Book Section:

Chapter 9

Politicizing the Audience? Film Fans' Experiences of Cinema in the 1960s

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The potential politicizing effects of a film or media text are often inferred from the political personae or directly expressed intentions of those involved in its making, from the presence of a political auteur-director to the mass-media friendly apolitical self-identifications of certain stars. Yet such expressions and influences must be understood as part of the star personae of these individuals – elements in the well-crafted public-facing characterizations on the basis of which films and merchandise are advertised to potential viewers. Instead of assessing the politicizing potential of a media text using the recorded opinions and behaviours of its creators, in this chapter I would like to propose a different approach. Analysing ethnographic material that deals with film viewers' memories of cinema cultures, I explore the possibilities and limitations of politicizing an audience through cinema.

For the purposes of this chapter, the term "politicized" characterizes the viewer's sense of the stimulation or generation of political awareness and activity. While the viewers quoted here often attribute the beginnings of their political awareness to a particular cinematic encounter or moment, it is not possible to determine whether the viewer sought confirmation of an already-forming or established political awareness or stance in the cinema narratives and personae of the era remembered, or whether engagement with those narratives and personae triggered political awareness and even activism. Being "politicized" may be understood to mean that an individual is not political by their own volition, however the ethnographic examples and analysis which follow are not offered with the intention of making this claim. Whether research participants were politically aware before finding a cinematic narrative percieved to confirm their political stance, or whether the cinematic

experience generated that political awareness out of a previous apolitical or depoliticized state is beyond the bounds of what we can ascertain in an ethnographic encounter. Instead, I am interested in exploring how talking about cinema becomes a way of describing political stances and charting developing political awareness. At the same time, we can see how narratives about cinema engagement are also used to explain and contextualize feelings of depoliticization, or being dissuaded from a political action or stance.

As we suggested in the introduction to this volume, politicization and depoliticization are not only communicated by what people say, but also by what they do. The politicization of the cinema audience can take many forms, and in turn, the cinema theatre itself can be used as a refuge from politicized spaces when understood as a depoliticized space. The same audience can contain viewers who interpret a film's content through a politicized lens, and members who have come to the cinema specifically to seek out a space where they perceive politics to be absent.

Drawing from a larger project on memories of cinema-going between 1945 and 1968, this chapter investigates the degree of politicization or depoliticization that audiences felt themselves to have experienced through the cinema during this period of rapid social change and political upheaval in the 1960s. During the "watershed events between 1960 and 1972 – such as the 1960 Anpo (U.S.-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty) protests, the beginning of the Zenkyōtō student movement (1968-71), and the subsequent breakdown of the New Left in 1972" (Shigematsu 2012, 33), cinema culture in Japan was in sharp decline from its peak production and attendance year in 1958. Nonetheless, the cinema was still a major part of the everyday lives of many people caught up in these "watershed events," and at the same time, the cinema screen also reflected a version of these events back to the generation who lived through them.

This chapter explores film fans' memories of this era, in order to understand how cinema culture and film theatres are remembered in relation to an individual's sense of their own politicization or depoliticization. In most cases these are not clear cut memories of historical fact, but rather complicated accounts that evoke a sense of depoliticization along with a nostalgia for the time when the person was, or felt, politicized. Over four years of fieldwork, I conducted a long form questionnaire survey with 84 responses, a series of formal and informal interviews, and participant observation at four sites in Kyoto and Osaka specializing in screening and discussing postwar and Shōwa era (1926-1989) films. Archival research, including analysis of material from the popular press of the period, contextualizes the memories shared by interviewees and questionnaire respondents.

These diverse examples of politicization and depoliticization performed and experienced at and through the cinema are linked together through a single fieldsite, the Kinugasa eiga kai (Kinugasa Film Club). The first part of this chapter explores the politicized state of the cinema audience at the end of the 1950s through a case study focused on one politically inclined film-viewing group in the northwest region of Kyoto, which was the first iteration of the group now known as the Kinugasa eiga kai. Moving on to the memories of those individual audience members, the second part of this chapter analyses conflicting discourses on politicization and depoliticization at the cinema as told to me by Kinugasa eiga kai members. The social form of film club or film circle (*eiga sākuru*, or *eisa*) is the micro context that links these periods together. At an *eisa*, screening and viewing activities are carried out in a collective context that can, potentially, lead to politicization. By taking a longer historical view of a micro site such as an *eisa*, I believe that we can also see how cinema itself can become a discursive object through which a person can explore, rationalize, and explain their own degree of politicization to others and to themselves.

Film Organizations and Political Ideologies in Postwar Japan

Organized film viewing, cinema-going, and ticket-buying groups were a major feature of the early postwar cinema landscape in Japan. A number of these organizations were affiliated with studios, theatres, workplaces, businesses, educational establishments, and political groups. Cinema-related organizations also developed cross-organizational links with one another, federating into large scale bodies with significant social and political potential. The close associations between cinema viewership, education, and political and personal development articulated by these organizations makes them an ideal starting point for investigating the political impacts and potentials of cinema culture.

In 1958, a special section of *Kinema Junpō* (Film Record, or The Movie Times) was devoted to the topic of organized cinema audience groups. Critics Okada Susumu, Hatano Kanji, and Uryū Tadao recalled their own participation in organized cinema clubs of various types, dating back to the 1920s. In his account of his workplace film circle, Okada noted that one of the most important aspects of the organization, for the members that he spoke with, was the opportunity to hear other people's impressions of the films screened at the organization ([1958] 1994, 743-744). "Like all film fans, I think about film. I talk about film. That's why audiences make opportunities to gather together. This is where audiences' ideas and independent expression are born" (Okada [1958] 1994, 744). Okada posited his workplace film circle as a space where new ideas emerged and were developed in conversation with others. While not explicitly political, the development of new ideas within the film circle organization is nonetheless connected to the major reforms enacted on the Japanese body politic after 1945. Okada argued that the film circles of the late 1950s, "were born from the liberation of film audiences' expression immediately after the war" ([1958] 1994, 744).

Okada also noted an economic imperative for the creation of workplace film circles that was consistent across the film study groups and clubs discussed within this special section of *Kinema Junpō*. "A popular slogan for many film circles today is 'Making good films cheap'" (*yoi eiga o yasuku*) (Okada [1958] 1994, 744). This same goal was reiterated, and more politically aligned, in the contributions of Hatano Kanji and Uryū Tadao, who connected the affordable provision of "good" films with an attempt to educate, and even politicize, working class and impoverished groups within the wider Japanese public.

The often poverty-stricken viewers of the organizations discussed in Hatano's article were students who formed film research groups (*eiken*) in order to invite film previews and filmmakers to university campuses ([1958] 1994, 744-746). Yet based on his experience in two or three university *eiken*, Hatano warned that it was "easy for *eiken* to become elitist" ([1958] 1994, 746). While the majority of *eiken* aimed to renounce the capitalist ideals and practices common within filmmaking, Hatano argued that many *eiken* themselves, "became flavoured with the most prevalent film capitalism" by selling discounted cinema tickets, and hosting large recruitment drives at the beginning of the academic year to capture new students and grow the organization ([1958] 1994, 746). Instead of practicing these high-capitalist activities Hatano argued, *eiken* should focus on the personal development (often bordering on political development) of the student body. "We shouldn't stop only at selling cinema tickets, but taking film as a key, students should undergo self-reformation, or self-reinvention (*jikokaizō*) by enjoying good films amongst themselves" (Hatano [1958] 1994, 746).

Closing the special section on *eiga sākuru*, which he shortened to *eisa*, critic Uryū Tadao reflected on the development of film circles within the film world, as well as in schools, universities, and workplaces around the country. Uryū noted that film study groups, clubs, and circles had been popular since the late 1920s and into the 1930s ([1958] 1994,

747). After the war, he argued, film viewing organizations took a new political turn and focused on educating the public about democracy. Recalling his own experience of high school *eisa* in the wartime years, Uryū argued that the postwar reform of the school system introduced high school *eisa* to political issues through a focus on the "social elements of film" (Uryū [1958] 1994, 747). "In the early years of the postwar, the emphasis on political and social elements of the *eisa* was strong… American films were borrowed and shown, and taught viewers about democracy" (Uryū [1958] 1994, 747). Against a socio-political background of severe poverty and rapid social change, *eisa* were sites of education as well as entertainment.

The Tokyo Film Circle Convention (Tokyo eiga sākuru kyōgikai, shortened to Tokyo eisakyō) was formed in 1948, with the goal of making "good" films available to watch cheaply, raising the taste and education level of working people who participated, and using circle activity to encourage the creation of democratic films. They also aimed to support the activities of democratic cultural groups, and to "protect" Japanese culture (Uryū [1958] 1994, 748). The labour union circles, film theatre friendship groups (*eigakan no tomo no kai*) and study groups within the Tokyo eisakyō all clearly prioritised social and political concerns among their aims. As we will see in the first case study analysed in this chapter, this focus on raising public awareness of social and political issues was not confined to Tokyo, but appeared in the manifestoes and advertising materials of *eisa* and other film organizations in Kyoto and Osaka as well as other areas.

Uryū argued that the protracted series of strikes which took place at the Tokyo Tōhō studios from 1947 until 1948 was a major influence on the politicization of many of the film circles that formed around Japan in this period.[1] The number of film "friendship" groups

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[1] After a successful strike by Tōhō employees in March 1946 to improve working conditions, second and third strike attempts became entrenched, culminating in a six-month occupation of the studio from April 1948 (Coates 2016, 51-52).

(*tomo no kai*) and study or research groups (*kenkyūkai*) was still increasing in 1958 and showed "no sign of stopping" ([1958] 1994, 748). Borrowing the politicized language of protest, many film viewing organizations had adopted the slogan, "Support the development of good films, boycott worthless films" (*yoi eiga o sodate, kudaranai eiga wa boikotto suru*) (Uryū [1958] 1994, 748). By the late 1950s, the number of *eiken* were also steadily increasing, and those formed at Kyoto University and Tokyo University had begun to produce film industry professionals such as directors and film critics, as well as publishing their own journals (Uryū [1958] 1994, 747). In this way, the professional film industry and non-professional film organizations overlapped and influenced one another, as political concerns from within the film industry were carried over into wider society through affiliated and associated film organizations. Film organizations produced the film industry professionals of the future, who brought these political concerns back into the film industry.

Uryū made a distinction between *eiken* (film research groups), *eiga kanshōkai* (film viewing meetings), *eiga sākuru* (film circles), *shokuiki sākuru* (workplace circles), film theatre friendship groups (*eigakan no tomo no kai*), and other organizations created to bring film to groups of viewers, and host discussions about those films. Collectivising these varieties of film organizations under the term *eisa*, Uryū argued that because these organizations brought together people of various genders, ages, employments, ideologies, and feelings, "not investigating the nature of these organizations and circles would really be a waste" (Uryū [1958] 1994, 749). In the spirit of Uryū's call for a deeper investigation into film viewing organizations and their activities, the next section of this chapter explores the foundation and development of an unusual film circle whose activities span the late 1950s to the present day.

Kyoto Kiroku Eiga o Miru Kai: Kyoto Society for Viewing Documentary Cinema

During participant observation at a monthly film circle in Kyoto, I was introduced to the unique history of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai (Kyoto Society for Viewing Documentary Cinema), a film organization-turned-filmmaking collective that had made the documentary film *Nishijin* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1961). Kinugasa eiga kai was the third incarnation of that film organization, after both the original Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and its successor had folded due to lack of funds and internal issues in the 1960s and 1970s. The contemporary Kinugasa eiga kai met on the third Saturday of every month near the Kinugasa campus of Ritsumeikan University, though the group had no affiliation with the school. Between ten and thirty members from an overall membership of 150 met to view two or three films on video or DVD, selected by a rotating *zacho* or meeting leader, and followed by a discussion session of one or two hours, with beer and snacks offered at 100 yen each, subsidized by the group's 500 yen participation fee.

After I had attended the screening club for six months, the three organizers of Kinugasa eiga kai introduced me to Asai Eiichi (1933-), co-organizer of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and producer of *Nishijin*. The three founding members of the Kinugasa film circle and Asai san described how this previous incarnation of the Kinugasa eiga kai had engaged with the political environment of late 1950s and 1960s Kyoto. In beginning with the history of the organization, before analysing selected memories shared by individual members, I want to emphasize the structural processes of politicization across the history of a group or organization, which in turn affects the politicization, or depoliticization, of members of that group. By tracing the political roots of the Kinugasa eiga kai, we can better understand the context of the politicized and depoliticized attitudes of its founders, members, and infrequent attendees.

In 1953, when he was 20 years old, Asai Eichi met and formed a friendship with Fujiki Shoji at an old coffee shop near Kawaramachi in central Kyoto. Fujiki was a 41 year old theatre group organizer whose theatre circle had just ousted him from the organization (possibly for being too politically-focused) (Morishita 2009). Fujiki wanted to continue the artistic and political organizing he had been developing within the theatre group and Asai wanted an education in documentary film. Together they formed the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, which ran from April 1955 to March 1962 (Asai 1961a, 21).

Monthly screenings were held at the Yasaka Hall in Kyoto, Gion Kaikan, Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, and other city locations. In a conversation in late 2016, Asai recollected that the primary motivating factor in the organization's initial programming choices was to enable people to "see films that can't be seen within the frame of commercial cinema" (*shōgyō eiga no waku*) (personal communication, 28 November 2016). Documentary films by the Scottish John Grierson and American Robert Flaherty were screened at the organization's meetings, Japanese directors were invited to discuss their own films, and solo exhibitions would often be arranged, showing work by Matsumoto Toshio, Wada Tsutomu, and Tsuchimoto Noriaki. At the same time however, Asai recalled the early years of the organization as "an era of politics" (*seiji no jidai*) when popular interest in investigative journalism and social issues was growing (personal communication, 28 November 2016).

Activities soon expanded to include the bulk buying of cinema theatre tickets for distribution among the membership. This practice had the effect of packing commercial theatres for selected screenings, and so the operation quickly became political. As Fujiki and Asai had leftist political leanings and an interest in grassroots organizing, members' cinema theatre attendance was channelled toward leftist films, particularly those focused on labour issues. In this way the organization became a commercial tool, supporting the public

screening of films with political themes in agreement with the outlook of the organizers. This in itself was not unusual – many film clubs deliberately mobilized their membership to support particular projects, directors, or studios. In fact the organizations affiliated with studios and commercial publications were developed to do just that, providing the studio or publishing house with a base of ticket-buyers who could be directed towards certain screenings to financially support the business and its projects.

Yet Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was less focused on controlling members' consumer habits than engaging their political consciousness. At the time, labour issues in the Nishijin textile-producing area of north west Kyoto were the subject of much discussion in the popular press, which described skilled workers struggling in poor conditions to make the elaborate woven and embroidered materials for expensive kimono and accoutrements. The combined symptoms of the labourers were collectivized as "Horikawa disease," which took its name from the hospital which treated the workers. The Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai decided to make a film to bring Horikawa disease to public attention, much as later documentaries would do for the "Minamata incident," in which Chisso Corporation was found to be leaking methylmercury into the water surrounding the Minamata plant in Kumamoto prefecture from 1932 until 1968, causing severe neurological damage to residents (George 2001).

Asai recalled becoming aware of the occupational injuries suffered by the weavers that were treated at Horikawa hospital, in part because the hospital had both organization members and members of the Communist Party within its workforce (personal communication, 28 November 2016). Asai remembers the discussion of the late 1950s focusing on this health issue as exemplary of a wider social problem (*shakai mondai*) evident in late 1950s Japan (personal communication, 28 November 2016), as the discourses of equality and human rights that had characterised the early postwar years gave way to an

acknowledgement that Japan was still very unequal. Labour rights, poverty, illness, and class division combined to make the story of the weavers highly appealing to the leftist politics of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai. The core membership decided to make a film to bring Horikawa disease and the suffering of the weavers to public attention.

This would appear to be the first instance of an experimental movie made by a film circle in Japan (Satō 2013, 41; Morishita 2009). The increase in political awareness across Japan at that time may have contributed to a sense of urgency in relation to intervening on behalf of marginalized and oppressed people such as the Nishijin weavers, while the political expressions of outspoken filmmakers such as Ōshima (see Standish in this volume) may have suggested filmmaking as the appropriate vehicle for this intervention. Political tensions had been building in Kyoto since the end of the Allied Occupation of Japan, influenced and sometimes fortified by news of political activism in Tokyo and around the country. Political foci were variously local, national, and international. For example, on 7 November 1951 a large student rally at Kyoto university celebrated the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, after which students stoned the house of a Diet member who had supported extending the U.S.-Japan Security treaty popularly known as the Anpo treaty. Shortly thereafter, 1000 Kyoto university students met the emperor of Japan on his visit to the city with placards, shouting slogans, demands and insults (Desser 1988, 32).

Events in Tokyo also registered with Kyoto political activists, such as the 1952 "Bloody May Day" in which 20,000 unionists tried to storm the plaza in front of the Imperial Palace and 1,200 were arrested. In November 1955, as Asai and Fujiki formed the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, protestors at Tachikawa Air Base clashed with police in a highly mediatized confrontation, while by 1959 protesters were swarming the Diet compound. As the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai began to plan their documentary film, the "First Haneda Incident" occurred in January 1960, in which the All-Japan League of Student Self-

Government (*Zen nihon gakusei jichikai sō rengō*, also known as Zengakuren) attempted to stop Prime Minister Kishi Nobosuke boarding a plane to the U.S. On 26 April 1960, The Association for Criticizing the Security Treaty (*Ampo hihan no kai*) staged coordinated protests across Japan, and by 15 June 1960 the protest movement had a martyr in the form of student Kanba Michiko, who was killed during an Anpo demonstration, creating significant popular sympathy for Zengakuren (Desser 1988, 36).

As political activist groups were forming and building their agendas throughout the 1950s and 1960s, film fans were also organizing. As detailed above, the majority of film organizations were formed around a workplace, school, university, dedicated film publication, or around a trade union (Satō 2013, 41). The motivations of these groups were largely to watch good films cheaply, discuss and critique, create club publications such as magazines, and interact with filmmakers. Many organizations also aimed at enriching audience members' lives through enhancing their awareness of film as an art (Satō 2013, 42), particularly those with leftist aspirations, which were also often those organizations formed around labor unions.

According to Satō, the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was unique in three key ways. First, it was relatively autonomous from existing organizations such as trade unions and political parties. Secondly, it pursued independent screening arrangements, using public hall spaces rather than hiring cinema theatres as was more common for organized film clubs. Third, its activities were diverse – films chosen for public screening included experimental cinema, animation, silent films, feature films, and concerts of contemporary music. From 1957, when other film clubs' activities were curtailed by the Environment and Health Act, which restricted the discounted bulk buying of cinema theatre tickets, film club activity in Japan began to decline. Yet the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai went from strength to strength, and soon expanded its activities to filmmaking.

Satō argues that the success of the club's activities also depended on the personalities of Fujiki and Asai, as well as Kyoto city's particular affinity for politicized arts groups (2013, 42). Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai emphasized a qualitative change in group members' consciousness as their primary goal, rather than financial gain, political influence, or increasing membership (Satō 2013, 42). Documentary films were selected as the main focus of the club's activities because the genre was relatively difficult to see in mainstream cinemas, as smaller independent documentaries in particular were often considered unprofitable.

Furthermore, Fujiki and Asai invited film directors and producers to screenings to discuss their films. At the time, a thriving audiovisual education movement was underway in elementary and junior high schools nationwide. This movement included screenings of documentary films, but was mostly limited to schools and their pupils. The Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was similar to the audiovisual education movement in terms of assembling a screening program of documentary film for public education. Fujiki and Asai received support from local educators, and the film circle was seen by some as something of an extension of education practices (Satō 2013, 42). The film club's similarities to existing screening and education practices, and key differences from other film clubs, groups, and circles, ensured its success, at least until group activities expanded to filmmaking.

While its impossible to cite one single motivation for the film club's move into filmmaking, the 3 August 3 1958 screening of Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten Ones*, 1950), accompanied by a lecture from Hanada Kiyoteru (also known as Hanada Seiki) may have inspired the group to think about the representation of underclasses and oppressed groups (Satō 2013, 49). Satō quotes a group member, Takahashi Akira, who claimed that the meeting had inspired him to think more deeply about social issues (Satō 2013, 50). For this reason, Satō characterizes the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai as something in between a

consumption-focused union-type organization and an organization for public education and enlightenment (2013, 51). At the same time, a number of the film club's members were employees of the Horikawa Hospital near Nishijin, which treated the weavers' chronic work-related pain, and local doctors, nurses, and administrators urged the group to make a documentary on the workers' condition (Wada Marciano 2014, 379).

Matsumoto Toshio, who was approached by Asai to direct the film club's project, recalled that making a film upon request from a particular group was not unusual in the late 1950s (Wada Marciano 2014, 379). Matsumoto remembered that, "Documentaries up until then were mostly made with the backing of a labor union or Communist Party organization. If you thought of doing something different from that, you had to create a completely different support structure because there was no foundation for making such films or showing them" (Gerow 2015). In this respect, the commission from the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai can be understood as a novel approach to documentary filmmaking. Matsumoto remembered that, "they were left-wing, but still not what you call a political organization. I think they were the first to try to cultivate new spectators and make the kind of films they wanted to see on their own" (Gerow 2015).

Matsumoto and Asai have recorded slightly different memories of the project planning. While Matsumoto recalled bringing the subject of the Nishijin weavers to the group (Gerow 2015), Asai presented the topic as emerging from the contacts, experiences, and political interests of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai members (personal communication, 28 November 2016). Nonetheless, producer and director agreed to focus on the subject of the weaving industry in Nishijin, bringing onboard poet Sekine Hiroshi (1920–1994) as a co-writer, Akira Miyoshi (1933-2013) as composer, and cinematographer Miyajima Yoshio (1909–1998).

Asai remembers Miyajima agreeing to cooperate without compensation (personal communication, 28 November 2016). Nishijin textile companies were approached to sponsor the film, and Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai members sold micro shares of 80 yen (approximately $5 in today's US dollars) to local people to help fund the film (Wada Marciano 2014, 379). A filmmaking association was founded from within the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai membership, with some members directly participating in the production. Morishita infers from contemporary newspaper reports that expenses totalled around 2.5 million yen, with an estimated deficit of 700,000 yen (2009).

Nishijin won the short-documentary award at the Venice Film Festival in 1961, but it was to bankrupt its producers and collapse the whole organization. The high cost of production and marketing overran the organization's funds, and despite the Venice award the film was not a commercial success. Furthermore, several in Nishijin's textile industry were angered by the depiction of industry personnel, and the depiction of rampant exploitation of the weavers. Industry personnel applied significant pressure to the filmmaking association to reedit the film with added footage, releasing a sanitized parallel version, *Orimono no machi, Nishijin* (*The Weaving Town of Nishijin*, 1961) (Wada Marciano 2014, 380). Finally, a fire at the offices wiped out the remaining membership cards and members' dues, and the organization folded, to be reborn again in in June 1964 as Shi dokyumentari shinema (See documentary cinema), or Shidofu for short. The core members of Shidofu would go on to create the Kingasa eiga kai.

Morishita notes that the stated goal of Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was to observe recordings of everyday life (2009), and this is clearly connected to the attempt to resurrect a leftist Japanese selfhood and find a new direction for the movement underway at the time (Kitagawa 2000, 175). In fact, Morishita records that a junior high school teacher who watched the film at the time argued that, "Nishijin is a microcosm of Japan itself" (2009). We

can understand the organization's effort to make a documentary film as an attempt to record a

something of the members' political concerns for postwar Japan, as symbolized by the

weavers' struggles. As Janet Staiger observes, "historical circumstances sometimes create

'interpretative communities' or cultural groups such as fans who produce their own

conventionalized modes of reception" (2000, 23). In this case, the historical circumstances of

the late 1950s and early 1960s gave rise to an active and politically engaged mode of

reception that culminated in an attempt at production. Yet as we will see, film fans today

recall a much more ambivalent relation between their cinema consumption and politicization

than the Kyoto eiga o miru kai members may have hoped for when they began their

filmmaking project.

Japanese Cinema in the Politicized 1960s

Attendance at the cinema was falling sharply in the 1960s, from a peak of 1,127,452,000 in

1958 to 313,398,000 in 1968 (Motion Picture Producer's Association of Japan). The number

of cinema theatres was also decreasing, from a peak of 7457 in 1960 to 3814 in 1968 (Motion

Picture Producer's Association of Japan). The majority of the films available in theatres were

made in Japan; in 1968, 494 Japanese films were screened, and 249 imported films. At the

same time, the average admission fee increased every year, reaching 262 yen in 1968, up

from 236 the previous year, compared to 72 yen in 1960 (Motion Picture Producer's

Association of Japan).

Studio management had perhaps hoped that the political mood of the 1960s could

present a solution to the downturn in cinema attendance. At Shōchiku and Nikkatsu studios,

young directors perceived to be radical and politically outspoken, such as Ōshima Nagisa,

Imamura Shōhei, and Suzuki Seijun, were quickly promoted and grouped together for

marketing purposes. While there was a degree of cross-influence between Japanese

filmmakers of the era and their French counterparts (see Standish, this volume), the young

directors objected to the hijacking of their voices for the studios' commercial purposes, and

by 1968 Ōshima, Imamura, and Suzuki and many contemporaries had left the studios or been

fired, moving into television, documentary, and independent filmmaking.

These young directors could not be said to constitute a cohesive movement, political

or otherwise, yet their films were influenced by the socio-political and historical

circumstances of the 1960s. Ōshima recalled the impact of the Anpo struggles on his films as

early as 1959, writing that the mood of the movement "flowed quietly like an underground

stream of water gradually gathering force and growing wider as my first film *A Town of Love

and Hope* [*Ai to kibō no machi*] quietly opened in 1959" (1963, 185, trans. Standish, this

volume). The political mood of the decade to come is woven into his subsequent filmmaking.

As Oguma Eiji suggests, the larger number of those involved in the political

demonstrations and activism of the 1960s divided their time between politics, music, and

theatre (Oguma 2009, 93). I would suggest that the activities of this group included cinema

attendance, not only at those cinemas directly connected to political theatre such as the Art

Theatre Guild's Sasori-za in Shinjuku, but also at the declining number of mainstream film

theatres showing the work of politicized filmmakers such as Ōshima alongside genre films

and pure entertainment features (though these categories should not be understood as

mutually exclusive). The memories of the cinema audience can shed light on the role of

cinema-going, as well as film content, in forming the political imaginaries of this group of

partially-involved and sometimes even disinterested occasional participants in 1968 activism.

An Ethno-History of the Politicized Cinema Audience

While a number of participants in my study remember traveling to Tokyo during the 1960s to

take part in demonstrations and protests, the majority encountered the political activities of

the 1960s in the Kansai region. Many were too young to remember the Kyoto University student rallies of November 1951 that celebrated the anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution and ended in students stoning the house of a Diet member (Desser 1988, 32). Yet a number were attracted to the university for its radical political atmosphere when they enrolled during the 1960s. The activism in and around Kyoto University was not always conducive to maintaining a love of cinema, both in terms of viewership and filmmaking. As Beheiren and Zenkyōtō (The All-Campus Joint Struggle Committees) membership increased in 1968, a number of participants in my research project recalled becoming caught up in activities they wished to avoid.

In applying discourse analysis to viewer-produced letters, questionnaires, and interviews, my study was modelled on key works in the field of audience and reception studies (Radway 1984; Ang 1985; Stacey 1994; 2002). I borrow Annette Kuhn's terminology in calling the project an ethno-history – that is, a study of an historical period conducted through ethnographic methods and involving memory work, with all the implications for factual accuracy and consistency that entails. In this sense the following ethnographic material and analysis is presented as suggestive of a historical mood and a variety of remembered responses to the events of the politicized 1960s, rather than a factual historical record. Nonetheless the memories of audience members of the era suggest the impact of cinema culture on the political imaginaries of many in the period.

Political Cinemas, Politicized Audiences?

In interviews and questionnaire surveys, I repeatedly encountered discussions about 1960s activism, and what these memories, as well as the movement itself, mean for today's citizens of Japan. These memories and arguments are rich and complex, and there is little consensus between groups who consider the movement a positive, negative, or inconsequential impact

on their lives, and on the political future of Japan. I group the discourses roughly into three distinct areas of sentiment expressed by three relatively distinct groups of research participants. The first group, just under one third of the total number of research participants, identified as politicized audience members who found some reflection of their feelings and aspirations for the protest cultures of the 1960s in the popular cinema of the time. These participants recalled casting popular film stars and characters as role models for their activist conduct and outlook. The second group, by far the largest number of participants, remembered the activist movements of the sixties as disruptive to their enjoyment of popular entertainments such as the cinema, and appreciated the film theatre as a space away from everyday concerns, including politics. In the most extreme cases, members of this group even situated 1960s political activism as directly impeding their own creative ambitions to make films, and remembered the activism of the 1960s as detrimental to their career aspirations. Similarly, the last group did not participate at all in political activism in the 1960s, but instead recalled the era with a wistful sense of longing. These research participants were generally the youngest in the study, and often cited their age or their geographical location as the main reason for their non-involvement the political activities. Instead, they imagined the cinema as communicating the mood of the era from a distance, allowing them a vicarious experience of activities they remember having wished to join.

The majority of participants in my study explicitly connected their film viewing experiences to their memories of contemporary political issues. As most were born in the early 1940s, the most frequent political reference point was the end of Japan's Fifteen Year War and World War II, followed by the American-led Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952). Most of the survey participants who were children in this era were still actively engaged in contextualizing and understanding their memories of the period through cinema at the time of our interviews (2014-2018). The same generation were teenagers and students

during the political protests of the 1960s, and their memories and opinions of these movements were similarly framed in relation to cinema, as well as explicitly connected to issues of war and occupation. Many viewers actively sought out political meanings and inferences in popular film texts, yet their own expressions of their feelings about, and involvement in 1960s activism was often conflicted. Some film fans wished to be closer to the political action, while others strove to avoid it. All used the cinema as both space and discursive mode to associate or distance themselves from political activism. In the ethnographic vignettes that follow, we can see how the cinema features in these shifting stances.

Cinematic Role Models for Political Action

Born in 1943, Hashimoto san was 18 in 1960 and 25 in 1968. He participated in the 1960 Anpo demonstrations, as well as the anti-Vietnam war protests that followed, and in 1968 demonstrations around the country. While film scholars today may think of the independent and left-associated filmmakers such as Ōshima Nagisa and Matsumoto Toshio in relation to protest movements and cinema, Hashimoto san drew his inspiration from a different genre – the yakuza film. He recalls the heroes of the genre as displaying a particular characteristic that he expressed as "*Gaman ni gaman*" – continuing to endure with self-control. In this respect Takakura Ken and other stars of the yakuza genre were the model for his engagement with demo and protest culture (Hashimoto 2016). Yakuza heroes embodied the spirit of never saying; "It can't be done" (*yaranai to ikenai*) for Hashimoto san and his fellow activists. "We tried to imagine we were the same" (Hashimoto 2016).

In 1968, film critic Akiyama Kiyoshi argued that, "yakuza films express the consciousness of our present times" (Akiyama 1968, 64). More than simply reflecting the feelings of the era however, he suggested that the genre was able to "somehow give comfort

to the viewer's heart" (Akiyama 1968, 64). Hashimoto san recalled the affect of Takakura and other yakuza stars as hopeful, demonstrating both the possibility of being able to endure physical challenges, injustice, and violence, and at the same time the positive results that such endurance could yield in dismantling inequalities and holding corrupt powers to account.

Critics at the time also suggested that the appeal of the yakuza genre film for students and young activists may have been similar to the appeal of activism itself, in that both appeared to offer an opportunity to organize collectively and socialize within a group structure. For example, film critic Hojo Nobuhiko argued that supporters of the yakuza genre film within the cinema audience might have felt themselves to be included in the "camaraderie" of the ensemble cast for the finite period they spent in the cinema (Hojo 1970, 50). Yet Hashimoto san's identification of Takakura Ken as a particularly significant role model for himself and his activist friends is an interesting counter to such dominant understandings of the importance of the yakuza genre for student activists. While fellow students, film critics, and scholars of the era often focused on the group aspect of the yakuza *gumi*, emphasizing the collective nature of political activism, Takakura's most famous yakuza characters are principled loners who despise both the police and prison guards and the organized ranks of the yakuza hierarchy. In the popular *Abashiri Prison* series (*Abashiri bangaichi*, 1965-1968), for example, Takakura's character repeatedly avoids group alliances, preferring to make single lateral bonds with men of his own age to challenge the yakuza hierarchy, rather than join the ranks of the brotherhood. It should be noted that by the start of the *Abashiri bangaichi* series Takakura had appeared in more than 100 films, and had a well-developed and nuanced public image not entirely reflected in his role within this single series. Furthermore, Takakura was claimed as a role model by both left wing and right wing critics, fans, and audience members. As Hashimoto identifies as politically left wing, his adoration of a yakuza idol might be surprising given the popular association of the yakuza with the

political left. However Takakura's nuanced public persona appears to have been sufficiently flexible to allow for both right and left identified viewers to seek political resonance in his onscreen characters.

If Takakura's yakuza characters offered the opposite of the group camaraderie identified as attractive to viewers by critics such as Hojo, his image appealed in other significant ways. Isolde Standish has suggested that the "powerful masculinity" performed by Takakura and other young male characters of the *Abashiri Prison* series provided both aspiration and outlet for contemporary male audiences in their performance of a type of masculinity "predicated on physical strength and stoicism" (2000, 160). Standish argues that Takakura's protagonist "closes the gap between the ideological image of masculinity and social experience, thus offering a vicarious solution to the eternal consequences lived by most men" (2000, 161). It is possible that Takakura offered a model for young viewers that did not champion collective activism, but rather demonstrated a way to maintain an ideologically constructed and valorised independent masculinity in spite of the social demands of the activist era.

Audiences such as Hashimoto san looked to yakuza film stars not only for a model for how to conceptualize their behaviour as activists, but also for a more generalized value system in the 1960s and 1970s. Writing for *Kinema Junpō* in 1970, Hojo Nobuhiko argued that yakuza film not only reflected "the very human desire to live a proper life" (*seijitsuna ningentekina kanbō*) but that "people often look to such fiction to tie themselves to something and build a life" (1970, 50). In 2016, Hashimoto san and his friends continued to insist on the importance of showing the political protests of the 1960s on screen, in both retrospective film programs and in new film texts. This group agreed on the potential of cinema to foster political change, and often expressed anti-war and anti-nuclear sentiment, in particular, in relation to key films by directors like Kinoshita Keisuke, Shindō Kaneto, and Kobayashi

Masaki. Many study participants expressed the wish that these films could be shown to younger Japanese viewers, as a means of ensuring the continuation of political attitudes including challenging government decision-making perceived to endanger everyday people. On the other hand, when members of this group participated in a screening of Ōshima Nagisa's *Death by Hanging* (*Koshikei*, 1968) at Kinugasa jōeikai, followed by *The Ceremony* (*Gishiki*, 1971), they declared themselves bored. The screening and discussion leader for that month (*zacho*) who had selected the films expressed feeling regret at her choices as early as 30 minutes into the first film. "I felt 'enough already!'" (*mo ii yo!*). She recalled the films having made a great impression on her in her activist youth, when she saw *Death by Hanging* screened on a white sheet hung up in the local park. In the wealthy corner of north west Kyoto that hosted the monthly film screening and discussion however, she expressed dismay at Ōshima's didactic tone, and wondered at how his films had inspired her as a young woman.

Cinema as Escape, Demos as Disruption

While a number of participants in my study reported drawing political inspiration from popular cinema, film viewership and creative production was conversely a means for some to escape or excuse themselves from political movements. For example, both Hashimoto san and Takeda san's accounts of cinema going in their teenage and later student years include complaints about the 1960s student movement as an inconvenience. Like Imamura Shōhei's protagonist in *The Insect Woman* (*Nippon konchūki*, 1964), political demonstrations inconvenienced their personal mobility. Takeda san, also born in 1943, remained concerned with the political situation of postwar Japan, and often noted parallels in fiction film with contemporary social issues. Watching Mizoguchi Kenji's *Ugetsu* (*Ugetsu monogatari*, 1954) for example, he discerned a critique of contemporary militarism in the film's historical

narrative. However, his personal cinema-related experiences positioned him in opposition to the student movements, rather than inspiring him to join in demonstrations.

Having failed the entrance exam to his parent's choice of university in Tokyo, Takeda san moved to Kyoto and studied to enter the university several years after graduating from high school. As a relatively mature undergraduate student, he devoted most of his time to the amateur filmmaking club within the university. After a year as a junior member, he graduated to a level of membership that allowed him to make his own short film. In the same year however, the student film club closed due to insufficient funds, and their room at the university campus was occupied by the student movement. He graduated in April 1968 and entered company life, steering clear of the student movement in particular, and activism more generally.

Takeda san associated the student movement with the disruption of his planned film, and subsequently his career. Instead of becoming a filmmaker, he joined a famous advertising company, working in the production section making internal information films for private companies. While he sympathised with the political attitudes of leftist auteurs, he continued to view grassroots activism and protest as a nuisance rather than an effective political strategy. He felt he suffered further misfortune a few years later when the film-viewing group he had joined was forced to close in 1970 after only 3 years. "[The group] continued from 1967 to 1970, but as the 70's were still the era of Zenkyōtō, it also broke down mid-way" (Takeda 2016). At a loss, he set up a film-viewing club within the advertising company instead, and was surprised to find that the dedicated attendees were the politicized members of the labour union. "In the end, the directors didn't come at all!"

While blaming the student movement, and Zenkyōtō specifically, for obstructing his filmmaking plans, Takeda san nonetheless continued to think about film, and film related organizing, from a politicized perspective. Perhaps due to his experience with the labour

union at his company, when he tried again to establish a film-viewing club after retiring, he insisted on a horizontal organizational structure without hierarchy. The Kinugasa film viewing club, which ran from 2012 to 2018, had a rotating meeting leader who chose films and organized screening notes, changing each month, as well as a subsidized bar for discussion sessions. While Takeda san's memories of filmmaking in the 1960s and 1970s are rhetorically organized as a device to distance himself from the student movement, his broadly leftist politics are evident in his conception of the ideal group structure as a horizontal one.

"Film allows you to experience things you can't experience in reality"

While we might understand Takeda san's relationship to the political action of the 1960s, mediated through cinema discourse, as ambivalent, the third distinct group perceptible among participants in the study regarded the era with a sense of longing (*akogare*). Over 10 percent of questionnaire survey respondents noted that their first experience of going to the cinema involved seeing newsreel footage of public protests, from the Anpo demonstrations of 1960 onwards. These respondents were generally the youngest in the study, born between 1945 and 1955. The average age of a first cinema visit was 6 years old, and a number of respondents in this category recall visiting the film theatre from the age of 4 or 5, and learning about Anpo and the student movement from newsreel films.

One interviewee from this cohort, Matsuda san, explained that he treasured the opportunity to experience new things through film, particularly things "outside my own personal experience" (*jibun no jitaiken to wa dekinai*). Amongst the younger group of study participants, this was a common attitude towards the political movements of the older generation. People born in the 1950s often expressed regret that they had been too young in the 1960s to participate in the activism and protest movements that shaped the decade. Of course, many of these study participants had been children or young teenagers, and observed

the demonstrations and public protests around them, even if they did not directly participate. For those living outside the urban centres where much protest activity was focused, television, newspapers, and radio, as well as conversations at home and at school brought key moments and issues from the protest movements into their everyday lives. In these ways, members of the generations who identify as "left out" of the 1960s protest movements nonetheless have strong memories of the protests themselves.

For Kobayashi san, another research participant born in 1955, cinema offered a window into the kinds of social hierarchies and inequalities which motivated his political attitudes. In Kurosawa Akira's films, for example, Kobayashi san noted, "The social situation of lower class people is really, well, realistically portrayed" (Kobayashi 2016). This realism gave him a sense of transcending time and place; "that era is really like another country [*chigatta kuni*], that Japan has really been replaced by time, its impossible to understand what it was like before" (Kobayashi 2016). Yet his interest was focused most intensely on the experiences and ideas of everyday people living unremarkable lives during periods of social and political turmoil. He looked to cinema for a way to understand the hopes, dreams, and fears of people undergoing historical experiences. By feeling the suffering of everyday people in previous decades, Kobayashi san argued that today's Japanese citizens could be persuaded of the value of everlasting pacifism. "Of course, its not an easy thing to talk about, but the construction of Japanese people's consciousness, and also social consciousness, and the human view of life are really connected to cinema I think" (Kobayashi 2016).

A significant number of study participants shared Kobayashi san's view of cinema as a means of both educating oneself and feeling historical moments, with a view to improving or expanding one's personal ethics in relation to war and social inequality, in particular. Kishida san, born in 1956, similarly understood cinema as a social justice motivator and exposer of state violence. Watching documentaries on the Minamata water poisoning

incident, and fiction films portraying the treatment of *burakumin* in Japan, he felt a strong sense of the urgency of social injustice. In the questionnaire distributed in the first stage of the study, participants were asked "Do you think that watching a film has ever changed your way of thinking?" Like most respondents, Kishida san believed that film could change one's way of thinking through feeling. "Well, when you get a strong feeling, your own, well, your thinking becomes elevated by the film, it changes... when I watch a film like that I think 'So there is also that way of thinking'" (Kishida 2016).

In the 1960s, film critics such as Akiyama argued that the yakuza film was popular because it created a sense of community among viewers, and "gave comfort" to their hearts. I noted above that as yakuza films dominated the theatres of late 1960s and 1970s Japan, this observation may hold for cinema-going more widely rather than yakuza genre film specifically. Indeed, it seems that many participants in this study associated film viewing with developing modes of co-feeling, whether with other viewers or with film protagonists. At the same time, many participants placed a high value on the role that film played in expanding their consciousness, making them aware of new possibilities. Film viewers who value community, equality, and the search for new and better future models of sociality may have been pre-disposed to think about their relation to cinema as connected to leftist politics, whether they participated in, avoided, or felt left out of the protests and activities of the 1960s.

Conclusion

Rather than assuming a politicized audience from seemingly political film content, or the political expressions of filmmakers, directors, and stars, this chapter has explored the relation of film to political attitudes in 1960s Japan through an ethno-historical approach that blends memory work, questionnaire surveys, interviews, participant observation, and archival

research. The results have been varied, demonstrating a range of responses to the question of cinema's relation to politics across a wide variety of demographics, from the activist film fan group to the apolitical or decisively depoliticized individual. I have attempted here to give some sense of the depth of the memories of cinema culture that were shared with me during my study, and to convey a sense of my research participants remembering their own engagements with Japan's turbulent 1960s as a period in which they stepped in and out of conflicted feelings of politicization and depoliticization.

In framing these memories around the Kinugasa eiga kai, and particularly the activist filmmaking project of its predecessor the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, I aim to demonstrate the persistence of structural or organizational memory in film fan's relation to the political culture of the 1960s. It is noteworthy that the very public failure of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai's efforts does not seem to have damped the political enthusiasms of a number of the members of its successor group, the Kinugasa eiga kai. And yet, the same members willingly offer memories of their senses of depoliticization that would seem to contradict their ongoing political commitments, today largely focused on pacifism and social justice.

The political efficacy of a film text, star persona, or cinema organization is closely tied to the political atmosphere of the time, yet not in any predictable way – for every audience member inspired by the harmony of politicized film content and organized action outside the cinema, there will be another who regrets the disturbance which distracts for them film. Nonetheless, talking about cinema, and memories of film-going, can give us an emotive insight into the political culture of a period, and provide a discursive object through which film fans can relate their recollections and feelings of the era.

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