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Cultural Intermediaries in the East Asian Film Industries

**Audiences as Cultural Intermediaries: A Case Study from Kyoto, Japan**

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(9335 words)

Cultural intermediaries are most broadly understood as those involved in the culture industries, their presentation, and representation (Bourdieu 1984, 359). Studies of cultural intermediaries have until recently tended to deal with cultural producers and productions, yet this relatively narrow focus does not account for the roles played by those outside these occupations in mediating cultural products (Hesmondhalgh 2006, 226-7; Nixon and du Gay 2002, 498). While cultural intermediaries are often credited with attempting to shape consumer tastes, it is becoming increasingly apparent that this activity has long been shifting beyond the “new *petite bourgeoisie*” identified by Pierre Bourdieu in 1979 (1984, 14). The shaping of cultural tastes in the broader consumer public is in fact a key goal of much audience and fan activity. We may go so far as to say that certain organized audience groups and fan clubs seek to exert a grass-roots version of the “control over the mass media” that Pierre Bourdieu identified as a distinguishing characteristic of his “new cultural intermediaries” (1984, 325).

This chapter argues for organized audience groups and their representative actors as cultural intermediaries who can play important roles in the establishment, development, and globalization of film cultures in East Asia. In addition to the study of individual entrepreneurs, film directors, actors and actresses, printed or electronic media, nation-states, and film companies, paying attention to how audience groups organize themselves to

intervene in cultural production can add nuance to our understanding of the operations and reach of cultural intermediaries. In fact, organized viewers and audience groups often operate at the point where cultural producers and cultural consumers meet (Lee 2012, 132). This makes the study of the organized audience an ideal case through which to explore the grey areas and overlaps between cultural producers and consumers.

The organized audience groups whose activities are analysed in this chapter evolved from a film viewing group called the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, or the Kyoto Society for Viewing Documentary Cinema (Gerow 2015), which formed in 1955. Rapidly organizing into a production unit in order to develop their own documentary film project, members of this group attempted to shape the viewing tastes and attitudes of Japanese film viewers. Their efforts also extended overseas: the finished film, *Nishijin* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1961) was screened at the Venice film festival in 1961, and has been shown at a number of international film festivals since (Gerow 2015). Yet the ultimate economic failure of the film at the time of its making led to the closure of this audience group turned production unit. The original film viewing club was later reformed as Shi dokyumentari firumu (See Documentary Films, or Shidofu) in the 1970s. Members of this group continued to meet in its third iteration, the Kinugasa eiga kai (Kinugasa Film Club), where I undertook fieldwork between 2014 and 2018. Previous publications resulting from this ethnographic project have focused on gender demographics in the postwar cinema audience (Coates 2017; Coates 2018) and the physical experiences and deportment of the postwar cinema audience (Coates 2020). A forthcoming book manuscript explores the role of talking about cinema in the formation of a sense of self among these study participants. In this chapter however, I focus specifically on the study participants involved in the Kinugasa eiga kai, whose members performed a number of cultural intermediary roles including hosting a regular monthly screening of classic films, producing newsletters and updates about cinema topics, building and maintaining online fan

sites, and commemorative cinema-related activities. This chapter explores the activities organized by this small group of dedicated cinema culture practitioners, which goes beyond the viewership practices explored in other publications, in order to locate some early antecedents of the attitudes and activities found among contemporary cultural intermediaries in the creative industries of Japan today.

Bourdieu argued that cultural intermediaries “sell so well because they believe in what they sell” (1984, 365). This chapter demonstrates that not only a belief in the cultural product, but a concomitant passion for the political ideologies underlying the development of that product render organized groups of audiences and fans among the most passionate and devoted of cultural intermediaries. The passion of cultural intermediaries can drive a shift from consumption, through cultural intermediary activities, to direct cultural production. Keith Negus has called for the development of “an ability to untangle or dis-aggregate the practices of cultural intermediaries: to work out when, how, and under what conditions such aesthetic activity might be creative, innovative, and providing any more than an impetus including towards the conservative and mundane (2002, 510). The activities of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai certainly proved to be anything but “conservative and mundane,” and yet the tensions which emerged between the group members and the professional filmmakers they commissioned does highlight the differing agendas and expectations that emerge between cultural intermediaries and the producers that they engage, or become. Tracing the activities and operations of this evolving organized audience group allows for a nuanced exploration of the spaces between cultural intermediary activities and the production of cultural texts.

### **Cinema and Cultural Intermediaries in Postwar Japan**

Bourdieu's 1979 definition of the most typical "new cultural intermediaries" included "producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers" (1984, 325). As Nixon and du Gay note, this is "inclusive, if not quite a catchall category" (2002, 496), and greater attention to the differences and "family resemblances" between the "occupational formations, cultures, and forms of expertise" subsumed within this category is needed (2002, 498). The audience groups that I am positing as cultural intermediaries in this chapter were formed of a cross-section of film fans in Kyoto, Osaka, and the wider Kansai region of Western Japan. The groups included professional writers and journalists, as well as those who worked in advertising and the media industries. Teachers, university staff, and professional and semi-professional artists and musicians were also included in the groups under study here, and can be understood as members of the wider *petite bourgeoisie* within which Bourdieu situated his "new cultural intermediaries." In popularising the activities of the audience groups, members regularly involved professional journalists, film critics, academics, and civic bodies. As group members began developing their own film project, they engaged professional filmmakers, composers, cinematographers, poets, and editors, and in doing so entered "the space between production and consumption" which Negus points to as a key area for investigation in the attempt to better understand "cultural intermediaries as a special occupational grouping linking production to consumption" (2002, 502).

Through developing this film project, the organized audience group inadvertently also participated in the invention of a new genre of avant-garde documentary cinema in Japan, discussed in more detail below. The emergence of the semi-documentary or avant-garde documentary sub-genre during this project mirrors Bourdieu's argument that cultural intermediaries invent "a whole series of genres half-way between legitimate culture and mass production" (Bourdieu 1984, 326). Hye Kyung Lee defines media consumers who produce

their own media materials, such as fan subbers and the manga translators known as “scanlators” as “participatory consumers” engaging in “participatory cultural consumption” that also generates an innovation or discrete product for others to consume (2012, 132). While many fans and fan clubs create trends and markets, we can think of this transition from consumer to creator of new material (participatory consumer) as a way of mediating the “unease of the inherently contradictory role of a ‘presenter’ devoid of intrinsic value” which Bourdieu identified as characteristic of the cultural intermediary (1984, 326). In order to situate the participatory consumer activities of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and its subsequent incarnations within their particular historical and cultural context, this opening section briefly outlines the place of cinema in the broader cultural landscape of late 1950s Japan.

Cinema in postwar Japan occupied an uneasy hybrid space between the educational, the cultural, and the mildly deviant. The censored cinema of the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) had been crafted with the goal of re-educating the Japanese public, using both Japanese and imported film texts to sell a new democratic capitalist lifestyle in the wake of World War II and the Fifteen Years War in the Asia-Pacific region. Postwar cinema content was developed under strict information dissemination and censorship guidelines, with the goal of fundamentally reforming the Japanese way of life. Beginning the Occupation of Japan on September 2, 1945, the offices of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (hereafter SCAP), headed by General Douglas MacArthur identified the cinema as a means to educate Japanese viewers (Kitamura 2010, 42). On September 22, 1945, Head of the Motion Picture and Theatrical Division of the Civil Information and Education Section (hereafter CIE) David Conde met with film and theater producers and forty Japanese Bureau of Information officials to explain the role of cinema in postwar Japan (Brandon 2006, 18). Reading from a draft document entitled “Memorandum to the Japanese Empire,” written two

days earlier, he urged those present to cooperate with the Occupation's goals, particularly in educating the Japanese populace in their "fundamental liberties" as well as promoting "respect for human rights" (SCAP 1945). Education and democracy were cornerstones of this early postwar cinema culture.

Schools were encouraged to involve their pupils in cinema culture as an educational pursuit, continuing a discourse on audio-visual pedagogy that had begun in Japan as early as 1910 (Tsunoda 2015, 15). As Takuya Tsunoda has described, both operating film apparatus and viewing films were part of the postwar school curriculum (2015, 16). Writer Hatano Kanji even opined that, "Cinema is the most revolutionary teaching media after print technology" (Hatano 1950, 8, translated in Tsunoda 2015, 68). By the late 1950s, film had been associated with formalized learning in Japan for some time, and dedicated educational publishers such as Iwanami were operating film branches of their educational outreach programmes. By the time the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai began planning their documentary film project, education productions had reached 900 per year, and documentary short films surpassed 900 a year in 1959 (Nornes 2002, 47).

Audience groups, fan clubs, and film viewing circles encouraged a similarly academic approach to engaging with cinema. Fan clubs and film study groups were often attached to magazines and film publications, which encouraged a studious style of viewing and fandom (Kitamura 2010, 155). For example, the June 1948 issue of *Eiga no Tomo (Film Friend)* featured a reader's correspondence in which a fan encouraged his peers to prepare studiously in advance of going to the cinema, establishing a sense of their own expectations in order to heighten the experience (Kitamura 2010, 170). In this way, cinema culture was often framed as educational in Japan in the early years after the war, in its development, censoring, and reception.

We can see a similar attitude to cinema expressed in the interview sections of Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Jacques C., the "technician who 'tries to get on'" (1984, 334) describes cinema-going as, "easy, you can go to the pictures whenever you feel like it" (1984, 335). At the same time, he is sure to qualify that, like the *Eiga no Tomo* readers, "we read up a bit before we go" (1984, 335). Jacques C. also expresses the desire to "try to choose good films" which he understands to be films that are "well made, well directed" (1984, 335). The desire to introduce such "good" films to a wider public shaped both the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and its subsequent reiteration as the Kinugasa eiga kai, as well as the first group's intervention into filmmaking. The cultural intermediary activities of both groups, described in more detail later in this chapter, should be understood in relation both to the consumption of certain film genres in Japan as educational, and to the perceived distinction between "good" films and bad.

Of course, "good" films were not the only films shown in the cinema theatres of postwar Japan, or France for that matter. Hiroshi Kitamura quotes a professional writer in *Eiga Nenkan (Film Yearbook)* who complained in 1950 that Japanese cinema culture suffered from "cheap amusement products that catered to the interests of the lowly masses" (2010, 44). Bourdieu argues that a taste for "works that demand a large cultural investment" is posited as in opposition to "a taste for the most spectacular feature films, overtly designed to entertain" (1984, 271). If we interpret the first kind of film's demand for cultural investment as an educational process, extending the viewer's comprehension or awareness by extending their cultural horizons, we can see the act of viewing, and screening, a "good" educational or "ambitious" (Bourdieu 1984, 271) film as a different kind of cultural engagement from the act of viewing an entertainment feature film. The efforts of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, and later the Kinugasa eiga kai, to bring "good" films to the general public can be understood

as a form of cultural intermediacy similar to that of the *Eiga Nenkan* writer, in that it attempted to develop a public taste for “good” films over bad (Asai 1961b, 18).

Bourdieu notes important differences in access to these two kinds of films, including ticket price and geographical location of the cinema theatres (1984, 271), which hold for Japan as well as France. Cinema theaters in early postwar Japan were organized into three tiers: first-tier cinemas were the most expensive and showed the most recent films. Second- and third-tier cinemas were cheaper and showed older films, often in shabbier surroundings, less prestigious areas, and using older prints and equipment. In contrast to the educational associations described above, postwar cinema culture in Japan also had a contrasting reputation as borderline dangerous and delinquent, and certain cinema theatres, entertainment areas, and film genres had low-class associations. In my ethnographic study on film cultures of the early postwar era, female participants disproportionately recalled second and third tier cinemas as intimidating places for young women and girls (Coates 2018), while some remembered being explicitly warned against going to certain entertainment areas (Coates 2017, 603-604). In contrast to the educational uses of cinema discussed above, many participants in my study remembered being dissuaded from engaging with the distractions or perceived dangers of lower-tier cinema theatres while they were students. Teachers were said to patrol these areas to watch for students entering “bad” cinemas (Coates 2017, 604). One interviewee remembered being told to remove his school uniform cap by an usher before he was able to buy a cinema ticket, (Coates 2020, 245), while another recalled a teacher scolding him for staring at a film poster (personal communication, November 24, 2016). Matsumoto Toshio (1932-2017), director of *Nishijin*, similarly recalled in an interview with Aaron Gerow that his film-going habits as a schoolboy were viewed with suspicion. “I loved movies and went to see them a lot from the time I was in middle and high school. I was even treated

like a juvenile delinquent and was arrested twice by the Shinjuku police because I skipped school.” (Gerow 2015)

These two sides to cinema culture in postwar Japan echo Bourdieu’s characterization of those who are predisposed to invest in such “‘middle-ground’ arts” as “either those who have entirely succeeded in converting their cultural capital into educational capital or those who, not having acquired legitimate culture in the legitimate manner (i.e., through early familiarization), maintain an uneasy relationship with it” (1984, 87). Among the membership of both the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and its successor, the Kinugasa eiga kai, those who received an early introduction to “good” films through education and in luxury cinema theatres, who supplemented their film consumption with classical musicianship and participating in painting exhibitions, mixed with those with a more uneasy relationship to high culture, or “legitimate culture.”

I would not attempt to argue that every member of an organized audience group is an independent cultural intermediary. Rather, the group as a whole had a cultural intermediary effect, both in communications between members and in its organized outreach projects. Whether cinema was seen as educational in itself, a pedagogical tool, or as a distraction or site of danger, the practice of cinephilia performed by organized audience groups has educational overtones. As Bourdieu argues, “the propensity and capacity to accumulate ‘gratuitous’ knowledge, such as the names of film directors, are more closely and exclusively linked to educational capital than is mere cinema-going, which is more dependent on income, place of residence, and age” (1984, 26). In organised audience groups such as the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and the Kinugasa eiga kai, this knowledge was accumulated and shared among members, raising the educational capital of the group as a whole. The Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai then attempted to channel this educational capital into an ambitious project to make a “good” documentary film that would educate and inform viewers.

## **Nishijin, Kyoto: A Case of Cultural Intermediaries “All the Way Down”**

Keith Negus argues that, “If we are to understand the more general relations between production and consumption, then we need to understand the symbolic, and the cultural in the broadest sense of the term, as well as the narrowly economic practices of business analysts and accountants” (2002, 506). While this wide ranging approach is outside the scope of a single chapter, taking the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai and its subsequent iterations as case study offers an example of a nested structure of cultural intermediaries, in which the production of a particular high-culture artefact was remediated and translated by a group of cultural intermediaries, who crossed the intermediary-producer boundary to make their own cultural production, and whose activities were then re-framed at a historical distance by another group of cultural intermediaries. By following the activities of this group, and their historical resonances, we can map a shifting of practices across the symbolic, the cultural “in the broadest sense of the term,” and the more “narrowly economic.”

The subject of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai’s self-produced documentary film was the working conditions of weavers in the Nishijin area of Kyoto, from which the finished film takes its name. The weavers made a highly specialised and expensive brocade used in the production of luxury kimono. *Nishijin-ori*, a kind of *sakizome* (cloth dyed before weaving) is thought to be one of Japan’s oldest craft products, dating back 1200 years. In 1976, the weaving process was designated a National Traditional Craft (Nishijin Textile Industry Association, 2020). “Nishijin” is now a registered trademark of the Nishijin Industrial Association. The Nishijin Textile Center on Horikawa street in north west Kyoto emphasises the “beauty and elegance of the kimono” (Nishijin Textile Center website, 2020), yet in 1957 the membership of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was more focused on the

darker aspects of textile production, and sought to reveal the exploitative and dangerous conditions in which the workers produced these luxury items.

Negus characterises factory workers similar to the Nishijin weavers as “a well established occupational group with a direct relationship to ‘cultural intermediaries’” despite the fact that, “due to the geographical location (and relocation) of factories and warehouses... the work of the so-called ‘creatives’ is often far removed from the manufacturing process” (2002, 507). Thanks to Nishijin’s historic importance to the city of Kyoto however, this was not the case in the production of *Nishijin-ori* textiles. The center of activities promoting *Nishijin-ori* products is located next to the small *machiya*-style houses in which the weavers worked, and the surrounding area borders onto several arts and culture districts, with the Imperial Palace Gardens to the east, and the theatre and cinema district around Senbon street to the west. Just south of Nishijin, Kyoto’s first film studio was established facing Nijō Castle. In some aspects then, the overlapping of the particular cultural interests and social concerns of the Kyoto *kiroku eiga o miru kai* with the activities of the weavers is not surprising.

The Nishijin area in the late 1950s was home to multiple groups of cultural intermediaries and the workers whose products they presented and sold. The film viewing club which became a production unit, itself a cultural intermediary, created a filmic representation of weavers and of the Nishijin Textile Association, the manufacturers’ professional association and a cultural intermediary in the sale of kimono fabric (Hareven 2002, 162). Nishijin as site of cultural production and cultural intermediary activity therefore diverges from Negus’s description of cultural intermediaries as “prone to encourage the establishment of a distance between themselves and industrial manufacturing, storage and shipment of the symbolic items that they have a stake in ‘mediating’” (2002, 507). Instead, the intersection of a variety of cultural production and cultural intermediary activities came

together in this small area of Kyoto. Weavers produced *Nishijin-ori*, which were made into kimono and sold by cultural intermediaries in the Nishijin Textile Association. The cultural intermediary audience group turned film production unit formed by the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai engaged professional filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio to represent the inhumane conditions in which these workers produced *Nishijin-ori*, and expose the parasitic relationship of the Nishijin Textile Association to the workers.

At a third level of cultural intermediary activity, members of the third successor group of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai actively maintain the narrative of the process of creating the film by collecting archival materials on the project and working with researchers such as myself. In this respect, the past 60 years of activity in Nishijin is, to paraphrase Clifford Geertz (1973, 29), a case of cultural intermediaries “all the way down.” In the ethnographic study of this small area of Kyoto and its deeper historical echoes, I remain aware of Geertz’s warning that “cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” and that, “the more deeply it goes the less complete it is” (1973, 29). What follows is a story about a group of cultural intermediaries turned cultural producers, told by another group of cultural intermediaries with vested interest in the narrative and its legitimating properties for their own association.

### **Locating Cultural Intermediaries at the Kinugasa Eiga Kai**

This chapter developed from a larger project on ethno-histories of cinema-going in postwar Kansai in Western Japan from 1945 to 1968. The project explores cinema-going as a formative experience during the first two decades after World War II, when cinema attendance peaked at 1,127,452,000 in 1958 (Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan, 2017), and film production and the number of cinema theatres grew rapidly until 1961 (Terasawa 2010). This four year project involved formal and informal interviews with elderly film fans, including recorded interviews, long form questionnaires, and participant

observation at retrospective film programmes and film clubs specializing in the cinema of the early postwar era.

From 2014 to 2018, I practiced participant observation at four sites, including the cinema theater of the Kyoto Culture Museum (Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan), two independent film viewing clubs in Kyoto, and a cinema in Osaka specializing in Shōwa period cinema (1926-1989). I conducted a large-scale questionnaire project with eighty-three respondents at the museum in May 2016, and a range of interviews between 2016 and 2018. Participants were self-selecting, beginning with interested patrons of the Kyoto Culture Museum cinema and the two Kyoto film clubs, before expanding through word of mouth to over one hundred people living in the Kansai region, aged between 70 and 95. As the major film companies' secondary studios specializing in period dramas were located in Kansai during the period under study, there was a significant degree of interest in the project from residents of this region, as a number had worked in the film industry or volunteered as extra performers on location shooting.

It was during participant observation at monthly film club Kinugasa eiga kai that I first heard about the film viewing club-turned-filmmaking collective that had made the film *Nishijin* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1961). Kinugasa eiga kai was the third incarnation of that film viewing club, after both the original and its successor folded due to lack of funds, a fire at the membership office, and various internal issues. Kinugasa eiga kai met on the third Saturday of every month in the northwest of Kyoto 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 each month to view two or three films selected by a rotating *zacho*, or meeting leader, followed by a discussion session, with beer and snacks offered at 100 yen each, subsidized by the group's 500 yen participation fee. The majority of the Kinugasa eiga kai members were aged over seventy; nonetheless, the long

*zadankai* discussion session after each monthly screening would run for two hours, totalling around seven hours altogether.

The three founding member-organizers and the rotating *zacho* would prepare an intricate 3-5 page document each month with details of the films screened, reasons for choosing those films, and plans for the following months, as well as a short history of the club. In both the printed scholarly materials supplementing screenings, and in the atmosphere of the screening itself, the Kinugasa eiga kai reflected the educational aspect of cinema culture in Japan discussed above. From 2015-2018, the screening was held in a Western-style house designed by the architect Motono Seigo in 1924, though in late 2018 the group moved to the Art Space Number One hall (*Āto supēsu ichiban kai*) near Imadegawa metro station. Motono's son and his wife were founding members of the Kinugasa eiga kai, and had offered the use of the house once each month. The house, located at Tōji in Kitamachi, is situated within the "*Kinugasa ekaki mura*", or "painting village," home to a group of Japanese modern artists since 1918. In a small shrine to the south, a statue commemorates Makino Shōzo (1878-1929), the film director, film producer, and businessman known as a pioneer of Japanese cinema. In a personal interview, one organizer noted that the house itself was key to the cultural atmosphere of the club: "People want to see these films, and they want to see them here" (personal communication, November 16, 2016).

Kinugasa eiga kai members and organizers were largely concerned with bringing films that they considered to be good, high-art, or ground-breaking to a broader viewership. In this respect, members clearly situated themselves as cultural intermediaries, and expressed the desire to draw in younger film viewers to educate them about cinema history. There were attempts at programming to attract younger viewers, for example, screening *Shin Godzilla* (*Shin-Gojira*, Anno Hideaki and Higuchi Shinji, 2016) alongside *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, Honda Ishirō, 1954) to draw local students to the viewing club towards the end of the university term

time. However, the members were disappointed when the five students left during the break after watching the 2016 film, showing little interest in the 1954 original.

Perhaps understandably, discussion around the club's mission tended to look back to previous decades when the forerunners of the organization had driven more direct interventions into local exhibition practices and reception. During my fieldwork at the Kinugasa eiga kai, the three organizers introduced me to Asai Eiichi (1933- ), co-leader of the previous incarnation of the club and producer of *Nishijin*. Their desire to situate the contemporary Kinugasa eiga kai as a kind of descendent organization from Asai's more explicitly active cultural intermediary group suggested the importance of a sense of lineage for organized audiences turned cultural intermediaries, and highlights the role of younger, later, or descendent cultural intermediary groups in re-mediating (and perhaps glorifying) the cultural intermediary activities of their forebears.

The organizers and participants of the Kinugasa eiga kai form the outer layer in the nested structure of cultural intermediaries that I outlined above. This organized group promoted the high-art Japanese and global cinema culture that had been popular during the "golden age" (*ōgon jidai*) of film viewership in Japan, as one of the organizers described (personal communication, November 16, 2016). In profession, upbringing, and self-identification, the majority of participants and organizers at the Kinugasa eiga kai fell within Bourdieu's "petite bourgeoisie endowed with cultural capital" who could be described as "devoted 'film-buffs' whose knowledge of directors and actors extends beyond their direct experience of the corresponding films" (1984, 564). At the same time, they also promoted an earlier mode of engaging with cinema, which took an active role in not only publicizing and popularizing films considered "good" but also in organizing to produce such films. The members of the Kinugasa eiga kai were not only cultural intermediaries for postwar Japanese film culture, but also for the story of that earlier mode of cinema engagement. By regularly

re-telling the story of the production of *Nishijin*, and insisting on Asai Eiichi's place within the history of grass-roots film production in Kyoto, the members of Kinugasa eiga kai acted as intermediaries, brokering a place for this film and its singular production narrative in Japanese cinema history.

### ***Nishijin* and the Kyoto Kiroku Eiga o Miru Kai**

In 1953, Asai Eiichi was 20 years old. At an old coffee shop near Kawaramachi in central Kyoto, he met and formed a friendship with Fujiki Shoji, 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). Satō Yō notes the film viewing group's historical precedents in the Kyoto engeki kurabu (Kyoto Theatre Club) and the Kyoto katei shohi kumiai (Kyoto Family Consumer Cooperative) (2013, 41). Asai and Fujiki "created a cooperative type of film society that is different from the enlightenment type of film society" (Satō 2013, 41). These "cooperative type" clubs and societies focused on "liberating the senses" and raising awareness of both aesthetic and political elements of cinema culture (Satō 2013, 41), in contrast to the "enlightenment type" of society, which had tended to focus on education. This emphasis on the senses and aesthetics became an "important foundation" of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai (Satō 2013, 41), demonstrating the appeal to high culture built into the group's identity and marketing from its conception. At the same time however, the education of the membership and the wider film-going public was to become a goal of the endeavour as the viewing club moved towards the production of their own documentary film.

The high-culture aspect of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was also reflected in the choice of venues for meetings. Monthly screenings were held at the Yasaka Hall in Kyoto, Gion Kaikan, Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, and other city locations with significant cultural capital. In a conversation in late 2016, Asai recollected that the primary motivating factor in the club'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 group'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 club as "an era of politics" (*seiji no jidai*) when popular interest in investigative journalism and social issues was growing (personal communication, 28 November 2016).

The club's activities soon expanded to include the bulk buying of film screening tickets for distribution among the membership. This had the effect of packing out commercial theatres for selected screenings, and so the operation quickly became somewhat political. As Fujiki and Asai had leftist political leanings and an interest in grassroots organizing, members were channelled toward leftist films, particularly those focused on labour issues. In this way the film club 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 viewing groups deliberately mobilized their membership to support particular projects, directors, or studios. In fact the film clubs and circles organized around 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.

While watching political documentaries from all over the world, the group remained aware of problems at home. By the late 1950s, labour issues in the Nishijin textile-producing area of north west Kyoto were under discussion in the popular press. The central government's Committee on Labour Relations, which consisted of business and labour representatives, had been debating the status and rights of cottage weavers known as *chinbata*. While manufacturers had argued that *chinbata* were self-employed, as they tended to work in their own residences (Hareven 2002, 60), in 1957 the Committee ruled that *chinbata* were in fact entitled to legal protection on maximum hours and minimum wages. Yet the manufacturers resisted. Tamara Hareven quotes a production manager in one of the Nishijin firms, who compared the weavers' labour to that of housewives, asking, "Does a housewife stop her work after eight hours, if her tasks are not finished?" (Mr Hiraoka, quoted in Hareven 2002, 61). The dismissive attitude and pejorative feminizing of the weavers' work implied here illustrates the widening gap between the weavers and the manufacturers' associations in the wake of the 1957 ruling.

Weavers complained of an "exploitative and paternalistic relationship between the manufacturer and the weaver" (Hareven 2002, 100). The manufacturer, occupying the role of *oyakata*, or independent labor contractor, situated the weaver as *kokata*, or dependent worker. This hierarchy had developed in the factories and textile industries of Meiji Japan (1868-1926), where employers would make lump-sum contracts with *oyakata*, who would find workers willing to do the job, supervise the work, manage production deadlines, and pay the workers. As the Japanese terms indicate, "the *oyakata-kokata* bond was a peculiar combination of father-child relationship and exploitation" (Annavajhula 1989, 17). Hareven's weaver interviewees echoed this assessment, complaining of "a hierarchical line between the manufacturer [*oyakata*] and the weaver [*kokata*] in Nishijin" which extended to slowing or

quickenning the pace of the weavers' work according to budgets and deadlines (Mr Konishi, quoted in Hareven 2002, 100).

While some weavers who responded to a 1962 survey of weaving households in Nishijin expressed their preference for working at home, others complained that "the cottage weaver's sense of solidarity is very low" (Mr Matsushita, quoted in Hareven 2002, 98) and that the situation was not conducive to Nishijin weavers unionizing to protect their new rights. Whether they worked at home or in factories however, the working conditions were very harsh, and these skilled workers struggled in poor conditions to make the elaborate woven and embroidered materials for expensive kimono and accoutrements.

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 film club members and members of the Communist Party within its workforce (personal communication, 28 November 2016). The combined symptoms of the weavers were collectivized as Horikawa disease, after the name of the hospital which treated the workers, located close to Nishijin in the north west area of Kyoto. Not coincidentally, prewar Horikawa had also been one of the larger *burakumin* districts in Kyoto, home to a discriminated minority caste. 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 many of the members 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.

Satō and Morishita argue that this is the first instance of an experimental movie made by a film circle in Japan (Satō 2013, 41; Morishita 2009). Unlike the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai, the majority of film viewing groups were formed around a workplace, school, university, or dedicated film publication, or around a trade union (Satō 2013, 41). Programming and meetings were organized in order to watch films, discuss and critique, create group publications such as magazines, and interact with filmmakers. There was also some discussion about enriching audience members' lives through enhancing their awareness of film as an art (Satō 2013, 42). However, the confluence of political orientation, geographical location, and pressing yet historic social issue seems to have offered the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai a unique opportunity to push their cultural intermediary activities beyond the educational and promotional, and into film production.

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 circles. Finally, 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 circles' activities were curtailed by the Environment and Health Act, which restricted discounted bulk buying of tickets, film club and viewing group activity in Japan began to decline. Yet at the very same time, the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was expanding its activities to filmmaking.

Satō argues that the success of the group's activities 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 the qualitative change of group members' consciousness as its primary goal, rather than financial gain, political influence, or increasing

membership (Satō 2013, 42). In these aspects, the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai was similar to the audio-visual education movement discussed above, 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).

Against the social, historical, and political background described by Asai, the 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 member Takahashi Akira, who claimed that the meeting had inspired him to think more deeply about social issues (Satō 2013, 50). At the same time, club members who were employed at the Horikawa Hospital and many local doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators urged the group to think about developing a documentary on the workers' condition (Wada Marciano 2014, 379).

### **Producing *Nishijin* (1961)**

If “knowledge of directors is much more closely linked to cultural capital than is mere cinema-going” (Bourdieu 1984, 27), then hiring a director for their own project was a significant marker of cultural capital for the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai. Director Matsumoto Toshio, who was approached by Asai to direct the film circle's project, recalled that making a film upon request from a particular group was not unusual in the 1950s (Wada Marciano 2014, 379). Labour unions regularly commissioned films, but this particular case was unique in involving an art movement, as both Matsumoto and film scholar Mitsuyo Wada Marciano understood the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai. 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 creating a new production line for experimental cinema, allowing Matsumoto to experiment with an avant-garde 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).

While Matsumoto was known to the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai due to the regular speaking and exhibition opportunities that the group offered to Japanese directors, he also had some background in the cultural intermediary business, having worked at the Shin Riken company, which specialized in science documentaries and industrial promotion films, from 1955-1959 (Raine 2012, 144). The Shin Riken company had produced a 2 minute short news film on the working conditions in Nishijin, which was broadcast on 8 October 1958, highlighting the suffering of those who produced the “beautiful kimono worn by the maiko of Gion” (Morishita 2009). After one year, he was confident that his experience of planning and completing film projects had prepared him to begin filmmaking (Gerow 2015). Matsumoto’s third film, a documentary called *Children Calling Spring* (*Haru o yobu kora*, 1959), focused on the “back-breaking jobs” which the children undertook (Gerow 2015), and this may have recommended the director to the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai production unit for the *Nishijin* project. The director recalled that, “in those days, a good documentary was defined as something that, first of all, had a poignant subject, and then was socially or politically controversial” (Gerow 2015). Yet his own approach was already developing along different lines, as he wondered, “whether there wasn't a need for documentary to assume a subjectivity that could make visible what was invisible. In that sense, I felt that documentary and the

avant-garde have to be connected within a moment of mutual negation” (Gerow 2015). If the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai had hoped that the Nishijin weavers would receive a similar treatment to the *Children Calling Spring*, they were to be disappointed.

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).

While Matsumoto recalls that he “got their approval to address Kyoto's Nishijin,” his goals, at least as he remembered them in his 2015 interview with Gerow, appear to differ slightly from the consciousness-raising aims expressed by Asai, and nurtured by the memory keepers at the Kinugasa eiga kai. Matsumoto remembers having, “the aim of giving form to something more deeply submerged within the situation, something warped and hard to express. I wasn't trying to depict the place called Nishijin or show people weaving, but to give shape to the thick, silent, unvoiced voices lurking beneath Nishijin” (Gerow 2015). By

contrast, Asai remembered wanting to film in colour in order to show the beauty of the weavers' work (personal communication, 28 November 2016). Due to the tight budget, Asai's wishes could not be accommodated (personal communication, 28 November 2016), and the filming was completed in black and white. In the end, Asai surmised, "Perhaps it's better for Matsumoto Toshio's avant-garde that it should have been black and white" (personal communication, 28 November 2016). That the end result was to further Matsumoto's career is not disputed by any of the production team, nor by Matsumoto himself. "Opinion was divided over the results, but the fact it won the Silver Lion at the Venice International Documentary Film Festival helped clear the way for my next steps" (Matsumoto quoted in Gerow 2015).

Tensions between the political aims of the *Kiroku eiga o miru kai*, the commercial requirements of the production team, the artistic desires of Asai, and the avant-garde sensibilities of Matsumoto are echoed in the jarring effect of the film's style and soundtrack. Rather than a classical documentary, Matsumoto sought to create "the form of a cine poem that persistently piled up exacting images" (Matsumoto, quoted in Gerow 2015). In contrast to the deeply local origins of the film's planning (Morishita 2009; 'Nishijin' *seisaku jōei kyōkai* handbill 1961), Yuriko Furuhashi observes that *Nishijin* "refuses to provide any establishing shots" (2013, 34). Layering close up shots of weavers' bodies and fast-moving machinery, "Matsumoto deliberately works against the expectation of a recognizable and lucid image" (Furuhashi 2013, 35). We may assume the membership of the *Kiroku eiga o miru kai* to have been disappointed by this lack of a "recognizable and lucid" account of the weavers' issues. The question of their physical health is briefly addressed with shots of moxibustion treatments, their stress and dissatisfaction with scenes showing weavers praying, and the poverty of the area in footage of children playing with rusty nails in the dirt.

However, overall the emphasis of the twenty-five minute film appears to be firmly on the aesthetic rather than the explicitly political.

The film previewed in Tokyo on 27 June and in Kyoto on 12 July 1961. The limited release was met with a significant volume of print criticism, both positive and negative. *Nishijin* was given a special feature in the September issue of *Kiroku Eiga (Documentary Film)*, the preeminent Japanese journal of the time for documentary cinema, in the same year. The Nishijin Textile Association strongly objected to the film, and particularly to the depiction of the weavers suffering in poor conditions under their watch. Bourdieu notes that “industrial and commercial employers” tended to choose heavily factual and historical films in the survey of Parisian and Lille area film-going discussed in *Distinction* (1984, 271). We might suggest that the avant-garde styling of Matsumoto’s documentary film was stylistically irritating to the employers and manufacturers who formed the Nishijin Textile Manufacturers Association, as well as the unflattering angles at which they themselves were filmed, and the garbled editing of their speech in meetings. However, it’s hard not to think that the scenes which most offended the Association might have been those of an Association meeting, filmed from above in order to render these cultural intermediaries truly absurd, with bald heads and comber hairstyles on full view. In this scene, the soundtrack features a jumble of edited and remixed voices, repeatedly sticking on one or two ridiculous phrases that underscore the emptiness of the values of this managerial class, in stark contrast to the honest labour of the suffering weavers.

*Nishijin* was to bankrupt its producers, bringing the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai to collapse under the weight of recriminations and sending Asai Eiichi fleeing debt, moving to Osaka. The high cost of production and marketing overran the production group’s funds, and despite the Venice award the film was not a commercial success. Furthermore, Nishijin’s textile 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 film club's membership cards and members' dues, and the film circle folded. The memory did not seem too bitter during our interview in 2016 however, as Asai related the story of the production of *Nishijin* from the lobby café of a hotel facing Nijō castle. "After the commercial failure of *Nishijin*," he remembered, "the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai had become famous in every sense, and so it disbanded" (personal communication, 28 November, 2016). The film viewing group was reborn again in June 1964 as Shi Dokyumentari Shinema or Shidofu for short. Asai briefly joined this successor group, keen to share his passion for avant-garde film, which remained undimmed by the disaster of *Nishijin*'s production. However, the members of Shidofu were looking for films with a strong journalistic sense, and so Asai moved on to the Gendai geijutsu no kai (Contemporary Art Society). Young members of Shidofu would go on to create the Kingasa eiga kai, continuing their cultural intermediary activities into their later years.

### **Organized Audiences as Cultural Intermediaries**

While the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai may have begun as a group intent on advocating for "good" films and bringing these films to the general public, their activities went far beyond this remit, culminating in the production of a short documentary film, and an enduring narrative about their activities that demonstrates the wide reach of this group of cultural intermediaries. It should be noted that *Nishijin* is an early example of a new genre of documentary cinema that emerged in Japan in the 1960s, and so the contribution of the film club that made this step possible has not been small. In blending factual narrative with expressive avant-garde imagery and sound, *Nishijin* can be understood as a 'neo-documentary' or 'documentary-like avant-garde film' (*kirokuteki zeien eiga*), close to Hanada

Kiyoteru's "semi-documentary" (Aleksyeva 2017, 17). In participating in the development of a new genre of cinema, the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai certainly shaped the cultural tastes of the cinema audiences of 1960s Japan.

This group of cultural intermediaries turned cultural producers, or participant consumers (Lee 2002) were also instrumental in continuing the legacy of the north west area of Kyoto as a place where producers, consumers, and intermediaries mixed across the boundaries of class as well as genre. We can understand the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai production group's desire to represent the struggles of the Nishijin weavers as an "artistic critique of capitalism" of the kind often attributed to cultural intermediaries (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005). The film's critical juxtaposition of the creative practices of the weavers with the predatory management of the manufacturers' association and the marketing bureaucracy of the Nishijin Textile Association mirrors how "this critique called into question the alienations of work and life under capitalism" (O'Connor 2015, 377). The activities of the Kyoto kiroku eiga o miru kai demonstrate the many spaces in-between production and consumption that are occupied by cultural intermediaries, as well as how individuals and groups negotiate between the designations "producer," "consumer," and "intermediary" in the development and reception of film and media. At the same time, the re-narration of these activities by the successor group Kinugasa eiga kai as a kind of origin story or foundational text reminds us that cultural intermediaries are always selling, even if they do indeed "sell so well because they believe in what they sell." While tracing the activities of consumers turned producers can tell us much about the nuances of cultural intermediary activity, we must remain aware of the narrative construction of the cultural intermediary as central media figure as a core element of the self-legitimation of the position of the cultural intermediary role.

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