of authoritarian militarism. During the 1930s, the authorities promoted the resurgence of traditional values and old ideologies, such as sacrifice, self-restraint, and loyalty to the group, in complete contrast to the existing indulgent and individualistic behaviors. Western cultural influence was rejected, and a new trend, known as *Nihon kaiki* (return to Japan), was embraced by middle-aged intellectuals. This movement aimed to "redefine Japanese tradition over and against the foreign influx of the 1910s and 1920s" (Bordwell 353).

In 1931, the film that is considered the first Japanese talkie, *The Neighbour's Wife and Mine* (Madamu to nyōbō), by Gosho Heinosuke, was released, although some films had experimented with sound earlier. In 1927, Osanai Kaoru employed a sound-on-film system in his film *Dawn* (Reimei). Sound-on-disc recordings were also used in 1929 by Makino Masahiro in the film *The Bridge of Return* (Modoribashi), and in 1930 by Ushihara Kiyohiko in the movie *The Great Metropolis: Chapter on Labour* (Daitokai: rodehen). There were also part-talkie films, such as Mizoguchi Kenji's 1930 film *Hometown* (Furusato), which included sound dialogues, intertitles, and scenes without dialogue performed in silent film-style pantomime, which resulted in an unnatural combination (Iwamoto 315). All of these experiments were technically inferior and were not considered talkies in the strict sense of the word.

Both talkies and silent films coexisted in Japan until the end of the decade, but by 1935 talkies had become the dominant form of domestic production. However, in 1937 one-fifth of all new Japanese films were still silent. That coexistence finally ended in 1941, when the government prohibited the making of silent films. Financial and cultural reasons explain the slow implementation of the talkies. Equipping studios and movie theaters to produce and to screen sound films was extremely expensive, but *benshi,* aware that the talkies would make their presence unnecessary and that they would end up losing their jobs, found ways to fight against spoken movies. Strikes became one of the most common forms of resistance. In 1932, just one year after the screening of the first Japanese spoken film, there were 203 strikes against talkies (Anderson 291). *Benshi* often turned off the sound on movies, replacing the dialogue with their own interpretations, explanations and comments. However, despite their attempts to halt the talkies, hundreds of musicians and *benshi* started to lose their jobs. Some of them, such as Kurosawa Akira's elder brother, felt so defeated that they committed suicide.

From 1935 until 1938, several sound adaptations of the works of French, Russian, and German writers were produced, the most remarkable filmed by Mizoguchi. He directed the first talkie adaptation of a Western work in 1935, *Maria the Virgin* (Maria no oyuki), based on Guy de Maupassant's story *Boule de suif*. The plot of the film follows the same storyline as Maupassant's story, although it is set during a battle for Hitoyoshi town during the Satsuma Rebellion. Setting the story in the Meiji era enabled Mizoguchi, like other filmmakers, to introduce social criticism while avoiding censorship. Thus, *Maria no oyuki* denounced the social condition of the burakumin – the lower social class, which suffered discrimination and ostracism and comprised people who held professions considered impure in Buddhist or Shinto beliefs – such as itinerant entertainers, beggars, and prostitutes – and vindicated neo-Confucianism and collectivistic values, such as self-sacrifice and loyalty to the group, at a time in which the individualistic mindset was growing among the urban upper and middle classes.

Mizoguchi later directed sound adaptations of Russian works of literature: *Sisters of the Gion* (Gion no shimai, 1936), partially based on Alexander Kuprin's novel *Yama: The Pit*, and *The Straits of Love and Hate* (Aien kyō, 1937), inspired by Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection*. In the *keikō* film *Sisters of the Gion*, the director transformed the story of the two Russian prostitutes narrated in the novel to depict a critique of the geisha world and contemporary

socio-political issues of the time, such as discrimination against women. By portraying the hard life of the geisha and the feudal nature of the profession, the movie could criticize the social system without being totally censored (Sato 48). Mizoguchi modified the plot of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* in the film *The Straits of Love and Hate*, so that as well as including narrative conventions of the Japanese *shinpa* love tragedies, it also portrayed socioeconomic issues of that time, such as the struggles of the underprivileged and the massive unemployment that affected *gakushi* and *benshi* after the transformation of the cinema industry upon the arrival of sound.

In 1936, Murata Minoru directed a movie based on a Russian play. *The Cherry Orchard* (Sakura no sono) was an adaptation of the well-known Chekhov drama. With regard to German literature, Takizawa Eisuke shot a period movie derived from Friedrich Schiller's *The Robbers*, presented in two parts. The first part, *Saga of the Vagabonds*, *Part One: Tiger-wolf* (Sengoku guntō-den - Dai ichibu: Toraōkami), was released on February 11, 1937. The second part, *Saga of the Vagabonds, Part Two: Forward at Dawn* (Sengoku guntō-den - Dai nibu: Akatsuki no zenshin), was screened only nine days later. At the end of the decade, two more sound adaptations of French literature were made: in 1938, Yamamoto Satsuo shot *Rural Symphonie* (Den'en kōkyōgaku), based on André Gidé's novel *La Symphonie Pastor*ale. Also, in 1938, Mansaku Itami directed another period film based on Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, titled Saga of the Giant Man (Kyojinden). Unlike the previous adaptations of Hugo's novel, Mansaku's version – although arguably a near-masterpiece aesthetically (O'Reilly 272) – did not perform well at the box office.

6. A Decade without Western Literature Adaptations

After 1938, no more adaptations of Western literature works were produced for a decade. Regulations concerning film proliferated throughout the 1920s and particularly the 1930s, culminating in 1940. Until 1937, censorship had banned scenes from national and foreign films which were against 'public decorum' or 'public morality' – such as adultery by women, nudity, kissing, and even hand-holding – and movies reflecting negatively on the Royal Family or depicting communist or proletarian ideas (Hirano 16). However, in 1937, after the so-called China Incident, regarded as the start of the second Sino-Japanese war, government increased ideological control of the film industry. Prohibitions included the making of films ridiculing the army or showing the horrors of the war and banning scenes of the suffering of men and their families when they were called to the army, as well as depictions of pleasure-seeking (High 292). In 1939, a law was approved that gave the state absolute control over all Japanese cinema. That law was a result "of the militaristic and nationalistic political climate, which had grown much stronger after the 1937 invasion of China by Japan, and the need to control opinion" (Richie 92).

The state then encouraged the production of films which praised the war or actively promoted the fascist ideology, and supervision and censorship became rigorous and harsh, with frequent scissoring of whole scenes. As the war progressed, the laws on films became stricter. In August 1940, the Home Ministry Censorship Division also proscribed films depicting the pursuit of personal happiness, films revolving around the lives of the wealthy, and films showing people drinking in cafes or women smoking. The use of foreign words and

movies dealing with sexual frivolity were also prohibited. Any films depicting lifestyles other than those officially decreed were banned and considered an offense to the authorities (High 169).

When the war ended, the Japanese film industry became regulated by the film policy of the American occupation government. The American authorities abolished previous film laws and introduced new regulations in order to re-orient and control the Japanese film industry politically and ideologically. Besides the burning of banned films – in 1945 the Psychological Warfare Branch of the Office of War Information banned 236 films considered anti-democratic "for having been utilized to propagate nationalistic, militaristic, and feudalistic concepts" (Hirano 41) – the Civil Information and Education Section, under the control of military intelligence, established a censorship department that suggested and prohibited subjects for films. The authorities encouraged the production of films promoting democratization and demilitarization, proposing to show aspects such as free discussions of political issues (except communist or left-wing ideas), individual initiative and enterprise, the principles of the new constitution, or the return of Japanese prisoners. However, the censors banned, for example, the shooting of films depicting or criticizing the American occupation, fraternization among the military and Japanese women, the atomic bombs and the devastation they caused, or traditional themes of period films such as feudal loyalty and revenge as a legitimate motive.

7. Adaptations during American Occupation

The Japanese film laws and censorship enforced from 1939, as well as the subsequent American film regulations imposing and prohibiting specific subjects, restricted the production of adaptations of Western literature. In June 1949, however, the Civil Information and Education Section was dissolved and the Film Ethics Regulation Control Committee (*Eiga rinri kanri iinkai*) was established. Official censorship ended, opening the way to more informal means of control, although the American Civil Intelligence Division continued monitoring films in post-production until 1952, when the occupation ended (Anderson and Richie 168).

A period of greater flexibility and creativity freedom began in 1949, and film directors and studios were able to shoot new adaptations of well-known Western works that had been successfully adapted in the past. For instance, in 1950, Itō Daisuke and Makino Masahiro each filmed one part of the adaptation of Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, produced by Tokyo Eiga Co. Ltd: *Les Misérables I: Gods and Demons* (Re Mizeraburu: kami to akuma) and *Les Misérables II: God and the Flag of Freedom* (Re Mizeraburu: kami to jiyu no hata). In the same year, Shochiku produced Nobuchi Akira's *Resurrection* (Fukkatsu) – a new version of Tolstoy's novel – and in 1951 Kurosawa Akira filmed *The Idiot* (Hakuchi), an adaptation of the homonymous Dostoyevsky novel, for Toho Studios. The most remarkable of those adaptations, *The Idiot*, received worldwide recognition. In his film, Kurosawa sets the story in Hokkaido, Japan, in a post-war context aiming to examine the cultural causes of War World II. The film "becomes an allegory of post-war Japan's ambiguous status as victim and perpetrator," showing in that way "the modernity and relevance of Dostoevsky's discourse as

a possible solution to the uneasy question of social recovery and cultural restoration in the post-war period" (Solovieva 133).

After the American Occupation, Western literature adaptations of classic and pulp fiction continued until the end of the century. A few of them, such as Kurosawa's adaptations of Shakespeare plays – *Throne of Blood* (Kumonosu-jō, 1957) and *Ran* (1985) – would become masterpieces.

8. Conclusion

The first adaptations of Western literature were produced in Japan in the decade of the 1910´s. At first, filmmakers tried to be 'faithful to the original,' preserving the cultural milieu of the literary source. From 1920 film directors began to adapt Western literature works to suit the Japanese cultural context, adding different levels of intertextuality and interculturality. However, these adaptations were influenced by the historical, ideological, political, and sociocultural context.

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